



Delegation for relations with Belarus

Joint statement on the suspicious death of Mr Shishov, the attempted abduction of Ms Timanouskaya, the forced closure of the Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ) and the closed trial of Ms Kalesnikava and Mr Znak

Brussels, 4 August 2021 – “We are deeply worried by the suspicious death of Vitaly Shishov in Kyiv, which looks like a political killing. Mr Shishov fled Belarus after participating in last year’s protests against Lukashenka’s regime. Since then, he was the head of the NGO ‘Belarusian House in Ukraine’, reaching out to fellow Belarusians who fled repression to seek refuge in Ukraine. Mr Shishov felt under constant surveillance and recounted instances of being followed recently. As the Ukrainian authorities have opened a murder investigation, we hope that light will be shed on this case as soon as possible.

This latest tragic development follows the Belarusian Olympic team’s foiled attempt to take sprinter Krystina Timanouskaya forcibly to Tokyo airport after she criticised the Belarusian Olympic Committee chaired by Viktor Lukashenka. Luckily, Ms Timanouskaya has been granted a humanitarian visa to travel to Poland.

The attempted abduction of Ms Timanouskaya in Tokyo and the suspicious death of Mr Shishov in Kyiv point to the fact that Belarusian dissidents are not safe, even outside their country.

In addition, We are outraged by the announced 'liquidation' of the Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ), a respected institution devoted to protecting all journalists working under the threat of harassment, intimidation and persecution, which was awarded the Sakharov Prize for the Freedom of Thought in 2004. The very fact that the Ministry of Justice ordered the closure of the BAJ without providing any clear legal grounds for doing so illustrates the state of absolutely lawlessness into which Belarus has been plunged.

Lastly, we solemnly demand a public trial for Maria Kalesnikava and Maksim Znak, two prominent figures of Belarus' democratic movement. In a ludicrous attempt to avoid scrutiny by the international community and human rights defenders, the Belarusian authorities have announced that they would face a closed trial, planned to start on 4 August. Prosecuted on absurd charges such as ‘extremism’ and ‘conspiracy’, they are facing up to 12 years imprisonment.

As the political and human rights situation in Belarus continues to worsen, we call on the EU to impose a new set of restrictive measures on Lukashenka's regime, including additional economic sanctions. Lukashenka and his clique must be held personally accountable and face justice for their outrageous acts.”

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