



Delegation for relations with Belarus

Joint statement by:

-)] **the Vice-President responsible for the Sakharov Network, MEP Heidi Hautala,**
-)] **the Chair of the Delegation for relations with Belarus, MEP Robert BIEDRO ,**
-)] **the Chair of the Subcommittee on Human Rights, MEP Maria ARENA, and**
-)] **the European Parliament's Standing Rapporteur on Belarus, MEP Petras AUŠTREVII IUS**

on the sentencing of leading opposition figures Maryia Kalesnikava and Maksim Znak in Belarus

Brussels, 7 September 2021 – "Yesterday, a 'court' in Minsk found leading opposition figures Maryia Kalesnikava and Maksim Znak guilty on trumped-up charges of trying to seize power and extremism, and sentenced them to lengthy prison terms.

A laureate of the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought and recipient of the International Women of Courage Award and one of the most prominent figures of the Belarusian democratic forces, Ms Kalesnikava was sentenced to 11 years in general regime penal colony for her support for presidential candidates who defied Aliaksandr Lukashenka in the fraudulent election of 9 August 2020. Likewise, Mr Znak, a prominent lawyer who also participated peacefully in the campaign process, was sentenced to 10 years in enhanced regime penal colony.

We are outraged by these politically motivated convictions and sentencings. They demonstrate that, ignoring the calls of the international community, Lukashenka and his henchmen continue to trample human rights and fundamental freedoms of the Belarusian people and to harass defenders of democracy.

Ms Kalesnikava, Mr Znak and all political prisoners in Belarus must be immediately released.

Ms Kalesnikava's and Mr Znak's process was held behind closed doors, which shows that Lukashenka's crumbling regime is afraid of its own people.

We reiterate our call for a genuine, inclusive dialogue between the regime and the democratic forces of Belarus, leading to new elections under international observation, as this is the only way out of the current political crisis.

Until then, in view of the atrocities committed by the regime and of the dangers it poses to the stability of Europe as whole, we urge the Commission and the Council to proceed swiftly with the fifth set of EU sanctions. These sanctions must be ambitious, targeting a large number of entities and officials responsible for or complicit in electoral fraud and human rights violations as well as the despicable use of illegal migration to wage hybrid warfare on the EU."

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