



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 Juozas OLEKAS,
- the Chair of the Subcommittee on Human Rights, MEP Udo BULLMANN, and
- the European Parliament's Standing Rapporteur on Belarus, MEP Petras AUŠTREVICIUS

on the sentencing of Ales Bialiatski, Valianstin Stefanovic and Uladzimir Labkovich to long prison terms in Belarus

Brussels, 3 March 2023 – "Today, a rubber-stamp court in Minsk found Sakharov Prize and Nobel Peace Prize laureate, founder of the Viasna human rights centre Ales Bialiatski guilty of 'smuggling' and 'grossly violating public order' and sentenced him to ten years in a penal colony and a heavy fine. His colleagues, member of the board of Viasna and Vice-President of the International Federation for Human Rights Valianstin Stefanovic, and Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections campaign coordinator Uladzimir Labkovich, were handed down sentences of nine and seven years, respectively, while human rights defender Zmitser Salauyou was sentenced to eight years in absentia.

This travesty of justice further highlights the continued disregard for human rights by the Lukashenka regime. The cruel reprisals against Viasna and other organisations under the pretence of bogus accusations are just part of a broader crackdown on civil society, and of the authorities' attempts to prevent Belarusian people and the international community from knowing the full extent of the grave human rights abuses committed in Belarus since the fraudulent presidential election of 2020.

We urge the Belarusian regime to put an end to this confrontational spiral, to release all political prisoners immediately and without preconditions, and to engage in a genuine dialogue with the democratic forces and civil society to find a way out of the current political crisis.

Until then, we reiterate our call on the European Union to step up its support, both inside and outside the country, for all the brave Belarusians who are fighting for a sovereign, peaceful and democratic Belarus, and to impose further sanctions against regime officials who commit or are complicit in human rights violations, such as officers of the so-called law enforcement and security services (notably agents of the nefarious KGB and GUBOPiK), prosecutors and judges.

Zhyve Belarus!"

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