



Delegation for relations with Belarus

Joint statement by:

- the Chair of the Delegation for relations with Belarus, MEP Juozas OLEKAS, and
- the European Parliament's Standing Rapporteur on Belarus, MEP Petras AUŠTREVICIUS

on the Belarus Freedom Day

Brussels, 25 March 2024 – *We congratulate all Belarusians across the world, who on 25 March commemorate the declaration of independence. 106 years ago, in 1918, sovereign Belarus was born after 150 years of Russian occupation.*

Today, the sovereignty and independence of Belarus is under threat again. By permitting Russia to use the Belarusian territory to invade Ukraine, station Iskander missiles and deploy tactical nuclear weapons, the Lukashenka's regime has effectively ceded Belarus' sovereignty to Vladimir Putin.

Amidst Russia's attempts at progressive takeover of Belarus in all spheres - political, social, economic and military, we reiterate our unwavering support to the courageous people of Belarus who continue to uphold the legacy of the first independent, free and democratic Belarus, and strive for a European future of their homeland.

The fight for the right to live in a country where human lives and fundamental freedoms are respected, comes often at a high personal price. Around 1500 political prisoners are held currently in prisons in inhuman conditions, exposed to torture and ill-treatment, testify of gross human rights violations that are committed every day in Belarus. Many more live under constant terror and persecution or were forced to leave their homeland.

On this very special day, we answer the call of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, the leader of Belarusian democratic forces, and join Belarusians around the world in celebrating the historic Freedom Day. We reiterate our support for all those Belarusians who are bravely defending the statehood of Belarus, their freedoms, fundamental rights and democratic values.

EU must further strengthen and extend its sanctions against the Lukashenka's regime for its human rights violations and for participating in Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. We must also stop Russia's de facto occupation and imminent annexation of Belarus by continuing to support Ukraine and ensuring its victory.

We remain committed to continue supporting the people of Belarus and to working with their democratic representatives - the United Transitional Cabinet of Belarus led by Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and the Coordination Council, to achieve the goal of building a democratic, free, inclusive and sovereign Belarus.

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