



Brussels, 29 March 2017

**Donald Tusk**, President of the European Council

**Jean-Claude Juncker**, President of the European Commission

**Antonio Tajani**, President of the European Parliament

**Federica Mogherini**, Vice-President of the European Commission, High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

**Johannes Hahn**, European Commissioner for Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations

We, Members of the European Parliament, strongly deplore the way the Belarusian authorities treated the peaceful demonstrations held on 25 and 26 March 2017 in Minsk in commemoration of a Freedom Day as well as the ones prior to this, organised across the whole country, in reaction to the Presidential Decree “On preventing social dependency”.

As a result, over the course of March, more than one thousand peaceful citizens of Belarus were beaten, arrested and fined, including human rights observers and journalists, women and elderly people. Even if many of them have been released, such an inappropriate and criminal use of excessive force by the security structures cannot be tolerated or remain ignored.

At the same time, it is appalling to see the Soviet-type KGB methods being applied against the leading opposition figures, such as Mikalai Statkevich, a former political prisoner and presidential candidate in 2010 elections, who was kept in KGB prison for four days without providing any information about his whereabouts, and Uladzimir Nyaklyayew, another presidential candidate of 2010, who was illegally detained prior to the rally of March 25 and was, as a consequence, hospitalised due to his health condition.

We therefore want to believe that all peaceful protesters who still remain detained will be set free immediately and that all judicial charges against them will be lifted, including in particular those concerning Mikalai Statkevich and his party members Syarhey Kulinich and Syarhey Kuntsevich, who will apparently face a fabricated case against them.

Having said this, we would particularly like to draw attention of the European Council, the European Commission and the European Parliament to a sad fact that these repressive measures have become possible to be carried out by the Belarusian authorities exactly one year after the EU’s decision to enter into a so-called re-engagement policy relations with Belarus.

Regrettably, this only proves that one should have listened more to the voices of those amongst the Belarusian civil society and democratic opposition who have been raising serious doubts about the sincere readiness of President Lukashenko to alter the nature of his regime and start pursuing a more democratic domestic policy.

In reality, the Council decision of February 2016 to remove restrictive measures against the certain Belarusian officials was reciprocated by yet another falsified election in September 2016, a number of death penalty sentences and executions throughout 2016, including one case already this year, and now by these brutalities and aggression of the special forces in the streets of cities across Belarus.

Based on this, we are strongly convinced that the European Union's policy vis-à-vis the Lukashenko's regime needs to be reconsidered in a very serious manner. The EU cannot abandon hopes of those thousands people in Belarus, who as the recent peaceful demonstrations prove trust in a democratic and European Belarus which would respect their dignity and other basic freedoms and rights.

The EU should therefore increase its assistance volumes aimed at strengthening of the civil society, independent media and democratic forces of Belarus by inter alia suspending the recently increased financial support dedicated to fund activities of the Belarusian government and other state structures. Finally, the EU should with no delay apply adequate restrictive measures against all those Belarusian officials responsible for violence and repression as well as electoral fraud.

Yours respectfully,

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