



September 24, 2020

As transatlantic legislators strongly committed to preserving and strengthening liberty, democracy, and human rights in Europe, we write with deep concern regarding the Lukashenko regime's unjust detention of opposition leader Marya Kalesnikava and her colleagues. We demand that all charges against her be dropped, and that she be immediately released along with fellow Coordination Council members Maksim Znak, Illya Saley, and all other political prisoners. Additionally, we call for the immediate release of Vitali Shkliarov who has unjustly languished in custody for two months.

The international community has condemned Belarus' August 9 presidential election as illegitimate. Reacting to the disputed results, the Belarusian people took to the streets demanding dignity, liberty, and a new election that reflects the will of the people. Sadly, Alexander Lukashenko and other regime members, such as Yury Karayev, Andrey Shved, and Ivan Noskevich have violently cracked down on these peaceful protests with arbitrary arrests, information lockdowns, persecution of civil society, as well as widespread torture and ill-treatment of the Belarusian people. Instead of heeding ongoing calls for liberty and political change, Alexander Lukashenko has broken the social contract, using state-sanctioned violence on the Belarusian people, and turned to Vladimir Putin for security assurances and other assistance to further suppress Belarusian citizens. As legislators whose nations are bound together by shared democratic, transatlantic values, we stand in strong solidarity with the Belarusian people, including those protesting and wrongly imprisoned. We condemn the Lukashenko regime's use of violence, intimidation, arrests, and repressive tactics against the people of Belarus, including the targeting of leading members of the Coordination Council.

We were deeply troubled to learn of the detention of key members of the Coordination Council such as Marya Kalesnikava. According to witnesses, Ms. Kalesnikava was abducted in broad daylight, and security forces attempted but failed to deport her to Ukraine. We admire Ms. Kalesnikava's commitment to liberty and that she chose to stay in her country despite the evident risks. Her leadership, as well as that of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, demonstrates the resilience of women at liberty's edge, and their critical role in advancing democracy in Central and Eastern Europe. The arrest of Ms. Kalesnikava will not end the Belarusians' demonstrations for liberty in Belarus. Nor will it temper our collective resolve to support the Belarusian people and hold Lukashenko regime members and foreign actors responsible for grave human rights violations committed against Belarusians.

For these reasons, we strongly urge the Lukashenko regime to immediately release Ms. Kalesnikava, Mr. Znak, Mr. Saley and all political prisoners. We condemn the unjust detainment of Mr. Shkliarov who has faced abuse and deprivation of medical treatment despite falling ill with COVID-19 symptoms. We urge the regime to cease violence against the Belarusian people consistent with Belarus' obligations under the Helsinki Final Act. We are monitoring the situation in Belarus and the regime's actions closely, and are fully

committed to using our legislative powers to advocate and act to support the Belarusian people. Further, we strongly support carefully targeted sanctions against human rights offenders in and outside of Belarus, in coordination with transatlantic allies and international partners. This includes those active and complicit in the detainment of Ms. Kalesnikava, Mr. Znak, and Mr. Saley as well as other political prisoners.

In conclusion, we stand in strong support of the vision of Europe free and at peace that has brought unprecedented stability and prosperity to the European Continent where citizens choose their own future. Surely, the people of Belarus deserve the same.

Sincerely,

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