

SCHOLARS AT RISK

NETWORK  ITALY SECTION

To: The Administration of the President
of the Republic of Belarus
Reception of citizens and representatives of legal entities
Residence of the President
38 Karl Marx Street
Minsk, Belarus
Email: contact@president.gov.by

Subject: Petition in support of Belarusian students and scholars and of academic freedom

9th April, 2021

To the Administration of the President of the Republic of Belarus

We are writing on behalf of Scholars at Risk (SAR) Italy, in agreement with the Conference of Italian University Rectors (CRUI). SAR Italy is the Italian section of SAR international network, whose mission is to protect scholars and students, and to promote academic freedom across the world.

With this letter, we express our concern for the serious events that have affected Belarusian higher education communities since the aftermath of the 2020 Presidential election, and in particular for the persistent violations of rights against Belarusian students and scholars.

Belarusian students and scholars from different universities, such as the Belarusian State University (BSU), Minsk State Linguistic University (MSLU) and the Belarusian State University of Informatics and Radioelectronics (BSUIR) joined peaceful protests over the election results and asked for the democratisation of the country and for the autonomy of Belarusian Universities.

We learn from Scholars at Risk International, specifically in the [Free to Think 2020 Report](#), as well as the United Nations Human Rights Office, that the state authorities demanded students' expulsion from universities and authorised violent repression by the police. At the end of 2020, the Viasna Human Rights Centre in Minsk reported more than 1,000 testimonies of torture victims, largely perpetrated against young students. We also learn from international and Belarusian organizations working on human rights that Belarusian students are increasingly subjects of detention, prosecution through penal cases and are denied the right to have contact with their families and lawyers. The recently published [Academic Freedom Index](#) registers a clear downfall of campus integrity and freedom of academic and cultural expression.

As members and representatives of Italian university communities, which include many Belarusian students, we are highly concerned about the information regarding the expulsion from universities, the arrest and prosecution of students as well as threats against and firing of scholars following their non

violent exercise of freedom of expression, assembly and association. The exercise of these rights is expressly protected in the Belarusian constitution, specifically in articles 8, 33, 35 and 36, as well as under international human rights instruments, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Belarus is a party. Attacks against higher education communities are inconsistent with the State's commitment to respect the norms, values and ethics of the Bologna Process, which Belarus joined in 2015.

The restriction of the nonviolent exercise of the rights to freedom of expression and association, when directed against the higher education community, undermines academic freedom and democratic society generally.

SAR Italy and CRUI call for the immediate and unconditional release of students and professors who have been detained for exercising their right to freedom of expression and association. Following the United Nations Human Rights Council's Resolution on the Situation of their human rights in Belarus in the run-up to the 2020 presidential election and in its aftermath (A/HRC/46/L.19), SAR Italy calls upon the Belarusian authorities to cease using force against peaceful demonstrators, torture and other inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and enforced disappearance, and to stop carrying out arbitrary arrests, detentions and imprisonment of persons for exercising their fundamental human rights. Moreover, we urge the Belarusian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release all political prisoners, journalists and other media workers, human rights defenders, NGO representatives, members of strike committees, and those arbitrarily detained in the lead-up to, during and after the presidential election for exercising their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

We appreciate your attention in this important matter and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

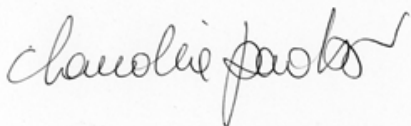
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