

# Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

## S T A T E M E N T

### On the persecution of journalists and medical doctors in Belarus

25 February 2021

We, the undersigned members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe,  
*referring to* the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the right to life, liberty and security of person enshrined therein,

*referring to* the fact that the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and its Article 10 in particular establishes a fundamental freedom of expression, which guarantees every person the right to the freedom of thought and convictions, as well as to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers,

*referring to* the fact that in its interpretation of the substance of the abovementioned freedom, which includes the right of both the person to disseminate information and the public to obtain it, the European Court of Human Rights (hereinafter referred to as the ECHR) has indicated that the right to disseminate information and ideas includes the right to disseminate certain negative information, too, rather than only neutral or positive information, which may be unacceptable to a particular part of the public. Furthermore, it follows from the ECHR jurisprudence that information which reflects true facts should not normally be prohibited,

*having regard to* the principles of medical ethics and of the work of medical doctors enshrined in the abovementioned instruments and other instruments of international law,

*having regard to* the statements and appeals made by journalist and medical associations of European countries, including, among others, the European Federation of Journalists and the Lithuanian Medical Movement, regarding the intimidation and persecution of their colleagues in Belarus on politically motivated grounds and in gross violation of the principles of justice,

*pointing out to* the ongoing protests in Belarus since August 2020 against the rigged presidential elections, where Alexander Lukashenko declared himself the winner, as well as to the fact that the global community of democracies does not recognise Lukashenko as President, while peaceful rallies in Belarus demand fair elections that meet international standards,

*following* the developments in Belarus, where Lukashenko's regime responds to peaceful protests by repression and where the number of political prisoners, including human rights defenders, journalists, activists, representatives of youth organisations and political parties, has reached 300, with fabricated cases against them and attempts to break them in prison,

**express deep concern over gross violations of human rights, restrictions on media freedoms and persecution, intimidation and imprisonment of journalists and medical staff in Belarus, and bring to the attention of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, its German Presidency, and other Member States of the Council of Europe the recent developments that clearly attest to the abovementioned facts of persecution and politically motivated imprisonment:**

1. On 18 February 2021, two journalists of the Polish-based television *Belsat* – Katsiaryna Bakhvalava, 27, and Darya Chultsova, 23 – were sentenced by the Belarusian court to imprisonment for a term of two years. The *Belsat* journalists were detained in November 2020 while filming a rally in support of one of the murdered participants of the anti-government protest. The journalists sought to provide objective information, but were sentenced for ‘organising and staging protests that grossly violate public order’. Both journalists deny their guilt.
2. On 19 February 2021, another trial started against medical doctor Artsyom Sarokin and Katsiaryna Barysevich, a reporter of the news website [www.tut.by](http://www.tut.by). They face 3-year imprisonment sentence. Doctor Sarokin honestly performed his work by saving a person’s life and defending his human dignity. Reporter Barysevich is on trial for daring to deny the lies spread by the government that Raman Bandarenka, who did not survive the violence used against him by the special forces of the regime, was allegedly under the influence of alcohol and died as a result of injuries received in fights. On the basis of the testimony of Sarokin, Barysevich disclosed that no alcohol had been found in Bandarenka’s blood.

We state that the trials of innocent people in Minsk make a mockery of justice and human dignity. These cases have been condemned by press freedom and human rights organisations, the medical community, and governments of democratic countries.

We are deeply concerned about the Belarusian citizens who fall victim to political persecution, express our support for the Belarusians fighting for freedom and democracy, urge the Belarusian authorities to immediately retract the unjustified accusations against doctor Artsyom Sarokin, journalists Katsiaryna Barysevich, Katsiaryna Bakhvalava and Darya Chultsova, and other political prisoners and prisoners of conscience, and demand that their prosecution be stopped as soon as possible.

Drafted and signed by Dr. Laima Liucija Andrikiienė, Vice-President of PACE, EPP/CD, Lithuania

Supported and signed by:

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