

Ursula von der Leyen
President of the European
Commission

Josep Borrell Fontelles High
Representative of the Union for
Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

[Letter sent by e-mail]
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Urgent action needed following the prison sentences for trade union leaders in Belarus

Dear President of the European Commission Ms von der Leyen,
Dear High Representative and Vice-President of the European Commission Mr Borrell,

I am contacting you to raise the grave concern of the ETUC about the convictions and imprisonment of BKDP President Aliaksandr Yarashuk, Vice-President Siarhei Antusevich and trade union official Iryna But-Husaim for “offences against public order” relating to peaceful demonstrations and workplace protests against authoritarian and anti-worker policies.

We recall that the conviction of trade union leaders for exercising their legitimate right to freedom of association constitutes a grave violation of the principles of freedom of association. Trade union rights lose all meaning in the absence of full and meaningful respect for those civil liberties enunciated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, in particular the right to freedom and security of the individual, freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention, freedom of opinion and expression, freedom of assembly, the right to a fair trial and the right to protection of trade union property. The ETUC reiterates the request of the ILO’s Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions (CEACR) to “release all trade unionists who remain in detention and to drop all charges related to participation in peaceful protests and industrial actions”, as well as the ILO Governing Body’s call to “allow the ILO, as a matter of urgency, to ascertain the conditions of arrest and detention and the welfare of the trade unionists.”

BKDP has been fighting for human rights and for democracy in Belarus for years. The sentences against trade union leaders are another sign of the intensification of repression by the Belarusian regime, that is determined to attack independent trade unions and suppress workers’ right to form and join independent unions in Belarus. These sentences constitute an unacceptable attack to human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The violation of fundamental rights by the regime must be held accountable. Aliaksandr Yarashuk, Siarhei Antusevich and Iryna But-Husaim must be released along with the other activists who are imprisoned for exercising human rights.

The struggle of trade unionists for decent working conditions and for democracy deserves the respect and support from all who stand for rule of law, democratic values and institutions and human rights.

The ETUC urges the EU to express public support for the independent trade union movement of Belarus, and to demand and take all possible steps so that the Belarusian authorities immediately and unconditionally release arrested trade unionists, as well as all human rights defenders and political prisoners, and cease harassment and reprisals against independent trade unions and against individuals exercising their human rights.

We look forward to your reply and we would like to thank you in advance for your support.

Yours sincerely,

Esther Lynch,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Esther Lynch', is positioned below the typed name.

ETUC and PERC General Secretary