

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

[Letter sent by e-mail]

cab-borrell-fontelles-contact@ec.europa.eu

Dear High Representative,

The situation for independent trade unions in Belarus has seriously deteriorated. On 19 April 2022, the leadership of the Belarusian Congress of Trade Unions (BKDP) - the President of BKDP Aliaksandr Yarashuk, BKDP Vice-President Siarhei Antusevich, President of Free Trade Union of Metal Workers (SPM) Aliaksandr Bukhvostau, President of Free Trade Union of Belarus (SPB) Mikalaj Sharakh - were arrested.

We were also informed that a number of other colleagues were also arrested, including Yana Malash, Vitali Chychmarou, Hanna Dus, Vadzim Payvin, Mikhail Hromau, Ihar Komlik (released yesterday), Yury Beliakou, Vasil Berasneu, Hennadz Fiadynich, Dzmitry Barodka, Miraslau Sabchuk, Iryna Bud-Husaim, Alena Yeskova (released yesterday). Aleh Padalinski, international secretary of BKDP, is not answering his phone. Several others are still not reachable and their location is not known.

The trade union premises of the BKDP in Minsk were searched. We understand that the premises of the Free trade union of Belarus (SPB), Free trade union of Metal workers (SPM) and Union of Radio-Electronic Workers (REP) were also searched. The security forces also searched homes of the trade union leaders and employees. The searches covered Personal Computers (PCs), flash cards, personal documents, passports, bank cards including those of family members, SIM cards of foreign mobile operators and trade union paraphernalia.

These developments are deeply concerning. The unions of the BKDP have been to the forefront in the fight for democracy in Belarus for more than twenty years. Many of our trade union colleagues have been repressed during this time, in particular after the fraudulent elections in August 2020, because of their principle stand for fundamental freedoms and rights that the Lukashenko regime has been suppressing. The BKDP leaders have been vocal against the war that Russia is waging against Ukraine and the role of Belarus in it. We have good reason to believe that the outrageous attack on BKDP and its activists is a direct retaliation. But it is also a clear signal that the regime no longer has any tolerance towards any democratic and free movement in the country, which the BKDP is the largest and probably the last part of. Nor does the regime appear to feel bound by any international conventions, including in particular, those from the International Labour Organisation

We call on you to express clear support for the democratic trade union movement of Belarus, to demand the immediate release of all arrested trade unionists, but also to exercise every possible pressure via diplomatic channels to ensure that the attacks against BKDP and its leaders and activists are stopped.

The ITUC has informed the ILO about this outrageous development and we have also called on all affiliates of both the ITUC and the ETUC to engage with the governments of their countries to ensure the release of our fellow trade unionists.

Luca Visentini
ETUC and PERC General Secretary

Sharan Burrow
ITUC General Secretary

