



EU-RUSSIA CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM ГРАЖДАНСКИЙ ФОРУМ ЕС-РОССИЯ

Statement of the Eastern Partnership and EU-Russia Civil Society Forum

on Ales Bialiatski imprisonment

1 December 2011

On 24 November, in Belarus, a politically motivated verdict was pronounced against a prominent human rights defender, leader of the Human Rights Center “Viasna”, Vice-President of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), Ales Bialiatski. He was found guilty of alleged “tax evasion on a large scale” and sentenced to four and a half years of imprisonment in a high security penal colony with confiscation of property.

Thus, a prominent human rights defender joined the list of political prisoners in Belarus.

Ales Bialiatski is internationally recognized as an impartial and outspoken human rights defender, who has persistently and consciously protected the ideals of human rights and democracy under authoritarian circumstances.

The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, expresses resolute protest at Ales Bialiatski’s conviction and reiterates its position on his persecution and arrest, voiced by over 50 participants of the EaP Civil Society Forum in a statement adopted on 29 August 2011.

We would like to state the following:

The prosecution and conviction of Ales Bialiatski on tax charges cannot disguise the true reasons for the harassment of the human rights defender. We are convinced that the tax charges, related to the disclosure of his personal bank accounts in the EU countries are nothing but a pretext for isolating the key figure of the country’s human rights movement. These accounts were used solely for the funding of human rights activities in Belarus.

We emphasize that the trial failed to produce even indirect evidence of Ales Bialiatski’s guilt, for which he was unjustly punished.

We believe that the verdict to Ales Bialiatski is the result of many years of the Belarusian authorities’ repressive policy against human rights groups and defenders for their criticism of the country’s human rights record.

We call upon the European Union member states to take joint measures toward the release of Ales Bialiatski and other political prisoners, as there should be no political prisoners in the countries that have signed the Eastern Partnership Declaration.

We demand an immediate and unconditional release and full rehabilitation of Ales Bialiatski.