

Supporting Political Prisoners in Europe in Times of Increasing Autocracy



Today, democracy faces big challenges across the globe, and autocracies are expanding their influence. According to estimates by the US government, there are **more than 1 million political prisoners worldwide**. Repressive regimes have been systematically muzzling independent voices, especially Russian and Belarusian authorities. According to the latest estimate by human right defender "Memorial", **Russia has 988 political prisoners**. According to the human rights center "Viasna96", **Belarus keeps 1462 political prisoners behind bars**. And these numbers are not final and constantly growing.

The European People's Party is deeply concerned by the growing numbers of political prisoners, especially affiliated to our political family:

Belarus: Belarusian authorities keep in prison two of our party leaders - Pavel Seviarynets (BCD) and Mikhalai Kazlou (UCP) as well as Artsem Liabedzka, the son of prominent opposition leader Anatol Liabedzka. Furthermore, many other activists of our political family are imprisoned on politically motivated charges, among them Tatsiana and Dzmitry Kaneuski, Barys Kuchynski, Mikalai Artsiukhou, Ihar Salavei, Pavel Spiryn, Pavel Belavus, Pavel Mazheika, Aliaksandr Nahela, Andrus Asmalouski, Dzyana Charnushyna, Anton Babrou, Artur Smaliakou, Andrei Tolchyn and Vasil Paliakou. Vitold Ashurak died in prison in 2021.

Russia: The unlawful and long prison sentence of Sakharov Prize laureate and EPP merit award holder Alexei Navalny, Ilya Yashin and Vladimir Kara-Murza have no judicial ground and are aimed at silencing the opposition voices within the country. Alexei Navalny has been subjected to ill-treatment, including torture, arbitrary punishment, psychological pressure and has been deprived of the possibility to see his family for more than eight months.

Georgia: The former President of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili has been in prison on politically motivated charges, he is deprived of proper medical care and his health condition has been alarmingly deteriorating. Armenia: The imprisonment of Vice President of Republican Party of Armenia Armen Ashotyan, despite the lack of substantial evidence, is causing great concern to us. Mr. Ashotyan was deprived of communication with his family for more than two months; the court also denied the motion of his defence team to release him on bail, to place him under house arrest, as well as the personal guarantees from prominent CDI members.

The European People's Party:

- **Stands** in support of all above mentioned political prisoners and other brave fighters for democracy, especially in Russia and Belarus.
- **Deplores** all forms of political repression and imprisonment.
- **Calls** for the immediate release of Alexei Navalny, Ilya Yashin, Vladimir Kara-Murza and other political prisoners, who fight against the criminal Putin's regime and have been prosecuted for their association with Navalny and their opposition to the war of aggression against Ukraine.
- **Demands** the release of Pavel Seviarynets, Mikhalai Kazlou, Artsem Liabedzka and other persons listed above, to ensure their full rehabilitation and to compensate them for the damage caused by arbitrary criminal prosecutions; calls also for the immediate release of all political prisoners in Belarus.
- **Calls** upon the authorities of Armenia to release Armen Ashotyan, to assure fair and transparent judicial process; and to stop political persecution of its opponents.
- **Calls** upon the authorities of Georgia to take urgent measures to protect the health of Mikhail Saakash-

vili and to immediately release him.

- **Reiterates** its call for the EU institutions to continue monitoring the human rights situation in Russia, Belarus and to support the human right defenders.
- **Stresses** that Putin and Lukashenka must be put on trial for crimes they committed against their own people.
- **Urges** the Council to adopt restrictive measures for those responsible for persecution and torture in Russia and Belarus against political opponents as well as against anti-war protesters.



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