



НАЦИОНАЛЬНАЯ ОБЩЕСТВЕННАЯ ОРГАНИЗАЦИЯ ЗА ПРАВА ЧЕЛОВЕКА

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To: Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe Dunja Mijatović
From: a group of Russian Human Rights defenders
Re: “Novaya Gazeta” journalist detained in in Belarus

Dear Ms. Mijatović!

We kindly ask you to urgently intervene in the situation that is happening in Belarus with a journalist of Novaya Gazeta, Vitaly Shklyarov, a political scientist and writer.

On July 29, 2020 he was detained in the city of Gomel, transported to Minsk and placed in custody for a period of 2 months on August 1. Vitaly Shklyarov is known as a scientific associate at the Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies at Harvard University. He has repeatedly covered the election campaign in Belarus, expressing his critical position regarding the current President Alexander Lukashenko.

Details of his arrest are provided on the website:

<https://news.tut.by/society/694792.html>

The detention of Vitaly Shklyarov has been also reported by the “Justice for Journalists” Foundation.

On August 4, the Russian Independent Trade Union of journalists published an official statement on its Facebook page, which concludes that the detention of Mr. Shklyarov was provocative in its nature and was intended to inflame tension before the presidential elections in Belarus.

The link to this publication:

<https://www.facebook.com/profsoyuz.zhurnalistov/photos/a.982955178449263/3082146581863435>

The Trade Union of Journalists emphasizes that Vitaly Shklyarov is a citizen of Belarus, a native of Gomel, where his elderly parents currently live. They are now taking care of Vitaly Shklyarov's young son Nikita, a US citizen who was separated from both parents as a result of the repressive actions of the authorities. Shklyarov's wife, a US citizen, works in Kiev and it is dangerous for her to visit Belarus. Thus, in case of this child the article 8 of the European Convention on human rights has been violated, as well as the Convention on the rights of children.

We would like to draw your attention to the circumstances that indicate the provocative nature of Shklyarov's detention.

Vitaly Shklyarov arrived in Belarus in early July. For two weeks he followed a strict police order not to leave the house, although no quarantine or observation was imposed on visitors in the country. The purpose of these actions became clear later: they detain mercenaries of the Russian private military company Wagner – and on the same day and in the same criminal case they capture Shklyarov.

The Trade Union of Journalists that is a member of EFJ (European Federation of Journalists), considers Vitaly Shklyarov a political prisoner and stated that the arrest, aimed at stopping "commenting on the political situation in Belarus", is a serious violation of human rights and impedes journalistic activities.

All this is happening at a very difficult time in the country's political life, when professional journalism in Belarus is fraught with high risks and many difficulties.

As Commissioner for human rights, you have a special role in relation to the activities of journalists. In this context, it is necessary to remind the Belarusian authorities that by arresting Mr. Shklyarov they violate the key human rights principle that States should create journalist-friendly environment and facilitate the work of journalists, allowing individuals, groups and associations of journalists and media workers to freely carry out their professional duties, communicating objective information to the public without any restrictions on freedom of self-expression or hindering journalistic activity.

This duty is most important in difficult circumstances, when the presidential election in Belarus is less than a week away.

Thus, we kindly ask you to urgently address the President of Belarus before the elections with a recommendation to immediately release Vitaly Shklyarov from the prison and secure the opportunity for him to freely perform his journalistic activity.

Lev Ponomarev, chairman of "For Human Rights" Public Organization
Valery Borshchev, co-chairman of Moscow Helsinki Group
Svetlana Gannushkina, chairman of the Committee "Civil Cooperation"