



The EWC condemns the attacks of the dictatorial Lukashenko regime on its member, the Union of Belarusian Writers, as well as on the writers' organisation PEN Belarus in Minsk.

An unprecedented wave of violations against independent cultural and human rights organisations rolls through the suffering country: On 14 July, the Directorate “Combating Organised Crime and Corruption” of the Belarusian Ministry of the Interior has conducted a nationwide ‘radical cleansing’ operation against independent associations of writers, journalists, cultural workers, and human rights organisations, including EWC Member, the Union of Belarusian Writers, and PEN Belarus.

Brussels, 16 July 2021 **Worrying news has reached us from our member the Union of Belarusian Writers, as well as from the equally independent authors' association, PEN Belarus.** They are among the at least 21 non-government organisations that have been subjected to a targeted and concerted attack by the Ministry of the Interior, as local sources reported to EWC. Their offices as well as the homes of the chair persons were stormed by law enforcement officers on 14 July. The list includes also the Association of Belarusian Journalists, the independent academic research centre BEROCC, and Viasna, the human rights organisation defending political prisoners. Viasna’s founder and Chair Ales Bialiatski, writer and laureate of the “Alternative Nobel Award” 2020, was detained.

On 14 July, the office of EWC Member the Union of Belarusian Writers (UBW), was raided, equipment and documents confiscated. The Chair of the independent Union of Belarusian Writers, Barys Piatrovich, is banned from leaving the country and lives now under restriction in his also raided home. His phone has been confiscated, and he was forced to sign a non-disclosure agreement. This “information ban” indicates that he would face a penalty if he spoke publicly about the indiscriminate proceedings against the Writers’ Union. Also, PEN Belarus’s registered address was raided. However, as the office is located elsewhere, the computers of an uninvolved organisation were confiscated instead. Previously, both writers' associations had been ordered by the Ministry of Justice to hand over documents from three years within 24 hours, including board minutes, correspondence, accounts and membership lists. On Tuesday, 13 July, the dictator Alexander Lukashenko had declared that 1500 organisations and journalists would be “financed from other countries” and were “causing unrest and promoting terror instead of democracy” in Belarus.

“[In 2020, 590 authors, artists and cultural workers were attacked and subjected to psychological and physical cruelty in Belarusian prisons.](#) Now we see the Belarusian authorities continue the violating crackdown against civil society, against media, activists for democracy, and against writers. Where are the consequences? Where is the interest, since [our Belarusian colleagues shout out for help?](#)”, criticizes Nina George, President of the European Writers’ Council. “The members of the UBW and PEN Belarus are in acute danger to be persecuted and detained under inhumane conditions or tried on absurd charges.” Already the Nobel Laureate for Literature Svetlana Alexievich, President of PEN Belarus and member of the Union of Belarusian Writers, [had to deal with the accusation of attempted coup d'état in 2020](#); she left Belarus shortly after the court hearings.

The EWC condemns these measures of the Belarusian government in the strongest possible terms. We call on the European community not only to make comments of concern, but to act immediately for the people and the democracy movement in Belarus. We ask writers and all the cultural workers to stand up and unite to the strongest possible voice: that of democracy and human rights.

On behalf of the Board of the European Writers’ Council:

Nina George
President

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