

“Crackdown on Religious Freedom in Belarus: A Threat to Fundamental Rights”
– tabled by KDH (Slovakia)

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The European People’s Party (EPP) strongly condemns the recent authoritarian crackdown by Aleksandr Lukashenka in Belarus on religious organisations, directly violating fundamental rights and religious freedoms. This move further strengthens a Lukashenka regime characterised by the systematic repression of political opponents and dissidents, including through the enforced disappearance of critics.

After the fraudulent presidential elections of 2020, Belarusian authorities have systematically purged “undesirable” associations, often under the pretext of combating alleged mass riots, extremism or terrorism. The purge targeted human rights organizations in 2021, followed by independent trade unions in 2022 and political parties in 2023; it has continued in 2024 and 2025 against religious organisations, methodically eroding any remaining civil liberties in Belarus.

Recently enacted changes to the law “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations” — which severely restricts freedom of faith, forces the re-registration of religious communities before 5 June 2025 and entails punitive measures against activities conducted on behalf of unregistered organisations — have created a climate of legal uncertainty. Up to two years of imprisonment are stipulated for activities conducted on behalf of any unregistered organisation. In practice, Belarusian legislation allows people to be imprisoned simply for holding prayer meetings at home without obtaining government permission.

As such, severe sentences have been applied against religious leaders: for example, Catholic priest Henrykh Akalatovich was sentenced in December 2024 to 11 years in prison for treason, allegedly for espionage in favour of Poland and the Vatican; and Orthodox priest Siarhiej Rezanovich was sentenced to 16 years in prison on 17 October 2022, allegedly for conspiring to seize state power.

Recognising that freedom of religion and belief is a fundamental human right essential to personal dignity and societal stability, and acknowledging that these rights are under systematic attack in Belarus, the European People’s Party (EPP) unequivocally condemns the new law on religion, the forced re-registration of religious communities, the criminalisation of unregistered religious activities and the targeted destruction of places of worship.

Particularly emphasising that these actions constitute violations of fundamental rights and freedoms guaranteed both by the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus and by international human rights instruments to which Belarus is a party, the EPP calls on the Belarusian authorities to:

- Immediately repeal the repressive measures introduced in the law “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations” and in Article 193-1 of the Criminal Code, which criminalises the activities of unregistered organisations, including religious groups, political parties, civil society organisations and media;
- Release all detained clergy, including Henrykh Akalatovich, Siarhiey Rezanovich, Andrzej Yukhnevich and Mikalai Khila, along with all political prisoners;
- Restore access to confiscated places of worship, including the Catholic Red Church, and halt further state interference in religious institutions.

The EPP further calls on all relevant EU bodies to:

- Strengthen cooperation between the EU, international human rights bodies, and Belarusian civil society to ensure transparent and regular reporting on religious repression;
- Request the EU Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief, upon being appointed, to launch an official inquiry into Belarus’s violations of international human rights treaties, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention Against Torture and the UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief;
- Allocate targeted EU funding to provide technical and legal assistance to religious communities at risk;
- Foster international solidarity initiatives, creating safe networks of support among persecuted religious groups, ensuring that these communities can continue to practice their faith without fear of state repression.