

H. E. Mr. *Sergey Aleksandrovich Maskevich*
Minister of Education,
Republic of Belarus

Dear Colleague,

Along with fellow ministers for higher education of higher education ... I am writing to you in order to express our deep concern over the situation for academic freedom in Belarus. Following the unrest in the wake of last month's presidential elections in your country, we have been informed that a number of students and academics have been harassed, detained and prevented from continuing their work and studies.

We are distressed to find that Belarusian students from the European Humanities University in Vilnius are among the detainees and are unable to return to their place of study. An independent Belarusian academic voice is of great value – above all to Belarus itself, but also as part of the European academic community at large.

To deprive academic staff or students of the opportunity to pursue their quest of knowledge because they have expressed their political views is deeply unjustified. Moreover, it undermines the intellectual reservoirs that promote social and economic development in your country.

This applies to Belarusian students and academic staff regardless of their place of study or work, be it Minsk or Vilnius or elsewhere. It must be a goal to us all that participation in the global community of scholars is borderless. European borders are gradually losing their significance, and the European Education Area is now a reality. The Bologna Process is an important expression of such aspirations, including by now most European states.

In this context, Mr. Minister, any action that restricts freedom of thought and expression reduces the vitality of the Belarusian academic community and seriously undermines the participation of your country in shaping the European future of knowledge. We urge you to help ensure that students and academics in Belarus are given the security and recognition they are entitled to and are able to pursue their academic careers regardless of their political views. On behalf of our own academic institutions, we offer partnership in expanding contacts and collaboration with the worldwide academic community, where we hope to see Belarus as a valued and fully integrated member. To achieve this goal, which I believe we share, Belarus needs to show that it fully respects the principles of academic freedom as well as other fundamental human rights and civil liberties.