

## Members of the European Parliament



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Brussels, 18 February 2021

### **Subject: Participation of Belarus in the Eurovision Song Contest 2021 and situation at EBU Member BTRC**

Dear Madam President,

right at the very beginning, we, the undersigned Members of the European Parliament, would like to emphasise that we **do not address you with the intention of politicising the Eurovision Song Contest**. On the contrary, we want to prevent an authoritarian regime from misusing the Eurovision Song Contest for its political goals and thus keep it free from a political agenda. And apart from this music event, it is about respecting and defending basic principles in media policy which, as we assume, the EBU and we share.

One of the main goals of the illegitimate Belarusian leader since last summer has been to **suppress and brutally crack down on the democratic movement** in "his" country. Many journalists, media professionals, artists and musicians have also joined the hundreds of thousands of courageous Belarusians in their peaceful and legitimate struggle for democratic basic principles and their fundamental rights and freedoms. Consequently, they too have

been and continue to be victims of intimidation, raids, brutal attacks and arrests, and in no way are they still able to freely pursue their professional and artistic activities.

Also persons who were involved in the participation of Belarus in the Eurovision Song Contest in the past, are among the victims. Denis Sokolov, Director of Photography at BTRC and for several years member of the Belarusian ESC delegation, was detained. NaviBand, Belarus' entry at ESC 2017, was forced to leave Belarus due to political persecution. TV host Denis Dudinski, commentator at ESC 2006 and host of Junior Eurovision 2008, was dismissed for voicing his civil stance.

Last year's entry VAL was not allowed to represent Belarus in Rotterdam this year due to an "absence of conscience" - as the head of BTRC put it. It is obvious that this was not simply a BTRC internal or artistic decision and loyalty with the Lukashenko regime will be the decisive factor in the selection of a new representative for the upcoming ESC. All these concrete examples are symptoms of the in general very worrying and more than problematic situation at your member BTRC, where **all journalistic and democratic values are severely violated**. This public broadcaster, which has a proven record of spreading fake news, hate speech and the propaganda of an authoritarian regime, and whose management is involved in illegal activities, is not only acting contrary to its mandate, but is complicit in the violence against peaceful protesters and the infringement of universal fundamental rights and freedoms in Belarus.

As recently as the beginning of February this year, the **EBU had joined a call addressed to us on the protection of media freedom and fundamental rights in a different context**. In another paper, you define the promotion of democratic values and the principles of **media freedom and pluralism as one of your key concerns** and you deplore the fact that journalists are exposed to serious threats and intimidation in parts of the EU. However, respect for these fundamental values, which you rightly call for at EU level, should not end at the EU's external borders and be the basis of all your members' activities and serious violations should be a criterion for exclusion from EBU membership. In the case of BTRC, there is a whole list of valid reasons that would justify terminating its membership of the EBU. It can also be assumed that many other EBU members do not want to continue to be "in the same boat" as BTRC and given the ever worsening situation in Belarus the reputation of the EBU as a whole might be at stake if no action is taken here.

The EBU is, as one can read on your website, the world's leading alliance of public service media with 115 member organisations in 56 countries combining a potential audience of 1.07 billion people. This reach is very impressive and, in our opinion, it creates responsibility and the obligation to protect and defend the aforementioned fundamental values in your own sphere of influence.

The EBU is also one of the stakeholders at EU level whose positions and comments on EU legislation are considered relevant and there has been an established and constructive exchange between the EP and the EBU for many years on many policy areas that affect your areas of activity and our common goals when it comes protecting rights and freedoms. This makes us confident that you will be **sensitive to our concerns and that you stand by our side in the struggle for the upholding of democratic and journalistic values** in the EU and beyond.

We thank you for your attention and look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely,

Viola von Cramon-Taubadel, The Greens/EFA

Petras Auštrevičius, Renew Europe

Anna Fotyga, ECR

Róza Gräfin von Thun und Hohenstein, EPP

Andrius Kubilius, EPP

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