

To: The President of Belarus

Aliaksandr Lukashenka

K. Marx Str., 38, 220016, Minsk

Belarus

Dear Mr. President,

Brussels, 26 November 2015

As it became known, in your reply to the question raised by the 'Radio Liberty' journalist Valery Kalinouski on August 4, 2015 about the frequent cases of prosecution by fines of freelance journalists cooperating with foreign media, you expressed the following opinion: "I think that it's nonsense... It is not my principle to ban something. I will look into this problem. As for the fines, we will examine the problem, too. These are not rich people, and I understand it. I promise you that I will consider this issue. It is not because we meet. It is because you apparently have the point here. We will address this problem."

The problem appeared since April 2014. The Belarusian journalists, whose materials published in foreign mass media, were prosecuted for their reports on administrative offences, drawn up by representatives of Belarusian internal affairs agencies.

The total sum of imposed fines amounted to approximately 146.78 million Belarusian rubles as of August 19, 2015. According to the police and courts, these actions were regarded as "violation of the procedure of production and / or distribution of media products" (article 22.9, part 2 of the Code on Administrative Offenses of the Republic of Belarus).

However, in our opinion, the application of this article in the Code on Administrative Offenses in relation to journalists constitutes to the violation of the citizens' Constitutional right to receive, store, and disseminate information. It would have a negative impact on the international image of the Republic of Belarus.

Journalists' organisations, including the Belarusian Association of Journalists, intended to raise the problem by addressing to state bodies, in order to bring legal

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certainty to freelance journalists. In particular, appeals were sent on the issue to the Supreme Court of Belarus, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Belarus, the General Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Belarus, and the State Security Committee of the Republic of Belarus.

However, none of the above-mentioned authorities took appropriate steps to resolve the situation.

We were very pleased to learn that the practice of bringing freelance journalists to administrative liability was ceased after you had expressed your opinion on the mentioned problem.

We are confident that the official authorities of Belarus will adhere to the progressive trend in the future.

In order to prevent similar problems in the future, we would like to address to you with a kind suggestion to introduce the legal status of freelance journalists into the law of Belarus.

With Kind Regards,

Mogens Blicher Bjerregård



EFJ President.

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