

Press Release

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Council of Europe parliamentarians strongly condemn denial of academic freedom in Belarus

Strasbourg, 31.03.2006 – The Committee on Culture, Science and Education of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) today adopted the following statement on academic freedom in Belarus at the conclusion of its colloquy on university autonomy and accountability in the 21st century, held in Prague on 30 March 2006:

“On the occasion of its colloquy on university autonomy and accountability in Prague on 30 March 2006, the Committee on Culture, Science and Education of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe heard testimony from the Rector of the European Humanities University, Professor Anatoly Mikhailov, and a number of students from Belarus who had been thrown out of their universities in Belarus as an act of political harassment. The Committee strongly condemned the denial of academic freedom in the Republic of Belarus.

Academic freedom is one of the cornerstones of a democratic society and a requirement for its progress. However, the regime of President Lukashenko has over the past decade introduced a totally controlled system of education in Belarus. This control has been realised through the appointment of propaganda guards at every educational institution, the virtual exclusion of the Belarusian language from the education system, the systematic harassment of non-conforming teachers and students and their exclusion from educational institutions, as well as the forced closure of educational institutions.

The Committee welcomed the support that the international community and in particular Lithuania provided to the European Humanities University which had to go into exile from Minsk (Belarus) to Vilnius (Lithuania). It encouraged member governments as well as universities in Europe to co-operate with the European Humanities University and facilitate student and faculty exchanges. In this context, the Committee's rapporteur on university autonomy and accountability, the Czech Senator Professor Josef Jarab, announced the decision of the Czech government to award scholarships to students from Belarus.

The Committee also stressed the need for the Council of Europe to develop contacts with students in Belarus as well as with Belarusian universities in order to promote respect for academic freedom.

‘Those in power in Belarus are trying to incarcerate the minds of the Belarusian people by controlling their education’, Senator Jarab told the colloquy. ‘They might have succeeded in incarcerating many people physically, but European history has shown that the freedom of the mind and academic freedom are stronger than any dictatorial system.’ ”

[Link to the programme of the colloquy](#) (PDF)

The Parliamentary Assembly brings together 315 members from the national parliaments of the 46 member states.

President: René van der Linden (Netherlands, EPP/CD); Secretary General of the Assembly: Mateo Sorinas.

Political Groups: SOC (Socialist Group); EPP/CD (Group of the European People's Party); ALDE (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe); EDG (European Democratic Group); UEL (Group of the Unified European Left).