

## **Special event in solidarity with Russian and Belarusian political prisoners**

*Monday, 24 April 2023*

Ladies and gentlemen,

In a civilized world, respecting human rights, democracy and the rule of law, political prisoners should not exist.

The place of politicians is in parliament and whether we agree with their views or not, they should be entitled to freedom of speech. But the reality is, as we know, very different.

Exactly a week ago today, Vladimir Kara-Murza, recipient of the 2022 Council of Europe Václav Havel Human Rights Prize, was sentenced to 25 years in prison, in a mockery of judgement by the judicial authorities of the Russian Federation.

We are all dedicated to help the political prisoners, but we should not forget their families because the burden that they feel, is also shared by their families.

Indeed, Political prisoners, whose only “mistake” has been to have diverging views from the power in place, and who couldn’t stay silent even at the cost of their personal freedom, are unfortunately not the only victims of repression.

Their families, many with young children, are left to survive on their own while their loved ones are taken away by a repressive state. I think one cannot imagine in reality their suffering.

I think here of Ales Bialatksi, whose wife Natalja is among us today, and also about Maria Kalesnikava, [whose sister Tatiana is also present]. Both of them are also Council of Europe Václav Havel Human Rights Prize winners.

I think about the hundreds of brave people who have had the courage to speak out for the truth.

Dear Evgenia,

With this gathering today we would like to show our solidarity with Vladimir, to you and your children. You are not alone and your friends from the 46 member States of the Council of Europe are together with you in this difficult time.