



YOUNG  
EUROPEAN  
FEDERALISTS

## #DemocracyUnderPressure 2021

Focused Infokit

Belarus & Russia

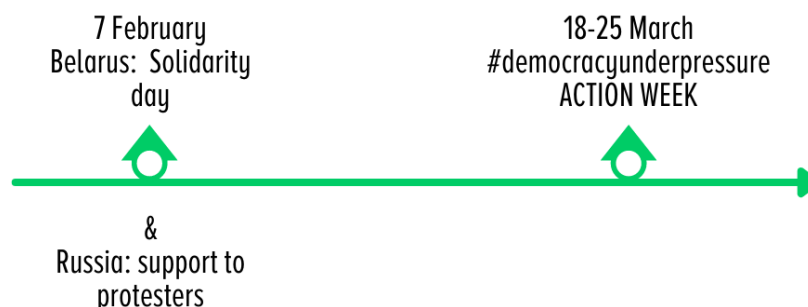
\*Call to action\*

Since 2006, JEF Europe has been organising the “**Free Belarus Action**” to raise awareness about the Lukashenka regime, characterized as the “last dictatorship” in Europe. The threat to democracy is unfortunately not only coming from dictators in post-Soviet states, but from various groups and situations all over the continent and beyond. That’s why the “Free Belarus Action” was rebranded in 2014 to the “**Democracy under Pressure Action**” to include the alarming developments that put pressure on fundamental democratic values such as the freedom of speech and rule of law in several European countries. This year’s campaign will mark the **15th anniversary of the pan-european initiative!**

Even during the tragedy of the pandemic, we must find the strength to condemn every human rights violation in the world. In the oblivion created in the international public opinion, many regimes in all continents have exploited the context to tighten their authoritarian grip on their citizens. The European Union, being founded on the rejection of authoritarianism and totalitarianism, should be a beacon in the world to provide a perspective for a different future.

This infokit is aimed at taking specific actions for **Belarus** and **Russia** in February.

### Our timeline:



Do not forget to join the dedicated [Facebook group](#) to not miss any update.

# 1. DAY OF SOLIDARITY WITH BELARUS

**When:** 7 February 2021

**Why:** Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, leader of the democratic opposition in the country, has proclaimed 7th February 2021 the Day of Solidarity with Belarus, calling on everyone in Europe and the world to organise performances and rallies, release statements, display the white-red-white colours, write letters to political prisoners and support the victims of repressions, among others.

There are currently more than 220 political prisoners in Belarus, many detained for peacefully protesting against the fraudulent presidential elections on 9th August 2020. Answering Ms Tsikhanouskaya's call, **we invite you to:**

- **send hand-written letters to political prisoners and raise awareness of human rights violations in the country on social media.** With this gesture of solidarity, we hope to convey a clear message to Belarusian dissidents and citizens that Europe is aware of their struggle and the abuses of Lukashenka's regime.
- If you want to do more, **you can also send a letter to your municipality to ask your city representatives to light up the institutional buildings in support of democratic Belarus.**

**What we can do:**

## **WRITE A LETTER TO A POLITICAL PRISONER**

*Here you can find detailed instructions guidelines based on a guide prepared by [Viasna](#).*

### **Who to write to?**

Here is a list of prisoners with a little information about them: <https://prisoners.spring96.org/en>  
You can write to as many as you want and do not forget the prisoners at the end of the list!

### **How to write?**

Write in Belarussian or Russian. Don't worry if you don't speak the language, you can copy the example below or use Google translate.

Write by hand (we know it is tedious but it helps getting your letter to the prisoner).

Put the date on the letter and number the sheets of the letter if you have several.

### **What to write?**

You can write about you, where you are from and find a topic of conversation (a novel you read for example). **Do not write about their court case, other prisoners, or political subjects, do not use foreign language or abbreviations.**

Here is a proposal of text you can use:

*Russian:*

Здравствуйте, (name of the prisoner)!

Пишу Вам из (your city, your country). Я пишу вам, чтобы вы знали, что о вас не забывают, о вас помнят. Люди во всем мире смотрят на Беларусь, внимательно следят за событиями в Беларуси и переживают за белорусов, за всех вас. Держитесь, сил вам и мужества! Надеюсь, что очень скоро наступят лучшие времена!

Belarusian:

Добры дзень, (name of the prisoner)!

Я пішу Вам з (your city, your country). Пішу вам з тым каб вы ведалі, што пра вас не забываюцца, пра вас памятаюць. Людзі ўсяго свету глядзяць на Беларусь, уважліва сочаць за падзеямі ў краіне і перажываюць за беларусаў. Трымайцеся, сіл вам і моцы. Спадзяюся, што вельмі хутка прыйдуць лепшыя часы!

Translation: Hello, (name of the prisoner)!

I am writing to you from (your city, your country). I write you to let you know that you are not forgotten. People all over the world are looking at Belarus, following what is happening there and caring about people like you. Please keep strong, I am hoping that better times will soon arrive!

If you have more questions, check out the FAQ on what to write here: [Viasna](#) or contact us.

### **How and where to send?**

The address of the prison is on the profile of prisoners of the link above.

If you would like to have an answer, join to your letter a sheet of paper and an envelope.

### **Last step : let us know!**

Take a picture of you writing or sending the letter and/or use the [dedicated visuals](#) and post it on social media using the hashtags **#DemocracyUnderPressure** and **#StandWithBelarus**. Do not forget to tag **@JEF\_Europe** and your organisation if you are part of a different network!

You can add a sentence or two about the human rights violations in Belarus, e.g.:

- Currently, there are some 220 political prisoners in #Belarus, most of them detained for demanding freedom and democracy in a peaceful way. Many of them face systematic torture and the deprivation of their basic rights.
- Altogether, more than 30,000 people have been detained on political grounds since the fraudulent presidential elections in #Belarus on 9th August 2020.
- Everyone can fall victim to the regime brutality in #Belarus: people have been beaten or detained because of handing out flowers, playing instruments in public or walking their dogs.

If you do not wish to post it on social media, please let us know you sent one by writing to [christelle.savall@jef.eu](mailto:christelle.savall@jef.eu) and [diletta.alese@jef.eu](mailto:diletta.alese@jef.eu).

 **ASK YOUR MUNICIPALITY TO LIGHT UP THE INSTITUTIONAL BUILDINGS FOR A DEMOCRATIC BELARUS** 

- Send a letter to your municipality asking to light up the institutional buildings in support of a democratic Belarus.

**Here you can find a letter template - also available in [French](#) and [German](#)**

Madam/Mr Mayor/other appropriate title of the mayor,

We are writing to you on behalf of [SECTION]. We are part of European youth movement who campaign for a more united Europe that is rooted in democratic values and rule of law.

Each year, we in JEF carry out a campaign called 'Democracy under Pressure' to draw people's attention to the rule of law situation across Europe, notably in Belarus. This year, our campaign has an added significance, owing to the present situation in Belarus. Since the contested Presidential elections of 9 August 2020, Belarusians have demonstrated in the streets every day to dispute the re-election of Alyaksandr Lukashenka, who has been in power since 1994. These protests have been violently suppressed by the authoritarian government, forcing those political opponents who had not already been imprisoned to flee the country.

The European Union has refused to recognise the August election result and has placed sanctions against the Lukashenka regime and the European Parliament awarded the 2020 Sakharov Prize to the Belarusian democratic opposition for their bravery and commitment to freedom of expression.

Sviatlana Tskihanouskaya, the leader of democratic Belarus who has herself been exiled to Lithuania, has launched a call on Twitter for Europeans to show their solidarity with the people of Belarus on Sunday 7 February by, alongside other individual actions, lighting up their municipal buildings in the national colours of democratic Belarus: white and red.

We would therefore like to ask if the City of [ADD CITY] would be willing and able to light up our City Hall? We believe that to do so would serve as a very potent symbol of solidarity and support to those who are currently fighting for those democratic values which we share.

Thank you in advance for reading our email to you and for considering this request. If you should have any follow-up questions, please do not hesitate to ask them, and we look forward to receiving your response.

On behalf of [SECTION]  
[NAME], [POSITION]

## 2.SUPPORT PROTESTERS IN RUSSIA

**When:** in February

**Why:** Demonstrations in support of the jailed opposition leader Aleksei Navalny swept the nation, beginning in the Far East and reaching the capital. Arrests climbed into the thousands. Hundreds are detained as protests in his support sweep across Russia.

**What we can do:**

 **CONDEMN RUSSIAN UNIVERSITIES THREATENING TO EXPEL THEIR STUDENTS** 

**VESNA**, a youth organisation from Russia fighting for liberty and democracy and starting the procedure to become JEF Russia, participated in the recent protests to free Navalny. The group asked support to JEF Europe to denounce the retaliation against protesters carried out by some Universities which are now threatening the expulsion of students who took part in the demonstrations. Since Russia is also part of Bologna process:

- **we will publish a general statement on the protests** to note this aspect specifically calling on European universities to join us in condemning Russian universities betraying the ideal of a university as the ultimate place for freedom of thought and expression. Check JEF Europe's channels in the next few days and share the statement!
- **local sections can do the same with their respective universities** preparing an open letter to their vice-chancellor or equivalent using the following letter template.

Dear [TITLE & FORM OF ADDRESS FOR HEAD OF THE UNIVERSITY],

I am writing on behalf of the [JEF BRANCH] to draw your attention to an important issue where I believe a strong statement from yourself on behalf of the [UNIVERSITY NAME] would be of great help.

On 17 January 2021, Russian democratic opposition leader and victim of a failed assassination attempt by the Russian government Alexei Navalny returned to Moscow, whereupon he was promptly arrested. In the wake of the arrest large protests have taken hold in Russia across the length and breadth of the country, encompassing people of all ages, including and especially young people, many of whom cannot recall a time when Russia was governed by Vladimir Putin.

These protests have been met with brutality and mass-arrest from the Russian regime despite being peaceful in nature. Young people especially have been targeted, with schools and universities both encouraged, and in some cases taking it upon themselves, to

discipline, punish, and even expel students who have exercised their right to peaceful protest.

Russian educational institutions are part of the European Higher Education Area, established as a result of the Bologna Process. Many of them are also signatories, as is the [UNIVERSITY NAME], to the *Magna Charta Universitatum* which emphasises the principle of the University as an “autonomous institution at the heart of societies” which is required to both “be morally and intellectually independent of all political authority and economics power” as well as to “ensure that its students’ freedoms are safeguarded”. The reprisals being taken against young people in Russia today are a violation of the letter and the spirit of the Magna Charta, and strike against what it is to be a University.

I write in the hope that you will use the power of your position to make a statement in defence of young Russians exercising their rights, and to defend those aspects of the institution of the University which we Europeans hold in such high regard. If you require any further information, we remain at your disposal.

Yours sincerely,

[FULL NAME]

[SIGNATURE]

On behalf of Young European Federalists

### Additional references

To know more about the Bologna Process:

[https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/higher-education/bologna-process-and-europe-an-higher-education-area\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/higher-education/bologna-process-and-europe-an-higher-education-area_en)

The Magna Charta Universitatum: <http://www.magna-charta.org/>

Text of Magna Charta Universitatum:

<http://www.magna-charta.org/resources/files/the-magna-charta/english>

Signatories to Magna Charta Universitatum:

<http://www.magna-charta.org/magna-charta-universitatum/signatory-universities/signatory-universities>

\*\*\*

If you have any questions about the actions, please do not hesitate to contact Christelle Savall [christelle.savall@jef.eu](mailto:christelle.savall@jef.eu) and Diletta Alese [diletta.alese@jef.eu](mailto:diletta.alese@jef.eu), contact people of this year #democracyunderpressure campaign.