

*November 14, 2022*

**Josep Borrell Fontelles**

EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy /  
Vice-President European External Action Service

**Ministers of Foreign Affairs of EU Member States  
Members of the European Parliament**

**Dear High Representative,**

**Dear Ministers, Members of the European Parliament,**

In recent months, the Belarusian democratic society has been shaken by severe disputes related to non-transparent funding of the media by foreign foundations and governments that is used for the purposes not related to spreading the truthful information but serving political and financial purposes of particular individuals.

The current practice shows that the allocation of financial resources by the EU countries to non-state media, bloggers, and initiatives is carried out by the recommendation of Svetlana Tsikhanouskaya's office. Thus, it created a situation of a dependency of mass media from a political force that represents a narrow segment of a broad Belarus democratic movement. The Belarus media that receives support from the EU based on recommendations of a small group of people created a situation inconceivable in any European country.

More than 65 million euros allocated annually by the European Commission to support NGOs and media raised a lot of discussions and speculations in Belarus civil society both inside the country and abroad. Belarus people do not understand the reason why the allocated funds cannot be spent to promote a broad democratic movement in Belarus but serves the interest of a small group of people who did not participate in any political and social activity neither in 2020 nor before. These people did not risk their lives, freedoms or property, but became the major beneficiaries of financial assistance provided by the European Union. These facts, after becoming public, seriously demotivate Belarus people to continue their fight for democracy. They are losing their hope for a better future since they start to believe they are simply used for someone's political or financial interests.

Belarus media resources are forced to adjust their editorial policies to the interests of specific individuals related to the so-called "Tikhanovskaya Office" (later called as "the Office") that was created to substitute a broad democratic movement that was formed in 2020. Belarus people actively discuss the information, confirmed by several sources, that a number of politicians, activists, and presumably journalists signed an official agreement that bans any criticism of "the Office" for 10 years. This is a condition of receiving direct financial aid from the Office or recommendations from the Office towards EU institutions to receive financial support. The violators have to pay a 30 thousand euros fine.

Moreover, the European money is used to disrespect democratic leaders of Belarus and thus dismantle the broad coalition of Belarus democratic forces. Those who did not agree to sign the NDA agreement are presented in an unattractive light, they are harassed and discredited. For instance, Euroradio that receives funding from the EU invites the so-called "psychologists" whose task is "to diagnose" other opposition politicians that risked their lives, freedoms, lost their property with mental diseases, disorders, phobias and various psychiatric deviations.

The European money is used to pay salaries for the people who work as a "bot farm" to humiliate other democratic leaders. Abusive quotes against speakers were shown on the screen during the August conference organized by the Office (see attachments).

The European money is also used to actively promote certain individuals that did not participate in any political campaigns on the territory of Belarus. Thus, significant money was spent to promote a

useless statement of F.Viacherko, Tsikhanouskaya's advisor and A.Logvinova, an employee of the office, that had close to 1 million views each. Viachorka explained to the Belarus public that he reached a special agreement with Alphabet company about promoting him on YouTube, the information that was publicly rejected by Google officials. The scrolling of views is done probably for the purpose to report to donors to receive further funding.

On top of the financial aid from the European Union that is used to subdue the independent media to the interest of a small group of particular individuals, the European aid is also used for personal enrichment.

Franak Viacherko, Tsikhanouskaya's advisor, is the ultimate beneficiary of the company Infopoint Media Network. The company is registered both in Lithuania and in Poland and is legally located at the same address as the "Office of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya". This organization deals with more than 30 Belarusian media resources and telegram channels. The director of both companies is Alexandra Romanova, who is the founder of Belarus media kyky.org. On the accounts of these two organizations were found 400 thousand Euros each, the money that appeared only after August 2020 following the most brutal oppression of a regime against people in the post Second World War Europe. The beneficiary of this company did not want to explain the origin of this money. According to a general opinion of Belarus civil society the money is received in a form of payments for the so called "consultancy services" from the Belarus "independent media" as a fee for recommendations from the "the Office" to European institutions.

The current practice of money distribution undermines the democratic values and principles and demotivates the citizens of Belarus to continue their fight for changes. Dependence on obtaining funding from one political force generates corruption, a system of kickbacks by lobbyists from the opposition. The quality of media resources is decreasing and they are turning into local, peripheral publications with a very little interest. The interest towards political and public life of Belarus is falling. The Belarus public is losing the interest towards the so-called independent media and turning to Russian media (see statistics).

We still believe there is still a high demand in the Belarus society for quality media which would objectively reflect social and political events in Belarus and in the world. In light of the above, we ask:

1. to give a legal assessment to the practice of signing an agreement with politicians, activists, bloggers and journalists that bans the criticism of "the Office" for the period of 10 years and a 30 thousand euros penalty in case someone would allow critical statements towards Tikhanovskaya;
2. to establish a public commission with participation of donors, members of European Commission, MPs of the European Parliament, representatives of Belarusian civil society, in order to dispel all doubts about the corruption components in the activity of representatives of Tikhanovskaya;
3. to create an international advisory board that would help the development of independent media and establish a system that can help to avoid crooked business practice of Belarus media;
4. create independent media that could give the floor to all representatives of Belarus democratic society, will organize discussions, debates among prodemocracy activists about the current situation and the future of Belarus;
5. actively employ not only journalists that have lived decades abroad, but hundreds of professionals that had to flee Belarus for their civil position after 2020, launch a training program for them in the Western media to learn the principles of independent journalism.

We are confident that with international support the victory to Belarus will come much faster.

A detailed report on the state of Belarus media is enclosed.

Respectfully,

Best regards,

*Team of the Belarus Democratic Forum*