

**On the Occasion of the Belarusian Freedom Day March 25, 2007**  
**Statement by the Association “Human Rights in Belarus”, Berlin:**  
**“Political Solidarity with the Freedom Fighters in Belarus”**

**Days to Remember: March 25, 2006 and March 25, 1918**

A year ago, Belarusians demonstrated in large numbers, among them many young citizens against the flagrant manipulation of the presidential elections on March 19, 2006, undertaken by the Central Election Commission and later on confirmed by President Lukashenko himself.

For days and nights the demonstrators resisted the pressure exerted upon them by the militia and the freezing temperatures prevailing at the time. These deep freeze temperatures symbolized the political climate prevailing in a country that is ruled by intimidation, and the abuse of the judiciary to break the determination of the freedom fighters in the country. The fight for political freedom continues unabatedly.

Demonstrators on March 25, 2007 will also remind the public of the Constitutional Act signed on March 25, 1918 in Minsk on the establishment of the independent Belarusian People’s Republic, a statehood however that was subdued by the ongoing communist revolution throughout the former Czarist Empire.

On March 25, 2007, certainly the ruling power will see to it that manifestations of discontent, of opposition and search for freedom in Belarus will not get out of control. Such discontent may, however, no be manageable as it appeared to be the case in the past. Russian subsidies for the Belarusian economy have been curtailed and there may be more setbacks of this sort thus raising questions among the citizens of the country about the future of the country’s economic and social stability. They may also wonder whether it is such a good idea to run an authoritarian system of government and shun the dimension and perspectives of a pro-European orientation.

**March 25, 1957: The European Union takes off – A Success Story of 50 Years**

The day to remember the brutal suppression of the longing of the citizens in Belarus for political freedom throughout the country – March 25, 2006 - coincides this year with the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Rome Treaties, signed on March 25, 1957 laying the political and legal foundations for the European Union. The Union that brought about peace among nations in Europe, created a common market among nations and thus laid the foundations for stable democracies, the rule of law and individual human rights and a common market with economic and social progress unheard of in many parts of Europe for long times. Today, the Union comprises 27 member states and there are more states wishing to join this remarkable development, which contrasts so convincingly with past centuries of bloodshed, suppression and misery in Europe. It may not be easy for nations that had been governed by socialist political and economic systems, to meet the framework conditions for their transformation. However the perspective of joining this new and historically unprecedented process of integration in Europe and safeguard for national identities and cultures very often serves as a stimulus to nations to shoulder the task of introducing meaningful democracy, the rule of law and the respect for individual human rights and socially rooted market economies.

## **The European Union: Solidarity with the Freedom Fighters in Belarus**

There are many ways in which citizens in EU member states express their solidarity with the citizens living under the regime in Belarus – let it be humanitarian assistance to victims of the Chernobyl catastrophe or the support for the development of small entrepreneurial activities, community projects and alike, or support for suppressed political and non-governmental activists or independent journalists and media.

Bridges of solidarity were built, foundations laid for mutual trust and confidence and channels established for meaningful communication in difficult times.

Belarus is located in the centre of Europe. The regime has self isolated the country, but in the end a free and democratic Belarus will assume its legitimate role among the free nations of Europe.

The European Union and the member states cannot stand by idly as witnesses of the ongoing suppression of freedom fighters from all walks of life in Belarus, of the democratic movement in the political arena and of mass organizations such as trade unions, youth and women organizations that seek to bring about the rule of law, independence of the courts and of the media and a parliament that was elected in free and fair, not manipulated elections, a parliament that can perform its functions as legislative independent from the executive power, the president.

These essentials of a democratic state and civil society structure are suppressed by the authoritarian if not totalitarian Lukashenko regime since more than ten years. The nation behind prison bars, the bonded civil society needs not only our moral support, but a meaningful partnership with the political structures of the European Institutions and of their members:

Therefore time has come to revitalize this partnership by identifying – from within the European Union - a personality entrusted with the task of serving as a partner, as a trusted representative from civil society for the dialogue and the much needed close and effective cooperation with civil society in Belarus. This representative would personalize the solidarity of the European Union with the freedom fight of the Belarusian nation to overcome despotism, tyranny and lawlessness.

Berlin, March

“Human Rights in Belarus”