

THE LAST TOTALITARIAN COUNTRY IN EUROPE

by Václav Havel, Former President of the Czech Republic.

This country of ten million inhabitants has been for over 11 years ruled by Alexander Lu for whom the governance means extensive abuse of the basic human and citizens' rights on daily basis, removal and imprisonment of his opponents and journalists and deception of people by mass media under his control. Last autumn in a bogus referendum Lukashenka had had removed two consecutive terms limit on presidency and thus he had made the first step to prolong his rule beyond 2006 when his current term expires. Since then for a number of months, largely unnoticed by most media and politicians of the democratic world, the last remains of non- governmental organizations, independent press and political parties that could thwart the plans of Belarus autocrat on prolonging his rule ad infinitum are systematically being liquidated. The information blockade of the country is growing, opportunities for young people to study abroad are being limited, and the last independent daily "Narodnaja Volja" is about to be closed down. Alexander Lukashenka can get away with all of this not only due to unsavoury legacy of totally decimated post-soviet social and societal structures but also due to lack of interest in the fate of Belarus on the part of the democratic countries.

We are, therefore, convinced that it is necessary to make use of every opportunity to break through this wall of lack of interest and inability on the part of the democratic community in order to take a stand against this post-soviet autocrat and his efforts to totally suppress the remains of independent initiatives in Belarus. At the same time it is necessary to continue in developing contacts and cooperation with Belarus' independent initiatives. European Union that so far has not been able to support efforts aiming at building Belarus based on democratic values should speedily seek such instruments that enable this process. At the same time the EU should fully open its exchange and educational programs for democratically oriented young people of Belarus. The EU should, together with Ukraine, quickly react to the proposal by EU parliamentarians Janusz Onyszkiewicz and Bogdan Klich to enable the people of Belarus an access to non-censored, non-manipulated information through radio and TV broadcasts from neighbouring countries. We call for creating a common strategy for the EU, USA and all other democratic countries that ought to be interested in the democratisation of Belarus.

This open letter is signed by the former President of Czech Republic Václav Havel, the former President of Ireland Mary Robinson, French philosopher André Glucksmann, Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, former President of Germany Richard von Weizsäcker, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan H.R.H. El Hassan bin Talal, former Prime Minister of New Zealand and former Director General of WTO Mike Moore, President of the Carnegie Corporation of New York Vartan Gregorian, Chairman of the Nippon Foundation Yohei Sasakawa, former President of South Africa Frederik W. de Klerk, U.S. theologian and author Michael Novak and Senator Karel Schwarzenberg of the Czech Republic.