

Comunicato stampa

L'APPELLO DI SCHOLARS AT RISK ITALIA PER FERMARE LE VIOLENZE CONTRO LA COMUNITÀ ACCADEMICA IN BIELORUSSIA

A otto mesi esatti dalle elezioni presidenziali tenutesi in Bielorussia che hanno visto la contestata riconferma del presidente Lukashenko alla guida del paese, la sezione italiana di Scholars At Risk (SAR Italia), in accordo con la Conferenza dei Rettori delle Università Italiane (CRUI), ha firmato una lettera di petizione indirizzata alla presidenza bielorussa per esprimere la più profonda preoccupazione circa gli attacchi nei confronti della comunità accademica nel paese.

Secondo diverse fonti internazionali, dopo le elezioni dell'Agosto 2020 la Bielorussia è stata attraversata da numerose manifestazioni pacifiche volte a chiedere l'avvio di un reale processo di democratizzazione del paese; manifestazioni che sono state represse con violenza dalle autorità bielorusse. Tali proteste hanno visto una grande partecipazione di accademici e studenti universitari, molti dei quali sono stati successivamente fermati, soggetti a detenzione, perseguiti penalmente, licenziati ed espulsi dalle università. I diritti di libertà di espressione, associazione e assemblea - formalmente protetti dalla Costituzione Bielorussa, e nello specifico dagli Articoli 8, 33, 35 e 36 - sono stati violati. Tali attacchi contro le comunità universitarie sono inoltre incompatibili con la Dichiarazione Universale dei Diritti Umani e la Convenzione internazionale sui diritti civili e politici.

Alla luce di questi fatti, SAR Italia chiede alla presidenza bielorussa il rilascio immediato di studenti e docenti universitari, prigionieri politici, giornalisti e attivisti arrestati per aver esercitato i loro diritti alla libertà di espressione e di associazione, e la fine delle violenze nei confronti dei manifestanti.

L'iniziativa di questa lettera di petizione è nata dalla comune volontà degli atenei di SAR Italia di proteggere e promuovere la libertà accademica in quanto valore fondamentale delle istituzioni universitarie. L'attento monitoraggio della grave situazione in Bielorussia da parte della rete SAR Italia è supportato dall'Associazione Supolka, una delle voci principali della comunità studentesca bielorussa in Italia, che si è mobilitata fin da subito a sostegno delle proteste pacifiche nel paese. La petizione rientra in una serie di iniziative congiunte tra queste realtà nel contesto italiano.

In occasione della ricorrenza, il 9 aprile l'Associazione dei Bielorussi in Italia - Supolka - in collaborazione con SAR Italia e l'Università di Padova, organizza un seminario pubblico dal titolo *Bielorussia a 8 mesi dalle elezioni: la libertà accademica nel mirino del regime*, con l'obiettivo di favorire un dibattito aperto sulla situazione della comunità universitaria nel paese. All'evento parteciperanno studiosi bielorussi ed italiani, esperti di politica e diritti umani in Bielorussia e nel contesto dei paesi dell'ex-Unione Sovietica.

È possibile seguire l'evento, in diretta Facebook, al seguente [link](#).

Per il coordinamento di Scholars at Risk Italia,

Francesca Helm, University of Padova. Co-chair, Scholars at Risk Italy; **Claudia Padovani**, University of Padova. Co-chair, Scholars at Risk Italy and SAR European Advocacy Committee for Academic Freedom; **Ester Gallo**, University of Trento. Co-chair, Scholars at Risk Italy and SAR International Advisory Committee.

SCHOLARS AT RISK

NETWORK  ITALY SECTION

To: The Administration of the President
of the Republic of Belarus
Reception of citizens and representatives of legal entities
Residence of the President
38 Karl Marx Street
Minsk, Belarus
Email: contact@president.gov.by

Subject: Petition in support of Belarusian students and scholars and of academic freedom

9th April, 2021

To the Administration of the President of the Republic of Belarus

We are writing on behalf of Scholars at Risk (SAR) Italy, in agreement with the Conference of Italian University Rectors (CRUI). SAR Italy is the Italian section of SAR international network, whose mission is to protect scholars and students, and to promote academic freedom across the world.

With this letter, we express our concern for the serious events that have affected Belarusian higher education communities since the aftermath of the 2020 Presidential election, and in particular for the persistent violations of rights against Belarusian students and scholars.

Belarusian students and scholars from different universities, such as the Belarusian State University (BSU), Minsk State Linguistic University (MSLU) and the Belarusian State University of Informatics and Radioelectronics (BSUIR) joined peaceful protests over the election results and asked for the democratisation of the country and for the autonomy of Belarusian Universities.

We learn from Scholars at Risk International, specifically in the [Free to Think 2020 Report](#), as well as the United Nations Human Rights Office, that the state authorities demanded students' expulsion from universities and authorised violent repression by the police. At the end of 2020, the Viasna Human Rights Centre in Minsk reported more than 1,000 testimonies of torture victims, largely perpetrated against young students. We also learn from international and Belarusian organizations working on human rights that Belarusian students are increasingly subjects of detention, prosecution through penal cases and are denied the right to have contact with their families and lawyers. The recently published [Academic Freedom Index](#) registers a clear downfall of campus integrity and freedom of academic and cultural expression.

As members and representatives of Italian university communities, which include many Belarusian students, we are highly concerned about the information regarding the expulsion from universities, the arrest and prosecution of students as well as threats against and firing of scholars following their non

violent exercise of freedom of expression, assembly and association. The exercise of these rights is expressly protected in the Belarusian constitution, specifically in articles 8, 33, 35 and 36, as well as under international human rights instruments, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Belarus is a party. Attacks against higher education communities are inconsistent with the State's commitment to respect the norms, values and ethics of the Bologna Process, which Belarus joined in 2015.

The restriction of the nonviolent exercise of the rights to freedom of expression and association, when directed against the higher education community, undermines academic freedom and democratic society generally.

SAR Italy and CRUI call for the immediate and unconditional release of students and professors who have been detained for exercising their right to freedom of expression and association. Following the United Nations Human Rights Council's Resolution on the Situation of their human rights in Belarus in the run-up to the 2020 presidential election and in its aftermath (A/HRC/46/L.19), SAR Italy calls upon the Belarusian authorities to cease using force against peaceful demonstrators, torture and other inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and enforced disappearance, and to stop carrying out arbitrary arrests, detentions and imprisonment of persons for exercising their fundamental human rights. Moreover, we urge the Belarusian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release all political prisoners, journalists and other media workers, human rights defenders, NGO representatives, members of strike committees, and those arbitrarily detained in the lead-up to, during and after the presidential election for exercising their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

We appreciate your attention in this important matter and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

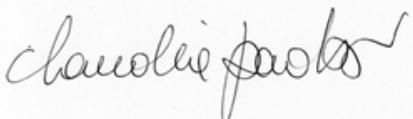
Prof. Francesca Helm, University of Padova. Co-chair, Scholars at Risk Italy



Prof. Ester Gallo, University of Trento. Co-chair, Scholars at Risk Italy and SAR International Advisory Committee



Prof. Claudia Padovani, University of Padova. Co-chair, Scholars at Risk Italy and SAR European Advocacy Committee for Academic Freedom



CC:

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**SAR ITALY'S APPEAL TO STOP THE VIOLENCE
AGAINST THE ACADEMIC COMMUNITY IN BELARUS**

8 months since the presidential elections held in Belarus which saw the contested confirmation of president Lukashenko, the Italian section of Scholars at Risk (SAR Italy), in agreement with the Conference of Italian University Rectors (CRUI) has sent a petition addressed to the Belarusian authorities to express our deep concern regarding the attacks on the academic community in the country. According to different international sources, following the elections in August 2020 several peaceful demonstrations took place in Belarus calling for a real process of democratization in the country; these demonstrations were violently repressed by the Belarusian authorities. Many students and academics took part in these demonstrations, many of whom were subsequently stopped, detained, legally prosecuted, fired or expelled from the universities. The exercise of the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly, which are protected by the Belarusian Constitution, in Articles 8, 33, 35 and 36, have been violated. These attacks against the university communities are incompatible with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. In light of these facts, SAR Italy calls for the immediate release of students and professors, political prisoners, journalists and activists arrested for having exercised their rights to the freedom of expression and association, and call on the authorities to cease using force on the demonstrators.

This initiative stems from the will of SAR Italy member institutions to protect and promote academic freedom as a fundamental value of higher education institutions. The careful monitoring of the situation in Belarus on the part of SAR Italy has been supported also by the association Supolka, one of the main voices of the Belarusian student community in Italy that has been active from the beginning in support of the peaceful protests in the country.

The petition is part of a series of joint activities between these organizations in Italy. On occasion of the 9th April, the Association of Belarusians in Italy – Supolka – in collaboration with SAR Italy and the University of Padova, has organized a public seminar called Belarus 8 months after the elections: la libertà accademica nel mirino del regime, with the aim of opening a debate on the situation of the university community in the country. Belarusian and Italian scholars will take part in the event, experts on politics and human rights in Belarus and in the context of countries of the ex-Soviet Union.

The event can be followed live on Facebook at this link [link](#).

For the coordination of Scholars at Risk Italia, Francesca Helm, University of Padova. Co-chair, Scholars at Risk Italy; Claudia Padovani, University of Padova. Co-chair, Scholars at Risk Italy and SAR European Advocacy Committee for Academic Freedom; Ester Gallo, University of Trento. Co-chair, Scholars at Risk Italy and SAR International Advisory Committee.