

Stockholm, January 22, 2018

Open Letter to the Rector of Belarusian State University (BSU), Mr. Andrei Karol

Dear Mr. Karol,

Östgruppen – The Swedish Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights – is deeply concerned about the news of the expulsion of the student Hanna Pacholka from the Institute of Journalism at Belarusian State University (BSU), allegedly because of poor study results.

Hanna Pacholka is heavily engaged in public activities in Belarus, and was recently appointed chairperson of the political organization “BPF Youth”. The alleged problems with her study results did appear only after this appointment, following contacts between representatives of the Belarusian Committee for State Security (KGB) and Pacholka’s teachers.

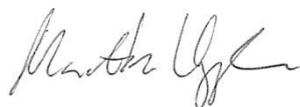
Accordingly, we believe there are strong reasons to suspect that the decision to expel Pacholka from BSU was made on political grounds rather than on the basis of her study results.

We have noticed that the apparently politically motivated expulsion of Hanna Pacholka is not a unique case. Her predecessor as chairperson of BPF Youth, Yury Lukashevich, was expelled from BSU in 2017, on obvious political grounds. In total at least 14 Belarusian students were expelled for their active involvement in peaceful protests or civil society organizations in 2016-2017, several of them students of BSU. This kind of punishment towards students for their participation in public life constitutes an obvious violation of the principles of the independence of universities and academic freedom.

We therefore urge you to withdraw the decision of expelling Hanna Pacholka, and to let her continue her studies at BSU.

Since all Swedish development cooperation programmes are obligated to have a human rights based approach, we will also inform BSU’s Swedish partners in such programmes about the case of Hanna Pacholka, and urge them to suspend and reconsider their participation in joint programmes with BSU, in case the expulsion decision will not be withdrawn.

Sincerely,



Martin Ugglå
Chairperson

Östgruppen – Swedish Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights