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Minsk, Belarus

Open Appeal to International Democratic Community

The alumni and administration of the East European School of Political Studies (EESPS)* express extreme concern over the continued violation of human rights in Belarus, and in particular, the persecution of one its graduates, Andre Bandarenko. Mr. Bandarenko was unfairly prosecuted and convicted on criminal charges in the lack of any evidence against him.

In the fall of 2008, former businessman, Andre Bandarenko, participated in the Parliamentary elections as a candidate for the member of the Chamber of Representatives of the National Assembly. It is well-known that the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights Election Observation Mission stated that the elections were conducted, neither in compliance with the European standards of democratic elections, nor with international agreements signed by the government of Belarus. Andre Bandarenko as a witness of violation of election legislation and fraud repeatedly brought complaints of these facts to the attention of government institutions. As a result, Andre Bandarenko was arrested and charged with financial crimes in May of 2009.

Before the parliamentary elections, Andre Bandarenko worked as a business consultant for the building company "Belvysotstroygrup". This company had not come under the scrutiny of the State control authorities before Andre's electoral participation. After his arrest Mr. Bandarenko was charged with using his official position to manipulate monetary instruments for personal gain (article 210.4 of the Criminal Code of Belarus). However, the prosecution failed to present any evidence that Andre either took money or personal property. This lack of evidence didn't influence the court's decision and in October 2009, the former parliamentary candidate was sentenced to 7 years in prison. Considering the court's decision to be unfair, on October 22 Andre protested his incarceration by going on a hunger strike of unlimited duration. At the same time he filed an appeal aimed at clearing himself of all charges and obtaining his release.

I was present at the court hearing and must say that Andre Bandarenko's prosecution is politically motivated. I am sure that the political nature of the judicial proceedings against Mr. Bandarenko is underscored both by the absence of evidence that he committed any kind of financial fraud and by the process of election campaign of Andre Bandarenko.

Mr. Bandarenko's lawyers protested the conviction on the basis of lack of evidence, and after the court hearing, petitioned to appeal the court's decision.

We, the alumni and administration of the EESPS, in which Andre Bandarenko participated during 2008-09, express our solidarity with his justified demands and appeal to Belarus and the international community to help us to obtain justice and free our colleague.

Respectfully,

In the name of the alumni and administration of the East European School of Political Studies,

Alexander Dabravolski,
Director of the EESPS

* The East European School of Political Studies (Belarus), established under the auspices of the Council of Europe, was created in 2007. There are currently Schools of Political Studies in 16 countries of Central Eastern Europe and Caucasus.