

Statement of the Coordination Council of Belarus in connection with the law “On restrictive measures against military aggression in Ukraine”, adopted by the Seimas of Lithuania in the first reading.

The Coordination Council, as a representative body of democratic Belarus, recognized by the international community, including the European Parliament, expresses its gratitude to the Republic of Lithuania for supporting democratic changes and human rights in Belarus.

At the same time, we are concerned about the law “On restrictive measures against military aggression in Ukraine”, adopted by the Lithuanian Seimas in the first reading, which significantly limits Belarusians in their right to move, the possibility of obtaining visas and legalization in Lithuania.

In case the law is adopted, the Belarusians will literally be trapped between the regime and visa restrictions. As a consequence, their potential to struggle for democratic changes in Belarus will be significantly limited. The fight is really possible and effective, only when it includes the efforts of both Belarusians inside the country and abroad.

The decision of the Lithuanian Seimas is an expression of the perception of the Belarusian and Russian public opinion as value-identical. The Coordination Council draws attention to the fact that public opinion in Belarus and Russia regarding military aggression against Ukraine is fundamentally different. According to the regularly conducted nationwide representative sociological studies, conducted by the Andrey Vardomatsky's Belarusian Analytical Workshop, 85% of Belarusians oppose the introduction of Belarusian troops into the territory of Ukraine to conduct combat operations. In this respect, the Belarusian society is absolutely consolidated. There were no examples of such consolidation on any other public issue. This figure has been established since the beginning of March 2022, and no significant fluctuations were noticed in subsequent studies, which reflects the dramatic historical experience of Belarusians.

The Coordination Council is concerned that the adoption of the law will establish a dividing line and antagonize the value-solidary representatives of the Lithuanian and Belarusian society. Belarus has been going through waves of politically motivated migration since 2020, when the democratically minded Belarusian society did not agree with the falsification of the presidential elections and so far

continues to fight, both within the country and abroad. Thousands of Belarusians participated in protests and were subjected to repression because of their position. Repressions in Belarus continue to this day. Today they are connected not only with internal political issues, but also with the anti-war position of Belarusians. According to the Human Rights Center “Viasna”, every week in Belarus, about 70 people are detained for political reasons, including for their open support of Ukraine.

The adoption of the law in Lithuania, as well as restrictions on the issuance of visas by Poland and other states, could become a significant obstacle in fleeing Belarusians from repressions and could be perceived as a devaluation of their principled anti-war position, as well as a message to Belarusians that Europe considers them a threat, seeks to isolate Belarus, and sees the future of Belarus together with Russia.

We believe that the European Union strives to bring Belarusians closer to Europe and European values, the values of freedom and human rights. This can be done not through closing the borders, but through the European example of how democracy and human rights work in a society that respects the rights of everyone, including those born in Belarus.

While fully sharing the concern of our Lithuanian and European colleagues and partners regarding security, we, nevertheless, call for a discussion of the existing problems and the development of joint solutions. We propose to hold a meeting with a group of representatives of the United Transitional Cabinet and the Coordination Council before the next reading of the Law. For our part, we are ready to offer for discussion solutions, which would take into account both the considerations of Lithuania's national security and the interests of the Belarusian society in promoting democratic transition. The Coordinating Council asks to revise the wording of the law, since obtaining visas for thousands of Belarusians is a matter of life, health and freedom.