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## **EU Parliament: President Sassoli welcomes Ms Tsikhanouskaya (Belarusian opposition). “Sviatlana is a symbol of the struggle for democracy and freedom”.**

(from Strasbourg) “I am honoured to have with us today Ms Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, leader of the democratic opposition in Belarus who, as you will recall, together with other leaders of the democratic opposition, was awarded the 2020 Sakharov Prize and who has accepted my invitation to speak at the European Parliament”. The President of the European Parliament, David Sassoli, accompanied the leader of the Belarusian opposition to the Strasbourg Chamber as MEPs stood up and greeted her with a round of applause. “Sviatlana is a symbol of the struggle for democracy and freedom and a voice for many political prisoners currently incarcerated in Belarus. More than a year after the elections, the results of which the European Union did not recognise, Belarus continues to violate the rights of its citizens, to silence civil society and to use repression as a daily weapon. The regime did not hesitate to use men, women, and children who were in need of protection. It put their lives in danger, without any respect for fundamental human rights, for the sole purpose of destabilising the European Union. “We reiterate today that the values of the Union are not for sale”, President Sassoli added. “This Parliament also calls on other institutions to stand up for the defence of fundamental rights”. “There are currently almost 900 political prisoners in Belarus, including 2020 Sakharov Prize winners Maryia Kaslesnikava, Mikalai Statkevich, Siarhei Tsikhanousky and Alies Bialiatski. We stand with them and we will continue to call for their freedom”.

Valentina Bombelli