## Supporting democracy in Europe

We, the members of the Universities for Enlightenment (U4E) network, which links national rectors' conferences from 10 European countries, are deeply concerned at the violation of democratic and human rights we continue to witness in Europe. The act of infringement of international law which led to the detention of the journalist Mr Roman Pratasevich and Ms Sofia Sapega is unacceptable and we support the demand contained in the European Council´s conclusions on Belarus from 24 May 2021 calling for their immediate release and free movement.

In Europe, freedom of expression is granted by national constitutions and by Article 10 of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of the Council of Europe. Freedom of expression is defined as a right that *shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers*. Universities, as democratic and independent institutions, recognise the freedom of expression as a human right. The role of universities is not only to teach, to educate, to perform research and to create art, but also to build resilient and sustainable societies. We must therefore protect our democratic societies and citizens.

As part of this commitment, European universities can serve as safe havens for students and researchers at risk. In this context, we support the call made by academic societies and associations, such as Scholars at Risk, the European University Association and the European Students' Union, on the European Commission to increase the support of European fellowship programmes for researchers and students at risk.

21 June 2021

Approved by representatives of:

the Austrian Rectors' Conference (UNIKO)
the Czech Rectors' Conference (ČKR)
the German Rectors' Conference (HRK)
the Polish Rectors' Conference (KRASP)
the Slovak Rectors' Conference (SRK)
the Slovenian Rectors' Conference (RKRS)
the Swiss Rectors' Conference (swissuniversities)

**Universities for Enlightenment** Europska inicijativa za akademske slobode i demokraciju / Evropská iniciativa pro akademické svobody a demokracii / A European initiative for academic freedom and democracy / Une initiative européenne pour la liberté académique et la démocratie / Eine europäische Initiative für Wissenschaftsfreiheit und Demokratie / Un'iniziativa europea per la libertà accademica e la democrazia / Europejska inicjatywa na rzecz wolności akademickiej i demokracji / Европска иницијатива за академске слободе и демократију / Európska iniciatíva za akademickú slobodu a demokraciu / Evropska pobuda za akademsko svobodo in demokracijo