

# In Belarus, education is a target:

## The European Students' Union's statement on the designation of the European Humanities University as an "extremist organisation" in Belarus

The European Students' Union (ESU) stands in unwavering solidarity with the students, staff, and broader academic community of the European Humanities University (EHU), following [the decision of the authorities in Belarus](#) to declare the institution as an "extremist organisation".

On April 14, 2026, the Supreme Court of the Republic of Belarus formalised this repression, justifying its decision under the guise of "Countering Extremist Activity." Backed by the Prosecutor General's Office, the Court alleges that the EHU, an institution where approximately **80% of the student body** is Belarusian, serves as a tool for foreign intelligence services to undermine national interests<sup>1</sup>. These accusations claim that the university promotes "alternative interpretations" of history and "encroaches on the foundations of the constitutional order", citing criminal cases against graduates and faculty who have called for sanctions.

This decision constitutes a **severe escalation** of systemic repression targeting higher education. **It is a blunt and undeniable attack on academic freedom.**

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<sup>1</sup> Source: [www.dw.com](http://www.dw.com)

Universities must remain safe spaces for critical thought, learning, and the free exchange of knowledge. They should never be used as political ploys for the judiciary to seize control over or to stifle the very pursuit of truth. Labeling an educational institution as “extremist” is an **alarming signal** for the entire European higher education community – one that we must not remain silent in the face of.

However, this is **not the first time** when Belarusian authorities have systemically criminalised democratic or educational actors. In the past years, several civil society organisations, including ESU’s member, [the Belarusian Students' Association](#), have already been labelled as “**extremist**”. The extension of such labels to higher education institutions marks a further dangerous step in dismantling independent academic and student spaces.

As highlighted [by the Belarusian Students' Association](#), this decision is part of a **broader pattern of pressure** aimed at **silencing independent academic voices** and **diminishing public trust in higher education**. The increasing use of “extremism” legislation against educational actors reflects a dangerous **abuse** of legal frameworks to suppress fundamental freedoms and intimidate students, scholars and institutions.

**ESU strongly condemns the persecution and intimidation of higher education institutions for exercising their fundamental rights.**

In the face of the expanding reach of authoritarian rule in Belarus, **Europe has a responsibility to speak up. And act.** ESU urges all European universities and higher education stakeholders to stand in solidarity with EHU and its students.

We are also turning our attention towards European institutions and national governments – who must move beyond mere expressions of concern and **take concrete steps to support students, scholars and institutions** – both inside of Belarus and in exile. This includes strengthening protection mechanisms, ensuring access to safe and

inclusive educational pathways for students at risk, and providing targeted support for those affected by the aggressions of the Belarusian system.

**ESU stands in full solidarity with EHU, and the whole academic community in Belarus, and reiterates its commitment to defending academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and the right to education.**

An attack on a university is an attack on the very foundations of higher education. Protecting students and academic communities is not optional, it is a necessary defence of the values that underpin democratic and open societies.