Alexandr Starikevich  
(SOLIDAR Silver Rose for Social Justice - European Category)

Born on October 28, 1972 in Minsk (Belarus), Alexandr Starikevich started his journalist’s career as a correspondent of Russian newspapers in 1990. In September 2000 Alexander became the editor-in-chief of the newspaper “BELARUSKI CHAS”, the founder of which was the Belarusian Federation of Trade Unions (FTUB). Within a short period of time the paper succeeded in doubling its size and increasing its circulation substantially, reaching a new high level of quality. By June 2002, it was the biggest opposition newspaper in Belarus.

The Belaruski Chas team has been struggling since its foundation for the universal rights to freedom of association and freedom of expression; fighting for both an independent Trade union movement as well as an autonomous media in Belarus.

As SOLIDAR was about to announce the awarding of this year’s Silver Rose prize to Mr Starikevich and his team, we learnt that the editor-in-chief had been dismissed from the paper and that the Belarusian state had taken over FBTU through a “farical extraordinary Congress” held on 18-19 September. After this event, most of the collaborators left the newspaper not accepting the change of the leadership.

Following this event Alexander Starikevich and his team worked out a creative concept and a business-plan of a new edition of the newspaper, which should become a tribune of all independent trade unions of Belarus. Now the project is at the stage of registration and searching for financing.

It should be noticed that the situation in the Republic of Belarus is increasingly alarming. This last dictatorial regime to exist in Europe oppresses all public institutes, including trade unions, which are not under his control. Since the arrival of authoritarian Victor Lukashenko to power on 1994, repression and human rights abuses against trade unionists, journalists and other opposition activists have been escalating. Lukashenko and a narrow circle of his followers, who get rid of their opponents using any means necessary, own the power in the country. Increasing international criticism has so far been largely ineffective.

The Independent media have become the target of the regime. According to the data of Belarusian Association of Journalists, during last two months and citing several different reasons, nine socio-political nongovernmental mass media organisations have had to stop their publications.