



Беларуская нацыянальная платформа
Форум грамадзянскай супольнасці
УСХОДНЯГА ПАРТНЁРСТВА

Position of the EaP CSF Belarusian National Platform

**"On possible resumption of cooperation between
the Republic of Belarus and the European Union"**

Current situation

The Belarusian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum welcomes the overall progress in the relations between Belarus and the EU, which has taken place in recent months. We acknowledge the importance of the EU-Belarus negotiations on the Interim Phase of modernization, progress of the parties regarding the signing of agreement on visa facilitation, as well as the first round of the EU-Belarus Human Rights Dialogue.

We welcome the release of the political prisoners on 22 August 2015 as a significant step for Belarusian authorities towards further improvement of the relations with the EU and international community. Positively evaluating this step of the Belarusian authorities, we are looking forward to their further steps towards improving the human rights situation in Belarus, including freedom of association, freedom of assembly and freedom of speech, which are particularly important for the development of civil society.

With the release of the political prisoners, the major obstacle for relaunching a deeper cooperation between Belarus and the EU is eliminated. This collaboration can be implemented through specific projects and programmes agreed upon in the framework of the Interim Phase of modernization, including the financial and technical support of the reforms in a wide range of areas from the EU side.

At the same time, we regret that the general political situation and human rights situation in Belarus remains unchanged. A number of civil society activists are under the criminal prosecution, particularly persons involved in drawing graffiti - Maksim Piakarski, Vadzim Zharomski, Viachaslau Kasinerau, and former presidential candidate Ales Mikhalevich, who took part in the 2010 electoral campaign and came back to the country recently. All released political prisoners are under preventive supervision and experience other restrictions of their rights. The persecution of human rights defenders is a common practice, for instance, the human

rights activist Elena Tonkacheva was deported from Belarus and banned from entering the country for three years. The freedom of media is restricted while the independent media cannot operate freely within the country. Persecution of independent journalists and civil society activists is often observed, including the practice of administrative fines, arbitrary detention, use of disproportionate force and non-lethal weapons against them. During the presidential electoral campaign, administrative pressure on voters at their workplace was recorded, while members of initiative groups of independent candidates were detained and the right of the opposition parties' representatives to be included in the district election commissions was unreasonably restricted. Legal, financial and political conditions for the activities of civil society organizations also remain unfavorable.

International Assessment of Human Rights Situation

Given these facts, we would like to draw attention of the European Union and EU Member States to the fact that the cooperation cannot be resumed without taking into account the general progress in the political and human rights situation in Belarus. We also believe that the progress in the field of human rights cannot be stated merely because of the political rapprochement and improvement of relations between the parties. Such progress can only be confirmed by independent international organizations and their special representatives. Currently, a public document on the situation with human rights on behalf of the Special Rapporteur of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) Mr Andrea Rigoni is not available. Therefore, the only independent international assessments of the human rights situation in Belarus are the reports of the UN Special Rapporteur Mr Miklos Haraszti. We call on the representatives of the European Union and EU Member States in their assessments of the human rights situation in Belarus to be guided by the opinion of the UN Special Rapporteur. We also advise to form a special group of international organizations' representatives (OSCE, Council of Europe and UN) for the assessment of the situation with human rights in Belarus to be published periodically. The main criteria of this evaluation could be based on the provisions of the European Commission Non-Paper "What the European Union could bring to Belarus" (December 5, 2006) that defines 12 conditions, which would allow to assess the improvements towards the respect for democratic values and fundamental human rights.

Cooperation Principles

We are also convinced that in future the Belarus-EU cooperation should be based on transparent and inclusive processes, including full public access to the information about EU supported projects and programmes for the Belarusian state, as well as the information about any other forms of cooperation. We sincerely hope that the rapprochement between the parties will mean that representatives of independent civil society organizations and, in particular, the Belarusian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, will be able to fully participate in the dialogue of the EU with the Belarusian authorities regarding the developments in the EU-Belarus cooperation.