



7th Annual Assembly of
the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum
**MOVING REFORMS
FORWARD
IN TESTING TIMES**
19-21 November 2015, Kyiv, Ukraine

Resolution No. 8/AA/2015

November 21, 2015
Kyiv, Ukraine

Resolution of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum

On academic freedom and student rights violations in Belarusian Higher Education Institutions

At the Summit of 47 European Ministers of Higher Education held on May 14-15, 2015 in Yerevan, Armenia, Belarus signed the Yerevan Communiqué assuming the obligations to support and protect students and teaching staff in exercising their academic freedom and to ensure their fully-pledged partnership in higher education institutions (HEI) management.

However, despite making a commitment to change, Belarus continues in its old ways, which was confirmed by the recent reports on academic freedom violation. The censorship has been enhanced with a new force. According to the media, the Ministry of Information ordered to destroy the entire edition of Vitalij Silitskij's book "Long way from the tyranny: the post-communist authoritarian regime and struggle for democracy in Serbia and Belarus". There continues the practice of forcing students to vote earlier in the presidential elections in Belarus and to participate during official classes in agricultural and construction works, as well as in political campaigns and public events. Independent student organizations are not registered and the existence of article №193-1 of the Criminal Code that forbids acting on behalf of an unregistered organization prevents students' activity.

In recent days, the students' campaign against introducing a fee for re-sitting failed exams became especially poignant. This campaign, initiated by the students of Belarusian State University on November 3, 2015, spread to other Belarusian higher education institutions. Students collected thousands of signatures against the newly introduced fee and expected a dialogue with universities' administrations for their views on the situation to be heard and taken into consideration in the decision making process. However, their position was ignored by HEI administrations, which constitutes a complete disregard of Belarus's obligations to increase students' participation in HEI management, arising from the joining of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

Furthermore, campaign activists are harassed, intimidated and threatened with expulsion from the HEI or even with court litigations. At the same time, the official student organizations, student representatives at the universities' boards and student self-governments are indifferent to the above-mentioned student initiative as well as to the fate of activists and campaign participants. In this situation, the official student structures once again demonstrate their dependence on the universities' administrations and the irrelevance of the obligation to respect student self-governance.

The General Assembly of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum calls on the Belarusian HEI leadership and on the Ministry of Education responsible for the Bologna Roadmap implementation to take actions to stop the harassment of students and to respect the fundamental academic values and freedoms.



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We appeal to the European Commission, European Students Union, Council of Europe and to other stakeholders participating in the Roadmap implementation, such as the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) and its subgroup the Advisory Group 2 – Support for the Belarus Roadmap, to demand clarification from the Belarusian side on the above-mentioned violations. We also call on the parties involved to suggest to the Belarusian side taking measures to avoid future violation of obligations set out in Yerevan Communiqué.

We solicit the EaP CSF Steering Committee to continue working on the inclusion of the EaP CSF into the Advisory Group 2 – Support for the Belarus Roadmap of the BFUG as one of the stakeholders monitoring the Roadmap implementation.



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