



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

Resolution No. 8/AA/2015

November 21, 2015
Kyiv, Ukraine

Resolution of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum

On Academic Freedom and students' rights violations in Belarusian Higher Education Institutions

At 47th European Ministers of Higher Education Summit held in May 14-15, 2015 in Yerevan, Armenia, Belarus signed 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, in spite of making a commitment for change, Belarus continues to proceed in old ways that were confirmed by the recent reports on academic freedom violation. The censorship has been enhanced with new force. In accordance with media, the Ministry of Information ordered to destroy Vitalij Silitskij's book edition "Long way from the tyranny: the post-communist authoritarian regime and struggle for democracy in Serbia and Belarus". The practice of forcing students to vote earlier in Republic of Belarus Presidential elections, their use at agricultural and construction works during official classes as well as participation in political campaigns and public events didn't cease to exist and still continue at the same pace. Independent students' organizations are not registered and existence of Criminal Code article №193-1 that forbids to act on behalf of unregistered organization prevents students' activity.

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

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

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



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We appeal on the European Commission, European Students Union, Council of Europe and other stakeholders participating in the Roadmap implementation - BFUG, Advisory Committee on the Support for Belarus Roadmap - to demand clarification from Belarusian side on the above mentioned violations. We also call on parties involved to offer Belarusian side to take measures to avoid future violations of Belarus obligations set out in Yerevan Communiqué.

Belarusian Independent Bologna Committee solicits EaP CSF Steering Committee to continue working on including EaP CSF into the Advisory Committee on the Support for Belarus Roadmap as one of the stakeholders monitoring the Roadmap implementation.



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