

**Alyaksandr Lukashenka**, President, Republic of Belarus

**Donald Tusk**, President, European Council

**Federica Mogherini**, Vice-President of the European Commission, High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

**Jean-Claude Juncker**, President, European Commission

**Johannes Hahn**, European Commissioner for Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations

**Martin Schulz**, President, European Parliament

**Ministers of Foreign Affairs**, EU Member States

**Michel Forst**, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders

**Anne Brasseur**, President, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

**Nils Muižnieks**, Commissioner for Human Rights, Council of Europe

**Thorbjørn Jagland**, Secretary General, Council of Europe

**Ilkka Kanerva**, President, OSCE Parliamentary Assembly

**Lamberto Zannier**, Secretary General, Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)

**Michael Georg Link**, Director, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)

*26 August 2015*

### **Statement by the Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum on the Release of Political Prisoners in Belarus**

The EaP CSF Steering Committee (SC) welcomes the decision of the Belarusian authorities to release six political prisoners – Mikalai Statkevich, Ihar Alinevich, Mikalai Dziadok, Euheny Vaskovich, Arysom Prakapenka and Yury Rubtsou.

We call on the Belarusian government to rehabilitate these and other former political prisoners and to fully restore their civil and political rights. We also thank those European Union and member state officials who have in the past months worked hard for the release of these prisoners and call on the EU to maintain a principled approach in its policy vis-à-vis Belarus.

This decision is an important and positive step by the Belarusian authorities in meeting the demands of civil society and international community, and towards improving relations with the European Union.

This step should be followed by further efforts towards an improvement of the human rights situation in the country and general conditions for civil society activities through respecting the international human rights commitments and abolishing restrictive regulations.

The SC is particularly concerned about the possibility of the incarceration of new political prisoners in Belarus - Vadzim Zharomski and Maksim Piakarski, youth activists who are currently held in custody and whose detention is politically motivated. They face a prison sentence for drawing patriotic graffiti which is a disproportionate punishment for a minor violation. We urge the investigating authorities to ensure maximum transparency including a public hearing of the "Graffiti Case", and call for the release of Vadzim Zharomski and Maksim Piakarski pending the hearing.

We also urge the Belarusian authorities to ensure that the forthcoming presidential election in Belarus is conducted in accordance with international standards for free and fair elections and to provide domestic and international observation missions, including those of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) and the European Parliament, with the full access to all the election procedures.

The Steering Committee urges the authorities of other Eastern Partnership countries to free all political prisoners in their countries immediately.

***Members of the Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum***