

EU-Belarus relations: a new round of engagement in the new geopolitical situation?

On 14 October, in the wake of the Belarusian presidential election, the panel discussion on the state of EU-Belarus relations was organised by the EaP CSF and hosted by MEP Bogdan Zdrojewski at the European Parliament.

The panellists, Dirk Schübel (European External Action Service), EaP CSF Co-Chair Andrei Yahorau, Anna Gerasimova (Barys Zvozkau Belarusian Human Rights House) and Vladimir Dunaev (Belarusian Independent Bologna Committee) deliberated on the future of the EU-Belarus relations.

As a result of the fruitful discussion covering a number of topical issues, recommendations on EU engagement with Belarus and the role of the civil society in pushing forward reforms in the country were produced.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1) New détente in the relations between EU and Belarus is confirmed **by temporary suspension of sanctions** against selected Belarusian officials and companies. The new period of engagement should be enlightened by previous experience with the regime and less dependent on the behaviour of ruling elites. **The EaP CSF calls for:**
 - EU policy to facilitate irreversible results by promoting wide range of societal actors to take part in the process of reforms and by **combining different types of conditionality** in various policy areas and in relation to the **list of 29 measures**, which was agreed by the EU Council.
- 2) Conditional **accession of Belarus to the Bologna Process** is a positive development. All relevant stakeholders should make sure this window of opportunity is used in full. The Roadmap for Belarus was adopted with an input from the civil society and provides the benchmarks and deadlines allowing for effective monitoring of the progress of the higher education reforms in the country. **The Advisory Group on Belarus, which is currently being formed under Bologna Follow-Up Committee, should consider:**
 - Establishing **observer status to the Advisory Group** on Belarus, allowing for wider representation of the civil society to be included in the monitoring process.
 - To facilitate **inclusive debate on the implementation process**
- 3) **Human rights situation** in the country has not improved. The human rights violations are of systemic nature and the repressive system is being refined, using legalistic approach, which legitimizes the moves of the Belarusian authorities. There is a temptation to evaluate the situation in the country in a positive way. Given the Human Rights Dialogue between the EU and Belarus is renewed, **the EaP CSF recommends:**
 - To push for systemic not cosmetic changes in the field of human rights via preparation and adoption of the **comprehensive roadmap for human rights improvements with specific benchmarks** in cooperation with the civil society