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УСХОДНЯГА ПАРТНЁРСТВА

29.12.2016

**Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland
Witold Waszczykowski**

**Address of the Coordination Committee of the Belarusian National Platform
of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum**

On the future of “Belsat” TV channel

Dear Minister Waszczykowski,

Belarusian civil society organizations, united within the Belarusian National Platform for the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum are concerned about the future of the TV channel "Belsat".

First of all, we would like to express our sincere appreciation to the Republic of Poland for the long-term political and financial support for the existence of the TV channel "Belsat" since 2007 as an independent television project, offering the Belarusian viewer information and judgements, free from the influence of representative government.

Thanks to the support of Poland, as well as the European Union and other partners who share the value of freedom of speech, "Belsat" TV channel was able to find its place and audience in Belarus in difficult conditions of lack of freedom of information and discrimination of independent media. It is also important to note that the vast majority of the actual television programs produced by Belsat are result of efforts of Belarusian journalists, as well as a wide range of experts, opinion leaders and just active citizens of our country invited to this process.

Over the past 9 years, the TV channel "Belsat":

- has become an important part of the independent media space in Belarus, despite the repeated denial of its official registration and the pressure on Belsat journalists for their professional activity from the Belarusian authorities;
- has been shaped as an important mean of formation of the Belarusian identity on the basis of pro-European values;

- has established itself as a constantly evolving project, capable of sincere reacting to the events taking place in the surrounding reality, as well as of the search for new forms and means of dialogue with the audience and the various stakeholders in the Belarusian society.

In this regard, we are extremely concerned about information, published in various media in Poland and Belarus, about the intention of the Polish government significantly cut funding for the TV channel "Belsat" and refuse to broadcast in Belarusian language. The presence of a small Belarus-speaking channel stimulating national and civic consciousness of many people in our country, seems much more correct response to the current challenges of information war, then the alternatives voiced in the media. Seriously discussed perspective of closing the channel may lead to even more negative effects, in particular substantial weakening resistance to the aggressive promotion of the ideology of "Russki mir" in Belarus.

Of course, the right to decide the future of the channel belongs to those who instituted and maintained it all these years - the Polish government and other international partners. At the same time, it would be wrong to underestimate the significant contribution to the existence of "Belsat", made by the Belarusian stakeholders - experts, journalists, representatives of civil society organizations and cultural community of our country. In this context, we see it strange, improper and unjustified that the Belarusian partners are denied the right to have voice and are not invited to the discussion of the future of the TV channel "Belsat".

Decisions of such type are of high importance for many actors in Belarus, they can greatly affect the domestic political context of the country. Civil society of Belarus is open and interested in discussing the future of the TV channel "Belsat" together with other stakeholders, and also expects better integration into this process a wide range of Belarusian partners.

Coordination Committee of the BNP of EaP CSF

Belarusian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum has been established in July 2010, and brings together on the basis of a pro-European values more than 80 organizations of various fields of activity.

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