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УСХОДНЯГА ПАРТНЁРСТВА

European External Action Service (EEAS)

Delegation of the EU to the Republic of Belarus

European Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement

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**Statement of the Coordination Committee of the EaP CSF Belarusian National Platform
on the events of 25-26 March 2017 in Minsk and other Belarusian cities**

In the past weeks and especially recent days, we have witnessed the repressive measures against citizens taking part in peaceful demonstrations. Firstly, we would like to draw particular attention to the unprecedented number of arrests of citizens exercising their freedom of expression, speech and peaceful assembly on 25 March in Minsk, as well as in other cities of the country. In this regard, the indiscriminate use of violence and repressive measures on the part of officials and law enforcement agencies of the Republic of Belarus against peaceful protesters raised deep concern and provoked indignation.

Another point of concern is the biased nature of the information on the events provided by the state media, so far characterized by an openly hostile language towards the demonstrators.

Finally, it is impossible to ignore and not to condemn the detention of Belarusian and international human rights defenders during the monitoring of the protests, in particular the detentions in the office of the Human Rights Center “Viasna” and the detention of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee members. Once again, during the events of 25-26 March 2017, journalists were detained while performing their professional duties.

These actions of the authorities are in violation of the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus, the national legislation in force and international obligations of the country, as they trample upon the values of democracy and human rights.

The Coordination Committee of the EaP CSF Belarusian National Platform underlines that, in light of recent events, relations between the Republic of Belarus and the European Union cannot be maintained under the current conditions. We call on the responsible EU officials to objectively assess the situation and consider the opportunities, as well as the conditions and limitations for any further development of the EU-Belarus dialogue.

We suggest postponing the EU-Belarus Coordination Group meeting scheduled for 3-4 April in Minsk until the release and withdrawal of charges in relation to all those detained in connection with the peaceful protests held in Belarus in February-March 2017, and until an objective, fair and lawful investigation into the arbitrary detentions and harsh treatment of demonstrators is initiated to bring those responsible to justice.

We also consider it necessary to revise the format of the Human Rights Dialogue between Belarus and the EU, by including in the agenda specific commitments of the Belarusian state with regard to the citizens' rights and freedoms.

We call on the European Union to take appropriate measures that could contribute to a genuine and wide-ranging dialogue between the authorities and society. From our side, we believe the EaP CSF Belarusian National Platform can be one of the potential platforms for such a dialogue.

Coordination Committee of the EaP CSF Belarusian National Platform