



Беларуская нацыянальная платформа
Форум грамадзянскай супольнасці
УСХОДНЯГА ПАРТНЁРСТВА

Government of the Republic of Belarus

Constitutional Court of the Republic of Belarus

Supreme Court of the Republic of Belarus

Administration of the President of the Republic of Belarus

Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus

Copies:

Delegation of the EU to the Republic of Belarus

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Bureau of the International Labor Organization

14 March 2017

**Statement by the Belarusian National Platform
of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum
on Repressive Actions against Participants of Peaceful Protests in the Cities of Belarus**

We, the representatives of the civil society organizations of the Republic of Belarus, united within the framework of the Belarusian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, express our indignation and condemn the repressive actions of the officials and law enforcement agencies of the Republic of Belarus related to the detention and punishment of participants in numerous peaceful protest actions in various cities of our country.

In recent weeks, mass peaceful protests of citizens have been organised around our country as a reaction to the notorious Decree of the President of the Republic of Belarus No. 3 (hereinafter - Decree No. 3) "On the Prevention of Social Dependence", the so called "social parasite decree". The protests are exceptionally peaceful and are held in consistence with the rule of law and national security, moral principles of the society, human rights and health of the citizens. The roots of these protests, representing the citizens of most diverse social strata and groups, are evidently a significant deterioration in the economic situation of people, as well as in the discriminatory and degrading nature of Decree No. 3.

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In the Republic of Belarus, according to Article 41 of the Constitution, "forced labour shall be prohibited, other than work or service specified in the verdict of a court of law or in accordance with the law on the state of emergency or martial law". Under Article 33 of the Constitution, "everyone is guaranteed freedom of thoughts and beliefs and their free expression. No one shall be forced to express one's beliefs or to deny them. No monopolization of the mass media by the State, public associations or individual citizens and no censorship shall be permitted." Article 35 of the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus provides that "the freedom to hold assemblies, rallies, street marches, demonstrations and pickets that do not disturb law and order or violate the rights of other citizens of the Republic of Belarus, shall be guaranteed by the State".

Despite the provisions of the Constitution, which are directly applicable, mass arbitrary detentions of protesting citizens, public activists, politicians, human rights defenders, and journalists covering socially significant events took place in a number of cities of the Republic of Belarus during the past week. These detentions were conducted in an illegal manner: the representatives of the law enforcement agencies did not introduce themselves and used physical violence. The law enforcement agencies regularly use an unacceptable practice of preventive detention and "house arrest" of civic activists in various cities. The incidents of searches in private premises and offices of political parties and NGOs were recorded. Many of the protesters, by decision of the local courts, received penalties in the form of fines and imprisonment, in fact for exercising their constitutional freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and professional activity.

These actions of the Belarusian authorities escalate social tensions, are repressive by nature and practically prevent Belarusian society from a constructive public dialogue on issues of socio-economic policy. Instead of addressing the initial causes of the protests and establishing communication with various interest groups in Belarusian society with an aim to find mutually beneficial solutions, the authorities of the country chose to crack down on the discontent. Such an approach does not contribute to strengthening the atmosphere of stability, security, trust and respect in our society.

We pay special attention to the fact that the above-mentioned repressive actions are causing serious damage to the recently revived process of normalization of the EU-Belarus relations. The values of freedom of speech, freedom of expression, human rights, constructive public dialogue, taking into consideration opinions and interests of citizens are unconditional for EU Member States. Respect for these values has been an indispensable guarantee of possible mutually beneficial relations between the Republic of Belarus and the European Union.

We call upon the competent state bodies in the Republic of Belarus to:

- 1. Immediately abandon the practice of repressive measures against citizens, including public activists, politicians, human rights defenders, other representatives of civil society, peacefully expressing their protest.*
- 2. Identify those responsible for violations of the constitutional rights of citizens and bring them to justice in accordance with law. Take measures to prevent future violations of the constitutional rights of citizens and international obligations of the Republic of Belarus in the field of freedom of expression, assembly, speech.*



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3. *Stop detentions and other measures aimed at hindering professional activities of journalists and independent media.*
4. *Immediately release all those arrested and detained in relation to the peaceful protests against Decree No. 3, and repeal the judicial decisions to bring these people to administrative responsibility.*
5. *Abolish Decree No. 3 as inconsistent with the constitutional rights of Belarusian citizens and Belarusian legislation.*
6. *Establish a place and format for a dialogue between government officials, employers, trade unions and civil society to address unemployment problems and ensure basic constitutional, including social and economic rights; initiate such a dialogue, ensuring full participation of all stakeholders.*

Only together, through peaceful constructive dialogue, we will be able to overcome complicated social, economic, political and legal crisis for the benefit of the Belarusian people, and for the sake of the European future of the Republic of Belarus!

***Belarusian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum
comprises more than 70 Belarusian civil society organizations***