

28 March 2017

Joint Statement on the Recent Developments in Belarus

We, the undersigned organisations, strongly condemn the large-scale detentions of peaceful protesters in Minsk and other cities of Belarus during the Freedom Day demonstrations on 25 March. These deplorable actions of the security forces accompanied by the use of force in violation of the fundamental human rights contradict the Belarusian Constitution and international commitments of the country.

While we welcome the recent thaw in the EU-Belarus relations and appreciate the importance of the dialogue with the EU for the implementation of reforms in the country, the consistency of the government's approach is crucial.

Regretfully, with its practice of preventive detentions applied to opposition politicians, human rights defenders and journalists, ahead of and on the day of the protests, the Belarusian government once again demonstrated the disrespect for the democratic values and unwillingness to advance in its rapprochement with the international community.

The crackdown on the protests against the controversial Presidential Decree No.3 throughout the country led to hundreds being detained with some demonstrators hospitalised due to severe injuries.

Denouncing these actions, we urge the Belarusian authorities to:

- immediately and unconditionally release all those detained during the peaceful protests;
- put an end to the prosecution of civil society activists, human rights advocates, journalists and opposition politicians;
- in compliance with the country's international commitments, conduct a thorough investigation into the use of violence against protesters and detainees;
- ensure the access to the developments on the ground for the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus;
- commit to concrete and systemic human rights reforms in the country.

In light of the above-mentioned situation, we call upon the EU institutions, EU member states and international organisations to:

- make the future cooperation with the Belarusian government conditional on the progress in the field of human rights;
- support the Belarusian civil society in its efforts to document human rights violations and provide assistance to the victims of infringements;
- support the extension of the mandate for the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Belarus during the Human Rights Council session in June 2017.

