

EAP CSF STEERING COMMITTEE STATEMENT ON THE VOTE ORGANISED BY THE LUKASHENKA REGIME FOR ITS LOWER HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES AND LOCAL COUNCILS OF DEPUTIES ON 25 FEBRUARY 2024

Brussels, 25 February 2024 - With the Lukashenka regime holding another vote that will consolidate its grip on the country on 25 February 2024, the EaP CSF Steering Committee calls once again onto the EU and its Member States and the International Community to develop and adopt a strategy for enabling democratic change in Belarus.

This Sunday, 25 February 2024, Lukashenka's illegitimate regime holds a vote for its lower House of Representatives and Local Councils of Deputies. This exercise of authoritarian consolidation will be followed, in April 2024, by the selection of members to the Council of the Republic, the upper House of the country. The process will lead to the appointment of members of the All-Belarusian People's Assembly, a new body established by the constitutional amendments of 2022 designed to consolidate Lukashenka's grip on power.

The tightly controlled nature of the vote, where only those aligned with Belarus' illegitimate President Lukashenka's political course are allowed to compete, undermines the principles of democratic pluralism and the right of citizens to freely choose their representatives. This illegitimate voting exercise is taking place while the human rights situation in Belarus continues to be alarmingly deteriorating, with dissenting voices facing investigations, persecution, and frequent prosecution.

Since the contentious 2020 presidential vote, hundreds of human rights defenders, independent journalists, and citizen election observers have been arbitrarily detained, with many remaining imprisoned in deplorable conditions without the right to a fair trial. Civil society organisations have been forced to shut down amid intimidation, raids, or property confiscation. The arrests of individuals for participating in peaceful demonstrations or expressing dissent through social media content are deeply troubling, and we reiterate the call for the release of all unjustly detained citizens and political prisoners.

The forced exile of thousands of Belarusians to safety abroad, including members of civil society and the political opposition, underscores the severity of this ongoing human rights crisis. Recent changes to Belarusian legislation, leading to arbitrary deprivation of citizenship

as punishment for vaguely defined "extremist activity" are striking examples of weaponised legalism that violate international human rights law.

We abhor the illegitimate, violent, repressive, and anti-democratic actions of the Lukashenka regime.

Since no democratic fair elections can be held by a regime perpetuating total repression, we call onto the whole International Community to unequivocally condemn these illegitimate elections. We echo the [European Parliament's urgent resolution on Belarus of 8 February 2024](#), calling onto the on the EU and the international community not to recognise the results of the vote.

We urge the European Institutions and EU Member states to speed up the formulation of a EU strategy for Belarus and a programme of joint actions that aim to halt repression, ensure the release and recovery of Belarusian political prisoners, and support the country's progression towards democratic integrity, formulated in cooperation with Belarusian democratic actors and civil society;

We call on media and all stakeholders making public statements in relation to this 25 February farcical vote not to use the term 'election' alone to describe this exercise of authoritarian consolidation. Free and fair elections presuppose the respect of key conditions including among others freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom from discrimination, all of which are absent in Belarus. This voting exercise is illegitimate and should be described unequivocally as such.

"The international community is doing a lot to support Belarusian civil society and democratic forces, but these actions alone will not suffice long term if not supported by an actual strategy. Lukashenka is sinking Belarus further towards totalitarianism, isolationism and supporting Russia, becoming every day more dangerous towards Belarusians and the rest of Europe. The development of a concrete and comprehensive strategy for the democratisation of the country can no longer be postponed." – Irina Sukhy, Co-Chair of the Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum.

**Members of the Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society
Forum**