

Brussels, 13 November 2020

EaP CSF Steering Committee appeal to the EHEA ministerial conference on the situation in Belarus

Ahead of the EHEA ministerial conference on 19 November 2020, the EaP CSF Steering Committee would like to highlight the impact of the ongoing political and human rights crisis in Belarus on the preservation of academic freedom.

The EaP CSF has previously raised a number of long-standing concerns regarding the Belarusian authorities' limited adherence to the values of the EHEA in its [Bologna monitoring reports](#). Yet the situation for university students and academic staff has only worsened in light of the current assault on fundamental rights and freedoms in the context of the country's post-election protests.

One of the fundamental vocations of universities is to serve as a bastion of free speech and independent thought. However, with the vast majority of universities under government ownership and control - making them indissociable from other state structures - academic freedoms are being actively suppressed in higher education institutions across Belarus today.

Like hundreds of thousands of their compatriots, Belarusian students have engaged actively in the current unprecedented mobilisation against consistent human rights abuses and the falsification of this year's presidential election results. This peaceful activism has been met with a disproportionate response by the country's authorities - often aided by the university administrations themselves. For example, according to the [European University Association and European Students Union](#) "threats of expulsion, dismissal or conscription into the military directed against students and staff" have become commonplace, with the [Belarusian Students Association \(ZBS\)](#) reporting that almost 250 students have been disciplined by their academic institutions or even expelled for their participation in peaceful protests. It is known about at least 142 students that have already been expelled or who are facing the expulsion.

More concerning still is the repressive action taken by law enforcement agencies against students: the ZBS has recorded the detention of 374 students since September, with 80 sentenced to a total of 953 days of administrative arrest, and 54 fined an average of 120 EUR each - almost five times the monthly value of an academic scholarship in the country.

In light of this highly concerning situation, the Steering Committee calls on the member states of the EHEA to:

- Condemn the repressions against students and teachers in Belarus and the violation of academic freedoms by the regime;
- Include the above repressions and violations on the agenda of the EHEA ministerial conference on 19 November 2020 as a matter of urgency;
- Create an *ad hoc* working group to monitor the situation in Belarusian higher education and review its report on the Belarus Follow-Up Group meetings;
- Actively consider the suspension of Belarus from the EHEA if no discernible improvements to the situation are made.

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