

EaP CSF Steering Committee Statement concerning the government Crackdown on Opposition and Trade Union Leaders in Belarus

Brussels, 15 June 2022

Since mass demonstrations took place to protest fraudulent Presidential election results in 2020, the illegitimate regime of Aliaksandr Lukashenka has sought to maintain its power at any cost. Mass repressions have been carried out to try and intimidate Belarusian society, including the systematic and total liquidation of independent civil society organisations, as well as the adoption of a number of changes to Belarusian legislation that severely restrict the rights and freedoms of citizens.

A [statement](#) from the General Prosecutor's Office of Belarus on the termination of the activities of the Free Trade Union of Belarus, the Free Trade Union of Metalworkers, the Belarusian Independent Trade Union of Miners, Chemists, Oil Refiners, Energy Workers, Transport Workers, Builders and other Workers, the Belarusian Trade Union of Radio-Electronic Industry Workers, as well as the Association of Trade Unions 'Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions' testifies that this is another repressive step from the Lukashenka regime in order to systematically destroy independent civil society in Belarus.

Since 19 April 2022, Belarusian security forces have raided the offices and apartments of leaders and activists of independent Belarusian trade unions. Many detained leaders and activists still remain in custody. Among them Mr. **Aliaksandr Yarashuk**, his deputy Mr. **Siarhei Antusevich** - former EaP CSF Steering Committee member, the leader of Belarusian Radio-Electrical Manufacturing Workers' Trade Union (REM), Mr. **Henadz Fiadynich**, activists Mr. **Vatslau Areshka**, Mr. **Mikhail Hromau**, Ms. **Iryna Bud-Husaim**, Mr. **Miraslau Sabchuk**, Ms. **Yanina Malash**, Mr. **Vital Chychmarou**, Mr. **Vasil Berasniou**.



We **draw** your attention to the fact that Article 5 of the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus, to which the General Prosecutor's Office refers in its statement, provides justification that the activities of public associations should be aimed at the 'realisation and protection of rights, freedoms and interests'.

Recalling the very important role of independent trade unions in protecting workers' rights and the legitimate interests of citizens of the Republic of Belarus in their desire to live in a democratic social legal state (as required by Article 1 of the Constitution), we **emphasise** that the General Prosecutor's Office's interpretation of the activities of the above public organisations, as those that have the goal of forcibly changing the constitutional order or promoting propaganda supporting war, or, social, national, religious and racial hatred is a **politically motivated attempt** by the regime to eliminate opportunities for democratic activities within the legal framework and thereby destroy another important segment of Belarusian civil society.

We **call** on the international community, the governments of democratic countries and the EU to take adequate measures against the Lukashenka regime in connection with another act of liquidation of Belarusian civil society.

We **demand** the immediate and unconditional release of all trade union leaders and activists, as well as all other political prisoners.

We **demand** an end to politically motivated processes to liquidate independent trade unions, as well as the creation of appropriate conditions in which they can carry out all of their activities unhindered.

We **call** on the democratic countries and the EU to show greater solidarity and support for Belarusian civil society, drawing a clear line between it and the illegitimate Lukashenka regime.

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