

## **EaP CSF Steering Committee statement on the Human Rights Situation in the Republic of Belarus on the occasion of the 13th EaP CSF Annual Assembly**

*Brussels, 30th November 2021*

The human rights situation in Belarus is close to a humanitarian crisis and requires an urgent and continuous response from the European and wider international community. Repressions against representatives of civil society that started after the presidential election campaign in 2020 and intensified after the falsified elections, continue.

During and after peaceful protests against electoral fraud, **more than 40,000 peaceful assembly participants were detained and imprisoned**. Armed police officers, OMON and special forces were violent towards peaceful demonstrators and used lethal force. As a result, several demonstrators were killed and hundreds were injured from plastic bullets and stun grenades.

Those arrested, were tortured. Belarusian and international human rights organisations, including the UN mission, have collected data on **more than 1000 cases of torture** of civic activists held in detention. Criminal cases are falsified against activists, human rights defenders and journalists. To date, **888 political prisoners** have been recognised by human rights organisations. There are **27 journalists** from independent media in prison. Human rights activists **Ales Bialiatski, Valentin Stefanovich, Vladimir Labkovich**, as well as political figures **Maria Kalesnikava, Pavel Sevyarynets, Viktor Babariko, Nikolai Statkevich, Sergei Tikhanovsky** and others are also incarcerated. Many political prisoners do not receive necessary medical care, including **Grigory Kostusyov, Ksania Luckina, or Maria Rabkova**. **On May 21, 2021, political prisoner Vitold Ashurok died in the Shklov penal colony.**

In 2021, the Belarusian authorities launched a campaign to close almost all independent democratic CSOs in the country. To date, **more than 270 CSOs have been liquidated**. The legislation of the Republic of Belarus in terms of ensuring human rights does not comply with signed and ratified international agreements with regard to freedom of speech, freedom of peaceful assembly and association, and free and fair elections.

In 2021, the Belarusian authorities also artificially created a **migrant crisis** on the border of Belarus and the EU in order to blackmail EU countries into recognising the legitimacy of the dictatorial regime and divert the attention of the international community away from the internal political crisis in Belarus. The Belarusian authorities have endangered the lives and wellbeing of thousands of vulnerable people, who are being held by force on the border with the EU by Belarusian border guards.



**We call on the international community, the governments of democratic countries and the EU to take all necessary measures towards the dictatorial regime in Belarus and to continue to demand the unconditional release of political prisoners, the safeguarding of fundamental rights and freedoms, and the holding of free democratic elections in Belarus.**

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