



## **EaP CSF Steering Committee statement on the decision made by Belarusian authorities to suspend Belarus' participation in the Eastern Partnership and the Readmission agreement**

*Brussels, 8 July 2021*

On June 28, 2021, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus announced the suspension of the country's participation in both the Eastern Partnership and the Readmission agreement. **The Steering Committee of the EaP CSF condemns in the strongest possible terms the Belarusian government's shameful decision to withdraw from these initiatives.** The EaP CSF Belarusian National Platform also [condemns](#) the Belarusian authorities' decision and insists on the further participation of the Republic of Belarus in the Eastern Partnership initiative, as well as other Belarusian-European initiatives, projects and communication formats at all levels.

The principal victims of these measures, taken by a desperate and illegitimate regime clinging to power, are not EU-Belarus relations, but the Belarusian people themselves. Belarusians are being held hostage by a regime which is trying to isolate itself from both its own population and the international community, a situation the Steering Committee acknowledges as exponentially dangerous.

In addition to this withdrawal, the illegitimate regime has enacted other petty retaliatory measures in response to the implementation of EU sanctions against officials and exports following the forced landing of a [Ryanair flight in Minsk on 23 May, 2021](#). By suspending participation in the Readmission agreement, Belarusian authorities are blackmailing the EU by facilitating illegal migration to the EU across the Belarusian border.

The withdrawal of regime representatives from the Eastern Partnership will be balanced out by an increase in the part played by civil society and, by extension, the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum. The EaP CSF, together with the Belarusian National Platform of the EaP CSF and the other National Platforms, will strive now more than ever to represent and channel the voice of Belarusian citizens within the newly-revised EaP architecture.

This outrageous and ill-timed decision comes at the same time the EU outlined [new priorities for cooperation](#) with Eastern Partners on July 2, 2021, thus undermining cooperation, cohesion and the Eastern Partnership itself at the worst possible juncture. The Steering Committee of the EaP CSF nevertheless welcomes the EU's further development of its ambitious plan for supporting democratic transition in Belarus, which underlines the augmented role played by civil society and other non-state actors in the meantime.

**The Steering Committee of the EaP CSF urges Belarusian authorities:**

- To reconsider this withdrawal as part of a de-escalation strategy in relations with the EU that would also consider how these degenerations have adverse effects on the Belarusian people;
- To immediately cease the persecution, repression, and imprisonment of human rights defenders, journalists, civic activists and students;
- To initiate a peaceful and genuine dialogue with the people of Belarus while acknowledging and respecting their democratic aspirations, paving the way for a democratic transition and free and fair elections in-line with international standards.

**The Steering Committee also call on the European Union and Member states:**

- To continue delivering on the promises of the Eastern Partnership policy to Belarus through alternative routes, while upholding EU norms and values at the core of this initiative and to uphold the cohesion of the policy;
- To strengthen the involvement of all other non-state actors, including civil society, in all aspects of policy implementation: procedurally, operationally and financially;
- To preserve channels of communication for dialogue and cooperation with Belarusian authorities while engaging with non-state actors from the country, including opposition leaders, businesses and civil society organisations.

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