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# EaP CSF Monitoring Mission: Belarus - political and societal developments after the presidential elections

Recommendations

#Belarus



September 2020

# Methodological Note

The EaP CSF Monitoring Mission to Belarus was formed based on the suggestions of the EaP CSF Belarusian National Platform (BNP) with the support of the EaP CSF Steering Committee and the participation of experts representing EaP CSF members. Its task was to monitor all stages of the 2020 presidential election, from the calling of the election by the House of Representatives of the National Assembly on May 8 to the announcement of the final election results by the Central Election Commission (CEC) on August 14, paying particular attention to the adherence of the authorities to political and human rights standards, and the civil society and media environment. It also took note of further political and societal developments in the post-election period when drafting its final report.

## Authors

The Mission was composed of six experts from EaP CSF member organisations: Hennadiy Maksak (Mission Leader – Ukrainian Prism, Ukraine), Zofia Lutkiewicz (Political Accountability Foundation, Poland), Nicolae Panfil (Promo-LEX, Moldova), and three experts from the Belarusian National Platform of the EaP CSF. All six experts contributed to the drafting of the final Mission Report.

The Mission Report was edited by Natalia Yerashevich (Director), Vera Rihackova (Advocacy Manager), and Billie Bell (Administrative & Advocacy Assistant), from the EaP CSF Secretariat.

## **EaP CSF Monitoring Mission to Belarus**

### **Political and societal developments around the 2020 presidential election**

#### **KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The results of the assessment of the EaP CSF Monitoring Mission to Belarus indicate that the August 9 presidential election in the Republic of Belarus cannot be considered free or fair due to a number of gross violations of democratic norms and standards. During all stages of the electoral process, the Belarusian authorities failed to respect and preserve the human and political rights set out in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document, as well as in the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus.

#### **Legal framework**

The current legal framework outlining the conduct of the presidential election is not in line with Belarus' OSCE commitments or international standards. It has been consistently criticised by the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), following the findings from previous international observation missions in Belarus. The Electoral Code in particular falls well short of complying with the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document.

The lack of impartiality of the election administration at all levels has been widely observed, allowing selective and discriminatory decisions adopted in favour of the incumbent president. At the same time, during the pre-election period and the election campaign, multiple cases of the use of administrative resources have been reported by local observers.

The Belarusian authorities consistently violated the right to peaceful assembly and hindered meetings with voters of alternative candidates and their teams. Intimidation of electoral actors and participants of meetings, arbitrary detentions, and arrests under far-fetched administrative and criminal charges have accompanied all the stages of the electoral process. Moreover, a significant number of gross irregularities during voting and counting of the votes proved a severe lack of transparency.

Deliberate actions by the authorities in Belarus created obstacles for the OSCE/ODIHR to carry out a fully-fledged long-term observation mission in order to assess all the stages of the electoral process. Despite the absence of international observation missions on the ground, local monitoring and observation initiatives (notably the 'Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections' campaign coordinated by the Human Rights Centre Viasna and the Belarusian Helsinki Committee, the 'Right to Choose' campaign of 8 opposition parties, 'Naziranne.by' organised by the 'Tell the Truth' movement and "Honest People", and initiatives by NGO Zviano, Human Constanta, and others) managed to compile a comprehensive account of widespread irregularities and political rights abuses which put into question the official election result announced by the Central Election Commission (CEC) on August 14.

Taking into account the violations reported by independent observers during the counting and tabulation of the results, it can be concluded that the Belarusian authorities severely infringed on paragraph 7.4 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document and article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Despite a large number of petitions and complaints about violations of the Electoral Code, lodged by the Belarusian human right activists, these did not have a noticeable impact on election procedures during various stages of the election.

## **Media**

The current media environment in Belarus is very restrictive in terms of freedom of speech, and does not ensure the safety of journalists or their ability to work without interference. In general, since the start of the election process, the Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ) has registered 133 cases of serious violations of the rights and freedoms of journalists. These included detentions, arrests, beatings and fines.

The MFA of Belarus deliberately delayed the temporary accreditation of approximately 30 foreign media outlets in order to prevent them from observing the election process. Against this backdrop, two teams of foreign journalists (from *TV Rain* and *Current Times*) were expelled from Belarus for working without accreditation.

During the pre-election and election campaign stages, alternative candidates received disproportionately less attention and were presented negatively on state-funded media. The incumbent was portrayed in a positive manner while other presidential nominees - those who were indeed mentioned - were afforded largely negative descriptions. Monitoring by the BAJ reports cases of biased coverage, information distortions, as well as selective or fragmentary presentation when it comes to coverage of the election actors in state-run media.

More balanced coverage of the presidential elections could be found in independent media, where news and analysis were devoted to electoral candidates and presidential nomination seekers, as well as the incumbent, across different stages of the electoral process.

During the five days of early voting and on election day itself, numerous witnesses reported that journalists were forced out from polling stations without a proper reason or explanation. To aggravate things, on August 9, twenty-two journalists were detained - some of them in a brutal manner. During the crackdown on protesters between August 9 and 11, seven journalists were beaten and injured. Internet disruption organised by the Belarusian authorities over that same period restricted the access of Belarusians and foreign citizens to independent online media and social networks. As of August 12, twenty-five Belarusian journalists and media representatives remained in police detention across Belarus.

## **Civil society engagement**

During all stages of the August 9 presidential election, there was an unprecedented level of civic activity and mobilisation, both in Minsk and in the regions, which in turn had a significant influence on the campaign's dynamics and results.

Many civic initiatives and NGOs launched monitoring and advocacy campaigns aimed at raising awareness, and protecting human and political rights. Human rights organisations continued to monitor the electoral process, and to create online trainings and webinars.

In response to the growing number of arrests and fines against human rights defenders, journalists, bloggers and activists, Belarusian civil society launched the 'BY\_Help' initiative. At the same time, active cooperation between civil society, new political movements, and the IT sector gave rise to new initiatives aimed at protecting people's vote. The *Golos* and *ZUBR* platforms helped to facilitate an alternative vote count and the process of independent observation.

In the post-election period, tens of thousands of Belarusian citizens were engaged in different solidarity actions with those detained or affected by police violence, and strikes of large state-owned enterprises also took place. This large-scale mobilisation is a clear indication that civil society in Belarus is ready to actively participate in the decision-making process and to protect its right to vote.

The mass protests which erupted on the evening of August 9 were mostly of a peaceful and spontaneous nature. The crackdown on peaceful protesters by Belarusian law-enforcement bodies was explicitly characterised by the arbitrary and disproportionate use of force, the unwarranted use of special equipment, and unlawful detentions and arrests. The authorities reported shocking numbers of arrests, with more than 6,700 people detained across the country between August 9 and 11. The number of those detained by the KGB of Belarus has not been disclosed, while the fate of many more people is also still unknown.

Human rights defenders report numerous cases of torture and ill-treatment of detainees by the police and special forces, including in temporary detention centres. Despite the high number of complaints against police officers and the obvious facts of human rights violations by them, the authorities have not opened a single criminal case to investigate such allegations. Cases against protesters on charges of preparing for or participating in riots, however, have indeed been actively initiated on large scale.

### **International solidarity and support**

The European Union, the United States of America and numerous other states have expressed their concern over the excessive and arbitrary use of force against protesters, and have declined to recognise the official results as the true outcome of a free and fair electoral contest. At the same time, they have called on the Belarusian authorities to initiate a genuine and inclusive dialogue with broader society to avoid further violence. Some EU member states, as well as EaP partner states, both on the public and civic levels, have expressed solidarity with the Belarusian people and have actively considered policies to support the peaceful resolution of the situation.

Upon monitoring the development of the situation in Belarus, the experts of the EaP Monitoring Mission have provided a list of specific demands to the Belarusian authorities in order to restore violated human and political rights, and to seek an inclusive and legitimate solution to the current political crisis, provoked by the falsification of the election results and by widespread violence against peaceful protesters.

The Mission team has also elaborated concrete policy recommendations, addressed towards different stakeholders in the EU institutions, EU member states, and EaP partner states, while a separate set of decisions has been proposed to international organisations and civil society.

The policy options formulated in the recommendations below are based on the assumption that post-election political events and developments might evolve along various scenarios. Indeed, they depend on the readiness of the Belarusian authorities to call new elections and engage cooperatively in constructive dialogue with representatives of the Belarusian people, civil society and other relevant Belarusian stakeholders.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **To the Belarusian authorities:**

- Cancel the results of the August 9, 2020, presidential election due to massive violations that occurred at all stages of the electoral process;
- Organise new presidential elections within a reasonable timeframe, preferably under the conditions of an improved electoral legislation and with unrestricted access for domestic and international observers;
- Release all political prisoners, as well as all persons accused of committing administrative and criminal offences related to the election campaign, election and post-election period;
- Investigate all cases of torture, cruel and inhuman treatment, and deaths of protesters that took place in the context of the election campaign period and after the elections;
- Prevent escalation between protesters and law-enforcement bodies by refraining from the disproportionate and unlawful use of special equipment against peaceful protesters.

#### **To the EU institutions:**

- Continue to express solidarity with the Belarusian people and call for dialogue and negotiations between the current authorities and representatives of the Belarusian people. Ensure that no negotiations are conducted without representatives of the Belarusian authorities and the protesting population;
- Call for the conduct of a new presidential election as soon as possible;
- Coordinate future steps with major actors such as the USA, as well as with the OSCE chairmanship, in order to have a greater chance of influencing the Belarusian authorities;

- Do not concede EU leadership in the facilitation of the peaceful resolution of the current political crisis in Belarus to Russia. Since Russia exerts a crucial influence on political developments in Belarus, a joint mediation group of the EU and Russia could be a possible option, if its mandate is legitimised both by the Belarusian authorities and by representatives of the coordination body advocating on behalf of the population whose votes were stolen;
- Be clear and vocal about the measures to be adopted *vis-à-vis* Russia if it violates the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Belarus;
- Reroute funding away from state institutions, and stop the implementation of any EU-funded cooperation projects (including those implemented via IOs) that involve the Belarusian authorities engaged in the recent falsification of elections and mass repressions, until the proper investigation of the role of these institutions in the election campaign, the election itself and post-election crisis is conducted. Such bodies include the CEC, courts, law enforcement agencies, Ministry of Education and other public agencies. Decisions on funding should be made bearing in mind not only the individual sanctions lists adopted by the EU, but also broader lists of those who have committed crimes and violations, as compiled by local and international organisations and CSOs;
- Consider imposing targeted economic sanctions against the regime of Aliaksandr Lukashenka if the main calls of the Belarusian population to the authorities - namely demands for a new election, for dialogue with civil society and the political opposition on the resolution of the crisis, for the release of political prisoners, and for independent investigations into all crimes committed during the election campaign, the election itself, and the post-election period - are not met within six months. Following the framework of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, the EU institutions should also issue recommendations for EU-based companies working with Belarusian state-owned enterprises or companies supporting the regime, on ensuring that their Belarusian partners and suppliers comply with international norms on human rights. They should also recommend reconsidering cooperation and trade in cases where violations include pressure on workers for their political positions and continuous politically motivated lays-offs;
- Limit cooperation with the senior political level of the Belarusian authorities within the multilateral framework of the Eastern Partnership if the regime does not demonstrate a cooperative stance towards delivering on the European Council conclusions of August 19. Such steps should be taken when planning the next EaP Summit in March 2021 and the meeting of EU and EaP foreign ministers preceding the EaP Summit. At the same time, cooperation at the EaP operational level (EaP Platforms and panels) must be preserved;
- Keep communication channels open, including by maintaining and strengthening the EU-Belarus Human Rights Dialogue and the EU-Belarus Coordination Group, bearing in mind their importance as platforms for meaningful exchanges. An Emergency Human Rights Dialogue should be convened as soon as possible to

discuss the recent violations of human rights. In case the Belarusian authorities decide to forgo this opportunity for dialogue, the EU should continue to engage with Belarusian civil society and other relevant stakeholders who represent the Belarusian people in this crisis situation;

- Use parliamentary diplomacy to exert a peer pressure on key political stakeholders in Belarus A rapporteur in charge of drafting a special report on human right abuses during the election and the post-election period in Belarus should be appointed under the framework of the Working Group on Belarus of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly. This should be in addition to the upcoming regular report drafted by the standing rapporteur, and should involve the advanced EaP partners in the process;
- Include regular discussions on the situation in Belarus on the agenda of European Parliament plenary sessions and AFET Committee meetings. Hearings with regular updates on the situation in Belarus should also be organised;
- Preserve the current approach of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly towards the Belarusian Parliament without changes until significant positive developments in Belarus take place.

#### **To the EU member states and EaP partner countries:**

- Refuse to recognise the results of the August 9, 2020, presidential election in Belarus and call for a new presidential election to be held. Such actions should be accompanied by active support actively for the peaceful and inclusive resolution of the current political crisis;
- Consider mirroring individual sanctions imposed by the EU on the exponents of violations of the electoral process and human rights, following the example of the government of Ukraine. This should be contemplated by the governments of Georgia and Moldova in particular;
- Increase the presence of the diplomatic corps of the EU member states in Belarus, in order to allow for better information about the situation on the ground - especially at this time, when foreign and independent media are being stripped of their accreditation or indeed refused accreditation in Belarus. This diplomatic presence would also serve as an additional restraining factor against the repression of the Belarusian population;
- Seek informal channels of communication, and hold unofficial talks on the release of political prisoners and on facilitating dialogue between the authorities and the Belarusian population, using prominent figures as mediators. The Cox-Kwasniewski mission to Ukraine (2011-2014) launched by the European Parliament to free opposition leaders under the regime of Viktor Yanukovich, can serve as an example. The mission should be devised and coordinated in cooperation with representatives of the Belarusian people.



## **CONDUCT OF THE NEW PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION**

*When the new presidential election is organised, the implementation of the following recommendations would help bring impartiality and lawfulness to the electoral process.*

### **To the Belarusian authorities:**

- Recognise the responsibility to defend and protect human rights, and especially political rights, in accordance with the international commitments laid out in such documents as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document;
- Adopt prompt measures for enhancing public confidence in the election administration. Such measures could include the revision of the mechanism for the appointment of members of the CEC, as well as for the selection of Territorial Election Commission (TEC) and Precinct Election Commission (PEC) members among the persons nominated by election candidates, thus ensuring the commissions' independence, pluralism and impartiality;
- Guarantee unrestricted access for citizen and international observers throughout the electoral process. In addition to the currently provided rights, observers must have access to voter lists, be allowed to closely observe the counting and tabulation of the results, and be given a certified copy of the protocol, if requested. Additional safeguards should be included in the Electoral Code to ensure that no decision of the CEC, lower electoral bodies or other authorities attempts to limit the rights of citizen observers. Invitations for international organisations should be sent in due time, but not later than 3 months ahead of election day (except for early elections);
- Refrain from the arrest and detention of candidates, their proxies, as well as members of their teams during the election campaign, except for situations when the person is accused of serious crimes;
- Consider abolishing the possibility of early voting, or at least consider the limitation of this practice, for example by organising a limited number of dedicated PECs for early voting within each TEC (thus ensuring the truly exceptional character of this voting procedure). Stricter requirements to qualify for early voting should be adopted, and the same safeguards should be applied during the early voting period as on election day itself (for example, PECs should be in quorum in both instances);
- If the early voting is retained, direct the election management bodies to enhance the transparency and accountability of election results by completing a single protocol, which should be publicly displayed in the polling station during early voting and until the end of the count. In all cases, disaggregated data should be published from each polling station;
- Allow for unimpeded conduct of campaigning activities, permit the conduct of rallies and other mass events in all public places, except for a narrow list of places where such events may be prohibited due to legitimate security concerns;

- Secure the integrity of the electoral process through the introduction of safety features to ballot paper, since currently there are none. Printing a unique code on the ballots, assigned to a single PEC, is one measure which should be actively considered;
- Provide detailed and transparent counting and tabulation procedures within the Electoral Code, allowing for meaningful observation. Consideration should be given to announcing and displaying the choice on each ballot, while the simultaneous counting of votes should be prohibited.

**To the OSCE/ODIHR:**

- Support reform of the Electoral Code and capacity building for election officials when the new election is called. OSCE technical support (institutional and training) will be needed for the transition of power within the Central Election Commission. A full-fledged international observation mission composed of both long-term and short-term observers (LTOs and STOs) and a strong core team focused on the work of the CEC (but not exclusively) is a core precondition to bring transparency and impartiality to the election process;

**COMPREHENSIVE ELECTORAL REFORM**

**To the Belarusian authorities:**

- Initiate an inclusive process for the development of a comprehensive electoral reform package in the post-election period, addressing previous OSCE/ODIHR and Venice Commission recommendations, as well as the recommendations of citizen observers and other relevant stakeholders;
- Reconsider the residence condition imposed on the Presidential candidates, since it infringes upon paragraph 15 of the 1996 UNHRC General Comment No. 25 to the ICCPR and paragraphs 7.3 and 24 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document;
- Ease the procedure for candidate registration by reducing the number of signatures required to 1% of the total number of registered voters, or by establishing an alternative method, such as an affordable yet refundable money deposit. All signatures should be subject to a transparent and objective verification process;
- Consider developing and implementing a centralised voter register that would ensure the accuracy of voter lists. Voter lists should be administered by a single entity – the Central Electoral Commission – and must be published by lower-level electoral bodies so that voters are able to inspect them ahead of election day and request changes to their information. Observers and candidate representatives should be given access to voter lists;
- Allow for unimpeded conduct of campaigning activities. In particular, the reviewed electoral legislation should permit the conduct of rallies and other mass events in

all public places, except for a narrow list of places where such events may be prohibited due to legitimate security concerns;

- Regulate political advertising in electoral legislation and ensure equal access of candidates to various forms of advertising (outdoor advertising, media advertising, distribution of booklets, leaflets and posters, etc.);
- Enhance the integrity of the voting process by providing each PEC with unique stamps, uniform translucent ballot boxes and numbered ballot box seals. Ballot papers should also contain additional safety features;
- Introduce training for PECs, focusing especially on counting and tabulation procedures;
- Modify the Electoral Code to allow every voter or candidate to file complaints and appeals against any decision adopted by the electoral commissions that resulted in the infringement of their electoral rights. Deadlines for examination of complaints should be established in the Electoral Code. The CEC should consider publishing general information on applications and complaints on its website in a timely manner.

#### **To the EU institutions, EU member states and the OSCE/ODIHR:**

- Consider providing financial assistance for the implementation of an electoral reform package that would have the consensus support of all relevant stakeholders, both for the new presidential election and for the comprehensive reform of the electoral framework. Such support should be conditioned on the cooperation of the authorities with non-state actors on the development of amendments to the relevant legal framework;
- [OSCE/ODIHR and Venice Commission] Provide technical assistance to the Belarusian authorities for the development and implementation of comprehensive electoral reform;
- [EU member states and EaP partner countries] Contribute to electoral reform by sharing relevant experience on reform of the electoral law, judiciary system, and more. The experiences of Central and Eastern European states could be particularly useful here.

#### **MEDIA**

##### **To the Belarusian authorities:**

- Stop pressuring Belarusian independent media, ensure the uninterrupted publication and dissemination of printed publications, and unblock access to the websites of foreign and Belarusian media as well as human rights NGOs;

- Release all detained journalists and media representatives charged with committing administrative and criminal offenses related to the election campaign, election, and post-election period;
- Cease pressuring, and respect the rights of striking employees of Belarusian state-run media, including by reinstating illegally dismissed workers and respecting their right to strike;
- Grant immediate access to Belarus to all foreign media outlets which apply to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus for accreditation according to the correct procedure. Their right to unhindered work and security must be guaranteed by the authorities;
- Stop the existing practice of expelling foreign journalists from the territory of Belarus. Their deportation, even due to the absence of Foreign Ministry accreditation, should be stopped;
- Amend the Media Law of Belarus, as it currently lacks essential safeguards for freedom of speech. The Belarusian Association of Journalists and international media experts should be invited to take part in drafting new amendments. Core changes should be introduced, including simplifying the procedure of media registration, reducing the possibility to close media outlets without the approval of a court of law, and creating an environment for the independent self-regulation of the media. Additional legal work should be done to lift restrictions on online media freedom and as well as on the activity of foreign media in Belarus;
- Lift all restrictions on contacts between the representatives of the Belarusian authorities/public agencies and the media. Currently, there is an unofficial ban on any contacts between civil servants and independent media.

**To the EU institutions, EU member states and EaP partner countries:**

- Facilitate, via available official and unofficial channels, the process of obtaining accreditation from the Belarusian MFA for media from respective countries in order to provide reliable information and sufficient coverage from the ground;
- Provide financial and technical support to independent media outlets which suffered from the unlawful actions of law-enforcement agencies (including the damaging or confiscation of equipment and the detention, shooting or torture of their staff). New support schemes for Belarusian independent media should be enacted;
- Increase funding to independent media to counteract the growing disinformation coming to the Belarusian population from official TV channels and other state media;
- Elaborate a simplified procedure for Belarusian journalists to receive visas for EU member states;
- Launch medical rehabilitation schemes for journalists in the EU member states;

- Support international fact-checking initiatives with the participation of Belarusian experts to counter the official propaganda and disinformation used by the Belarusian leadership against neighbouring EU and EaP states (namely Lithuania, Poland, and Ukraine). These initiatives should be oriented around debunking false narratives and raising awareness. With the same aim, Belarusian independent media could be invited to neighbouring NATO member states to be provided with objective information about military drills or other actions by NATO on the Eastern flank.

## **CIVIL SOCIETY**

### **To the Belarusian authorities:**

- Seek a peaceful resolution of the current political crisis, demonstrating genuine engagement in dialogue with civil society and political initiatives. This dialogue should be inclusive and transparent;
- End the criminal prosecution of members of the Coordination Council seeking dialogue with the Belarusian authorities, as well as other of civil society activists and members of striking committees at state-owned and state-run enterprises;
- Allow the EU member states and EaP partner countries to run emergency programmes of medical and psychological rehabilitation for victims of violence within Belarus or outside the country;
- Revise the legislation on peaceful assemblies in line with the requirements of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as well as the OSCE's Guidelines on Freedom of Peaceful Assembly. Belarusian civil society experts must be included in relevant working bodies;
- Simplify the registration process for political parties and public associations in order to facilitate the exercise of civic and political rights;
- Abolish the mandatory registration of civic initiatives and the administrative liability for participation in the activities of unregistered organisations, in line with article 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;
- Remove restrictions on obtaining foreign aid, including limitations on the types of activities which can be supported and the mandatory registration of such funding.

### **To the EU institutions, EU member states and EaP partner countries:**

- Consider emergency support for Belarusian civil society, especially with regard to the protection of civil rights, and assist those who have been imprisoned, detained, laid off for politically motivated reasons, and who have voluntarily stepped down from their positions for political reasons (including employees of government agencies, the army, the police, the judicial system, state TV and other media, schools, universities, etc);

- Provide technical and financial support to civil society organisations to conduct independent domestic election observation;
- Raise the existing restrictions on foreign funding for civil society organisations with the Belarusian authorities (bilaterally or in a multilateral format);
- Continue supporting Belarusian civil society and independent media (see recommendations for donors). As a special area of support, the EU member states may consider organising an emergency programme of medical and psychological rehabilitation for victims of violence within Belarus, and in EU member states;
- Create humanitarian corridors to provide shelter for Belarusian citizens who fear for their life, health and wellbeing. EaP partner countries such as Ukraine should also consider establishing humanitarian corridors. Such initiatives could be supplemented by simplified legal procedures to obtain work and residence permits and access to the social and health care system;
- Consider launching new projects/programmes for supporting civil society and independent media within the existing initiatives of regional cooperation in Central and Eastern Europe, like the Visegrad Four (Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Slovak Republic) via the International Visegrad Fund, or the Lublin Triangle (Lithuania, Poland, Ukraine);
- Foster further people-to-people contacts by establishing student exchanges and other academic programmes for scholars which will allow Belarusian young people, academics and teachers affected by the violent or unlawful actions of the Belarusian authorities to continue their studies and professional development. Offering free national visas (where applicable) for certain groups of citizens, namely students, academics, NGO workers etc., should be considered.

#### **To the OSCE/ODIHR:**

- Summon and deploy a monitoring mission to Belarus to monitor the trials of those that have been detained during peaceful demonstrations, as well as those that will have criminal cases launched against them in the near future;
- Launch a temporary working group under the auspices of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media with participants from international civil society and Belarusian human rights organisations. This working group could be engaged in the assessment of the current civil society and media environment in Belarus, and propose a set of recommendations for improving the legal and institutional framework in the media and civil society domain. *Inter alia*, this body could be employed in providing amendments to the country's media legislation.

#### **To international civil society:**

- Show solidarity with Belarusian civil society and use existing NGO platforms to amplify the voices of Belarusian colleagues;

- Use civic instruments to address national governments and other decision-makers in relevant countries. This approach could be operationalised in various forms, from open online statements to expert briefings to government representatives and MPs;
- Demonstrate solidarity with sectoral counterparts in Belarus, following the recent example of video addresses from the Independent Trade Union of Miners of Ukraine (KVPU) to Aliaksandr Lukashenka. Such sector-focused appeals may add significantly to the chorus of international pressure on Belarusian authorities;
- Reach out to the civil society networks of international organisations such as the OSCE, the UN, and the CoE to involve them in awareness raising campaigns and lobbying decisions at the governmental level;
- Increase the interdependence between EU and Belarusian civil societies in the long run by engaging regularly with Belarusian partners and including Belarusian organisations in new and existing pan-European and Euro-Atlantic coalitions and cooperation programmes.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL DONORS**

### **Emergency support:**

- Support the work of Belarusian human rights defenders, especially with regards to the provision of legal aid, building evidence of unlawful actions and violence, monitoring of detention facilities, and trial monitoring;
- Support independent media, including via financial support to replace equipment destroyed or confiscated by the police;
- Consider providing institutional support to volunteer initiatives, including those that collect funds for legal, psychological and medical support for victims of repression. The financial support for coordinators of the initiatives as well as their consultations on planning, organisational development and communications are needed;
- Assist independent trade unions and workers who have suffered due to their political convictions, including through the provision of financial support and re-qualification programmes;
- Facilitate security training for CSOs and media organisations. Such training should include physical and psychological security, as well as the protection of equipment and data;
- Foster community-building initiatives, including programmes that aim to build trust to avoid the political polarisation within the country.

### Programming priorities:

- It is important that new support builds upon the successes of the previous programming while addressing the current needs of civil society and newly mobilised citizens. While the country is undergoing significant changes, fields such as human rights, anti-discrimination, and the protection of minorities will need stable support;
- Increase support for programmes aimed at facilitating civic engagement and participation in order to capture this social energy that has been unleashed throughout this election campaign;
- Consider increasing **support for women's rights** and women's self-organisation in light of the central role of women in the ongoing social mobilisation in Belarus;
- Invest in **civic education** and the development of essential skills such as critical thinking and fact-checking by: a) supporting the design of modern curricula as well as training for teachers so that they can benefit from new technologies, focusing primarily on teachers who mobilise and want to bring about change to the educational system; b) supporting the design of innovative and engaging online courses, as well as content for social media platforms, making use of new technologies and new methods of work like gamification;
- Support for all sectors of alternative education, including private schools, educational initiatives of private enterprises (for example IT sector) and civic education. Support for alternative education for schoolchildren is needed, since many parents and schoolchildren themselves are disappointed with the current education system and with the role of some school administrations and teachers in the falsification of election;
- Reinstate **arts and culture** as an important priority in programming, since culture helps to develop and maintain the social fabric while being an efficient vehicle for the transfer of values;
- Consider supporting **research and sociological studies** that aim to discover the values, beliefs and needs of the Belarusian people, taking into account the new wave of civic activism;
- Focus on supporting those organisations which offer services that are beneficial to the entire CSO community, like crowdfunding platforms, petition platforms, training centres etc.;
- Support **independent media** as a reliable source of information. Invest in content creation, providing both training for journalists, with respect to improving their understanding of the market, distribution channels and the readers' needs and institutional support for media organisations, so that they can afford to invest



- in the non-journalistic personnel that they need to improve content and monetisation - namely graphic designers, marketing and sales professionals;
- Foster the development of new channels of distribution which build upon informal networks, Telegram and other social media platforms;
  - Keep in mind the importance of maintaining an **offline presence** when financing online media activities. Engagement via radio, events, conferences, and the physical presence of local media on the ground (regional offices) develops a different type of audience involvement while being a good contingency plan for situations when mobile networks and the internet at large are down;
  - Support **regional and local media** outlets, as they play a key role in community building at the local level. Support cooperation and the fostering of partnerships between local media and community organisers.
  - Encourage **cross-sectoral cooperation** and the creation of networks and partnerships between civil society, business, media and local government. Building upon the successes of this election campaign, support namely the development of cooperation between civil society and business, including the IT sector;
  - Support platforms for dialogue - conferences, hackathons etc. - which help to build trust and foster cooperation and the development of joint projects;
  - Facilitate the exchange of expertise and technology between civil society and businesses, including knowhow and sociological research;
  - Assist CSOs in gaining greater business acumen in order to foster their understanding of how to work with business and how to find a common language.
  - When designing CSO-local government cooperation programmes, consider moving away from direct funding to local authorities and avoid channelling funding through GONGOs by improving internal organisational assessment procedures. Support for meaningful CSO cooperation with local government should be complemented by multi-stakeholder study visits, exchanges and twinning programmes where civil servants can build contacts and learn from their EU/EaP counterparts;
  - Prioritise smaller initiatives, especially those in the regions, and consider broadening funding to cover unregistered initiatives or implementing regranting schemes in order to reach small initiative groups.

### **Methods of work:**

- **Flexibility** - allow reprogramming or postponement of certain activities which were planned before the elections and before the pandemic;
- **Variety** - offer a mixed portfolio of both grants and capacity building programmes: assistance could include project grants, programme and institutional support and development, provision of training, and facilitation of study visits;

- **Stability** - consider offering flexible multi-year programmes or institutional support instead of shorter-term assistance;
- **Trust** - believe in partners' knowledge, and their ability to analyse the situation and adjust their actions accordingly;
- **Future** - include a separate organisational development component in grant-making so that organisations can set aside resources to focus on strategy creation and institutional development, without doing so at the expense of their core activities.

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## About EaP CSF

The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) is a unique multi-layered regional civil society platform aimed at promoting European integration, facilitating reforms and democratic transformations in the six Eastern Partnership countries - Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Serving as the civil society and people-to-people dimension of the Eastern Partnership, the EaP CSF strives to strengthen civil society in the region, boost pluralism in public discourse and policy making by promoting participatory democracy and fundamental freedoms. For more information, please visit the EaP CSF website at [www.eap-csf.eu](http://www.eap-csf.eu).



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