

Alexander Schallenberg, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Austria
Philippe Goffin, Minister of Foreign Affairs and of Defence, Kingdom of Belgium
Ekaterina Zaharieva, Deputy Prime Minister for Judicial Reform and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Bulgaria
Tomáš Petříček, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Czech Republic
Gordan Grlić Radman, Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, Republic of Croatia
Nikos Christodoulides, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Cyprus
Jeppe Kofod, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Kingdom of Denmark
Urmas Reinsalu, Foreign Minister, Republic of Estonia
Ville Skinnari, Minister for Development Cooperation and Foreign Trade, Republic of Finland
Jean-Yves Le Drian, Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs, French Republic
Heiko Maas, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Federal Republic of Germany
Nikos Dendias, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hellenic Republic
Péter Szijjártó, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Hungary
Simon Coveney, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Ireland
Luigi Di Maio, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Italian Republic
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Linas Linkevičius, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Lithuania
Jean Asselborn, Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, Grand Duchy of Luxembourg
Evarist Bartolo, Minister for Foreign and European Affairs, Republic of Malta
Stef Blok, Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Netherlands
Jacek Czaputowicz, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Poland
Augusto Santos Silva, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Portugal
Bogdan Aurescu, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Romania
Ivan Korčok, Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, Slovak Republic
Anže Logar, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Slovenia
Arancha González Laya, Minister of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation, Spain
Ann Linde, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Kingdom of Sweden

25 August 2020

**Joint Statement by the Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership
Civil Society Forum and the Board of the EU-Russia Civil Society
Forum ahead of the Meeting of Foreign Affairs Ministers,
27-28 August 2020**

We are dismayed at the continued violation of the fundamental rights of the Belarusian people in the wake of the undemocratic presidential election on 9 August 2020. We urge the international community to push for upholding international standards and use all available mechanisms in order to:

- guarantee the right of the people of Belarus to assemble peacefully and express their views freely, and their right to free and fair elections;
- put an end to the excessive use of force and torture against peaceful protesters in Belarus, and punish the perpetrators;

- secure the release of illegally detained Belarusian protesters and political prisoners, and conduct a fair, public investigation into the criminal and administrative cases initiated in an attempt to defame and discredit the opposition.

We emphasise that open and constructive dialogue with the protesters represented by the Coordination Council¹, the body recently established by the opposition candidate Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya², is a crucial step in the peace restoration process in Belarus, and we call for its formal recognition by the international institutions³. **The European Union and other international actors should assist the Council in organising negotiations with the Belarusian authorities in order to facilitate future free and fair elections and to reach consensus with Belarusian society about the way forward.** A criminal case on charges of attempting to seize power and undermine Belarusian national security has been launched against the Coordination Council, though the Council has clearly stated that it does not pursue such goals.

We call on the EU to use all available mechanisms to end unlawful detentions, dismissals and pressure on striking workers who ceased work in response to the unlawful action of the Belarusian authorities. Efforts to organise a national strike in support of democratic change have started, yet currently many members of the striking committees are being detained, while workers participating in the strikes are being unlawfully laid off and subjected to psychological and other pressure⁴.

As the Kremlin has expressed its willingness to support Aliaksandr Lukashenka in line with its obligations stipulated by its membership of the Union State of Russia and Belarus as well as the Collective Security Treaty Organisation⁵, **we also call on the Russian authorities to restrain from any intervention against the expression of the Belarusian people's will. Further, we urge the European and global institutions to publicly disapprove such statements by the Russian government: the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of the Republic of Belarus should remain inviolable.**

While the authorities of the Russian Federation state the inadmissibility of interference in the internal affairs of Belarus, they are also granting Aliaksandr Lukashenka strong support in the information sphere in Belarus⁶. We call therefore on the Russian authorities to prevent information interventions, dissemination of fake news and statements from high-level officials that do not correspond to the reality regarding the nature of the protest, the programme of the

¹ See the composition at the website of the Committee <https://rada.vision/book> (in Russian)

² See <https://belarusfeed.com/coordination-council-transfer-power-belarus>

³ See <https://eap-csf.eu/wp-content/uploads/EaP-CSF-Steering-Committee-Statement-on-Belarus-ahead-of-the-European-Council-meeting.pdf>

⁴ See

<http://ktr.su/content/news/detail.php?ID=6995&fbclid=IwAR2Vj09wV9G7kXjXPtYVrQmGtJsY72f2D88VazrrSmq mO9UPnQjOPTZSdxI> (in Russian)

⁵ See <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/63894> (in Russian)

⁶ See <https://news.tut.by/society/697252.html> and <https://news.tut.by/culture/697592.html> (in Russian)

Coordination Council, the use of the Belarusian language, the so-called ‘nationalist’ motives of the protesters, etc.

Finally, we call on the international community to closely follow and react to developments in Belarus, and encourage adherence to international democratic standards.

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

Zaur Akbar, Youth Club Public Union, Azerbaijan

Olga Chyzhova, Digital Communication Network, Estonia

Ina Coseru, National Environmental Center, Moldova

Lousineh Hakobyan, Europe in Law Association, Armenia

Mikayel Hovhannisyan, Eurasia Partnership Foundation, Armenia

Shahla Ismayil, Women’s Association for Rational Development (WARD), Azerbaijan

Maksym Koriavets, Polissya Foundation for International and Regional Studies, Ukraine

Mikalai Kvantaliani, Association “New Group”, Belarus

Natia Kuprashvili, Journalism Resource Center, Georgia

Adrian Lupusor, Expert-Grup, Moldova

Tatiana Marian, National Trade Union Confederation of Moldova

Sofia Strive, ForumCiv, Sweden

Yurii Vdovenko, Center for Cross-Border Cooperation, Ukraine

On behalf of the Board of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum

Polina Filippova, Sakharov Centre, Russia

Nikola Mokrović, Co-Chair of the Forum Board/ Documenta, Croatia

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. The EaP CSF is a non-partisan bona fide non-governmental organisation. For more information, please visit the EaP CSF website at www.eap-csf.eu

EU-Russia Civil Society Forum (www.eu-russia-csf.org) was established in 2011 by non-governmental organisations as a permanent common platform. At the moment, 183 NGOs from Russia and the European Union are members or supporters of the Forum. It aims at development of cooperation of civil society organisations from Russia and EU and greater participation of NGOs in the EU-Russia dialogue. The Forum has been actively involved, inter alia, in the questions of facilitation of visa regime, development of civic participation, protection of the environment and human rights, dealing with history and civic education.