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9th EURONEST Parliamentary Assembly – Opening Session

Speech by the EaP CSF Co-Chair Irina Sukhy

Dear Euronest members,

Thank you for this opportunity to speak on behalf of the EaP CSF and for listening to the voice of civil society. We have always felt the parliamentary ground is where we do not have to shy away from naming the problems openly and our concerns are to be taken seriously.

I would like to elaborate first on the **situation in Belarus**, my home country. Let me start by saying that we are very happy that the Belarusian democratic forces led by Ms Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya are represented at this 9th Session of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly. It is a great signal and practice that could be followed also for the upcoming EaP Summit and other meetings within the EaP architecture.

The scale of repression in Belarus is unusually high, this has not happened since the time of Stalin. It can't even be compared to anything. The prosecutor's office opened 935 criminal cases against the protesters, 354 political prisoners in Belarus today, more than 30 thousand people went through administrative detentions and arrests. I would like to make six important points on the way forward:

1. There is no doubt that **Belarus is on the path of change**. An archaic political regime is trying to preserve the existing system, but the majority of society is in favor of change. The majority on the side of change makes this change inevitable.
2. Today, both in Belarus and outside Belarus, any actions can either accelerate the onset of these changes or play to freeze the situation.
3. **The main driver of change is civil society**. And most importantly, new communities and structures that emerged in the wake of the 2020 protests. Preserving them and giving them opportunities for development is about accelerating change.
4. **Change may not come quickly**. This means that the strategy towards Belarus should be conceived as long-term. This also means that the international community must avoid switching to engaging the regime in cooperation policy, when it grows tired of sanctions and freezing of relations, as it happened in 2008 and 2015. Murder, torture and hundreds of political prisoners should not be forgotten and forgiven.
5. The Belarusian regime should not be engaged in cooperation but must be pushed towards negotiations. **Peaceful change is negotiations**, negotiations between society and the political regime.
6. **Independence is the main condition for the possibility of change**. The annexation of Belarus by Russia or the signing of any agreements that curtail Belarusian sovereignty should be regarded as unacceptable by Eastern Partnership and EU countries.

Beside the situation in Belarus, I would like to touch upon **environmental policies** as one of the key processes for modernization of the EaP countries. All the countries of the Eastern Partnership have ratified the Paris Agreement but their progress towards reducing CO2 emissions, developing renewable energy, and adapting to climate change is very slow. **The European Green Deal** is a new challenge. More ambitious goals are very much needed in

countries, which stand to be affected by climate change and struggle with environmental protection, security of energy supply and climate change adaptation plans among other issues.

EaP countries should have a policy of joining the European Green Deal formally and implement it into national plans, legislation and strategies. The role of parliaments is very important in this process. We look forward to your active participation in conversing of existing economic growth strategies into Green Deal strategies

Lastly, I would like to stress that **civil society should be a key involved stakeholder** at each stage of green decision making, to ensure careful policy formulation and avoid ineffective implementation.

Thank you for your attention.

Delivered by Irina Sukhy, Co-chair of the EaP CSF Steering Committee