



Беларуская нацыянальная платформа

Форум грамадзянскай супольнасці
УСХОДНЯГА ПАРТНЁРСТВА

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**Statement of the Belarusian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum –
In connection to the wave of searches in the editorial offices
of the media and the detention of journalists**

On 7 August 2018, the Investigative Committee of the Republic of Belarus announced the start of a criminal investigation under Part 2 of Art. 349 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus (unauthorized access to computer information – committed with a different personal interest, which caused significant harm). Over the past two days, the offices of a number of Belarusian media outlets were subject to searches: BelaPAN, Tut.by, the newspaper Kultura, Realt.by.

Dozens of journalists were interrogated by the Investigative Committee, a number of whom had their homes searched and computer equipment seized. As of the evening of 8 August, journalists Maryna Zolatava, Hanna Kaltyhina, Galina Ulasik, Hanna Ermachonak, Paulyuk Bykouski and Aliaksei Zhukau were detained for 3 days.

We, the members of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) Belarusian National Platform, fully agree with the previously published Statement of the Belarusian Association of Journalists, Human Rights Center “Viasna”, the Belarusian PEN Center and the Office for the Rights of People with Disabilities, and we also believe that these recent events are a flagrant violation of the freedom of expression and media activities. The actions taken by law enforcement agencies is obviously disproportionate in relation to the brought charges. The detention of journalists who are not considered a public danger for 3 days is, in our view, an excessive investigative measure. Of particular concern is the campaign that began in the state-run media, denigrating the reputation of the media outlets and journalists under investigation – including the alleged revelation of prosecution material, which is unacceptable for any country that respects the presumption of innocence and the rule of law. The investigation of criminal cases should not affect journalists’ freedom and the professional activities of the media.

The nature of the investigation is a great concern, as it comes as against a backdrop of systematic violations of the right to publish information and intimidation of journalists – through the persecution of BelaPAN founder, Alexander Lipai and a number of journalists, associated with the Belsat TV channel.

We call on the Belarusian authorities to release all detained journalists immediately. We also call on the international community, professional journalists’ and human rights associations, as well as diplomats and politicians to pay attention to this situation, give it an appropriate assessment and support actions to protect the freedom of speech in our country.

The Belarusian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum was founded in July 2010, uniting over 80 organizations and various initiatives, on the basis of adherence to pro-European values.