

*Brussels - Minsk, 16 November 2020*

## **Joint statement of the Belarusian National Platform and Steering Committee of the EaP CSF on the latest concerning developments in Belarus**

On behalf of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum we express our great concern at the prolonged continuation of violence and oppression towards peaceful protesters and civil society activists in Belarus, including the recent murder of Raman Bandarenka, recent detentions of hundreds of people including our member Andrei Yahorau and many other abuses.

We call for an open and free investigation into the murder of **Raman Bandarenka**, who was kidnapped from the courtyard of his home on 11 November 2020 by unrecognised people in civilian clothing, and delivered to the hospital with severe injuries a few hours later. He later died of his injuries on 12 November 2020.

We also call for a release of **Andrei Yahorau**, the political scientist and civic activist. The chair of the Steering Committee of the Belarusian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum and a member of the Coordination Council initiated by Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, Andrei was detained for the second time in a matter of weeks on 8 November during a Sunday peaceful protest, and sentenced to 12 days of imprisonment. More than **1000 protesters** were also arrested at the same time, bringing the total numbers of the detained since the presidential elections to almost **20,000 people**.

In addition to the above acts of gross misconduct by the Belarusian authorities, we note with dismay the new practice of **seizing the money of the victims of violence**. Particularly heinous is the decision of the Belarusian state to order banks to seize money legally received by victims of repressions and torture from the #BYHELP initiative. This practice started on 11 November. The latest episode in this concerted assault on the excellent work of #BYHELP has been the questioning of a number of donors to the fund by police, with the intention of framing the initiative for fraud. We call on the Belarusian authorities to cease their relentless harassment of this vital civic initiative.

**Students** have also become a main target of the state repression in Belarus. At least 133 students have been expelled from the universities for their civil position while almost 150 have been detained. We call for the immediate release of the Belarusian Student Association activists, who, on 12 November, were searched by police, detained and remain in KGB prison with no official charges. In particular, we call for the release of **Alana Hebremarijam**, the representative for youth and students on the Coordination Council initiated by Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, as well as **Ksienija Syramalot**, **Jahor Kaneuski**, and BSPU students **Kasia Budzko** and **Jana Arabiejka**.

The blogger and anarchist **Mikola Dziadok**, was detained on 12 November and later forced to make a video confession having clearly been severely beaten. We call on the Belarusian authorities to stop all use of violence and torture against detainees, and for an open and fair investigation and trial for Mikola and other protesters.

On 8 November, **two British diplomats** were declared *personae non gratae* and expelled from Belarus, in an act that will further worsen Belarusian-European relations and lead to greater international isolation. We truly believe that dialogue with friendly nations is a solution to the ongoing crisis, so we call on the Belarusian authorities to reinstate both British diplomats, and make a public apology for fake accusations.

The above episodes are indicative of the current **wave of repression** being wrought against innocent civilians by the authorities of the Republic of Belarus. We call on the Belarusian state at all levels to stop its brutal campaign of violence against peaceful protesters during detention, and demand the release of all political prisoners and detained citizens of Belarus. We believe that the “dialogue” currently conducted by the regime is a decorative one and will not bring real changes in the country. A genuine dialogue is the only way forward, and we encourage the authorities to start looking for constructive solutions, rather than resorting to oppressing the Belarusian society and individual citizens. Belarus will face a severe economic crisis in the upcoming months and the deep and persistent political turmoil is only helping third parties to exploit the situation, regardless of the interest of the Republic of Belarus and its people.

Finally, we call on the international community - particularly the EU and the incoming US administration under president-elect Joe Biden - to step up their engagement and efforts to help find solutions for the future of the country.