

EaP CSF Steering Committee statement on the unprecedented attack on civil society in Belarus

Brussels, 19 July 2021

For three consecutive days, between July 14th and July 16th, the Belarusian authorities have carried out **unprecedented attacks on dozens of Belarusian civil society organisations, human rights defenders, and activists across the country**. The offices of the Belarusian Association of Journalists, the Belarusian Helsinki Committee, the Lawtrend Center for Legal Transformation, the Movement for Freedom and the Association of Belarusians of the World "Fatherland", the Gender Perspectives, the Office of European expertise and communication, and many others **were raided, sometimes by means of forced entry**.

Many human rights defenders, journalists and CSO activists were detained - or outright disappeared - as a result, most of the time on either unknown or politically motivated charges. This severe and large-scale crackdown is to be interpreted as the regime's attempt to effectively dismantle the few remnants of civic activism in the country, which has been shrinking steadily since the peaceful mass protests of 2020.

On July 8th 2021, the Steering Committee of the EaP CSF decried the [decision made by Belarusian authorities to withdraw from the EaP and the Readmission agreement](#) and warned against the augmented risk for repression brought about by the Belarusian government's further isolation from both the international stage and its own population.

The Steering Committee of the EaP CSF denounces these coercive measures taken by an illegitimate regime. The Belarusian authorities are straying further and further away from a peaceful and genuine dialogue on democratic transition, thus showing their utmost disregard for the Belarusian population. The Steering Committee therefore wishes to convey a sense of urgency when dealing with human rights issues in Belarus, as Lukashenka's regime continues to move further astray and repression is escalating.

For the reasons mentioned above, the Steering Committee of the EaP CSF once again calls on the Belarusian government to recognise and act on the Belarusian people's demand for free elections and democratic values, as witnessed by the peaceful protests in 2020. This also entails the immediate release of journalists, human rights defenders and civil society activists arbitrarily jailed for political reasons.

In the meantime, the EU and Member States need to reaffirm the democratic aspirations of the Belarusian people, providing lifelines for affected CSOs while safeguarding the rights of, and providing assistance to, Belarusian political refugees. Eastern Partnership governments and CSOs should express their solidarity with Belarusian civil society and strongly condemn these actions taken by the regime.

Lastly, members of the international community should provide options for legal recourse under international jurisdiction on gross violations of human rights in Belarus.

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