

## **EaP CSF Steering Committee statement on the state-sponsored purge of civil society in Belarus**

*Brussels, 29 July 2021*

Throughout the summer of 2021, the international community has helplessly witnessed Belarus' further descent on the path of authoritarianism. First, by withdrawing from the Eastern Partnership and other international initiatives on June 28th, Belarusian authorities started severing the last remaining ties they had with the European Union; the Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum [back then raised the alarm](#) on the possibility for the situation in Belarus to deteriorate at exponential speed. Only two weeks later, the Belarusian state initiated unprecedented attacks against civil society organisations, human rights defenders, and activists across the country - most of the time through raids or detainments, [which the Steering Committee also denounced](#).

Undeterred, Belarusian authorities have since then only kept showing their relentlessness and determination to effectively purge its society from any elements that do not perfectly fit the regime's forcefully imposed narrative. So far, about 100 civil society organisations have been closed down, and many more are about to suffer a similar fate.

The Steering Committee of the EaP CSF resolutely decries these liquidations, which can only be interpreted as the liquidation of civil society as a whole. This destructive operation is being led not only against human rights organisations, but also think tanks and journalistic, environmental, social, charity, educational, youth, and business organisations. In response to the sanctions of the European Union and the United States, and through what is essentially the scapegoating of civil society for the past year's social unrest, Belarusian authorities are eluding their own responsibilities in the current political situation, only leaving room for intensified repression.

This crackdown on civil society is, in reality, the latest attempt of the Belarusian state to further suffocate its own population and their desire for political transition and democracy. Amid this escalation of repression with no end in sight, all parties should remember that the principal victims are the Belarusian people, currently held hostage by an illegitimate regime that can now only exert its power through coercion.

Based on the above-mentioned points, and on the [United Nations General Assembly's Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms](#), the Steering Committee:

- Appeals one more time to the Belarusian regime to put an end to this disastrous purge of the civil society. Authorities now need to acknowledge their people's democratic aspirations, to release journalists, human rights defenders, and civil society activists jailed



on political motives, and rehabilitate civil society organisations that fell victim to arbitrary state action;

- Urges the European Union, Eastern partners and all members of the international community to stand up to the Belarusian regime's gross human rights violations and to address the need to safeguard civil society in Belarus;
- Encourages the international community to establish and maintain contacts with Belarusian CSOs to facilitate the continuation of their activities, provide the necessary assistance and support, including to activists which were forced to flee their country;
- Calls upon the civil society community to express their support and solidarity with CSOs in Belarus that have fallen victims to malignant state attacks.

The Steering Committee also wishes to draw the attention of the international community to the need to consider new circumstances in organising cooperation and support for civil society organisations in Belarus, which calls for:

- Establishing and developing cooperation with deregistered organisations whose status and activities were recently terminated by the Belarusian authorities, which in the near future will represent the majority of the Belarusian civil society;
- Supporting and simplifying the possibility of registering and conducting activities for Belarusian CSOs in the neighbouring countries of Belarus, as well as ensuring access to political asylum for repressed civil society activists;
- Broadening opportunities for emergency support towards the stabilisation and normalisation of Belarusian CSOs' activities;
- Strengthening the role played by the Belarusian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum in Belarusian-European initiatives, namely the Eastern Partnership, to ensure delivery of the promises of the policy while upholding EU norms and values at the core of this initiative.

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