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Statement of the Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum on the intensified pressure against human rights defenders, independent journalists, and civil society activists in Belarus

At least 40 human rights defenders, journalists, and civic activists in Minsk and all other regional centers detained or targeted in police raids today

Brussels, 16 February 2021

Following a sharp intensification of state violence against human rights defenders, independent journalists, and civil society activists in Belarus in recent days, the Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum feels compelled to express its unequivocal condemnation of the latest degradation of the human rights situation in the country.

For more than six months, the regime of Aliaksandr Lukashenka has launched a sustained assault on fundamental rights and freedoms in Belarus, beginning with the blatant falsification of the 2020 presidential result on 9 August, and extending to the active repression of peaceful protesters, journalists, and civil society activists.

The Belarusian people have exhibited admirable resilience against the threats and violence of the regime. In response to this unparalleled popular resistance, the Belarusian state has shown the true extent of its weakness and illegitimacy, by intensifying pressure on all active strata of the Belarusian population.

The scale of repression is unprecedented and is growing every day. Independent media, human rights defenders, and civil society activists have all been targets of the regime, with many of them imprisoned, fined or forced to flee the country as a result.

Not a day goes by without repressive actions against these groups, and today has been no exception.

Early on 16 February, **at least 40 human rights defenders, journalists, and civic activists in Minsk and all other regional centers were either detained or targeted in police raids.** As a result of the raids, conducted by officers of the Interior Ministry's Main Directorate for Combating Organised Crime and Corruption and by riot police, several activists have been detained. These include **Andrei Bastunets**, Chairman of the Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ), and **Dzmitry Salauyou** of the Human Rights Centre "Viasna" - both members of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum - among others. Most of the activists targeted by these early morning raids were connected to these two reputable civil society organisations.



Searches were also conducted at the office of the Independent Trade Union of Workers of Radio-Electronic Industry, and at the homes of **Nikolai Kvantaliani**, a member of the Coordination Committee of the Belarusian National Platform (BNP) of the EaP CSF, and of the member of the Coordination Committee of the Belarusian National Platform (BNP) of the EaP CSF, and of **Kristina Richter**, a lawyer and member of the BNP. The security officers searched the activists' private homes, seizing IT equipment and documents.

According to the available information, the searches were conducted in the framework of a criminal investigation under Article 342 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus ("Organisation and preparation of actions severely violating public order, or active participation in them").

Based on the above, 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 Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the Steering Committee:

- Demands that **the Belarusian authorities** avoid further use of violence, respect international human rights law, engage in a genuine political dialogue with the people of Belarus and ensure the holding of free and fair elections in line with international standards and under the OSCE / ODIHR's observation;
- Calls on **the Belarusian authorities** to end the persecution and repression of human rights defenders, journalists, and civic activists;
- Calls on **the EU and the EU member states** to maintain its focus on what is going on in Belarus and monitor the situation closely; publicly express their condemnation of the most recent episode of repressions against Belarusian human rights defenders and civic activists, to use all possible means to stop the persecutions and violations of human rights in Belarus;
- Calls on the competent **UN organs** - namely the Human Rights Council, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the relevant treaty bodies - to issue an immediate response, in accordance with all special procedures for the protection of human rights defenders and journalists.

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