

**Alexander Lukashenko**, President, Republic of Belarus

**Andrei Kobyakov**, Prime Minister, Republic of Belarus

**Vladimir Andreichenko**, Chairman of the House of Representatives, Republic of Belarus

**Vladimir Makei**, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Belarus

**Donald Tusk**, President, European Council

**Jean-Claude Juncker**, President, European Commission

**Antonio Tajani**, President, European Parliament

**Federica Mogherini**, Vice-President of the European Commission, High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

**Johannes Hahn**, European Commissioner for Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations

**Stavros Lambrinidis**, EU Special Representative for Human Rights

**Andrea Wiktorin**, Head of the EU Delegation to the Republic of Belarus

23 March 2017

**Statement by the Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum  
on repressions against civil society activists and journalists in Belarus, in view of  
the demonstrations planned on 25 March 2017**

Over the course of March 2017 mass peaceful protests of citizens as a reaction to the adoption of the Presidential Decree No. 3 "On preventing social dependency" have been taking place in Belarus. In disregard of the Constitutional provisions on freedom of speech and assembly, in many cities around Belarus, mass arbitrary arrests with excessive use of force against protesting citizens, civic activists, politicians, human rights defenders, as well as journalists covering socially significant events, have taken place almost daily. To date, more than 260 people have been fined or arrested.

In its Statement issued on 14 March 2017, the EaP CSF Belarusian National Platform (BNP) drew attention to the fact that the repressive actions of the Belarusian authorities cause serious damage to the recently revived process of normalization of the EU-Belarus relations, undermining the possible mutually beneficial relations between Belarus and the EU.

The EaP CSF Steering Committee joins the demands to the Belarusian authorities outlined in the Statement of the Belarusian National Platform:

- *To immediately abandon the practice of repressive measures against citizens peacefully expressing their protest, including civic activists, politicians, human rights defenders, other representatives of civil society;*

- *To identify those responsible for violations of the constitutional rights of citizens and bring them to justice in accordance with law; to take measures to prevent future violations of the constitutional rights of citizens and international obligations of the Republic of Belarus in the field of freedoms of expression, assembly and speech;*
- *To stop detentions and other measures aimed at hindering professional activities of journalists and independent media;*
- *To immediately release all those arrested and detained in relation to the peaceful protests against Decree No. 3, and repeal the judicial decisions to bring these people to administrative responsibility.*

We urge the Belarusian authorities to demonstrate tolerance, refrain from using violence and repressive measures against participants of the peaceful demonstrations scheduled for 25 March 2017 in Minsk and other cities of the country, as well as to remain open to the dialogue with peaceful demonstrators.

We also call on the European institutions and governments of the EU member states to:

- *To closely monitor the situation with violations of citizens' rights and freedoms in Belarus, explicitly express their attitude towards the actions of the Belarusian authorities'*
- *To take necessary measures to prevent further escalation of the situation, use all possible formats and tools in the context of the EU-Belarus relations to guarantee the government's respect for the constitutional rights and freedoms of citizens;*
- *To act as moderators in facilitating the dialogue between the Belarusian authorities and civil society.*

In its turn, the EaP Civil Society Forum will continue to monitor the situation, and together with the representatives of the Belarusian civil society will assess the consequences of this social and political crisis for the EU-Belarus relations and for the conditions of the civic activists, civil society and media's activity.

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