



ЦЭНТР ЕЎРАПЕЙСКАЙ ТРАНСФАРМАЦЫІ  
CENTRE FOR EUROPEAN TRANSFORMATION

Civil society  
program  
monitoring

July–September 2012

**Center for European Transformation**

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Quarterly  
analytical  
report

## Introduction

This paper presents the results of monitoring of processes taking place in the Belarusian civil society in the period from July to September 2012. The program monitoring is conducted by the Center for European Transformation, starting from April 2011<sup>\*</sup>, in order to track the dynamics of development of civil society organizations working in the field of democratic transitions through specific actions, advocacy-campaigns, protecting human rights, system of organizational development. The monitoring framework defines the following set of processes that have been monitored and analyzed:

- Formation and development of the National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum.
- Development of the processes of civil society dialogue with national and local authorities.
- International cooperation and interaction with civil society in Europe, in the Eastern Partnership countries, international donors and European structures.
- Expansion of “composition” of civil society and cooperation with various types of entities.
- Development of the quality and effectiveness of promotion and advocacy work, realization of the rights of target groups.
- Changes in terms of civil society activity.

The presented analysis is based on monitoring of the media, analytical materials and normative documents, monitoring the terms of NGOs’ activity and law enforcement practices, as well as special analysis of civic initiatives. The results obtained allow assessing the situation in the processes in the Belarusian civil society development and setting priorities for further development.

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<sup>\*</sup> The methodology of program monitoring and its results for prior and subsequent periods can be found by following this link: <http://cet.eurobelarus.info/en/news/2012/06/01/civil-society-program-monitoring-EN.html>.

## **State and development of civil society in Belarus**

*Analytical report based on monitoring materials*

**July-September 2012**

### **General political conditions and circumstances**

During this period, as well as the previous six months, the general-political context has been set by the parliamentary electoral campaign. Throughout the whole period and for a short time after the election, representatives of the political opposition have continued their quite empty disputes concerning the tactics of behavior during the campaign (boycott or participation). The majority of civil society organizations have not taken part in this campaign, except for the traditional bloc of human rights defending organizations within the framework of the “Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections” coalition that has carried out their independent supervision campaign. During the election, some members of the political opposition have also tried to look like a certain form of civil supervision campaign (e.g. the civil campaign “For Fair Elections”). The brightest example is the carrying-out of the demonstrational campaign “Boycott-101” in Frunze Election District # 101 in Minsk by the coalition of political organizations (Movement “For Freedom”, campaign “Tell the Truth”, Belarusian People’s Front). This campaign has showed, on the one hand, an example of a possibility of cooperative actions of political forces; on the other hand — it has revealed the essential limitedness of their human resources and inability to be present at all polling stations so as to totally supervise them; it has also vividly showed the absence of principled contradictions in the discussed tactics “boycott-participation” because the organizers have adhered to these or those forms of participation in the election. In all other respects, the period of election has been a dead season with the traditional increase of the state repressive measures; the attention of the mass media and international structures has been diverted from the questions and problems of civil society.

Besides the topic of the election, during this period, it is possible to mark a wave of protests of workers of industrial enterprises, the loud PR action “Teddy Bear Airdrop”, the diplomatic scandal with the renvoi of the Swedish Ambassador, the appointment of the UN Spokesperson for human rights in Belarus, and the decision that Belarus has infringed the Aarhus Convention.

### **The establishment and development of the National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum**

During this period, the National Platform of civil society has been practically not seen behind the basic events as it has been occupied with the questions of its internal structural development. There have been consultations within the framework of the inter-regional group concerning the tasks and forms of the creation of regional platforms, as well as participation of members of the Platform in the process of the European dialogue on modernization.

On September, 27<sup>th</sup>, the National Platform made a statement concerning the fact that the Lithuanian authorities forbade several Belarusian antinuclear campaign activists to enter the territory of Lithuania. The coordinator of the public campaign “Astraviec Nuclear Power Plant is a crime!” Nikolai Ulasevich and the coordinator of the Belarusian Antinuclear Campaign, executive secretary of the Public Environmental Impact Audit of the project of



the Belarusian NPP, Tatiana Novikava, have been added to the list of persons who are banned to enter the territory of the Lithuanian Republic. On September, 26<sup>th</sup>, 2012, Nikolai Ulasevich and Tatiana Novikava were going to Vilnius in order to participate in the conference “Lithuania-Belarus, nuclear neighborhood” in the Seimas of the Lithuanian Republic where they had been invited by the organizers so as to present their speeches about the role of public control during making decisions that have to do with atomic energetics. The National Platform has expressed its concern in connection with the unreasonable announcement of these Belarusian public activists to be the persons who menace Lithuania’s national safety and urged to revise this decision.

### Development of dialogue with the national and local authorities

During the considered period of time, the topic of dialogue between civil society and the state at the national level has been in the frozen condition and has not been actualized practically by any of the specified subjects.

On the one hand, the attention of leaders of civil society and experts’ community has been concentrated on the EU initiative European dialogue on modernization with Belarusian society (EDM) where they were proposed to designate the basic spheres of life of the country, which modernization could be assisted by the European Union. Within the framework of this work, the opinion about the necessity to involve representatives of the state in this modernization dialogue has been expressed by analysts of the Belarusian Institute of Strategic Studies (BISS) and the public association “Liberal Club”, but it has been addressed first of all to the European partners.

On the other hand, the Belarusian authorities continue to exclude any possibility of their participation in this EDM on the conditions suggested by the European Union when civil society together with the political opposition is put in an equal position with the state. Thus, the Belarusian regime avoids in every possible way the situation created with the support of the EU when it will have to dialogue with its opponents inside the country as equals.

Also, the EDM is reducing its intensity, facing internal problems such as:

1. Absence of full-fledged communication with public-political groups (stakeholders) interested in modernization reforms:
  - a) Weak communication of experts with stakeholders;
  - б) Weak advancement of the EDM in the activity of interested public-political groups;
  - в) Not sufficient coordination of activity at the EU level and inside Belarus.
2. Non-equilibrium of experts’ groups who look like consultative, but not like working groups.
3. Low level of work of groups that study the spheres which must be reformed.

Representatives of civil society’s politically focused part have preferred again to be satisfied with some attributes of the public-political dialogue simulated by the authorities while they carry out electoral campaigns; in this case — during the campaign of electing the new structure of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly. However, neither inclusion of several representatives of oppositional structures in structures of district and local commissions, nor inclusion of three representatives of opposition parties with a deliberative vote right in the structure of the Central Electoral Commission, nor registration of candidates from the opposition, nor independent observers who were allowed to be in polling stations during voting, nor oppositional candidates hitting the campaign trail, including their participation in TV debates, nor in general the oppositional structures’ strategy of participation in the election to the end or removal of their candidates — all these have failed to render any influence either on the very way the authorities have carried out this election campaign, or on its results.

The way the interaction between the state and civil society has been happening at the local level has once again confirmed that in the cases of direct collisions of the interests of the state with the interests of citizens or civil society organizations, the possibility that any full-blown dialogue can take place equals zero. Thus, the inhabitants of the Smaliavičy district, who are protesting against the building of the Belarusian-Chinese Technopark, have been refused to carry out a local referendum; at the public hearings, which have taken place in Svietlahorsk and concerned the influence on the environment of the new plant that produces bleaching sulphate cellulose, none of opponents of the building of this enterprise has been given a chance to express his/her position.

### Expansion of civil society “composition” and cooperation with various types of entities

In July-September 2012, in the independent mass media, there were lots of messages about collective protests of workers of first of all industrial enterprises. Everywhere, as a principal cause that spurred these protests, they mentioned low salaries. Protesters resorted to different forms of expressing their discontent and rendering pressure upon employers: exit from official trade unions, threat of announcing strikes, work suspension, etc. Most often, protests arose spontaneously and were quickly settled by administrations of enterprises. Still, the protests appeared in the field of vision of independent trade unions and in certain cases — in the focus of their management.

- On July, 9<sup>th</sup>, at the Babrujsk-based factory of tractor details and units, workers of two brigades, after they received their letters with the information about their salaries for June, declared about their refusal to continue work until they were paid their cut down bonus. The next day, these two brigades started to work, but in the “working-to-rule strike” mode. Then, there was a message that all the workers who had participated in this protest became members of the factory branch of the Belarusian Free Trade Union.
- On July, 13<sup>th</sup>, workers of several shops of “HrodnaZhilStroy” refused to start working and demanded to increase their salaries. They returned to their workplaces only after a meeting with the director of the enterprise who promised to fulfill the requirement of the protesters.
- On July, 17<sup>th</sup>, workers of one of the enterprises of the “PinskDrev” holding carried out a spontaneous meeting protesting against the reduction of the sizes of their salaries and started to write letters notifying that they leave the official trade union. A distinctive feature of the situation with the protests of workers of “PinskDrev” is that among protesters there appeared a leader whose actions were guided by the fresh strike experience of workers of the enterprise “Granit” (the town of Mikaševičy, the Brest region); he also became the initiator of the creation of the Workers’ Council so as to have negotiations with the administration on behalf of all protesters.
- On August, 10<sup>th</sup>, about 60 workers of the Baranavičy-based road and transport organization “DEU-3” declared about their refusal to come to work. They started to work only after a meeting with the head of the organization who promised to organize a meeting of the protesters with representatives of the administration of the national unitary enterprise “BelAvtoDor” which structural sub-division is “DEU-3”.
- In the beginning of September, there were messages about a pre-strike situation in the 2<sup>nd</sup> city hospital of Minsk. Physicians demanded from the administration of this medical institution to double the size of salaries and in case it would not be done, they promised to organize a protest meeting. Members of the independent trade union of the Mikaševičy-based “Granit” expressed their solidarity with the requirements of the Minsk doctors and sent an open letter addressed to the Minister of Health.

- Many workers of the Polack-based winery began to leave the official trade union and join the Free Trade Union in the beginning of September, protesting against their low salaries, and on September, 14<sup>th</sup>, they suspended their work and arranged a spontaneous meeting near the entrance of the enterprise.

### International cooperation and interaction

Despite the summer period, the situation with human rights and freedom of speech, the problem of political prisoners and new political prosecutions, as well as the course of the parliamentary election, have been under steadfast control from the outside — by international civil society organizations and international political structures, as well as their separate representatives. The attitude to what is going on in Belarus has been expressed in already traditional forms:

- **Acceptance of resolutions, statements, and appeals:** the condemnation of infringements of human rights in Belarus, the requirement to free all political prisoners and rehabilitate them, as well as an intention to support Belarusian civil society, are present in the resolutions accepted almost simultaneously by the UN Council for human rights (July, 5<sup>th</sup>), the European Parliament (July, 5<sup>th</sup>), and the OSCE PA (July, 7<sup>th</sup>); the requirement to stop the criminal prosecution of journalist Andrzej Poczobut is in the statement of the International Federation of Human Rights (July, 4<sup>th</sup>); the Amnesty International addressed to all partner organizations concerning an emergency reaction in connection with the information on the deterioration of the conditions of Mikalai Statkevich's imprisonment (July, 14<sup>th</sup>), it also supported Dzmitry Dashkevich against whom a new criminal case was initiated (July, 18<sup>th</sup>), and already on July, 20<sup>th</sup>, the UN spokesperson for tortures was sent a complaint with the requirement to investigate the information on the facts of tortures of these two political prisoners; Lithuanian environmental organizations acted with a joint statement, protesting against the arrest in Minsk of environmentalists Tatiana Novikava and Andrey Ozharovsky, who tried to bring to the Embassy of Russia a letter against the signing of the general contract to build the Belarusian Nuclear Power Plant (July, 19<sup>th</sup>); the demand to free the student of the Department of Journalism at the BSU Anton Surapin who was arrested in connection with the “Teddy Bear Airdrop” case is in the statements of the Journalists Protection Committee (July, 19<sup>th</sup>) and the Amnesty International (July, 24<sup>th</sup>), and the Belarusian Association of Journalists addressed to the UN spokesperson for protection of the right for freedom of opinions with a request to react to the arrest of this young journalist (August, 2<sup>nd</sup>); 15 members of parliament from the EU countries, who participate in the program of patronage upon Belarusian political prisoners, acted with a joint statement on the general situation in Belarus (July, 26<sup>th</sup>); the “Reporters without Borders” reacted to the detention of the journalist of “Euroradio” Vital Rugain with their statement-protest (July, 30<sup>th</sup>); the EU High Representative Catherine Ashton made a statement concerning the renvoi of the Swedish Ambassador in Belarus Stefan Eriksson (August, 3<sup>rd</sup>); a joint statement concerning the closed Swedish Embassy in Minsk came from the Freedom House and the Center of European Policy Analysis (CEPA) (August, 9<sup>th</sup>); the OSCE representative for freedom of the media Dunia Mijatović supported the administrators of groups in social networks who were prosecuted (September, 4<sup>th</sup>); the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay criticized the general situation in Belarus (September, 15<sup>th</sup>); the requirement to investigate the case of the police officers' attack and beating of journalists in Minsk during the actions of the youth organization “Zmena” is in the statement of the Journalists Protection Committee (September, 19<sup>th</sup>); on the eve of the



parliamentary election, the Amnesty International made a statement on the general situation in Belarus, in which it marked the strengthening of repressions against the opposition and independent journalists; after the announcement of the results of the parliamentary election, there were critical statements not only from the OSCE mission which had supervised the course of this election, but also from the European Parliament and the European Commission, as well as from governments of some EU countries (end of September); the release of political prisoners Siarhei Kavalenka and Pavel Syramalotau has also been noticed by a number of statements of the European political bodies welcoming this step of the authorities of Belarus (end of September).

- **Carrying-out of pickets and protest actions:** participants of the female organization FEMEN protested against Alexander Lukashenko's presence at the final of the Football World Championship in Kyiv (July, 1<sup>st</sup>) and representatives of Ukrainian democratic organizations picketed near the Belarusian Embassy (July, 2<sup>nd</sup>); there were pickets against Lidziya Yarmoshyna's presence at the OSCE conference in Vienna; besides, during the speech of the head of the Belarusian Central Electoral Committee, representatives of the USA and EU countries left the hall in an emphatic manner (July, 12-13<sup>th</sup>); in many European capitals, there were actions in protection of Belarusian political prisoners: Dzmitry Dashkevich (July, 20<sup>th</sup>), Mikalai Statkevich (August, 12<sup>th</sup>), and Ales Bialiatski (September, 25<sup>th</sup>), the day when Ales Bialiatski was arrested — August, 4<sup>th</sup> — was marked as the Day of Solidarity with Belarus; the young members of the British Party of Liberal Democrats carried out an event to support the Belarusian journalists who were arrested for photographing with teddy bears (middle of August); in Eindhoven, there was an annual event to the memory of the missing Belarusian politicians and journalists, attended by the relatives of the disappeared and European human rights defenders and politicians (September, 16<sup>th</sup>).
- **Nominations and awards:** the Heinrich Böll Foundation awarded its Petra Kelly Prize to Ales Bialiatski (beginning of July); the German PEN center awarded its Hermann Kesten Prize to Iryna Khalip (August, 8<sup>th</sup>); Ales Bialiatski was also nominated as a candidate to receive the Andrey Sakharov Prize of the European Parliament "For Freedom of Thought" (August, 27<sup>th</sup>).

However, there have also been events which stand out against the already habitual ones. On July, 4<sup>th</sup>, there was a daring action which consequences were ambiguous; it was sponsored by and implemented on behalf of the Swedish advertising firm "Studio Total" and received the name "Teddy Bear Airdrop", or the "Plush Landing" in Russian. Two citizens of Sweden on their single-engine aeroplane imperceptibly crossed the Lithuanian-Belarusian border and scattered over Ivianiec and Minsk about one thousand toys, i.e. teddy bears, with the words supporting democracy and freedom in Belarus, and then also imperceptibly returned back to Sweden. Here, it is also possible to mention the act of the winner of the 2012 international television song contest "Eurovision" — the Swedish singer Loreen. Being invited to Belarus to perform at the musical festival "Slavic Bazaar in Viciebsk", on July, 13<sup>th</sup>, she met with the wife of Ales Bialiatski and in the presence of independent journalists expressed her support to all Belarusian political prisoners and signed a petition to abolish capital punishment in Belarus.

If to speak about successes of Belarusian civil society's promotion of its interests at the international level, then it is necessary to mention that the UN Council introduced again the post of its spokesperson for human rights in Belarus. It has been done thanks to the joint efforts of a big pool of international and Belarusian human rights defending organizations, among which there are the Human Rights Watch, International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), Amnesty International, Belarusian House for Human Rights, Human Rights Defending Center "Viasna" ("Spring"), etc. On September, 28<sup>th</sup>, appointed to this post Miklós Haraszti started to work. Within the

framework of his mandate, the spokesperson for human rights will have to dialogue with the Belarusian party concerning the questions of human rights in the country, to present a competent analysis of the existing problems, being based on which he will be able to offer ways of improving the implementation and protection of human rights in Belarus according to the international standards. However, the Belarusian authorities have refused to recognize the validity of this mandate and declared about their refusal to cooperate with the appointed spokesperson.

**Organizational capacity and abilities to advocacy work,  
promoting and protecting the interests**

During the analyzed period, there have been the following types of civil initiatives and campaigns:

1. **Initiatives-appeals** (performances with statements, acceptance of petitions and resolutions, drives for signatures). This kind of initiatives, as a rule, has an exclusively reactive character and is used for the fastest presentation of one's attitude to appearing situations. In the majority of cases, these appeals remain without any reaction. In particular, in July-September 2012, Belarusian civil society organizations with the help of statements, appeals, and petitions were reacting to illegal arrests and detentions, as well as the situation with political prisoners (appeals against the detention of the antinuclear activists (July), protest against the arrests of Anton Surapin and Siarhei Basharymau in connection with the "Teddy Bear Airdrop" (July-August), appeals with a demand to free political prisoners (the whole period), the statement of the musical group "Lyapis Trubetskoi" to support the detained moderators of protest groups in social networks (August), statements concerning the interdiction to enter Lithuania for the antinuclear activists (September), etc.).
2. **Fund raising actions.** This type of actions, as a rule, has a character of symbolical solidarity and is rather effective due to the concreteness of objects in view. During the specified period, such actions have included: fund raising to perform operations for Inesa Krutaya who suffered during the act of terrorism in the Minsk metro station in April (July); the proceeding fund raising (July-September) to pay for the book of Kazimierz Siemienowicz "Artis Magnae Artilleriae" (1650) (which is similar to the previous voluntary fund raising so as to return the Statute of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (the old Belarusian state)), fund raising to cure civil activist Krystsina Shatikava (July-September), fund raising for the lawyer for Anton Surapin (July-August), fund raising organized by environmentalists to pay at an auction for an elk exposed for hunting (September).
3. **Initiatives of local residents against the building of ecologically dangerous objects or objects worsening living conditions.** Except for individual initiatives, citizens' resistance has brought no results:
  - in Salihorsk, the authorities declared about public hearings concerning the construction of some objects, including those connected with the cutting-down of a part of the city park (July, 2012). Activists of the Salihorsk campaign "Protect Woods" are going to use this moment for resistance, but they do not hope for success.
  - On August, 17<sup>th</sup>, in Svietlahorsk, the authorities also carried out formal public hearings concerning the chemical plant building; public activists estimate extremely negatively their results, considering that they [public hearings] did not really take place.



- The protest of residents of summer houses in Smaliavičy against the building of the Belarusian-Chinese Technopark is continuing; on July, 12<sup>th</sup>, an initiative group of citizens was refused to carry out a local referendum concerning this question.
- In Minsk's microdistrict "Uručča", citizens are also losing in their struggle against the construction of new houses; the building is going on; meanwhile, the citizens made an attempt to get politicized and to use the situation of elections (promotion of their candidate, July-September).
- Inhabitants of cottage houses in the settlement of Kalodziščy near Minsk collected one and a half thousand signatures and demand from the authorities to change the project of building of the microdistrict "Zialiony Bor" (September).
- One of successful initiatives is the protest of Brest inhabitants against the building of a chemist's shop; the citizens of nearby houses managed to block this building and the authorities cancelled their decision; probably, it was done because of the election and the authorities did not want to radicalize the situation (July).

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4. **Initiatives to promote the Belarusian language.** The traditional type of initiatives that sometimes brings some successes. In Hrodna, parents assisted by the Belarusian Language Association managed to receive a permission to create a Belarusian-language group in a kindergarten (July).
5. **Social initiatives.** Initiatives to create cycle tracks for bicyclists in Homieĺ (July), in Brest ("For Velo-Brest", July-September) have been quite active. In Minsk, there is a volunteer initiative "House of dogs' hope" aimed at rescuing homeless animals (July-September). There have been again events of the NGO "Avant-guard" that regularly organizes harmless flashmobs, frequently under the permission of the authorities (this time they organized an event to blow soap bubbles, July).
6. **Political initiatives** during this period have concerned basically the electoral subjects. The brightest of them concerned the organization of the technological campaign "Boycott-101" in Frunze election district # 101 in Minsk.
7. **Human rights defending initiatives** have been mostly connected with the actual topic of political prisoners, the brightest of which was the signing of an appeal to free political prisoners by 114 candidates (September).

#### Changes in terms of activity and structures of civil society

The general conditions of civil society's activity have been complicated by the authorities' traditional reprisals and restrictions during the election campaign: arrests, searches, interdictions to carry out events, etc. The project of the law "About modifications and additions to some laws of the Republic of Belarus on the activity of political parties and other public associations", despite a number of positive changes, according to experts, will not essentially improve the conditions of activity of civil society. The pressure upon human rights defending organizations has become more active; in particular, there is a process of liquidation of the Human Rights Defending Establishment "Platform"; the Human Rights Defending Center "Viasna" can lose its premises because of confiscation of Ales Bialiatski's property. For a long time, the problems with the physical space for the

organization of even non-political events have been faced by the majority of civil society organizations in Belarus, e.g. the noncommercial cultural initiative “Art Siadziba” which is refused a possibility to rent premises for its cultural events.

On July, 4<sup>th</sup>, Lukashenko signed his decree № 295 “About simplification of the order of departure from the Republic of Belarus”. According to this decree, the KGB has a right to include a person in the “list of those who cannot leave abroad” if this person “is included in the preventive list of the KGB” — it has actually legalized the practice of “black lists”. Some representatives of civil society have been removed from these lists and now can travel abroad, e.g. Zhanna Litvina, head of the BAJ; human rights defender Aleh Volchek; Andrei Bandarenka, Garry Pahaniaila, politician Viktor Karneyenka, and some other civil and political activists. Nevertheless, the decree is working and the practice of the “lists who cannot travel abroad” remains in force: thus, on September, 17<sup>th</sup>, human rights defender Ihar Lednik was not allowed to leave for Poland.

On September, 27<sup>th</sup>, two political prisoners — Siarhei Kavaliienka and Pavel Syramalotau — were released; however, this time as well, it was only a demonstrative step of the Belarusian authorities, aimed at softening the reaction of the international community to the non-democratic character of the latest election. More than 10 democratic activists are still in prison, which vividly characterizes the deplorable state of conditions of activity of civil society.