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УСХОДНЯГА ПАРТНЁРСТВА

The position of the Belarusian National Platform of the Civil Society Forum

**"On possible resumption of the cooperation between Republic of Belarus
and the European Union"**

Current situation

Belarusian National Platform of the Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership is welcoming the overall progress in the relations between Belarus and the EU, which has taken place in recent months. We observe the importance of the EU - Belarus negotiations in the interim phase of modernization, progress of the parties regarding the signing agreement on visa liberalization, as well as the first round of EU-Belarus Human Rights Dialogue.

We state, that the release of the political prisoners on August 22, 2015 is a significant step for Belarusian authorities towards further improvement of the relations with the EU and international community. Positively evaluating this step of the Belarusian authorities; we are looking forward to their further steps towards improving the human rights situation in Belarus, including issues on freedom of associations, freedom of assembly and freedom of speech, which are particularly important for the development of civil society.

We note, that with release of the political prisoners, the major obstacle to reopen a deeper cooperation between Belarus and the EU is eliminated. This collaboration can be expressed through specific projects and programs implementation, agreed in frame of the interim phase of modernization, including the financial and technical support of the reforms in a wide range of areas from EU side.

At the same time, we regret that the general political situation and the human rights situation in Belarus remains unchanged. A number of civil society activists are under the criminal prosecution, particularly persons involved in drawing graffiti - M. Pekarski, V. Žeromski, V. Kosinerov, and A. Mikhalevich, a former presidential candidate in the 2010 electoral campaign, who came back to the country. All released political prisoners are under preventive supervision and have other restrictions in their rights. The practice of the human rights defenders persecution is being carried out, the human rights activist, Elena Tonkacheva, has been deported from Belarus and banned to enter the country for three years. The freedoms of the independent mass media has been restricted. The facts on persecuting independent journalists and civil society activists

were often being observed, including the practice of administrative fines, arbitrary detentions, using the disproportionate force and non-lethal weapons against them. During the presidential electoral campaign, evidences of administrative pressure on voters at their workplace were observed, members of initiative groups of independent candidates were being detained and representatives of the opposition parties were being unreasonably restricted to be included in the district election commissions. Legal, financial and political conditions for the civil society organizations work also remain unfavorable.

On international assessment of human rights situation

Given these facts, we would like to draw attention of the European Union and EU Member States to the fact that the cooperation cannot be resumed without taking into account the overall progress of the political situation and the human rights situation in Belarus. We also believe that the overall rate of the human rights progress cannot be made merely because of the political rapprochement and political warming relations between the parties. The progress in the field of human rights in Belarus can only be confirmed by independent international organizations and their special representatives. In current situation, of the non-availability separate public document on the situation in human rights on behalf of the Special Rapporteur of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), Andrea Rigoni. The only independent international assessments of the human rights situation will be reports of Mr. Miklos Haraszti, a UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus. We call on the representatives of the European Union and EU Member States in their assessments about the situation of human rights in Belarus be guided by the view of the Special Rapporteur of the United Nations. We also advise to form a special group of representatives of international organizations (OSCE, Council of Europe and UN) for periodic public registered assessment of the situation with human rights in Belarus. The main parameters of this evaluation could be based on the provisions of European Commission Non-Paper, "What the European Union could bring to Belarus", dated December 5, 2006, defining 12 conditions, which would allow stating the improvements towards respecting democratic values and basic human rights.

On Cooperation Principles

We are also convinced that the future of the Belarus-EU cooperation should be built as transparent and inclusive process, including full access for the public to the information about EU-supported projects and programs for the Belarusian state, and the information about any other forms of cooperation. We sincerely hope that the rapprochement between the parties will fully include representatives of independent civil society organizations and, in particular, the National Platform of the Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership, into the dialogue of the EU with the Belarusian authorities regarding the development of European-Belarusian cooperation.