Joint Statement by the Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum and the Board of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum ahead of the Meeting of Foreign Affairs Ministers, 27-28 August 2020

We are dismayed at the continued violation of the fundamental rights of the Belarusian people in the wake of the undemocratic presidential election on 9 August 2020. We urge the international community to push for upholding international standards and use all available mechanisms in order to:

- guarantee the right of the people of Belarus to assemble peacefully and express their views freely, and their right to free and fair elections;

- put an end to the excessive use of force and torture against peaceful protesters in Belarus, and punish the perpetrators;
- secure the release of illegally detained Belarusian protesters and political prisoners, and conduct a fair, public investigation into the criminal and administrative cases initiated in an attempt to defame and discredit the opposition.

We emphasise that open and constructive dialogue with the protesters represented by the Coordination Council1, the body recently established by the opposition candidate Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya2, is a crucial step in the peace restoration process in Belarus, and we call for its formal recognition by the international institutions3. The European Union and other international actors should assist the Council in organising negotiations with the Belarusian authorities to resolve the current post-election crisis in Belarus. A criminal case on charges of attempting to seize power and undermine Belarusian national security has been launched against the Coordination Council, though Council has clearly stated that it does not pursue such goals.

We call on the EU to use all available mechanisms to end unlawful detentions, dismissals and pressure on striking workers who ceased work in response to the unlawful action of the Belarusian authorities. Efforts to organise a national strike in support of democratic change have started, yet currently many members of the striking committees are being detained, while workers participating in the strikes are being unlawfully laid off and subjected to psychological and other pressure4.

As the Kremlin has expressed its willingness to support Aliaksandr Lukashenka in line with its obligations stipulated by its membership of the Union State of Russia and Belarus as well as the Collective Security Treaty Organisation5, we also call on the Russian authorities to restrain from any intervention against the expression of the Belarusian people’s will. Further, we urge the European and global institutions to publicly disapprove such statements by the Russian government: the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of the Republic of Belarus should remain inviolable.

While the authorities of the Russian Federation state the inadmissibility of interference in the internal affairs of Belarus, they are also granting Aliaksandr Lukashenka strong support in the information sphere in Belarus6. We call therefore on the Russian authorities to prevent information interventions, dissemination of fake news and statements from high-level officials that do not correspond to the reality regarding the nature of the protest, the programme of the Coordination Council, the use of the Belarusian language, the so-called ‘nationalist’ motives of the protesters, etc.

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1 See the composition at the website of the Committee: https://rada.vision/book (in Russian)
2 See https://belarusfeed.com/coordination-council-transfer-power-belarus
4 See http://ktr.su/content/news/detail.php?ID=6995 (in Russian)
Finally, we call on the international community to closely follow and react to developments in Belarus, and encourage adherence to international democratic standards.

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

Zaur Akbar, Youth Club Public Union, Azerbaijan
Olga Chyzhova, Digital Communication Network, Estonia
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Lousineh Hakobyan, Europe in Law Association, Armenia
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Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) is a unique multi-layered regional civil society platform aimed at promoting European integration, facilitating reforms and democratic transformations in the six Eastern Partnership countries - Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Serving as the civil society and people-to-people dimension of the Eastern Partnership, the EaP CSF strives to strengthen civil society in the region, boost pluralism in public discourse and policy making by promoting participatory democracy and fundamental freedoms. The EaP CSF is a non-partisan bona fide non-governmental organisation. For more information, please visit the EaP CSF website at www.eap-csf.eu
EU-Russia Civil Society Forum ([www.eu-russia-csf.org](http://www.eu-russia-csf.org)) was established in 2011 by non-governmental organisations as a permanent common platform. At the moment, 183 NGOs from Russia and the European Union are members or supporters of the Forum. It aims at development of cooperation of civil society organisations from Russia and EU and greater participation of NGOs in the EU-Russia dialogue. The Forum has been actively involved, inter alia, in the questions of facilitation of visa regime, development of civic participation, protection of the environment and human rights, dealing with history and civic education.