



**EU-RUSSIA CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM**  
**ГРАЖДАНСКИЙ ФОРУМ ЕС-РОССИЯ**

## **Stop the Massive Attack on Independent Voices – One Year after the Presidential Elections in Belarus**

### **Statement by the Board of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum**

The Board of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum condemns the massive attack on independent voices in Belarus. We demand from the Belarusian authorities to immediately release all unlawfully detained citizens. We also demand from the Russian authorities to stop any kind of support to the inhuman regime of Aliaksandr Lukashenka. Finally, we address the international community with a request to execute further pressure on the Belarusian authorities and provide any help needed to the Belarusian citizens who had to flee the country.

One year after the fraudulent presidential elections held on 9 August 2020<sup>1</sup>, the persecution of those who are not in line with the official position of the Belarusian authorities has been taken to a new level of violence and now involves human rights defenders and civil society leaders, lawyers, journalists and other citizens – many of them were forced out of the country or decided to leave Belarus – due to a threat to their freedom or life.

Only last week, another wave of unlawful and politically motivated arrests took place. Ulad Vialichka, former General Director of the INGO “EuroBelarus”, was detained together with another three members of the organisation: Uladzimir Matskevich, Oksana Shelest and Tatsiana Vadalazhskaya<sup>2</sup>. The latter three were also involved in the Flying University, an initiative aimed at creating and encouraging an environment for free and independent thinking in Belarus. They are now part of an infamous list of political prisoners in Belarus with the current count of over 620 activists, including Ales Bialiatsky, who spent several years in prison in the past already, and his colleagues from the Human Rights Centre “Viasna”<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> See the statement of the Board from 3 August 2020: <https://eu-russia-csf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/StatementSolidarityBelarus03.08.2020.pdf> - and our joint statement with the Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum from 25 August 2020: <https://eu-russia-csf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/StatementBelarus25.08.2020Final-2.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> See <https://eap-csf.eu/project/statement-on-the-recent-arrests-in-belarus>

<sup>3</sup> See <https://prisoners.spring96.org/en>

The Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Belarus forcibly shut down dozens of NGOs; searches and detentions took place in major media houses in the country, the work of many of them (Tut.By, “Nasha Niva“, “Euroradio“) was discontinued in Belarus<sup>4</sup>; and licences of lawyers, who defended political prisoners, were withdrawn<sup>5</sup> – and these are just some examples of the brutal repression that has taken place in recent months.

The Board of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum stands by all civil society activists and organisations, human rights defenders and independent voices in Belarus, our colleagues from the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum and its Belarusian National Platform.

As representatives of non-governmental organisations and initiatives from Russia and EU member states, we specifically address the authorities of the Russian Federation with a demand to stop all forms of support to the regime of Aliaksandr Lukashenka – economic, moral or political, including the practice of extradition of those persecuted in Belarus. Methods of threat, intimidation and suppression on the state level have no place at the very heart of Europe, and to back such methods means to take the side of the perpetrator.

We also call on the international community, most notably the European Union, to further extend the sanctions regime against the instigators and perpetrators of the violence against the opposing voices in Belarus and to provide all possible support for Belarusian civil society inside the country and for exiled activists, up to an access to political asylum and an environment encouraging their activities.

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The EU-Russia Civil Society Forum was established in 2011 by non-governmental organisations as a permanent common platform. At the moment, 189 NGOs from Russia, the European Union and the United Kingdom 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.

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<sup>4</sup> See e.g. <https://belsat.eu/en/news/08-07-2021-massive-crackdown-on-independent-media-in-belarus>

<sup>5</sup> See e.g. [www.forbes.com/sites/ewelinaochab/2021/08/09/it-is-not-safe-to-be-a-lawyer-in-belarus](http://www.forbes.com/sites/ewelinaochab/2021/08/09/it-is-not-safe-to-be-a-lawyer-in-belarus)