Prevent a Closer Military Alliance between Russia and Belarus –
A Call for the Day of Independence of Ukraine

Statement by the Board of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum and
the Coordination Committee of the Belarusian National Platform
of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum

Tomorrow, Ukrainians all over the world are observing the Day of Independence. Russia’s violent aggression against Ukraine has been going on for exactly half a year, with no foreseeable ending of the hostilities. What is more, even closer involvement of Belarus in military actions on the territory of Ukraine might become a reality.

The Coordination Committee of the Belarusian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum and the Board of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum reiterate their strong anti-war position expressed right after the start of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine¹ and call the international community to prevent an even closer military alliance between Russia and Belarus.

The territory of Belarus has been used by Russian troops as a staging ground for entering Ukraine from the North and retreating, supplies to the army, air strikes and missile launches; the threat of a full-scale involvement of Belarus in the conflict remains high. The military exercise of Belarusian troops has been extended for one week at a time since 29 April 2022, i.e. for 17 weeks in total since the first prolongation. These days, a joint Belarusian-Russian air defence exercise is taking place in the South of Russia³.

By marking 24 August, a special day for Ukraine and all democratic forces, we express our support for the people of Ukraine, the independence and territorial integrity of the country. To ensure this, we believe the following actions by the European Union and its member states are indispensable:

● to use all diplomatic means available to stop Russia’s aggression, to prevent a broader military alliance between Belarus and Russia and to systematically inform the counterparts in both countries on the consequences of the continuation of such cooperation;
● to consistently speak up against the so-called “deep integration” between Belarus and Russia⁴, which might be eventually leading to a broader military alliance between the countries and de facto annexation of Belarus by the Russian Federation;
● to make clear that any involvement of Belarusian citizens in the aggression against Ukraine will result in their judicial prosecution as war criminals, like it will be the case with Aliaksandr

² See e.g. www.newsweek.com/belarus-join-vladimir-putin-troops-ukraine-war-alexander-lukashenko-1733261
³ See https://tass.com/defense/1491303
Lukashenka and Vladimir Putin, as well as top officials of both armies and high-ranking representatives of both regimes;
● to guarantee reception and protection in an EU member state or another safe country to those Belarusian and Russian nationals, who will refuse to execute a criminal order related to the war in Ukraine and who will be therefore in danger in their home countries;
● to make sure that the sanctions regimes applied to Belarus and Russia do not hinder the independent civil society and anti-war activities.

The Board of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum and the Coordination Committee of the Belarusian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum urge the international community to use all means possible to hold the authorities of Russia and Belarus, first of all, Vladimir Putin and Aliaksandr Lukashenka, accountable for waging a war in Europe. We call on the civil society groups in the region to combine efforts and stand with the oppressed.

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The EU-Russia Civil Society Forum is a permanent common platform of currently 190 NGOs from Russia, the European Union and the United Kingdom. More information is available at www.eu-russia-csf.org.

The Belarusian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum joins together more than 85 Belarusian organisations and structures. Read more at https://npbelarus.info/eng.