



# EASTERN PARTNERSHIP Civil Society Forum

## JOINT ADDRESS OF THE NATIONAL PLATFORM OF THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM

*January 6, 2011*

*Minsk, Belarus*

We, the representatives of Belarusian civil society united under the National platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum,

**Consider savage crackdown of the peaceful protest action that took place on December 19, 2010 at the Independence Square in Minsk and further numerous repressions, arrests followed after that as roughest violation of human rights and democracy principles.**

Anticipatory actions of the authorities: public statements made by individual civil servants, concentration of special and military forces and vehicles in the city center, preliminary unlawful detentions of civic activists on December 18-19, searches and seizure of property, attacks on the candidate Mr. Uladzimir Niakliaeu and his supporters, beating Mr. Niakliaeu and his hospitalization - created and pressurized the atmosphere of fear and emergency situation in Minsk.

Despite this, many thousands of citizens gathered at 8 P.M. of December 19 at the October Square for a peaceful action to express their opinion and support presidential candidates. State bodies were aware of the scheduled meeting point for the peaceful action; all that state authorities are obliged to do in this matter is provide for citizens' security. Instead, authorities have surrounded the area of the Square with an immensely loud "pillow" of music and noise, and that is why thousands of those who were present at the action were deprived of a possibility to hear the speakers. This circumstance has forced participants of the peaceful protest action to move out to the Independence Avenue and start heading in an orderly manner towards the Independence Square.

The meeting at the Independence Square was suppressed in the toughest manner. A decision on applying forces against those present was unjustified neither from moral nor from legal perspective – securing law and order, respect to individual rights and personal liberties. Provocative acts committed by several citizens who broke window glass in the building of a state institution were stopped by the participants of the peaceful action themselves. Numerous evidence and video-materials confirm that there were no calls upon storming the building of the government. Moreover, participants of the action insistently asked to stop instigators and not to counterstand the militia.

During the crackdown of the peaceful action over 200 people were beaten up, more than 700 people were detained, held liable to administrative responsibility and placed into temporary detention facilities in Minsk and Zhodzina. Monitoring of court processes revealed outrageous violations of human rights during conduction of those, in particular right to fair court, right to access to legal assistance, right to appeal etc.

Further actions of the authorities: arrests of candidates to the president of the Republic of Belarus, members of their staffs, searches in their private apartments and threatening their family members, attacks on offices of human rights organizations and media institutions, unreasonable calls for examination in KGB - we assess as politically motivated persecution of political opponents. Currently there are well-known political figures and civic activists still detained in the investigatory detention facility of KGB upon a suspicion of a criminal offence. Health conditions of Uladzimir Niakliaeu, Andrei Sannikau, Natallia Radzina, Anatol' Liabedz'ka, Mikalai Statkevich are cause the utmost concern of publicity. We also state the attempts of administrative pressure to the lawyers of detained political and civic activists.

State media keep pumping the hysteria up. We receive messages that students who participated in the protest action are threatened with expulsion from their educational institutions, whereas lecturers and other employees of state bodies – with termination of employment.

In connection with the abovementioned, we **urge the governments of the EU member states, international institutions (Council of Europe, UN, OSCE), European Commission, European Parliament, Council of the European Union:**

- To put all possible diplomatic efforts on cessation of illegal and immoral actions of Belarusian authorities against participants of peaceful protests on 19-20 December, 2010;
- To suspend participation of Belarusian authorities in the Eastern Partnership initiative as well as existing intergovernmental technical assistance programs in the field of economy, energy, cross border cooperation, negotiations on economic and trade preferences until cessation of criminal prosecution and other illegal actions against presidential candidates and civic activists held in KGB temporary detention facility and other detention facilities all over Belarus as well as people preventively detained before developments of 19-20 December, 2010;
- To create international commission for objective and detailed investigation of developments of 19-20 December, 2010 and bringing to account the real culprits;
- To address to the Minister of foreign affairs, Minister of education, Minister of labor and social protection of the Republic of Belarus the statement about:
  - a) Inadmissibility of expelling students from educational institutions of Belarus and dismissal of people from their working places because of participation in peaceful protests;
  - b) Impossibility to continue cooperation with Belarus in any thematic field in case of such repressive actions;
- To strengthen regular contacts and dialogue of Belarusian civil society organizations with their European counterparts as well as to cancel consular fees for Belarusian citizens when applying for Schengen visa in the embassies of EU member states in Belarus.

**We rely on well-considered and balanced reaction of all structures of the European Union and international organizations, which could give clear and single-meaning assessment of developments of December 19, 2010 and following days but at the same time won't let repeated isolation of Belarus. Rapprochement processes between Belarus and the EU are of the highest importance for future democratization of the country and correspond to the interests of Belarusian society.**

**We expect that reaction and restrictions in contacts and interaction will be addressed to real culprits of latest accidents including the highest officials but won't be expanded to the whole country, our citizens and civil society.**

***Signatories:***

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