



Беларуская нацыянальная платформа
Форум грамадзянскай супольнасці
УСХОДНЯГА ПАРТНЁРСТВА

Resolution

of the Conference of the Belarusian National Platform
of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum:

“Belarus in circumstances of regional crisis and stagnation of the Eastern Partnership”

Minsk, 21 June 2014

We, the participants of the Conference of the Belarusian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, bringing together more than 60 civic organizations and initiatives, express our concern with the situation in the Eastern Partnership region, as well as with the current state and development of the initiative of the EU Eastern Partnership. We have to state that:

- the process of convergence of the Eastern Partnership countries with the European Union meets rough opposition from Russia, which uses illegal methods of economic and political blackmail. These actions have led to the denial of the Armenian leadership to initiate the Association Agreement with the EU, and have also provoked a long political crisis in Ukraine;
- stability and security of the Eastern Partnership region have been undermined by blatant military aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, which has already led to the occupation by Russia of a part of the territory of Ukraine (the Crimean Peninsula), and has been the cause of destabilization in Eastern and Southern Ukraine. As a result of aggression, hundreds of people were killed on both sides, including civilians in Ukraine. Civilians in Eastern Ukraine are intimidated by terrorist groups; the situation is close to humanitarian disaster;
- signing by Belarus of the Treaty on the Eurasian Economic Community(EAEC) on May 29, 2014 increases even more its dependence on Russian Federation and clearly contradicts to the European way of our country development. The project of Eurasian integration in its actual state closes opportunities for the members of the EAEC to develop parallel integration with the European Union, which greatly hinders the development of relations between Belarus and the European Union;
- human rights violation, political pressure and prosecution of public and political activists in Belarus and Azerbaijan is the main practice in our countries' authorities' relations with the civil society. We still have to state the absence of improvement in human rights' relations in Belarus. Ungrounded detention of political prisoners, execution of death sentences, restriction of freedom of speech, association, assembly, permanent deterioration of conditions for the social and political activities are integral elements of the Belarusian authorities' politics;
- welcoming the move to signing by Belarus of the Visa Facilitation Agreement with the EU, as well as the wish of the Belarusian authorities and the EU to dialogue under the "interim phase" framework, we note that in conditions of political prisoners' detention and practice of repressions against civil society, beginning of a full-fledged dialogue with the Belarusian authorities is justified neither practically nor morally and ethically. Members of the Conference of the BNP sincerely welcome the release of a well-known Belarusian human rights activist Ales Bialiatski, head of the Human Rights Centre "Viasna" who was behind bars as a political prisoner since August 2011. The release of Ales Bialiatski gives us ground to hope that other political prisoners will be released in the near future, as well, and Belarus will stop the shameful practice of detaining dissidents behind bars. We strongly emphasize that only the release of political prisoners and starting a real dialogue of Belarusian authorities with civil society may be sufficient to restore the full-fledged dialogue with the EU;

- in the situation of launching a new electoral cycle and presidential elections in 2015 in Belarus, we can state the obvious fact that the electoral law and electoral practice in Belarus are now in a state that don't let talking about democratic elections. What is done in the country under the guise of elections has nothing to do with implementation of the electoral law and democracy. On the basis of this statement, the Conference of the BNP recommends to its members and all other representatives of civil society not to be involved in processes that do not meet the rule of law and democracy, ideals and values of civil society.

Assessing the previous stage of development of the Eastern Partnership initiative and current challenges that it faces, we note that:

- one of the most successful multilateral interaction formats under the Eastern Partnership has remained the Civil Society Forum and its National platforms. The Forum has been held as a transnational cite for wide interaction between civil societies of the Eastern Partnership countries and the EU. National platforms have helped to strengthen and consolidate civil society organizations, as well as to broaden horizontal international links between them. At the same time, we state the exclusion of the Belarusian National Platform from the process of dialogue between the EU and the Belarusian authorities, as well as limiting its participation in the relations with the EU;

- despite the political crisis, Uzbekistan, as well as Moldova and Georgia, have made a clear step towards the European Union through initiation and signing the Association Agreements with the EU. Under certainly positive nature of this process, there is at the same time a risk of isolation of these leading countries from the rest Eastern Partnership countries, and gradual replacement of the Eastern Partnership multilateral format by exclusively bilateral relations. In the long term, it threatens with isolation and marginalization of relations with the countries-outsiders of the European integration (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus);

- EU initiative of the Eastern Partnership has not established mechanisms for an adequate response to external and internal challenges for development of the partner countries. The crisis of the Eastern Partnership is obvious taking into account its impossibility to respond to the Russian intervention, Armenia's ceasing of the convergence with the EU, the collapse of multilateral dimension of the initiative, conservation of authoritarian regimes in Belarus and Azerbaijan, challenges of massive human rights violations in the Eastern Partnership region.

In connection with mentioned above, we:

- 1) draw attention to the need for revision and reformulation of the Eastern Partnership program in accordance with modern challenges. We believe that the National civil society platforms of six partner countries, together with civil society of the EU should fully participate in discussions on formulation of a new strategy for further development of the Eastern Partnership;

- 2) call on the European Commission, the European External Action Service and the EU Delegations in partner countries to immediately start broad consultations with National platforms on further development of the initiative;

- 3) emphasize the need for further strengthening of integrity of the multilateral framework of the Eastern Partnership and preventing marginalization of the EU's relations with Belarus, Armenia and Azerbaijan;

- 4) note the need for such an architecture of the Eastern Partnership, which would be consistent in all six partner countries with their common agenda in the form of challenges for further de-Sovietization, construction of sovereign and stable democratic countries with the rule of law, respect for human rights, free and fair market institutions, comprehensive security, and other values enshrined in the European model;

- 5) support the proposals of business community of Belarus to improve business climate, formulated in the Belarus National Business Platform 2014.