

# **Opinion: Why the Eastern Partnership Fails to Reach Belarus**

Although formally a member of the Eastern Partnership (EaP), unfortunately Belarus does not participate in any of its programmes. It is excluded from visa liberalisation, the EaP flagship initiatives, and bilateral track programmes: for example, the Small and Medium-Size Enterprise Funding facility with a €15m budget, or the Eastern Partnership Pilot Regional Development Programmes with an allocation of €75m. It is worth mentioning that for 2010-2013, in total around €350m have been set for the Eastern Partnership programmes.

The Eastern Partnership programmes have been implemented since 2008, and during that time there has been a so-called period of liberalisation in Belarus. But civil society's expectations of an improved situation have not been fulfilled. Minsk ignored the EU's recommendations regarding democracy, the observance of human rights and an independent judiciary. Full cooperation with Belarus is impossible for Europe without political changes and the release of its political prisoners.

Because Belarus does not participate actively in any of the EaP initiatives, it does not receive any of the resources from the EU that are designated for the development of the Eastern Partnership. Belarus is losing great opportunities. As a result resources go to the other five partner-countries within the EaP. In other words, others benefit from the opportunities lost by Belarus.

## **The Diplomatic Conflict Is a Conflict of Values**

The complex situation which Belarus is in has now been further complicated following the departure of European ambassadors

from Minsk. The present conflict is a conflict of values which is difficult to resolve. It is the confrontation between the EU's commitment to a values-based approaches with regard changes in the country's, and the aspiration of the Belarusian authorities to retain absolute power and their wish to get different bonuses from their foreign partners.

The Belarusian authorities impudently wanted to threaten the EU and make it reverse its position on sanctions. However, the effect was the inverse: Europe has shown solidarity and was not afraid to say "no". The following conciliatory statements of the Belarusian authorities testify that they did not expect such conduct from Europe.

### **Belarus Faces a Geopolitical Imbalance**

For the general public it is hard to be aware of the result of Belarus' participation in the Eastern Partnership. It has not brought any evident benefit that could be seen by the people. At the moment Russia "supports" Belarus. The question is what Belarus will do when its "support" ends. Receipt of Russian financial injections means technological backwardness, poor management, and the decline of entrepreneurship, and it needs to be stopped. People should live according to their own minds and their own work, and not receive free money for making declarations of geopolitical love.

The abolition of the visa regime with EU countries may be the most evident way to tackle such imbalance. That would enable Belarusians to actually experience Europe through something other than the lens of official propaganda. It would also entail better access to education: it would be easier to attract foreign specialists to the country. Though we cannot bring an extra sausage to every home in Belarus with the Eastern Partnership, we can pave the road to a better life in future.

### **EU Policy Needs Consistency**

The question is whether the restrictive measures against Belarus are effective or not. Sanctions have done neither serious good nor serious harm. Everything has stayed as it was. But when the Western stream narrowed, the Eastern broadened. The necessary resources are coming from the East. Because of the sanctions, Belarus faces a geopolitical imbalance.

The most negative aspect of sanctions is the inconsistency of their implementation. That was the case with the 12 conditions for engagement with Belarus demanded by the EU which were first presented in November 2006. In 2008 the number of those conditions was reduced to “democratic elections, the freedom of expression and of the media, and the freedom of assembly and political association” and periodically had been disappearing from the agenda only to “emerge” from time to time. It is high time that the EU developed a coherent approach to Belarus and stuck to it.

There is no doubt that the best proof of the Belarusian authorities’ intentions to come to the negotiating table regarding cooperation would be the release of political prisoners. This would be a clear signal for everybody. In Belarus such a decision depends on the desires of the very few and that is why it can be made at any time.

As for the Eastern Partnership, the main task of the National Platform of EaP CSF is to help interested civil society bring Belarus back to the European path, and implement European standards in daily life. For me, as for the national coordinator, it is important that we Belarusians use the opportunities offered by the Eastern Partnership.

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# Civil Society Forum in Poznan – Civil Society Digest

The third meeting of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum was held in Poznan, Poland on 28-30 November 2011. The Forum gathered around 300 participants and guests from civil society sector working in EaP countries and EU, including more than 20 representatives of Belarusian NGOs. During three days with an intensive agenda, participants discussed different question on civil society engagement in eastern partnership, challenges and prospects for further development of EaP Civil Society Forum.

**New Coordinator of National Platform.** Director Executive Bureau of the Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs, [Siarhei Lisichonak](#), was elected as the new Belarusian National Coordinator of EaP CSF. Lisichenok replaced Ulad Vialichka, EuroBelarus, in his post.

**Statement of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum.** The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum in Poznan [adopted](#) a Statement on 29 November with a demand of an immediate and unconditional release and full rehabilitation of Ales Byalyatski. The Statement also calls upon the European Union member states to take joint measures toward the release of Ales Byalyatski and other political prisoners.

**Three Belarusians were elected to the new Steering Committee of EaP Civil Society Forum.** A new 17-member Steering Committee was [elected](#) at the annual meeting of the Civil Society Forum in Poznan. Three Belarusian NGO activists became Steering Committee members: Siarhei Lisichonak (Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs), Olga Stuzhinskaya (Office for a Democratic

Belarus), and Yaroslav Bekish (Green Alliance).

## **Other Civil Society Activities**

**Information campaign against gender violence.** From November 25 to December 10, the Belarusian Association of Young Christian Women [conducts](#) information campaign "Say Yes to family without violence." The campaign is a part of the international campaign "16 Days of Activism Against Violence Against Women" and dedicated to the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (November 25).

**#TwiPartyBy.** On 26 November, Minsk [hosted](#) the First Party of the Belarusian Twitter community – #TwiPartyBy. The offline event attracted about 300 people. They decided what would be the logo of the Belarusian twitter community and honored the most outstanding twitter people.

**Young Front against official radio.** "Young Front" has launched a campaign "[Stop feeding the regime](#)." The organization offers Belarusians to refuse to pay for radio, which broadcasts official news. Thus, the authors of the idea demonstrate □ their attitude towards government propaganda.

**New Scholarship Program for Belarusians Opens.** Young Belarusians can now apply for scholarships to study for a BA or MA degree at European universities. The Open Europe Scholarship Scheme ([OESS](#)) is financed by the European Commission and managed by the Nordic Council of Ministers. The purpose of OESS is to contribute to a democratic and prosperous development in Belarus by giving young Belarusians access to higher education without ideological bias and according to internationally accepted academic standards.

**The project for the re-socialization of convicts summed up in Homel.** On 30 November, a Roundtable in Homel [summed up](#) the project "Adult Education for the re-socialization and professionalization of penal institutions." Gomel regional NGO "Social Projects" with the support of German association

"Deutscher Volkshochschulverband e.V." implemented an educational program (a training course of psycho-social support, computer courses and crafts) in two penal colonies.

**Office for the Rights of People with Disabilities presented an Alternate Report.** On 1 December, Educational human rights institution "Office for the Rights of People with Disabilities" [held](#) a press conference in Minsk. The topic was a Report (alternate) on support and performance of rights of people with disabilities in Belarus. About 40 people took part in the press conference, including journalists, NGOs, governmental agencies, international organizations.

**World AIDS Day in Belarus.** On 1 December, World AIDS Day, Belarusian HIV NGOs [conducted](#) a number of events aimed at bringing people together around the issue and to demonstrate commitment to the fight against AIDS. UN Development Program [presented](#) the TV youth 8-series "Above the sky." The series is dedicated to those who are affected by HIV, and produced on the initiative of the UNDP in collaboration with the Belarusian Ministry of Health for the grant of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

**Final of the contest "What I know about Europe?"** On 3 December, Belarusian Human Rights House in Vilnius [hosts](#) the final game of the VIII National Competition of school teams "What I know about Europe?" The competition is organized by Club of European teachers with the support of the Association for International Affairs (Czech Republic) and the Movement "For Freedom".

**Festival of Belarusian European Lyric Culture.** Cultural Initiative "Your Fest" with the support of "Budzma" [presents](#) the First Literary and Musical Festival of Belarusian European Lyric Culture "Love in Belarusian, Live in European!.." Festival guests will see Belarusian poets and musicians of all generations on the one stage. The event will take place on 5-6 December, at the club LOFT, Minsk.

**International Conference on Ecumenical Dialogue.** On 9-10 December, Center "Ekumena" jointly with "Advocates Europe" and "Center for the Study of contemporary religiosity" [holds](#) in Minsk a Conference "Dialogue between the society and religious communities and ecumenical dialogue as a factor for sustainable development, pluralism and religious freedom." The conference invites for participation representatives of religious organizations, civil society, governmental bodies, the academic community, diplomatic missions, and lawyers.

**International Conference in Warsaw.** On 9-11 December, in Warsaw, Lazarski University, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and National Endowment for Democracy [host](#) an international conference "Belarus and Belarusians among neighbors: historical perceptions versus political constructs". The goal of the conference is to examine a diverse range of issues regarding the relations of Belarus with its neighbors, including political and economic ties, cultural links, historical stereotypes, and interaction with the nationalities, confessions, cultural groups and NGOs that make up Belarusian civil society.

**Transforming Belarus: Ways Ahead.** On 7 December, in Brussels, Carnegie Europe, the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies (BISS), and the Office for a Democratic Belarus will [host](#) an expert forum to discuss the European Union's policies on Belarus in the context of the latest developments in the country. Among speakers there are European Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy, Stefan Füle; Pavel Daneyko (Belarusian Economic Research and Outreach Centre); Arkady Moshes (Finnish Institute for International Affairs); and Aliaksei Pikulik (BISS). The event is organized with the support of Pact/USAID.

*Belarus Digest prepared this overview on the basis of materials provided by Pact. This digest attempts to give a richer picture of the recent political and civil society events in Belarus. It often goes beyond the hot stories*

*already available in English-language media.*

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# **American and German Experts on How To Deal with Belarus – Digest of Belarusian Analytics**

Last month was rich in international events and analytical materials discussing the situation in Belarus. On 25-26 October Belarus was discussed on both sides of the Atlantic – at the US-Central Europe [Forum](#) in Prague and at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington, DC. In addition, David Kramer and Hans-Georg Wieck unveiled their visions of how to deal with Belarus.

**20 Years of Belarusian Independence: Current Challenges and Future Development** – Balázs Jarábik, Matthew Rojansky and a number of other experts [discussed](#) popular attitudes towards the Lukashenka regime, Belarus's economy, and Belarus's relations with the United States, European Union, and Russia at a two-panel discussion in Washington D.C. hosted by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

**Do's and Don't's on Belarus** – David J. Kramer, President of Freedom House, has [formulated](#) 10 things for the West to do in dealing with Belarus. Kramer is sure that "Lukashenka's departure would free the people of Belarus from Europe's last dictator and lead to positive engagement from Europe and the



West" so Lukashenka's demise should be facilitated via "ten things the West should do and ten it should avoid". The proposed measures focus primarily on isolation of the Belarusian regime and additional economic and political sanctions.

**German Association "Human Rights in Belarus" strategy report** – the document [focused](#) on the situation in Belarus with recommendations for action by the European Union and its members. The unveiled report outlined its vision of European policy towards Belarus. The Head of the Association is Hans-Georg Wieck, former head of the OSCE mission in Belarus. The main message of the report is broader engagement of Belarusians into Europe as a whole. Visa exemptions and reduction of visa fees, large-scale expansion of employment and educational opportunities for young Belarusians, are among the proposed measures.

**Recovery, planning, consolidation: the development of political parties between elections** – political scientist Yury Chavusau [notes](#) that today Belarusian political parties are engaged in the intra-party and coalition processes, rather than a struggle for power. Sharp deterioration in economic conditions and increasing dissent in society became an unexpected challenge for all opposition parties. It seems that today the political parties can only articulate alternatives but not aggregate political interests.

**Belarus and Eastern Partnership: Civil Society Catches Initiative** – Larisa Doroshenko [analyzes](#) the results of the Conference of the National Platform of EaP CSF (Minsk, October 29). The expert draws attention to the debates inside the civil society about the possible politicization of the Platform. She sees them as an example of dialogue within civil society aimed at achieving solidarity through democratic tools.

**Analysis of Law Amendments Initiated to Be Introduced in**

**Belarus** – Belarusian Human Rights Defenders – Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs, Legal Transformation Center, BHC, Human Rights Centre "Viasna" – [developed](#) an analytical note on analysis of amendments initiated to be introduced into a range of laws of the Republic of Belarus in autumn 2011. In particular, the following Draft Laws were researched: “On Amending Certain Laws of the Republic of Belarus”; “On Amending the Law ‘On Mass Events in the Republic of Belarus’”; and “On Amending the Law ‘On State Security Bodies in the Republic of Belarus’”.

**Public councils in Belarus: legal regulation and practice** – an analytical paper is being [prepared](#) by Legal Transformation Center and Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs. The paper is aimed at improving the institutional and legal regulation of public councils, which operate under government bodies at various levels. The conclusions and recommendations, contained in the note, are based on the complex political and legal studies, conducted in June-August 2011. The study includes a compilation and analysis of domestic and foreign practice of legal regulation of public councils (the analysis of legal acts) as well as a series of in-depth interviews with members of the public councils.

**Roundtable: The judiciary and political repression** – Garry Pogonyaylo (Belarusian Helsinki Committee), Elena Tonkacheva (Legal Transformation Center), and Oleg Ageev (former lawyer of the Minsk City Bar) [discuss](#) the possibility of Belarus' independent judiciary. Experts conclude that today the situation is developing in a direction opposite to strengthening judicial independence so it is nearly impossible for the judiciary to resist tyranny.

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# Digest of This Week's Belarus-Related Events in Warsaw

Official Minsk refused to take part in the Eastern Partnership Summit in Warsaw this week. According to the special statement [made](#) by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 30 September, the organizers of the Eastern Partnership Summit have applied an unprecedented discriminatory measures towards Belarus.

In addition to the Summit, this week Warsaw hosted a number of other Belarus-related events including the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation [Meeting](#) (26 September-7 October 2011) and an international [conference](#) titled “The Eastern Partnership Conference: towards a European Community of democracy, prosperity and a stronger civil society” (29 September 2011). Representatives of Belarusian civil society and opposition had several opportunities to meet with top EU politicians and partners from other countries in the region.

**The Head of EU Delegation met participants of the NP of EaP CSF.** On 26 September, in the run-up to the Eastern Partnership Summit in Warsaw, Ambassador Maira Mora, Head of EU Delegation to Belarus, [met](#) with Belarus' participants of the National Platform for the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum to discuss the agenda and organizational aspects of the summit.

**Measures for release of political prisoners considered at OSCE conference.** On 28 September, Warsaw hosted a [side-event](#) called “Ales Byalyatsky: a symbolic case of the restrictions to political and civil rights in Belarus after the 2010 presidential elections” as part of the OSCE Human Dimension

Conference, arranged by a coalition of a number of human rights organisations. Among Belarusian participants were Valiantsin Stefanovich, Andrei Bastunets, Uladzimir Kobets.

**Side event on Freedom of Association.** On 29 September, The Assembly of Pro-democratic NGOs of Belarus, with participation of Legal Transformation Center (Minsk, Belarus), held a side event within the annual OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw. The topic was *Freedom of Association in Belarus: How to Improve Conditions of NGO Work*.

**Public Address of the Belarusian National Platform of EaP CSF to participants of the EaP Summit in Warsaw.** On 28 September, Belarusian National Platform of EaP CSF [called](#) on the Heads of States and Governments of Countries of the EaP (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) to synergize their position towards Belarus with the EU approach. The public address was due to the fact that the draft of the Summit Declaration does not include support for the EU approach on the immediate release and rehabilitation of all political prisoners as a condition for political dialogue with Belarus.

**Declaration of EaP CSF.** On 29 September, in Warsaw, the Civil Society Participants of the Eastern Partnership Conference "Towards a European Community of Democracy, Prosperity and a Stronger Civil Society" [adopted](#) a Declaration. In the very first paragraph they express their main concern about the recent arrest of the Belarusian human rights defender Ales Byalyacki and the danger to the lives and health of other political prisoners in Belarus.

**Position paper of the Civil Society Forum to the EaP Summit.** On 29 September in Warsaw, the CSF Steering Committee [presented](#) a position paper, in which it reiterates its role as a fully-fledged participant in the development of the Eastern Partnership and suggests mechanisms to contribute to its implementation. In particular, in section #1, "Strengthen democratic societies," the CSF welcomes the approach of the

European Commission and the EU member states to consider civil society in Belarus as a partner despite de-facto suspension of cooperation with the Belarusian government.

**Europe's leaders meet with Belarusian opposition.** The Belarusian opposition was [met](#) at the highest level at the Eastern Partnership summit. The Belarusian opposition delegation held a meeting with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, British Minister of State responsible for European Issues David Lidington, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk, Polish Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski, and the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights Thomas Hammarberg.

The Belarusian side was represented by relatives of political prisoners – Andrei Sannikov's sister Iryna Bahdanava, Mikalai Statkevich's wife Maryna Adamovich – as well as Uladzimir Nyaklyaeu, Anatol Lyabedzka, Ryhor Kastusyou, Valery Matskevich, Vital Rymasheuski, Yury Hubarevich, Syarhei Kalyakin, Ales Mikhalevich.

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