



ЦЭНТР ЕЎРАПЕЙСКАЙ ТРАНСФАРМАЦЫИ
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The methodology for civil society program monitoring

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About the program monitoring

The differences between “program” and “project” activities are still poorly realized. These differences are only being developed, and gradually find their reflection in the programs’ implementation and evaluation methodology. The program of civil society development can be realized as a program, but may remain as such also only in title. And it depends on those who are concerned about the civil society development in Belarus. For such a program implementation, there are a **number of possibilities which are incorporated in procedures for program management**:

- Flexible programs format which provides only a general framework, and decisions on priorities and specific implementation are associated with the competency of management system;
- Inclusion in programs of research studies as a component of programs management, and it is exactly **management**, rather than simple monitoring and tracking results.

What is the difference between the program and the project? Most often this difference is associated with the name, duration and scope of the activity. All of this refers to the differences, but is not the key point. Fundamental is *the difference between objects which “program” and “project” are aimed at*.

Projects deal with concrete objects (create, convert them, etc.), and *programs deal with processes* (launch, support, minimize, intensify, etc.). This difference is rather complicated and lays not in the nature of what projects and programs are aimed at, but rather in the nature of how we conceive them. We can implement an education reform project, and we can implement a program. In the first case we should exactly know how the education of “our dream” will look like and gradually move towards its creation. The discrepancy between the projected image and the one that is obtained (at any stage) requires the project alteration or abandonment and thus creating of a new one. If we consider an education reform as a program, then it is important not to lay the image of the object, but the processes that should be launched to realize the reform (expert advice and critics, development of a dialogue, personnel training, management system reform and etc.). The main efforts of the program are aimed at ensuring these processes and adjusting them in accordance with the current state of education. The objectives in this case are being formulated rather as values and principles to be followed by the program. In contrast to phasing in the project thinking, the program approach processes are thought of simultaneously. But for organizing activities at any given moment of time it is necessary to assess which of the processes requires the greatest attention and investment, and which one may advance yet “naturally”.

The second important point of difference is *relationship between actions and results*. In a project results of actions (or set of actions) and the result of the same project are equal (for example: “As a result of the activities, X was created which had been the project goal”). Side effects, consequences, changes in the environment (positive and negative) are not direct results of a project. *The result of the program activities is the process change*. Herewith the process change is affected not only by our actions, but also by many other forces: personal development, aiding and opposing factors, accumulating effects, etc. One can change in a program the intensity or even the direction of the process with specific action; however, we can not say that the very process has been the result of the action. For example, we held hearings on the Public Advisory Council at the Administration of



the President of the Republic of Belarus in due course, and the very process of “simulation of an effective communication platform of civil society creation” has been temporarily slowed down. We can not assign it as the result of the hearings, but rather we should assign it as the cumulative positive effect. Sometimes a small, but precisely estimated action can become a catalyst for the strong changes, although these changes can not be described as a direct result of this action.

The relationship between actions and changes in the state of public life sphere, or in civil society structures is not direct: “We have been doing the one thing; then we’ve gotten the following result”. This is not a paraphrase of a Russian singer Alla Pugacheva’s song about half-educated magician: “...He wanted to conjure up an iron — an elephant appeared suddenly there”. In the song a magician was dealing with isolated objects, which were conjuring up as a result of his art. But here the object and the subject of action are of the same nature: campaigns, analytics, consulting, etc., and estimated effects are of different nature: changing the modes of thought, new field structurization, etc.

For the present the majority of European programs are such in name only. It is so not least because providing programs’ management is more complex than projects’ management. For the project logic there are well proven forms of fixing the results (the results of actions), and the effects if taken into account, are considered only by-effects. For the program logic one requires more sophisticated ways of assessing results and inclusion of the results of this assessing in the operational management.

What’s with the program?¹ Underlying “expected results” we can consider as specific results of specific activities (e.g., increased communication with target groups should be expressed in achieving a number of indicators: the number of events for “connecting” or outreaching of target groups with actions of certain public associations, the number of covered, etc.). Or we can treat them as the processes in the civil society development which have been assigned as a priority processes at programming stage. In this case, in order to evaluate the effectiveness of program implementation, setting specific indicators of the results of actions is not enough; it is necessary to evaluate how the process has changed. Thus, for evaluation of the program implementation we must have two types of indicators and criteria: 1) for evaluating the effectiveness of specific actions, plans’ performing; 2) for evaluating the effectiveness of the program implementation, assessing the dynamics of the processes. The first criteria and assessments are rather managerial, the second ones are expert, sociological, political, and most importantly — are not related to actions, but to processes. But the “transformation” into a program is not only in assessing the effects. The processes’ monitoring should be integrated into the management.

What for do we need results of the program monitoring? Currently, within a number of European programs the concept and methodology of the *Results Based Management*² is being implemented which is designed exactly for transferring the management from the project mode in the program mode. Studies, incorporated into the project implementation and its management, make it possible to respond adequately to changes in the processes which are the object of the program, switching attention and resources. In the program mode we embrace and keep in the field of attention and activity quite a wide range of objects (a set of processes); some of them we can just

¹ This refers to the civil society development program, being implemented by the International Consortium “EuroBelarus” jointly with the Forum SYD Swedish NGO Centre for Development Cooperation and a number of public organizations of Belarus.

² **Results Based Management** is one of common modern approaches of strategic management, management result-oriented approach; general management strategy aimed at changing the management organization activity and having as the main reference point the efficiency improving task (specific results’ achieving). The basic management procedure in a number of international organizations (UN, OECD, etc.). For details, see: **Implementation of results-based management in the United Nations organization**, Geneva 2004: [ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/meeting/009/J4769e/J4769e06.pdf](http://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/meeting/009/J4769e/J4769e06.pdf)



track and apply to them point corrective efforts, while some, on the contrary, require our inclusion and actions. But, anyway, the object of our activity is the entire field of activity (all the processes). To ensure such a control we need constant monitoring. It is obvious that the essence of control and monitoring in a program is different from an ordinary control and monitoring of project activities. More specifically, the program monitoring and control includes the project monitoring, but has broader functions and purpose. It provides a basis for making decisions about the activities inside the program.

Thus, implementation of the program monitoring is aimed at implementation of two functions:

1. To present the development activity as a program, that is to identify a set of processes which will be subject to our management. To perform this action we need to define the current situation in Belarus and also the current processes in the civil society, first of all, the ones that determine its development.
2. To define two types of indicators for tracking processes: 1) indicators of performed activities and 2) indicators of processes.
3. To organize continuous indicators' tracking (monitoring), evaluation, selecting priorities for action and decision-making procedures about the future management of the program — defining action plan for the next period (from preliminary study to the final one).

Current situation in the civil society development

The time of the program implementation comes to the period of the launch of *new political and social processes* in Belarus. For the present we can not define any significant changes neither in political, nor in social and cultural sphere that would have radically change the conditions of civil society activity. But a range of events and accompanying processes create new challenges for Belarusian civil society, highlight key points and, figuratively speaking, change the coordinate system where the planning and self-determination takes place.

Changing relations with Europe and Russia can no longer be considered as occasional one-time events. And although it is impossible to speak of irreversibility or even of the stability of this trend, however, the actual situation can be called *the beginning of the geopolitical turn* (no matter how elusive, formal and pragmatic it is). The civil society has gotten into a situation when *civil society structures become in formal demand inside the processes of interaction of the Belarusian government and European governing bodies*. It depends upon the actions of Belarusian civil society, whether not only pragmatic values and orientations, but also values and benchmarks for democracy, human rights, etc. will be introduced in this interaction. Thus, the situation for civil society is being replaced from the situation of stagnation and accumulation of resources in a situation of challenge, active actions. The area where these challenges occur with room for growth for the civil society is the Eastern Partnership and the EU-Belarusian relations. A legitimate site has appeared in this framework — the National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum³ — for the presentation of the civil society

³ **National platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum** (also: the National Civil Society Platform, the National Platform) — public communication and coordination site for civil society organizations in Belarus. The beginning of the National Platform formation (since April 2009) was launched by a series of conferences, public hearings and roundtables on issues of European-Belarusian cooperation and participation of Belarusian civil society in the EU Eastern Partnership initiative and the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF). In July 2010 the participants of regular conference took the decision to establish the National Platform of the EaP CSF. In regular conferences and consultations of the National Platform participate from 80 to 100 different civil society organizations of Belarus. Since October 2011 the institution of permanent membership was introduced within the National Platform; it is obtained by civil society organizations of Belarus that have



position and launching the dialogue on national issues and problems. The value of the Eastern Partnership is in the primary legitimization of the site and ensuring its status.

How are the National Platform and the development of civil society related to each other?

The National Civil Society Platform is:

- Although delusive, but still the opportunity to launch the dialogue within the country. And all that not on the local individual problems, but a fundamental dialogue on the most important issues by taking into account civil society opinion;
- High qualification standard level of problems and challenges that should be addressed. The Belarusian civil society will need to greatly increase their competence and relations not only with the target groups, but with others subjects in order simply to meet the high level of questioning and challenges;
- Search tool of “agreed solutions”. The need to overcome the discordance requires simply establishing the agreement within civil society on fundamental issues and modicum of activities’ coordination.

But all these prospects risk remaining unfulfilled. Without sufficient efforts, the site for the dialogue will either be profaned or replaced with a pro-governmental one. It can be seen in constant ignoring by the Belarusian governing bodies of the civil society relevance inside the Eastern Partnership and constant attempts of creating structures that could be given for “National Platform” (public councils, starting from the Public Advisory Council under the Administration of the President and ending with “public vertical” of Yuri Zagoumenov that has even had a similar title of “the Platform of the Belarusian civil society”⁴).

Thus, the Eastern Partnership and strengthening of the National Platform (which implies launching the permanent work with an increase in the number of participants and the level of tasks) is the most relevant response to the challenge of the Belarusian civil society development. The other lines of development will be successful and effective, provided progress in this direction. Failure means sharp deterioration of the terms of civil society organizations’ activity, their marginalization and starting dealing with local, small tasks. To realize all the potential there is need to:

1. Pay particular attention to the launch and establishment of the regular National Platform’s work — so that it can not be ignored within the “dialogue with the state” and the “dialogue with the EU”;
2. Establish close networks and cooperation with civil society of the Eastern Partnership countries, in order to significantly strengthen the civil society voice within the Eastern Partnership;
3. Expand the “composition” of the Belarusian civil society through inclusion in joint work and communication of independent experts, journalists, businesses, churches or religious communities, informal communities that don’t have forms of non-governmental organizations, etc. This will

signed the Memorandum of Cooperation (see **Memorandum on Cooperation within the Belarusian National Platform of the EaP CSF**: http://www.eap-csf.eu/assets/files/Downloads/english/Memorandum_29.10.2011_EN.pdf).

⁴ “**Belarusian Civil Society Platform**” was an attempt of creating a vertical and centralized system of sites for cooperation of civil society and the state under profile ministries in August and November 2010. It was supposed to create 12 thematic platforms and the National-Wide Platform of NGOs under the auspices of the Public Advisory Council under the Administration of the President of Belarus. The initiative to establish such simulative dialogue sites was blocked by the organizations-participants of the National Platform (see: *Andrei Yahorau. Political situation before the Second EaP Civil Society Forum*: <http://old.eurobelarus.org/content/view/5916/78/>).



significantly increase the capacity and resources (intellectual, organizational, human, lobbying, etc.) in order to protect the civil society positions.

Strategic lines of the program activities

Given the current situation and while considering the time, organizational and purpose framework of the program, one can define *the following processes that are strategic for the implementation of the program objectives*, namely creation of a circle of Belarusian public associations working for the development of democratic changes through specific actions, advocacy-campaigns, human rights defense:

- **Establishment and development of the National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum** (formation and consolidation of special sites and forms of communication and activities, including links with similar platforms in other Eastern Partnership countries).
- **Developing dialogue with national and local authorities** (changing the intensity, composition of participants, the level and the content of problems).
- **International cooperation and interaction with European civil societies, donors and structures.**
- **Expansion of civil society “composition” and cooperation with various types of entities** (engaging in dialogue and joint actions of experts, intellectuals, businessmen, informal groups, churches, trade unions, etc.).
- **Development of the quality and effectiveness of promotion and protection of interests, realization of rights of target groups** (the quality dynamics, intensity and effectiveness of public campaigns, actions, etc.).
- **Organizational capacity and abilities to advocacy work, promotion and protection of interests** (qualitative changes in the organization of activities, innovation modes of operation, changes in the structure and organization, etc.).
- **Changes in the terms of civil society activity** (legislative, political, public opinion, etc.).

This is consistent with the results outlined in the program, which fix the priority activities’ directions. It is quite difficult attribute these processes to separate “expected results”, as far as the selected processes can be reflected in various results. Therefore, we will distinguish the “core” and “additional” processes — in order to provide more complete compliance.



<i>The expected results of the program actions</i>	<i>Strategic processes of the program</i>
<p>Belarusan civil society organizations (CSOs) are channels or sites for target groups' presentation, their rights' implementation and their participation in democratic management.</p>	<p>Development of the quality and effectiveness of promotion and protection of interests, implementation of the rights of target groups.</p> <p>Expansion of civil society "composition" and cooperation with different types of entities.</p> <p>Development of the dialogue with national and local authorities.</p>
<p>Belarusan CSOs actively and effectively cooperate to promote their interests.</p>	<p>Establishment and development of the National Platform of the EaP CSF.</p> <p>Development of the dialogue with national and local authorities.</p> <p>Development of the quality and effectiveness of promotion and protection of interests, realization of the rights of target groups.</p> <p>Expansion of civil society "composition" and cooperation with different types of actors.</p>
<p>Belarusan CSOs are effective in promotion of selected problems.</p>	<p>Development of the capacity and ability to advocacy work, promotion and protection of interests.</p> <p>International cooperation and interaction with civil European society, donors and European structures.</p> <p>Development of the quality and effectiveness of promotion and protection of interests, realization of the rights of target groups.</p>
<p>Terms for Belarusan CSOs' work in respect of freedom of association are under constant supervision, assessment and appropriate activities.</p>	<p>Changes in terms of civil society structures' activity.</p> <p>Development of the quality and effectiveness of promotion and protection of interests, realization of the rights of target groups.</p> <p>Development of the dialogue with national and local authorities.</p> <p>International cooperation and interaction with civil society of Europe, donors and European structures.</p>



Control scheme of the program based on the monitoring

Control of the program is based on the following **algorithm**:

1. Launching continuous tracking of the processes' state based on a range of specially designed indicators.
2. Determinating of the first profile of the processes' state.
3. Determinating of the action plan (of the activities) for the period (e.g., for six months) on the basis of the processes' state (section 2), concepts about the necessary changes in these processes, available resources and notions about the methods and tools for action.
4. Determinating of criteria and indicators of planned actions (e.g., the number of people covered by the training, the number of members of a public campaign, composition of the people involved, etc.) that become benchmarks for performance and implementation, the base for the calculation of resources.
5. Actions' implementation under management control and evaluation of activities based on selected criteria and indicators of activity (section 4).
6. Evaluation of actions' effects on the general processes' state through the appeal to the processes' monitoring (section 1).
7. Evaluating the effectiveness of the actions undertaken in view of the processes' change (section 6) and the used resources, methods and tools (section 3).
8. Determinating an action plan for the next period based on the current state of affairs and previous reflection and assessment of the processes' state. And then — from section 3.

To implement such an algorithm it is necessary to have two types of indicators:

- The first type: indicators that would reflect the process state. These should underlie the continuous monitoring.
- The second type: indicators for the activities that we plan and perform to influence the process. These indicators are defined at every stage of the activities' planning for the next period.

Here we can not rely only on indicators of the second type, because for their allocation we need to “pass through” the first three points. At the same time, the practice of determinating such indicators is well-mastered in management activities. Available indicators of this kind are described in the standard procedures of the *Logical Framework Approach* (LFA)⁵, oriented on the whole time of program activities', but these can not be used for our needs from the very beginning. However, these are the base and the ground for the work on the section 4 of the algorithm.

The main challenge is to organize the processes' tracking on the basis of the indicators of the first type.

The system of the processes' indicators

Since the processes are deployed simultaneously in several spaces, we need to allocate “fields” which we will be able to make measurements in:

⁵ **The Logical Framework Approach** (LFA) is a management tool mainly used in the design, monitoring and evaluation of international development projects. It is also widely known as Goal Oriented Project Planning (GOPP) or Objectives Oriented Project Planning (OOPP).



- The media (public and independent, printed and online resources) — the media monitoring.
- Awareness (concepts, opinions, assessments) of public associations' representatives — interviews, focus groups. If possible, making several public opinion profiles.
- Civil society activities and development (events, appointments, promotions) — events' analysis.
- The field of knowledge (analytics, expert advice, research studies) as a place for development and comprehension of ideas and concepts, changes' reflection — documents' analysis.
- Regulatory and policy documents (laws, treaties, conventions, resolutions, decisions, etc.) — documents' analysis.

In this table the indicators are formulated to be measured, evaluated and analyzed on the basis of each of the processes in each of the fields. A set of indicators may be adjusted at the beginning of the monitor.

Processes	Fields of measurement and analysis				
	Public media	Awareness of public associations' representatives	Civil society activities and development*	The field of knowledge (analytics, expert advice, research studies)	Regulatory and policy documents
Establishment and development of the National Platform of the EaP CSF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The number of materials dedicated to the EaP and the National Platform - Faces, persons, entities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The level of awareness - Assessments and prospects of inclusion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The intensity, regularity of events, associated with the National Platform - Continuity and relatedness - The number of subjects included - The nature of inclusion - The events (not appealing to the National Platform) at level and on the EaP subject matter and their participation in the EaP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The volume of materials on this topic - Estimates, forecasts, prospects - Diversity of ideas and proposals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The number (intensity) and contents of documents dedicated to the EaP and the National Platform



<p>Developing a dialogue with national and local authorities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The presence of subject matter of the dialogue in media (reflection of all forms of dialogue or rejection) - The number of “appeals” and “answers” through the public media - The subject matter of the dialogue - The level and nature of arguments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Evaluations of the dialogue course - Inclusion of subjects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The number of meetings with both sides’ participation - The number of refusals of the dialogue - The composition of participants of those meetings - The content and subject matter - Reasons for refusal - The intensity and subject matter of the work of community councils and committees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Estimates, forecasts, prospects for dialogue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The volume and the content of documents on “cooperation”
<p>International cooperation and interaction with European civil society, donors and European institutions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The number of materials dedicated to interaction (content and modality) - Faces, persons, entities - Statements of international organizations’ representatives (content and modality) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Evaluations of the interaction - Range and intensity of contacts - The level of contact - Evaluation of the interaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The number of consultations and meetings - The nature of dialogue and cooperation (partnership, consultations, etc.) - The number of participants (countries, structures) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Documents, policy-notes for donors, EU structures, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The number of agreements, contracts
<p>Expansion of “composition” of civil society and cooperation with different types of subjects</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The composition of the subjects, referred to as “civil society” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The idea of “insiders” (people able to act as civil society) - Evaluation of the interaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inclusion of different subjects - Nature of the relationship (inclusion, cooperation, etc.) - The party initiating the cooperation - Subject matter and purpose - Independent civic engagement of churches, informal groups, businesses, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reflection in the analytics and examination of the effect of the civil society expansion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Availability and content of “joint documents”



<p>Development of quality and efficiency of promotion and protection of interests, implementation of the rights of target groups</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Amount of campaigns', public hearings' reflection, etc. - General assessments of efficiency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assessments of efficiency - Inclusion and cooperation of various subjects - Satisfaction of target groups' needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The number of campaigns and actions - The goals' achievement - The target groups (coverage and nature) - The duration - The number and composition of campaigns' participants - Resources' supply - Type of management, subjects of management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Availability of analytical maintenance or expert advice - Assessments of the effectiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Availability and content of "joint documents"
<p>Organization capacity and ability to advocacy work, promotion and protection interests</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Amount of campaigns' reflection on advocacy and promotion - General assessments of efficiency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Evaluation of potential and capacities - Demand for training - The nature and level of projects (goals, subject matters, types of mastered donor programs) - Dynamics of organizational changes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Subject matters and objectives of the events and campaigns organized - The effectiveness of management - Subjects of management, cooperation and interaction - Methods of tasks' achieving (innovation, effectiveness) - The effectiveness of using the resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reflection and analysis of methods of work - Own Belarusian elaborations on the basis of methods 	



<p>Change of terms of civil society structures' activity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The nature of civil society representation in state media - Amounts of reflecting the subject matter of "terms" in the media - Assessments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Terms' assessment - Cases of prohibitions, discriminations, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The number of cases of repression and discriminations: bans on activities, failures to register, harassment - The duration of registration - The ratio of registered and unregistered entities, causes for refusals to register, etc. - The number of campaigns, actions, dedicated to terms of civil society activity - The effectiveness of actions - Type of action and methods - Composition of participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regularity of analytical documents - The level and type of analysis - Dynamics of forecasts and estimations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Change of legislation - Documents submitted by Belarus on the European or other international level (documents, reports and speeches)
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* This field will be interpreted as the most meaningful. In addition, in each of the processes it is necessary to evaluate the share of the program in total events and actions.



How will the program monitoring be organized?

There is no need to fully deploy the entire methodology of data collection and analysis of information. We'll note only some general observations on the organization of the monitoring:

- This monitoring is organized with to provide management, rather than as a “scientific research”. Its specific features are subject to this function.
- Monitoring should be carried out constantly, and not through separate studies. This mode allows always having the latest information on the status of processes. Herewith, some special studies can be integrated in the course of the monitoring, such as public opinion polls.
- Monitoring results (despite the constant mode) must be provided in the form of regular reports at the level of program management and to the program experts. Furthermore, this monitoring should be made public as a means of reflexive influence the situation, engaging in general notions and understanding of the program realization transparency and feedback.

Selection of events, documents, media (sources) can not claim to “scientific objectivity” and will be focused primarily on the most accurate tracking of the processes within the overall goals, however being limited by the availability of information.



State and development of civil society in Belarus

Analytical report based on monitoring materials

April–June, 2011

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Introduction

This paper presents the results of monitoring the processes deploying in civil society of Belarus. The monitoring is aimed at tracking the dynamics of the circle of civil society organizations working in the field of democratic developments' changes through specific actions, advocacy-campaigns, human rights protection, and system of organizational development. The monitoring framework defines the following set of processes that have been monitored and analyzed:

- Formation and development of the National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum.
- Development of the processes of civil society dialogue with national and local authorities.
- International cooperation and interaction with civil society in Europe, in the Eastern Partnership countries, international donors and European structures.
- Expansion of “composition” of civil society and cooperation with various types of entities.
- Development of the quality and effectiveness of promotion and advocacy work, realization of the rights of target groups.
- Changes in terms of civil society activity.

The presented analysis is based on monitoring of the media (12 popular media), analytical materials and normative documents, monitoring the terms of NGOs' activity and law enforcement practices, as well as special analysis of civic initiatives⁶. The results obtained allow assessing the situation in the processes in the Belarusian civil society development and setting priorities for further development.

General political conditions and circumstances

All the processes in civil society, starting from the beginning of 2011, have been evolving under the influence of the number of political events, which set conditions and possibilities for the civil society activities.

The presidential election of December, the 19th 2010 have become the defining moment, setting the general background in the life of civil society. During the election campaign major public attention was focused on the political processes and figures. The election set thematic priorities in the activity of a part of civil society

⁶ The monitoring materials were prepared by: analysis of civil initiatives — George Plaschinsky, media monitoring — Tatiana Hurynovich, terms of NGOs activities' and law enforcement practices' monitoring — Olga Smolianko, analytical documents' monitoring — Viola Yermakova, international cooperation monitoring — Andrei Yahorau.



associations: organization of election monitoring, civil campaigns to support democratic candidates. Meanwhile the other activities of civil society structures remained in the shadow of pre-election events and received no coverage and resonance neither in the public opinion nor in conceptualizations of other subjects of democratic forces.

The events of December, the 19th and the wave of repressions which followed have totally affected civil society: structures and associations and single citizens, as well as informal and temporary communities and associations. Firstly, detentions, searches and arrests have become the major circumstance of life and activity of many public associations and civil society activists for few months. Secondly, the wide wave of repressions and appearance of political prisoners has become a challenge for joint civil actions for public associations which they've been actively organizing. This also required urgent actions, firstly, the human rights ones, which hadn't been planned in advance. Thirdly, the overall change of the political and civil society conditions in the country has become a basis for an analysis and revision of mid- and long-term plans and programs, formulation and discussion of new strategic prospects.

Against the background of these circumstances have been evolving the processes analyzed below.

Development of the National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum

The National Platform of the Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership (even though it was created under the Eastern Partnership initiative) has been conceived and established as a site for forming and strengthening the circle of civil society subjects, leaders and associations, jointly working to promote democratic transformations. The Eastern Partnership has become an occasion and possibility for creating such a platform, which legitimately claim being a site for a dialogue with the Belarusian authorities on the most important issues in the development of the country⁷.

Activities under the National Civil Society Platform in a period from April to June 2011:

1. **Intensive consultations and formation of the further strategy of civil society activities after the events of December, the 19th.** Since February, 2011 on the basis of the National Platform the active discussion of strategic prospects and activities' organization⁸ has started. On 11-12 of April 2011 the conference "The role and place of civil society in the strategy of the future"⁹ took place in Minsk, where a number of resolutions were adopted. The conference failed to adopt a joint strategy for the National Platform, but it became the basis for forming the coalition for implementation of the strategy "We are one people". In the following months, the coalition for the strategy implementation failed to initiate a negotiation and

⁷ The idea to form national platforms under the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum as wide platforms for dialogue was offered for the first time in analytical materials of the Humanitarian Techniques Agency, "[Participation of the civil society in the Eastern Partnership initiative: problems and mechanisms](#)" (in Russian), formulated afterwards in paper, "[The International Consortium "EuroBelarus". Proposals on the organization of the Civil Society Forum within the framework of the Eastern Partnership](#)" in April 2009. In July 2010, the conference "[Road map of Eastern Partnership for Belarus](#)" (in Russian) was carried out under the National Platform.

⁸ "[Strategy 2012](#)" has been presented by the International Consortium "EuroBelarus" as a proposal for the joint strategy. The strategy has supposed consolidation of all the country's democratic forces as to compel the authorities to start the socio-political dialogue in the country.

⁹ See: **Conference "The role and place of civil society in the strategy of the future" has been held in Minsk:** <http://www.eap-csf.eu/en/news-events/news/press-release/>



consolidation process with the democratic opposition forces and a broader range of civil society organizations in the country. However, this civil society initiative has influenced the unification processes within the opposition forces which resulted in formation of a new joint platform on June the 29th, 2011 (the so-called “six”): United Civil Party of Belarus, Movement “For Freedom”, Belarusian Left Party “A Just World”, unregistered party “The Belarusian Christian Democracy”, the BPF Party, campaign “Tell the Truth!”.

2. **Preparation for the third Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum in Poznan.** On May, the 25th 2011 the next call for applications has been launched to participate in the 3rd Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF). This year there were received 78 applications for participation in the EaP CSF (in 2010 there were 94). A greater number of applications among all the partner countries were received only from Azerbaijan. According to the selection procedure, the final list of organizations that will go to represent Belarus at the Forum in Poznan is being formed on the base of three types of recommendations: 1) from the National Platform of the EaP CSF; 2) from the coordinators of the thematic groups of the EaP CSF and 3) the recommendations of the European Commission. On July, the 5th 2011 the Conference of the Belarusian National Platform of the EaP CSF¹⁰ was held in Belarus, where a list of 31 organizations, recommended for participation at the Forum in Poznan, was formed. The feature of this year became a marked activity of pro-state NGOs while applying for participation in the EaP CSF. In particular, the applications were received from such organizations as the Belarusian Union of Writers, chaired by Nikolai Cherginets, the official Belarusian Union of Journalists, the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus, as well as a number of sectoral trade unions of the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus.

The basic tendencies and results of the National Civil Society Platform development as a site for consolidation of civil society subjects:

1. **The National Platform has strengthened as a site for wide communication and coordinated decision-making activities on specific matters, but hasn't reached the level of strategic consolidation and hasn't become the real actor of public transformations.** At present, the National Platform is a stable place for joint consultations where a wide range of civil society subjects can rather quickly and constructively work out general, coordinated positioning on certain issues and get mobilized for their promotion. However, the circle of these issues is limited. First of all, it is a point-target response on urgent events or actions. Herewith, the interaction under the National Platform at this stage does not let making coordinated strategic decisions and creating long-term development programs which would demand coordination of activity not in private, separate situations, but during a long period of time, and require reorganization of the activities of civil society subjects and structures according to the general prospect of development. While in a more favorable period (before December, the 19th) consolidated actions and decisions on the basis of the National Platform had a proactive character, then after these conditions have changed, the possibility of consolidation became limited, being presented only by the response attitude (answers and statements being response to the authorities' actions and to external circumstances).

The obstacles on the way of moving to the strategic coordination and actions' level are:

- Absence of a shaped structure of relations (formal and informal) within the framework of the National Platform. Among the Platform participants there has been formed a certain pool of

¹⁰ See: **Conference of the National Platform of the Civil Society Forum of the EaP has taken place in Minsk on 5th of July:** <http://www.eap-csf.eu/en/countries/belarus/resources/conference-of-the-national-platform-of-the-civil-society-forum-of-the-eap-has-taken-place-in-minsk-on-5th-of-july/>



initiative and active leaders; nevertheless, their authority level is low and trust to them is not high enough so that they could speak responsibly on behalf of the Platform and quickly react to challenges and possibilities, being supported by the Platform. In the conditions of a wide and non-structured discussion it is impossible to make rapid decisions and to act as a united subject in relations between other subjects of the public and political field.

- The principle of a wide inclusion in consultations under the National Platform turns into distinctions in the tasks' levels, space for self-determination and action, claims and ambitions of the entering subjects. This variety, which is per se an advantage of the Platform, taken a formal equality of participants and absence of other ways of decision-making, besides consensus, becomes an inhibitive factor as for the possibilities of a strategic consolidation.

2. **Increasing of the number of the National Platform participants, as well as growth of its popularity and influence on processes in the country are slow.** The National Platform is an open site with extremely minimized bureaucratic equipment: all the delegates of the two previous Forums as well as all of those who demonstrate their activity and desire to participate in joint consultations are considered as participants. Taken such an informal principle of inclusion, the number of participants could be assessed as the number of subscribers of the Platform newsletters (more than 100 addresses), the number of participants in various events under the National Platform (around 100 organizations-participants of the last conference), the number of subjects joined to general statements and appeals (up to 50 signatures). While the circle of the subjects who have participated in the National Platform actions, at least in one form referred above, is increasing more intensively, then the pool of subjects (associations and leaders) who constantly demonstrate their activity and initiative, remains effectively the same since the moment of the first National Platform actions in 2009 (no more than 10 associations and no more than 15 leaders).

The National Platform, despite its living activity, has not become widely known not only in Belarusian society, but also among the very public structures¹¹, as well as among other subjects who are traditionally considered to be democratic forces (political opposition, cultural and religious communities, etc.). The number of materials or even mentions about the National Platform and its leaders in the most popular mass media which do not belong to the participants of the Platform ranges from the total absence of mentions in the state-run editions to 1-2 materials on an average during the most active periods of its activity in separate independent editions: TUT.BY, BelaPAN¹².

The National Platform is most seriously perceived by the official European structures, in the first place by those that are directly linked to the Eastern Partnership initiative. For them, this association and its ability to formulate the coordinated position of Belarusian civil society (partly, at least) as on generally valid matters acts as a potential subject of relations.

The obstacles on the way towards strengthening the influence and increasing of the number of active participants of the National Platform are:

¹¹ According to the research carried out by the Assembly Of Pro-Democratic NGOs of Belarus, all the structures of the third sector and the very civil society are represented in a public consciousness in an extremely poor way. In this respect, the degree of the National Platform obscurity is indistinguishable in comparison with other civil society subjects.

¹² The following editions participated in the monitoring: "Sovietskaya Byelorussia", "Zvyazda", TUT.BY, BelaPAN, BelTA, Charter'97, Deutsche Welle, Naviny.by, Interfax, Telegraf.by, AFN, Regionby.org.



- Narrow understanding of the content and functions of the Platform by its participants;
 - Difficulties of self-determination of civil society subjects (organizations, communities, informal circles) as real subjects of social and political life;
 - Absence of a purposeful policy of informing and promoting both the National Platform and its leaders.
3. **Active inclusion of a number of think-tanks in the National Platform activity while defining the position and coordination of actions has essentially increased their work efficiency and potential. It was due to constant analytical support and in-depth studies of the ideas offered as the general bases.** In a most impressive way it was manifested while drawing up the joint position, proposals and the strategy of actions of the Belarusian delegation at the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum in Berlin (it carried on the earlier tradition). In the conceptual elaboration of ideas and actions for the Platform there took part: Center for European Transformation, Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies (BISS), Analytical Portal “Wider Europe”, and as well as analytical work of the Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs of Belarus and the Movement for Freedom. This fact allowed preparing qualitative proposals having stood up to criticism and having passed a test of alternatives proposals, forming a basis for launching a wide discussion at a high professional level. The professional level of discussion allowed other participants to be engaged in the discussion and to understand more deeply the experts’ proposals so that to assert the common position in the sequel and to act according to it. Moreover, the experts’ and analysts’ inclusion allowed preparing the documents according to the necessary format and quality.

At the same time, low level of participation of various experts and expert centers in joint elaboration of the National Platform strategic proposals resulted in the absence of a coordinated and accepted conceptualization on further perspective steps.

The further development of the National Platform of the EaP CSF as a place for the civil society structures’ consolidation requires:

- a) Further proactive inclusion and initiative in the processes of the Eastern Partnership, its correcting and conceptualizing of the civil society roles;
- b) Further practice of coordinated positioning of the National Platform participants according the events and processes in Belarus;
- c) Development of the own long-term programs of activity on the National Platform basis (participants or their coalitions) and increasing the number of the general strategy supporters;
- d) Establishment of linkages and relations at institutional level with other subjects of democratic forces: associations and political forces’ coalitions, trade unions, etc;
- e) Wide public circles’ informing on the essence, activity and prospects of the National Platform;
- f) Formation of working bodies, elaboration and fixing the regulations of the National Platform activity, its representation on different levels.

Expansion of interaction between various civil society subjects (expansion of the civil society “composition”)

Difficult terms of activity of any non-state joint activity forms for Belarusian citizens make resolving the challenge of such subjects’ interaction more important and relevant, not only in order to strengthen the efficiency of their



own activity, but also to form and fix such a phenomenon and factor of influence on public life as civil society. The force and influence of civil society depend on the quantity of subjects and joining of the most various subjects' efforts: independent experts, journalists, businesses, churches or religious communities, informal communities, non-governmental organizations, etc., as well as on their awareness of being related to the civil society of the country. Expansion of interaction of different subjects under the joint name "civil society" and promotion of this name in the public consciousness is an actual, but quite a difficult challenge. In this context we need to underline several trends:

1. **The category of "civil society" remains rather vague and insignificant both at level of public consciousness of the country and as a possibility of self-identification for the actors.** As the researches¹³ show, the awareness of public associations' activity is low (46,4% know what public associations are), while the very concept about civil society subjects is blurred. This is due to the absence of knowledge about independent public associations, on the one hand, and on the other hand, to the presence of state support, including informational one, of the state-run public associations (Belarusan Republican Youth Union, "Belaya Rus" ("White Russia"), etc.). Participation in public activities or events carried out by public associations is even less representative (no more than 25% of the population confirms their participation in such activities).

The word combination "civil society" is perceived even in a more abstractive way and strongly depends on the context. This is due to the form the materials are presented in the mass media, using the category of "civil society" in articles as well as the fact how the subjects identify and call themselves as civil society representatives. In the period of political tensions and actions of solidarity the word combination "civil society" was used basically to designate the ideological and civil position of political and not political, individual and collective subjects. It was a uniting category. Still, as for more traditional kinds of activity, out of solidarity actions, civil society is the name (and the self-name) of the non-political part of democratic forces; in the first place, public associations, networks and associations, separating from these trade unions, informal communities, etc. This does not help perceiving the unity and necessity of coordinated consolidated actions.

2. **Interaction between various civil society subjects is mainly built according to a "sample" principle while public associations act as initiators of actions on behalf of the "civil society".** Active participants of the majority of civil initiatives, actions, campaigns and activity programs are either separate public associations or coalitions of basically the same type of associations (public organizations) and of the same orientation. Cooperation of public associations with mass media, and, sometimes and even more in recent time, with expert or analytical structures has been the most often. However, it is often noted that public associations separate themselves from political or politicized structures; trade unions and religious associations rarely join such coalitions. Coalitions that include collective and individual subjects as equals are formed even less often.

The appeal concerning the draft law "On non-commercial organizations" (May, 2011) became the most wide-scale fact of interaction of a wide range of public associations of different types and directions of activity. The appeal was signed by 112 non-commercial organizations of various organizational-legal forms and directions of activity uniting more than 270,000 members. However, such a wide participation is seen at the level of one-time interaction, and the prospects of any further joint activity are not high

¹³ See: **Public associations and their role in modern Belarusian society. Analytical note based on the results of the national public opinion poll** / The Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs of Belarus / Centre for Eastern Europe studies, Minsk, 2010 (in Russian).



yet. An example of longer interaction of collective and individual subjects of different types on behalf of the “civil society” is the coordination of actions within the framework of the National Platform of the EaP CSF. Here as well, however, are no steady trends and stable forms for such interaction.

Despite the importance of the matter of increasing the civil society influence in the country and coordination of activities of its various subjects in defending the general interests, interaction remains rather weak. Mutual public representativeness and awareness on activity of various segments of civil society remains weak; awareness of the unite problems and necessity of consolidation in front of the general challenges is extremely low; sporadic contacts and separate attempts of cooperation between various subjects are overflowed by reciprocal stereotypes. The problem of overcoming the situation of dissociation in civil society remains essential, but almost unsolvable in the short-term period.

Dialogue between the civil society and the state

Despite “the dialogue between the state and civil society” being declared by both sides as the essentially important mechanism for interaction, there has been no real advancement towards it during referred period. Moreover, the perspective and potential steps and positions, which had been worked out by autumn 2010, have been almost erased by the events on December the 19th and its consequences.

1. **Before December, the 19th each of the sides offered and promoted its understanding of the organization of such a dialogue and its mechanisms.** The state created institutions and “consultation structures”, which embodied its format of the dialogue, regulated according to the structure of participants and the themes with a vague and unessential mechanisms of execution of arrangements. This format was embodied, in the first place, in public consultative councils, which were created or became more active in various state structures (ministries, executive committees, committees). A complete, vertically organized system that would include a complex of thematic platforms of civil society in various ministries and departments and corresponding public consultative councils as tools of lobbying and advancement of public interests, should have become a way of fixing such a format. Legitimization of this system had to take place during the negotiations between the Belarusian authorities and European Commission within the framework of Belarusian-European cooperation development; there was organized a conference on the creation of another “National platform of civil society” held by Yury Zagoumenov¹⁴.

This proposal was positively accepted by a number of public associations and leaders who saw it as a possibility to promote their ideas and proposals and to influence the solution of certain issues. At the same time, another part of civil society, mainly concentrated around the National Platform of the EaP CSF, considered these mechanisms and actions on their introduction as an imitation and simulation of the dialogue with no necessary conditions and possibilities for equal and free participation. As a result of coordinated actions, the hasty attempt of fixing and legitimizing the proposed mechanisms of the dialogue was shut down.

Unlike the uniform position of the state, civil society didn’t demonstrate the same coordination in its beliefs and actions. The orientation on the dialogue with the state structures was shown, first of all, within the framework of local topics or specific tasks or problems. Despite special cases of success (in the field of protection of the heritage, ecological solutions, introduction of some articles in legal acts), as a

¹⁴ See link 4.



whole, this practice can be called little effective. It was supported by individual qualities of the state officials eager to listen to certain arguments. Still, the facts of successful interaction did not provide any further systemness of communication.

2. **The majority of attempts of the “dialogue” with the state concerning separate vital issues used to come to an end at the first step — claims and proposals from public associations which received no reply.** However, rather steady interaction has been built concerning some matters. Unilateral claims and proposals is the most widespread form of the “dialogue” of civil society and the state. The habitualness and prevalence of this form leads to the fact that “applicants” do not hope to receive an answer and have no plans concerning the further steps. It affects the content and the form of claims and requirements which quite often are not initially planned to be carried out and to have the dialogue possibilities. At the same time, possibilities of interaction and conversation (with the further promotion of interests) exist in separate spheres when the state does not see any threat in this cooperation and can control the course of conversation. Such examples as interaction with the Belarusian Voluntary Society for Protection of the Monuments of History and Culture, Belarusian Language Association and Minsk Capital Union of Businessmen and Employers act as a demonstration of the presence and possibility of the dialogue. However, after the events of December, the 19th even these forms of interaction are if not suspended, but at least are not widely advertised.

The problem of the dialogue between civil society and the state remains sharp. For the moment, it is necessary to state the unreadiness of the both subjects for an equal dialogue. Civil society has not resolved the issue of uniform legitimate subjectness and the uniform substantial position in the situation of a possible dialogue. The current abandonment of the policy of the relative liberalization after the events of December, the 19th has suspended the minimum forms of interaction of civil society with the state that, though does not demonstrate an absolute impossibility of a renewal of the dialogue in the near future (presumably, in autumn 2011). Civil society has received an extra time to strengthen and internally reorganize its relations; however, the attempts of such reorganization in February-May of 2011 were not successful basically for the reasons of subjective resistance and mutual contradictions between different agents of civil society (inside the National Platform of the EaP CSF, between the National Platform and subjects of the democratic opposition, single leaders, etc.).

International cooperation and interaction

The international cooperation and interaction of civil society of Belarus is ranged between several basic levels:

- Partner interaction with civil society organizations of EU and the countries of the Eastern Partnership;
- Interaction with international donor structures;
- Interaction within the framework of the EaP CSF;
- Contacts with official structures of Europe and the European Union.

The level of partner contacts not often gets into open sources and it is difficult to trace it. Nevertheless, there is no sufficient base to believe that the intensity of contacts at this level has essentially increased during the examined period. As for the other levels, it is possible to speak about some new tendencies:

1. **Increasing the role of Belarusian civil society organizations in projects and programs designed for Belarus. During the referred period, there has been growth of the value and relative weight of civil**



society organizations in the definition of priorities and purposes of the donor policy as to Belarus. Since the beginning of 2011, civil society organizations actively participated in conferences and meetings regarding changes in the volume and structure of the donor support of the EU for Belarus with the participation of high representatives of European institutions, EU member states, international donors (on February, the 2th in Warsaw, on March, the 21th and on July, the 7th in Brussels). Coalitions of influential non-governmental organizations have become the subjects of planning and implementing major programs of support and development of civil society. Coalitions of influential public organizations have become the subjects of planning and implementation of large programs of support and development of civil society. As examples, it is possible to consider the program of support to the repressed people initiated by the European Commission in the framework of the Instrument for stability, Belarusian research and academic consortium with the support program of the doctoral research studies, the project of Organizational consulting services market and some others. The basic change is that Belarusian organizations are included in such projects and programs at all stages: from designing and projecting to direct actualization and monitoring. The reason for such changes has been the success of civil society of Belarus at the European level, including the visibility and effectiveness of actions of civil society organizations of the country within the framework of the Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership, the big visibility of coalition actions of civil society during the recent years (the National Platform of the EaP CSF, counteraction to the “verticalization” of the public-state interaction in August-November, 2010).

- 2. In a situation of sharp deterioration of relations between Belarus and the EU after the events of December, the 19th the Civil Society Forum has become the last legitimate platform for cooperation between Belarus and the EU.** This fact poses to civil society in Belarus a number of serious challenges; in particular, the potential to influence the content of the EU policy towards Belarus through the Forum meets the weak commitment of civil society organizations in promotion their own proposals. The initiative and innovative character of actions of the Belarusian delegation at the 1st and the 2nd EaP Civil Society Forums has allowed the Belarusians to keep the position of chairperson of the Forums¹⁵. The proposed ideas of the “roadmaps”, monitoring of processes, bigger substantial weight of offers of the Forums came to be defining in discussions and decisions of the EaP Civil Society Forums. However, the chronic problems of interaction of Belarus civil society within the framework of the structures of the CSFs were not solved; this fact reduces the probability of recurrence of success by the Belarusian delegation at the next CSF in Poznan. Firstly, even the former participants of the Forum and the organizations of the National Platform have no understanding of the accurate strategy of their own actions concerning the Eastern Partnership and CSF. Secondly, horizontal interaction between civil societies of the countries of the EaP remains extremely weak. A positive moment was the meeting of participants of the National Platform with the Steering Committee of the CSF, having, at the same time, more symbolical rather than working value.
- 3. Rhetorical accent on the growth of support for civil society of Belarus in statements of the official structures of the EU.** After the crackdown of the protests of December, the 19th of 2010, the total number of official statements of structures and officials of the EU concerning Belarus has sharply increased. Besides statements on infringements of human rights, reprisals against civil society and political opposition, requirements for immediate release of political prisoners, there have constantly seen theses about the necessity of increasing support to civil society. In the EU, there have taken place

¹⁵ See: **The chair of the “EuroBelarus” Ulad Vialichka was appointed an interim spokesperson of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum** (in Russian): http://belapan.com/archive/2010/11/19/eu_428027/



several representative conferences on topics of increasing forms of support to civil society of Belarus (in particular, the Conference dedicated to Belarus in Warsaw on February, the 2nd 2011 and a coordination meeting of donors and implementators of international programs on March, the 21st in Brussels) at which it was declared about a substantial growth of the volume of financial support for the development of civil society. Nevertheless, concrete forms of help and implementation mechanisms of these promises remain vague enough.

It is necessary to note that the general concepts used in statements about civil society of Belarus, are quite wattered as well. As a rule, they speak about some abstract civil society; concrete types and names of organizations or names of people appear only while talking about those who have suffered from reprisals. This is the result of not only the weak knowledge of civil society of Belarus, but also of the absence of accurately expressed subjectness of civil society in the country. The same fact explains the practically total absence of motivated and reasonable diplomatic efforts on the part of civil society of the country in promoting their interests at the European level. Despite the constant presence of representatives of public organizations at meetings in the European Parliament, PACE, international conferences, etc., it is not possible to speak about the coordinated strategy of civil society of Belarus in this direction.

The period of successful actions of Belarus' civil society at the international level in 2009-2010 has led to the strengthening of its international influence. Further development of this influence will be possible if there is a tendency on consolidation inside civil society, expansion of consultations and coordination of the foreign policy actions of civil society of Belarus both inside the country and in interaction with civil societies of the countries of the Eastern Partnership and international donors.

Promotion and protection of interests, actualization of the rights of target groups

During the referred period, from the beginning of the 2011, there have been working more than 20 civil initiatives of different types: from one-time, local actions on concrete issues and tasks to complex, permanently working campaigns aimed at promoting certain ideas and mass civic protests in the frames of "Revolution Through Social Networks"¹⁶. There are among them: complexes of actions on protection of the architectural-historical heritage, on promotion of the Belarusian language and culture, the initiative on the organization of an independent investigation of the death of journalist Aleh Byabenin, the initiatives in the sphere of monitoring the presidential election "Fair Elections" and "Human rights defenders for free elections", the campaign "The Human Rights Defenders against Capital Punishment" (acting since 2009), a complex of actions and measures to prevent the building of the nuclear power plant; a number of ecological initiatives; the initiatives of solidarity with people repressed during the 2010 presidential campaign and the repressions that followed as to the participants of the protests; the campaign on protection of the office of the BPF Party ("Belarusian Popular Front"); the collective appeal concerning the draft law "On Noncommercial Organizations", formation of the "Visa-Free" coalition and others.

Analyzing the character of the organization, its methods of activity and the efficiency of these initiatives, it is possible to allocate a number of features:

1. **After the 2010 presidential election the character, the type and the topics of civil initiatives have changed.** In the previous period, the bulk of civil campaigns in Belarus was concentrated on the cultural-

¹⁶ It is a civil initiative, which is reflected in the media.



historical, ecological and human rights subjects. After the events of December, the 19th the overwhelming majority of campaigns, actions and initiatives have been substantially linked to the consequences of the presidential election, expression of solidarity and rendering assistance to those who suffered from the crackdown of the oppositional demonstration of December, the 19th and the actions that followed in June, “Stop-Petrol” and “Revolution Through Social Networks” and also to those who have been arrested and accused of participation and/or organization of mass riots. These campaigns have their own features:

- Mobilization of wider layers of Belarusian citizens who did not belong to public and political structures;
- Individual participation and initiation of actions, instead of belonging to an organization or a party;
- Spontaneous and temporary character aimed at solving a concrete problem;
- Active use of a network principle of distribution of the information and organization of initiatives according to the network principle, using of social networks in the Internet for coordination of initiatives;
- Primary use of resources inside the country (of civil society), active attraction of material means of citizens.

A flare of such a kind of civil initiatives testifies in the right of the potential of citizens of Belarus who can be mobilized to solve tasks or to overcome problems that are localized, clear and proportional to individual activity of people. At the same time, the analysis shows that the number of such initiatives gradually decreases, giving way to more habitual forms of work on promotion of interests.

2. **Even the most mass and active civil initiatives have insufficient information support.** More often, the information on campaigns does not go beyond the scope of the mass media directly connected with the organizers (their own and friendly sites, newspapers). The appearance of the messages concerning civil initiatives in a wide range of the mass media is, at best, singular. The exception is a complex of actions of the antinuclear agenda and counteraction to the building of the nuclear power station as well as protest actions “Stop-Petrol” and “Revolution Through Social Networks” traditionally widely covered by media. Still, its development, course and results are presented even less often in the mass media. More frequently, it is possible to find only information on applies on organization or implementation of an action. In the state-run mass media, the information on such initiatives and campaigns of civil society is not presented at all even in the negative light.

Such an informational policy narrows the possibilities of a wider range of subjects to join the initiatives, it also it does not allow the activity of civil society to become a visible phenomenon in the country’s life, and the positive cases do not become known to the public.

3. **Organization and active participation in initiatives on promotion of interests are often limited by a narrow circle of public associations and structures (sometimes it is even one structure); it isn’t considered to have a wide connection neither with other associations nor with wide public.** The majority of initiatives “belong” to one or several structures; coalitions of associations of a certain type and a thematic direction are less; there are practically no coalitions and campaigns uniting subjects of different types: NGOs, party structures, trade unions, etc. The appeal concerning the draft law “On Noncommercial Organizations” became the most wide-scale fact of interaction of a wide range of public



associations of different types and directions of activity, which can be explained, on the one hand, by the topic that is important for many people, and, on the other hand, by the purposeful work of the initiators to draw a wide range of the interested subjects. As the initiatives which have arisen after December, the 19th have shown, solidarity and interaction are revealed more often and more effectively at the individual level, rather than at the level of structures and organizations. The obstacles on the way to display solidarity and to widen the structure of participants of civil initiatives are:

- *Politicization of the public life.* Many organizations of an entertainment, cultural and social orientation are beware of cooperation and interaction with public associations that claim to have a democratic orientation and especially, with openly political structures. A different political orientation can also become a ground to refuse interaction.
 - *Thematic limitation of activity of the majority of public associations.* It does not allow to display solidarity with the activity on other topics and to reach the level of shared problems. It is supplemented by difficult conditions of survival of public associations which do limit resources: temporal, human, and financial ones.
 - *Difficulties of compatibility of spontaneous initiatives and civil participation at the individual level with activity of organizations and associations.*
4. **The most widespread methods and forms of advancement of interests are drives for signatures for requirements, petitions and claims, distribution of informational materials, pickets, protection of interests through legal procedures.** Among the creative, but rarely used methods have been attraction of well-known people (the campaign against the capital punishment), organization of public hearings (ecological initiatives), organization of cultural actions (the campaign for advancement of the Belarusian language), using of expertise. A small variety of methods is partly caused by the marginal conditions of civil society existence which limits forms of direct lobbying, interaction and dialogue with the state structures. On the other hand, this is a reflection of the reactive character of civil activity, i.e. initiatives arise as reply to someone's actions or events, such as to protect or to stop decisions, already accepted. Proactive proposals find support and public resonance less often.

A considerable part of actions are appeals, demands and claims which do not receive any public reaction from the authorities or, in cases of a bureaucratic necessity, receive only a formal reaction which all the interaction comes to an end with.

Analytical work is used mainly “inside” campaigns and initiatives such as expertise, monitoring of the condition of a problem or of the legislation. At the same time, analytical support of the course of campaigns is practically absent as well as regular analytics of the general condition of the sphere of civil society and its separate components.

5. **Efficiency of campaigns and initiatives differs, depending on concreteness and scale of purposes as well as in the form of interaction with the state structures.** Campaigns of solidarity with the victims aimed at concrete purposes, limited in time and focused on actions inside civil society, were the most effective and reached their objects. Campaigns and initiatives with wide procedural purposes (informing, supervision, popularization) planned to be implemented during long period of time and aimed at having influence on public consciousness and behavior, are also often estimated as effective ones. However, they have no more or less precise criteria of evaluation, and their efficiency is commensurate with the efforts, general possibilities and conditions, and is defined as performance or not performance of the planned actions. The absence of high-grade and regular researches of public consciousness concerning a



wide range of questions does not allow us to trace precisely changes and to connect them with activity within the framework of campaigns and initiatives. Nevertheless, as for the topics of ecology and the building of the nuclear power station, the capital punishment, development of the Belarusian language, it is possible to speak about the effective promotion of interests.

Campaigns and initiatives directed on interaction with the state structures — requirements of cancellation or acceptance of these or those decisions, execution of legislative norms, protection of the rights, etc., — practically never achieve full performance of tasks in view. Success of such initiatives is connected with coincidence of interests represented by subjects of civil society and tasks and priorities of the state structures or separate officials. Such a coincidence sometimes happens in the politically non-engaged themes — protection of the historical-architectural heritage, advancement of the Belarusian language, ecological solutions.

As a whole, promotion and protection of interests remains mainly to be protest activity, which effects do not almost leave the limits of a circle called “democratic forces”. At the same time, the events have shown the ability of Belarus’ society to have a wide spontaneously organized civil activity and solidary actions. For development of processes of promotion of interests and protection of the rights of citizens is necessary:

- wider consolidation and interaction of various structures;
- broadcast and distribution of the positive experience of joint actions;
- expansion of informational work with the population of the country about initiatives and campaigns.

Change of terms of civil society subjects’ activity

The general political condition in the country has been extremely negative background and factor that influence the activity of public associations, communities and other forms of display of civil activity. Primarily, the negative influence is reflected not in the deterioration of formal legal conditions, but on the law enabling practice. An additional factor is that the mass media form the negative image of civil society in the public opinion.

1. **The legal conditions of the public associations (non-commercial associations) existence have not been essentially changed.** In November, there were insignificant alterations in liability of infringement of the order of use of foreign free support (“the upper plank” of responsibility was reduced). The list of public associations, societies and unions, which, while renting premises, could have used the basic rates with the lowering factor 0,1, was supplemented.

At the same time, in March, 2011 it was planned to discuss in the Parliament the draft law “On Noncommercial Organizations” which would regulate legal conditions of activity of structures of civil society. According to experts (a number of domestic and foreign NCOs: the International educational NGO “ACT”, Enlightening Institution “Centre of Legal Transformation”, International center of the non-commercial right, etc.), the offered draft law does not eliminate the existing obstacles in the activity and development of public associations, but even complicates procedures and norms:

- The sphere of the use of the “declaring” principle of registration of NCOs is reduced (now it includes establishments and associations), the registration system becomes even more difficult;
- The problem of existence of non-registered organizations is not solved and, the main thing, the criminal responsibility for activity of some forms of NCOs which do not have the state registration, is not eliminated (article 193.1 of the Criminal code of Belarus);



- There are additional forms of the already bulky reporting and control requirements for NCOs;
- There are restrictive measures for separate categories of persons who are deprived of the right to create NCOs in the form of establishments;
- Still remain invariable positions of the draft law which define the location of NCOs.

After a formal discussion of the draft law, organized by the state structures, and an alternative discussion in the circle of independent public associations, which resulted in the collective appeal of the 112 non-commercial associations, the draft law has not been brought for discussion in the Parliament.

- 2. The law enabling practice testifies about a selective (individual) approach of the state structures to the process of registration and liquidation of non-commercial organizations.** The international public association of social support of children and youth “Zabota” (“Care”), which chief executive was a presidential candidate, was liquidated because of an insignificant infringement (it was not situated at its legal address in the presence of the lease contract); at the same time, for the first time since 2001, in a judicial order, there has been registered the Association of Life-Long Education and Enlightenment. The headstrong approach of the state structures is aggravated by the absence of the official data on refusals in registration. According to human rights organizations, every month, one-two associations receive refusals in registration (about a half of them receive refusals regularly already for several years). Meanwhile, the official data on registration show that 4-15 public associations, funds, or establishments are registered monthly. Among the registered associations, the majority is sports and entertainment societies; there are practically no associations aimed at democratic transformations.
- 3. After the events of December, the 19th the regular practice have become reprisals and not legal actions against civil society activists (in particular, human rights defenders and human rights organizations) as well as obstacles in rent and use of premises for activity of public associations.** According to the Human Rights Center “Viasna” and Belarusan Helsinki Committee, during the post-election reprisals, in total, there have been registered 165 searches in NGOs’ offices and apartments of members of oppositional and other public organizations. In the search warrants for the non-registered public organizations (for example, Human Rights Center “Viasna”, “Legal aid to the population”, “Studencheskaja rada” (“Students’ Council”), inspectors specified that the search was carried out in the office of a non-registered NGO; that can be considered as a disturbing signal (possibility of application of the article 193.1).

As a whole, the conditions of activity of civil society structures have essentially worsened, primarily, due to the law enabling practices of a repressive character. This fact strengthens marginalization of public structures and turns their activity from the regime of development and expansion into the self-preservation and protection mode. The Belarusan authorities do not make any steps to improve the situation. Actions of structures of civil society, aimed at changing the conditions — monitoring of the situation, human rights defending actions in case of reprisals, campaign 193.1, and the collective appeal concerning the draft law — are not sufficient to change the general negative tendencies. They have no necessary support among a wide range of interested subjects and are little known to the public of the country. It allows the power to ignore these actions. To change the existing tendencies, the strengthening of activity of public associations aimed at changing the conditions of their activity is necessary:

- Expansion of a circle of the subjects included in the general actions;



- Coordination and bringing the wide range of questions, which are being solved by subjects of very different types (public associations, unions and associations, religious communities, intellectual circles, business communities, etc.), to one common matter;
- Strengthening of information work with the broad public.

General conclusions

1. Despite a certain positive advancement in the ability of consolidation of structures of civil society and of defense of a uniform position at the national level, the serious public and political challenges demanding coordinated actions, first of all, inside the country, currently remain without an adequate answer. The reactive position prevails, i.e. civil society reacts to the arising new circumstances, but does not create them neither in relation to the Belarusian power nor in the political opposition.
2. The conditions of activity of civil society subjects do not promote their systematic development, making this sphere more and more marginal. Thus, these conditions create situations of a possible quality leap in development that demands the initiative and consolidation around the circle of the most powerful subjects.
3. The growth of the international influence of civil society in Belarus during the actual period is the result of the proactive actions of the previous period and is not stable. It will be possible to fix the existing positions only if there will be growing internal consolidation, bigger activity concerning the Eastern Partnership, definition of the coordinated position on behalf of civil society of Belarus in relations with international donors and official structures of the EU and the Council of Europe.
4. The current economic crisis and increasing social and political tensions act as negative factors of advancement of democratic pro-European values. The protest moods aimed at returning the social stability and standard of living, which are almost incompatible with the orientation on democratic and market reforms, are being actualized.



State and development of civil society in Belarus

Analytical report based on monitoring materials

July–October, 2011

Andrei Yahorau,
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General political conditions and circumstances

The general political background for the civil society activity in the period from July to September 2011 was formatted by a protracted political crisis started from December, the 19th 2010. The country was effectively in the state of emergency due to the deepening social division, presence of political prisoners in the country, harassment of civil society activists and human rights defenders. In such circumstances, the civil society institutions of the country were in total confusion, while reacting to the authorities' actions rather than attempting to reorganize and consolidate their structures as to change the overall political situation. The media attention was focused on the issue of political prisoners, the unfolding economic crisis and the actions of the authorities, while affecting to much lesser extent the civil society activity.

Development of the National Platform

The National Platform of the EaP Civil Society Forum has failed to resolve the situation of adopting a general activity strategy concerning the new socio-political situation. The period was characterized to a greater extent by a pause in active work of the National Platform, internal debates of the participants on the work, failed attempts to form a “negotiating team” as to start the dialogue with other social and political actors, matching issues of institutionalization, decision-making procedures, and formation of the governing bodies of the National Platform.

1. **Preparations for the third Civil Society Forum in Poznan.** On July 5 the National Platform held the Conference under the preparation for the next Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum¹⁷. The Conference recommended for participation of the Forum in Poznan a list of 31 civil society organizations (out of 78 applications for participation). The Steering Committee of the Civil Society Forum selected of these 24 organizations that would represent Belarusian civil society on the upcoming Forum (3 more organizations were included in the reserve list).
2. **The strategic debates.** The Conference of July 5 continued the debates that had begun in April, as for the strategy of the National Platform. Among the participants of the National Platform there has appeared a distinct opposition between the strategic approach of the International Consortium “EuroBelarus” (and the coalition on the National Platform basis “For the strategy “We are one people!”¹⁸) and the number of other active organizations, participating in the Platform: Belarusian Institute For Strategic Studies (BISS), Office for Democratic Belarus, the Assembly of NGOs. The first approach has suggested more active

¹⁷ See link 10.

¹⁸ See: **The resolution of the National Platform of the EaP CSF of April 12, 2011 “About interaction of the National Platform of the EaP CSF with all democratic forces in the country and with broad public” (The strategy “We are one people!”):** <http://www.eap-csf.eu/en/news-events/news/press-release/>



engagement in the National Platform work on the political level, development and expansion of the internal dialogue and negotiation with other actors of civil society and the political opposition. The strategic aim of such negotiations should become the extended socio-political dialogue between the state and civil society of the country. The second approach has focused on the fault of the National Platform on the issues of the Eastern Partnership, development of procedures of monitoring and control of the interaction with the EU, promotion of the interests of civil society in Belarus at the level of the EU institutions. The Conference participants could not solve neither these contradictions, nor related issues of institutionalization of the National Platform, in particular, the issues of formalizing procedures for participation in the Platform work, formation of working and governing bodies, decision-making procedures. To date, the National Platform is legitimate only in the format of general public forums and conferences.

3. **Creation of a “negotiating group” (a “response group”).** Statements of Lukashenko (on August 29) on the possibility of organizing a wide round table discussion with civil society has intensified the internal debates about the formation of the negotiating group of the National Platform as to begin consultations with the political opposition and other civil society actors of the country. During the consultations of the Steering Committee was taken decision to create a “negotiating group” consisting of four persons: Ales Biliatski (the Human Rights Center “Viasna”), Ulad Vialichka (“EuroBelarus”), Uladzimir Matskevich (Humanitarian Techniques Agency), Siargei Matskevich (Assembly of NGOs). However, the Steering Committee members have differed in their approaches to the way of legitimizing this group, the fact that has provoked controversy and intense debates between the participants of the Platform. De facto the group has remained unactive, at least until its’ legitimacy decision by the next Conference of the National platform, scheduled for late October 2011.
4. **The official statements and responses.** The most effective way of the National Platform activity are the participants’ joint statements. On August, the 30th 2011 was adopted a joint statement of the Civil Society Forum participants as for the arrest of human rights activist Ales Biliatski, addressed to the Civil Society Forum of the EaP and the European Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy Štefan Füle¹⁹. With the active participation of Belarusian participants was prepared the statement on the fourth platform of the 2nd Civil Society Forum on the same issue (in August). On September 3 the National Platform participants made a statement to the press about the issue and possible conditions of a dialogue with the state, while the attention was focused on the fundamental conditions of any negotiations with the authorities — the release of all the political prisoners²⁰.

Increasing interaction of different actors of civil society (extension of civil society)

As well as during the previous period, the civil society actors group has still remained the same, and the concept of civil society in Belarus has been sufficiently vague and abstract. The way of reflecting the civil society and its subjects’ activity in the media, the concept of the civil society subjects’ while reflecting in analytical papers, in official statements of Belarusian and European politicians and official institutions do not actually contribute to the specification of the civil society subject composition. Attempt of increasing the contacts and cooperation of the

¹⁹ See: **Statement of the EaP CSF participants relating the Ales Bialiatski’s arrest:**
http://old.eurobelarus.org/images/stories/Letter_for_Ales_Bialiacki_August_2011_eng.pdf

²⁰ See: **Civil society of Belarus commented on its attitude towards the dialogue with the authorities:**
<http://old.eurobelarus.org/content/view/23305/78/>



National Platform with the opposition political forces' coalition (the so-called "six") as to develop a coordinated position and overall strategy didn't meet neither with a large part of participants of the Platform, nor with political forces.

The dialogue between the civil society and the state

The subject of dialogue between civil society and the state was re-actualized in late July – early September 2011, which was connected with attempts to expand the composition of the Public Advisory Council at the Presidential Administration of Belarus and the attempt of the Action Team to change the rules of its activity (late July), as well as the statements of Alexander Lukashenko on the possibility of a broad dialogue in the near future (late August). These events have caused a reaction from civil society part (the statement of the National Platform from September, the 3rd²¹ and the statement of the Human Rights Center "Viasna"²², etc.), representatives of democratic opposition, as well as the feedback from the authorities. Both civil society and political opposition position as for the dialogue has been formulated in the form of the principle of "no dialogue in the presence of political prisoners in the country". As response, Alexander Lukashenko claimed that the dialogue format does not suppose the dialogue between the government and the opposition, and it will be organized with the widest participation of all the political forces.

In late July, civil society organizations received an answer to their collective appeal signed by 40 organizations under the public campaign against tortures. The responses were received from the House of Representatives of National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus, from the Council of National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus, from the General Prosecutor of the Republic of Belarus, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Belarus, the Belarusian military prosecutor's office²³. The overall tone of the responses varies from quoting the provisions of the Belarusian legislation to informing about the inspections on tortures on political prisoners' claims.

The dissolution of the Public Advisory Council at the Presidential Administration (the PAC) by its chairman, the head of the Presidential Administration Vladimir Makei (late September) has abolished the simulative platform of dialogue between the state and civil society. This fact could be interpreted as an attempt to "clear the field" as to organize in the sequel a larger public dialogue simulation. On the other hand, the PAC hasn't been able to drive back the real civil society, and was not recognized by the EU structures as legitimate dialogue platform that has deprived it the sense of existence for the authorities.

Having a positive dynamics in the direction of a dialogue (release of a part of political prisoners, rhetoric statements of the authorities) the possibility of organizing by the authorities of the real public dialogue without pressure from the EU and the international institutions remains quite elusive. Nevertheless, we can not exclude the attempts of simulating the dialogue process by the authorities in the forthcoming months.

²¹ See link 20.

²² See: **Statement of HRC Viasna about conditions for dialogue with Belarusian authorities:**
<http://spring96.org/en/news/45568>

²³ See: **The Public campaign against torture** (in Russians):
<http://www.lawtrend.org/ru/content/about/centr3/publiccampaingtorture/>



International cooperation and interaction

In addition to traditional forms of partnership with the EU civil society organizations, the interaction was taking place in the form of a series of joint actions on advocacy. In connection with the arrest of human rights activist Ales Biliatski (August 2011) were adopted joint statements of the fourth Working Group of the Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership, there was a reaction from civil society of Armenia, Azerbaijan and a number of the EU countries, was obtained a reply of the EU Commissioner Štefan Füle to the National Platform of the EaP CSF letter in support for Ales Bialiatki²⁴. The same case of repressive actions of the authorities has served as the basis for condemnation of detention of human rights defender by the formal structures of the EU (the Catherine Ashton office), the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the EU member states, by international organizations (UN, OSCE, Council of Europe). Earlier, as occasion for such an international legal response had served the sentence against a journalist Andrzej Poczobut (the first decade of July), as well as a response against the participants of the silent protest in Belarus.

In addition to the international response to the repressive actions of the authorities it is worth noting the 4th meeting of the Working Group in Brussels for the EaP CSF, which took place on September 16-17, as well as a meeting of international donors and implementers (July 7 in Brussels), a donor coordination meeting on September 15-17 in the BIIM²⁵ format with the participation of civil society representatives of Belarus.

On the eve of the Eastern Partnership Summit (on September 29 in Warsaw) has intensified work of the Steering Committee of the EaP CSF as to estimate the CSF and the EaP development as a whole. The challenge of the possible exception of human rights violations' in Belarus issue from the agenda of the Summit has led to the preparation of the appeal of the National Platform to the Summit representatives with mainstreaming of the issue²⁶.

In general, civil society representatives during this period in Belarus were active in promoting their interests at the international level and in developing joint responses to internal and external events.

Promotion and protection of interests, implementation of the rights of target groups

In July-September the number of civic initiatives of the previous period took place (the most important were the silent protest actions ("Revolution Through Social Networks", the actions of "Stop-Petrol"), among the new initiatives there appeared campaign in support of Ales Biliatski, as well as flyback of solidarity and assistance campaigns of participants-victims of mass actions ("The Guardian Angels", fund-raising campaigns).

The silent meetings of "network revolutionaries" had gradually come to nought by the end of July, the search of new formats of protest actions didn't not bring the expected success to the organizers. Resumption of actions in September has also failed to revive the initiative. Apparently the lack of positive and meaningful incentives, as well as visible results of the initiative is not conducive to mass participation. The actions of drivers "Stop Petrol"

²⁴ See: **The reply of Commissioner Štefan Füle to letter in support for Ales Byalyatski:**
http://old.eurobelarus.org/images/stories/signed_letter.pdf

²⁵ **Belarusan International Implementers Meeting (BIIM)** — regular coordination meetings of international donor organizations and representatives of Belarusan civil society.

²⁶ See: **Public address of the Belarusan National Platform of the EaP CSF to the participants of the Eastern Partnership Summit:** <http://old.eurobelarus.org/content/view/23384/78/>



(on July 21 and August 28) were also significantly inferior by the resonance and by the number of participants to the load June action.

Changes in terms of civil society actors' activity

During this period, significant changes in conditions of civil society activity have not happened. The authorities were attempting to introduce the repressive legislation rules on standards as for mass events of citizens in response to actions of "silent protest" (end of July-August), continued the general repression practice against peaceful assemblies and individual civic activists. There should be also mentioned the arrest of human rights activist Ales Biliatski on charges of tax violations, which has clearly demonstrated the absurd practice of regulating the financial conditions of public organizations in the country.



State and development of civil society in Belarus

Analytical report based on monitoring materials

September–December, 2011

Andrei Yahorau,
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General-political conditions and circumstances: suppressed stability

During the considered period, the general-political conditions of civil society's activity have worsened. The sentence against human rights defender Ales Bialiatski (on November 24), as well as the fact that the Belarusian parliament accepted amendments to the laws "On mass events", "On public associations", and "About political parties", became a symbolical sign of a new onset of the state on civil society's structures. These changes have impacted the questions of foreign financial assistance, implementation of mass actions, educational seminars, and other activities of civil society that provides the state with wide grounds for prosecution of public organizations and political parties in their activity. During the same period, the parliament has essentially diluted the powers of the KGB, which allows us to consider the complex of the new laws "anti-revolutionary".

Like in the previous period, there have been no significant changes in the camp of democratic forces. The trends to unite and to strategically coordinate their activity remain weak and are more likely dictated by external circumstances: it is necessary for political parties and movements to show their unity before the international community and to develop their attitude towards the future campaign of the 2012 parliamentary elections. In such a situation, it is possible to expect public statements that the opposition has united, but there are no hopes that this process would be real. Like before, the oppositional political forces show neither will, nor desire to consolidate with structures of civil society.

The economic crisis has not justified the hopes of mass public support of democrats. Moreover, since August – September 2011, the population began to adapt to the new economic living conditions; the number of respondents who say that the situation is deteriorating, decreases; and A. Lukashenko's rating starts to show a tendency of growth after the record falling in the summer of 2011²⁷. Russia's return to the policy of indirect subsidizing of Belarus' economy reduces the risks of future economic shocks for the Belarusian political regime. The policy of the international community's symbolical sanctions against Belarus, introduced after December, 19th, 2010, shows their obvious inaptitude to affect the Belarusian authorities' decisions. Generalizing, it is possible to say that Belarus is threatened by an approaching new long-term period of "suppressed stability", characterized by a low economic growth, further marginalization of the socially active population, and escape of qualified professional cadres from the country. The beginning of such a scenario closes for a long time the possibility of any political changes.

²⁷ See: IISEPS. Results of the Nation opinion poll conducted on December 2-12, 2011: <http://www.iiseps.org/edata11-12.html>



Development of the National Platform of the EaP CSF: unresolved contradictions

The dynamics of development of the National Platform of the EaP CSF was set by the two basic questions: the unresolved internal conflict and the Belarusian delegation's preparation to the third Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership. The contradiction, which appeared in April 2011, i.e. either the National Platform should cover a wider range of political tasks, or just work within the scope of the Eastern Partnership's agenda, has not been overcome. The conference on October 29th, 2011²⁸ fixed once again the basic discrepancies between the organizations of the coalition "For the strategy "We are one nation!"²⁹ (guided by the International Consortium "EuroBelarus") and the group of participants of the National Platform, who expressed their concern that there might be "possible politicization of the National Platform and its transformation into one more political subject" (guided by the NGOs Assembly)³⁰. Nevertheless, these discrepancies did not lead to a dramatic split of the National Platform because the participants found a possibility to get consolidated on the basis of the Memorandum of Cooperation³¹. The Memorandum fixed the main principles, purposes, and bases of activity of the National Platform on the basis of the consensus between the two factions.

The conference of the National Platform on October 29, 2011 made a step to further institutional development, having elected the Interim Coordination Committee and having fixed membership questions. Since that moment, only the organizations, which have signed the memorandum of mutual understanding, receive the status of a permanent participant and the right to solve questions of establishment of procedures of work and elections of constant regulatory bodies of the National Platform. Till the moment of convocation of a proxy conference, the Interim Coordination Committee has the limited mandate to represent the National Platform.

In October – early December, the structure of participants of the National Platform was widened due to a more active inclusion in its activity of other (besides traditional NGOs) subjects, in particular: the Association of Employers and the Public Bologna Committee³². In particular, the chairperson of the Minsk Capital Union of Entrepreneurs and Employers Vladimir Karyagin went into the Interim Coordination Committee of the National Platform. The Bologna Committee, formed in the beginning of December 2011, consisting of representatives of youth, students', human rights defending, and experts' organizations and independent experts in the sphere of education, became a reaction of civil society on the fact that on November 29, 2011 the Ministry of Education applied to join the European space of higher education. Sharing the strategic plan to Europeanize higher education of Belarus, the Public Bologna Committee, nonetheless, presented an alternative report on Belarus' joining the Bologna process. The Committee's principled position is that it is impossible to accept Belarus in the Bologna process until it implements the necessary reforms, solves the questions of academic and students' self-government, stops using the system of higher education for political expediency, and establishes a system of independent monitoring of the quality of education.

²⁸ See: **Video of the Conference of the National Platform of the EaP CSF (Minsk, October 29, 2011)** (in Russian): <http://old.eurobelarus.org/content/view/23551/21/>

²⁹ See link 18.

³⁰ The statement was signed by 13 leaders of civil society organizations (See: **Leaders of large NGOs dissociated themselves from Uladzimir Matskevich** (in Belarusian): <http://nn.by/?c=ar&i=62859>).

³¹ See: **Memorandum on Cooperation within the Belarusian National Platform of the EaP CSF**: http://www.eap-csf.eu/assets/files/Downloads/english/Memorandum_29.10.2011_EN.pdf

³² See: **It has been announced the creation of the Public Bologna Committee at the ground of the National Platform of the EaP CSF** (in Russian): <http://old.eurobelarus.org/content/view/23759/164/>



The preparation for the 3rd Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership was characterized by the accent on the completion of institutional development of the Forum, in particular — to continue the focus on development of thematic “road maps” and special projects within the scope of the CSF, to complete the structural building of the EaP CSF, to discuss the questions of registration of the Forum. Almost all tasks were rather successfully solved within the scope of the work of the Forum in Poznan (November, 2011).

Interaction of civil society organizations: insignificant dynamics

Interaction of various subjects of civil society (NGOs, churches, associations of employers, trade unions, mass media, ordinary citizens) remains quite weak and is implemented mostly in the traditional forms of collective appeals and protest campaigns. However, the autumn period is also characterized by a number of other, indicative enough, joint campaigns and events. Among the most appreciable solidary actions, it is necessary to mark:

- Reaction of public organizations to the acceptance of the restrictive amendments to the legislation on mass meetings, public associations, and political parties. In October, leaders of human rights defending organizations expressed their joint statements³³; collective appeals on behalf of participants of the National Platform of the EaP CSF and separate public organizations were sent to deputies of the House of Representatives and the Council of the Republic³⁴ (October, 2011). Even though these actions were widely enough covered by the mass media, unfortunately, they have not led to the blocking of these legislative changes;
- Collective appeals of the coalition “For the European continent without visa borders” to the governments of the EU countries and the Eastern Partnership (end of September, 2011);
- Activity of the Public Bologna Committee. Coordination of actions and synergy within the scope of the Committee has provided quite high attention to the problem of both mass media and international community (December, 2011);
- The international conference “Dialogue between society and religious communities and ecumenical dialogue as a factor of sustainable development, pluralism, and religious freedom” on December 9-10, 2011, mentioning the questions of interaction of churches and society;
- Public campaign for fund raising to cover the financial requirements of the state to the condemned human rights defender Ales Bialiatski (November-December, 2011);
- Struggle against the destruction of the Park of the 40th anniversary of the October Revolution, which united local residents, ecological organizations, radical groups of anarchists, the Belarusan Green Party, and special public campaigns. As a result, the Ministry of Natural Resources has sided with the public and expressed its opinion — to stop building on the territory of the Park (October-December, 2011).

At the same time, the traditional summer series of civic actions, i.e. the “Revolution Through Social Networks” and “Stop-Petrol”, did pass into oblivion in autumn, having remained only as a media phenomenon.

³³ See: **On the Threat of Significant Limitations on Human Rights in Legislation:** <http://spring96.org/en/news/46526>

³⁴ See: **Human rights defenders are against, deputies — pro** (in Belarusan): <http://www.svaboda.org/content/article/24367245.html>



Dialogue between civil society and the state: aloof from the main points

The previous period ended by A. Lukashenko's public statements about a possibility of a beginning of a wide political dialogue; however, the subsequent actions received an absolutely other orientation. The formal dialogue platform, i.e. the Socially-Advisory Council under the jurisdiction of the Presidential Administration, was dismissed in the end of September, and the new legislative initiatives of the states have strengthened its repressive trend. The attempts of the National Platform of the EaP CSF to launch a dialogue with democratic political parties in September (by forming a dialogue «reaction groups») did not find any mutual understanding. Thus, it is possible to state mutual unpreparedness of civil society and the state to start a negotiating process.

There are still sporadic contacts between civil society organizations; however, they do not touch the main points of liberalization and freedom of activity for civil society. Indirect attempts to establish contacts on these questions have no success, as in the case with public organizations' appeals to deputies of the parliament concerning the restrictive laws. In other cases, interaction takes place. Proceeding attempts of demonstrative economic liberalization lead to a dialogue of the state with the unions of entrepreneurs concerning the implementation of provisions of the 2011 National Platform of business of Belarus (October-December, 2011). In particular, on November 3, 2011, a joint working group of representatives of business associations and state bodies was created; the group was headed by the Minister of Economy of Belarus Nikolai Snopkov³⁵.

Indirect forms of interaction of the state with civil society took place during the campaign of struggle against the cutting-down of trees in the Park of the 40th anniversary of the October Revolution in Minsk; when the Ministry of Natural Resources and Preservation of Environment partially supported the public. There was a more conflict variant of interaction between the Ministry of Education and the Public Bologna Committee on the basis of the National Platform when the latter actually blocked at the international level the attempt of the Ministry of Education to get integrated in the Bologna process without performance of the necessary requirements.

International cooperation and interaction: feeble subjectness

The basic problem for civil society of Belarus remains its poorly expressed subjectness in its activity at the international level. The National Platform of the Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership is, perhaps, the most perspective platform for international interaction not only within the scope of the structure of the Eastern Partnership, but also as a platform for communication with international organizations, such as the Council of Europe, OSCE, with the governments of the EU Member States, and supranational EU bodies. These prospects are poorly expressed for the reason of not always possible coordination of actions on some question (for example, EU sanctions) between various civil society organizations of Belarus, on the one hand. On the other hand, the international community accepts slowly enough new subjects and actors as partners for interaction, preferring the already developed traditional channels and types of subjects.

International contacts of civil society organizations of Belarus proceeded in the context of the Warsaw Summit of the Eastern Partnership (September, 2011) and the 3rd Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership (Poznan, November, 2011). In the light of the aggravation of relations of Belarus with EU, structures of civil society of the country remained probably the unique channel of legitimate communication with the international community. The summit aggravated even more the situation of contradictions between Belarus and EU in view of a sharp fall

³⁵ See: **Snopkov was the head of the working group on the implementation of provisions of the National Platform of business** (in Russian): http://www.belta.by/ru/all_news/economics/Snopkov-vozglavil-rabochuju-gruppu-po-realizatsii-polozhenij-Natsionalnoj-platfomy-biznesa_i_580654.html



of the status of the official representation of Belarus in the presence of a series of meetings at the high level with representatives of the Belarusian opposition and civil society. Thus, the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs created a rather artificial division between the representation from the oppositional parties and the representation of the leaders of civil society, who were present in Warsaw. It testifies about quite vague subjectness of civil society of Belarus in the understanding of European politicians and officials.

In the run-up to the Forum, there was a meeting of the delegation of the European Union in Belarus with representatives of the National Platform of the Civil Society Forum (end of September). Such meetings took place in parallel in other countries of the Eastern Partnership where they had a character of a tripartite dialogue between civil society, the national governments, and EU. In Belarus, with its severe contradictions between civil society and the state, a similar dialogue format was not possible. The Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership (on November 28-30, 2011) in Poznan focused its attention on the completion of institutional building. In particular, it discussed the questions of registration of the CSF Secretariat, creation of a new working group of social dialogue, launch of inter-state thematic projects, acceptance of strategic and conceptual documents, organizing work of CSF. The traditional visibility of the Belarusian delegation led to the inclusion of three Belarusians in the structure of the Steering Committee of the Forum — representatives of civil society organizations of Belarus (Assembly of NGOs, “Green Network”) and the Brussels-based “Office for Democratic Belarus”. The Civil Society Forum accepted a resolution concerning the trial and condemnation of human rights defender Ales Biliatski³⁶.

The repressive actions of the authorities against Ales Biliatski, as well as the acceptance of the new laws limiting freedom of activity of civil society, became the subject of communication between civil society of Belarus, EU structures, the national governments of the EU countries and their officials, and international organizations. Among them, it is necessary to mark the correspondence of the National Platform of the EaP CSF with Štefan Füle, the Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy. In his reply, the Commissioner paid attention to securement of protection of due safety of bank accounts of non-state organizations. Questions of infringements of human rights repeatedly became a subject of reaction of deputies of the European Parliament (practically all the period) and its chairperson Jerzy Buzek (the statement of November 24, 2011). The OSCE conference in Warsaw (end of September, 2011) and the OSCE summit in Vilnius (beginning of December, 2011) focused significant attention on questions of human rights in Belarus. The conference of representatives of civil society passed in parallel with the OSCE summit in Vilnius. On the basis of the data of the alternative report of Belarusian human rights defenders, the UN committee against tortures accepted recommendations to the government of Belarus with requirements to guarantee the implementation of fundamental laws of prisoners, including creation of an independent commission of human rights with inclusion of representatives of non-state organizations with effective powers (on November 11-14, 2011).

In November, a new financial tool of help in development of civil society for the EU countries-neighbors (Civil Society Facility)³⁷ was started. The tool is an addition to the already existing programs of EU and is urged to strengthen civil society organizations in the countries-neighbors, and also to provide horizontal inter-state

³⁶ See: **Statement of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum in connection with the sentence to Ales Biliatski in Belarus:** <http://www.eap-csf.eu/ru/news-events/news/statement-of-the-eap-civil-society-forum-on-the-sentencing-of-ales-bialiatski-in-belarus/>

³⁷ **Civil Society Facility** is a new financial instrument of the EU (effective since 2011) in support of the civil society in the countries covered by the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), is aimed at strengthening the role of civil society in EU neighbor states.



cooperation between them. Besides the special tool, it has been planned to create a European fund of assistance to democracy (European Endowment for Democracy)³⁸; its possible structure and mechanisms were actively discussed at the EU level in November-December 2011, including with inclusion of representatives of civil society of Belarus.

In the autumn of 2011, many figures of civil society and democratic opposition received awards and premiums in the countries of the European Union. In particular, the Human Rights Center “Viasna” (the Danish award to support political prisoners), Nicolai Khalezin (the award of Helman-Hemet), Natalia Radina (the award of Freedom of Press), Uladzimir Niakliayeu (the Russian Poetic Award), Svetlana Aleksievich (the international award of Central Europe “Angelus”), Dmitri Bondarenko is nominated for the award of Sakharov, Ales Bialiatski has received the award the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland, journalist Andrzej Poczobut became the Polish journalist of the year.

As a whole, the attention to Belarus and problems of civil society remains at the high level that creates a positive context for advancement of its interests in international relations.

Advancement and protection of interests, implementation of the rights of target groups

During the analyzed period, there were the civil campaigns (“Revolution Through Social Networks”, “Stop-Petrol”, “Visa-Free” coalition, etc.), which had been begun earlier; and there was also a number of new campaigns. The problems concerning infringements of human rights (political prisoners, prosecution of Ales Bialiatski, the death sentence to Uladzislau Kavaliou and Dzmitry Kanavalau — the case of the act of terrorism in the Minsk underground, etc.) became the subjects of autumn campaigns and public actions. The domination and intensity of political actions and campaigns has decreased: the pretentious November actions of some oppositional forces (“National Meeting” — Narodny Skhod) gathered an insignificant number of people (less than 1.000 people in Minsk); by November, the actions of the “Revolution through social networks” began to collect only tens of people. The general tendency of the politicized campaigns’ reducing number of participants led to actions with one-three participants. The vivid political action of the Ukrainian movement FEMEN who undressed before the KGB Office, led to tragic consequences for its participants: the girls were actually stolen and abused. It has become the cause for reaction of the Belarusian Internet community — unknown citizens have uploaded a video with a reconstruction of the abuses against the background of the militia oath about protection of the rights of citizens; it has collected about 100 thousand viewings. Besides, the video was sent to all police stations of the country.

In the autumn, the human rights defending campaigns addressed to the sharpest cases of their infringements, dominated. Attention was paid to the topic of political prisoners: relatives collected signatures to support the condemned anarchists, September, 2011), sporadic actions in protection of all political prisoners (tens of people participated, wide geography, throughout all the period), actions to support Ales Biliatski (including the fund raising to pay the financial requirements of the state, petitions, street actions), meetings of believers on October Square and near the Red Catholic Church with prayers for political prisoners (November-December, 2011). An important occasion for reaction became the mentioned above innovations in the legislation that received a

³⁸ **European Endowment for Democracy** is an EU initiative to create a special fund to support democratic actors (political parties, NGOs, trade unions, etc.). See, for example: *Andrei Yahorau. Can the European Endowment for Democracy conduce to democratization? (Working Document):* http://eurobelarus.info/en/news/temp/2012/01/27/can_the_european_endowment_for_democracy_conduce_to_democratization.html



negative public estimation and that were accompanied by collective appeals to the Parliament and the Constitutional Court (October-November, 2011).

The death sentence to Dzmitry Kanavalau and Uladzislau Kavaliou, accused of the fulfillment of the act of terrorism in the Minsk underground on April 11 has served as a subject of an acute reaction of the public. Even before the sentence, in the Internet, there was a collection of signatures for the petition against the supreme penalty; appeals to hierarches of Christian churches were sent; Catholic metropolitan Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz has urged A. Lukashenko to abolish the capital punishment (December); the relatives of the condemned have sent an appeal to the United Nations (December); after the execution, a number of citizens have demanded “to shoot them instead of Kavaliou” or “together with them” (poet Dmitry Strotsev), other actions have been undertaken as well. The campaign to abolishment of execution of Kavaliou and Kanavalau is appreciable enough, its goals are obvious, but it is very spontaneous, its actions are scattered, which questions its possible effects.

The creative intelligentsia’s reaction on artist Vitaly Kalgin’s compulsory placement in a psychiatric clinic became a campaign with a similar orientation on protection of human rights. In December, there was a collection of signatures to protect him, with a possibility to sign both electronic³⁹ and real versions of the appeal.

There were a number of campaigns to protect public interests. Among them, it is necessary to mark campaigns in protection of parks (Sevastopol Park and the campaign “European Prospect”, protection of the Park of the 40th anniversary of the October Revolution), campaigns of bicyclists in Hrodna and Brest (September-December, 2011), students’ collection of signatures for free travel (October, Brest), the gay-parade in Shabany district in Minsk in protection of the rights of sexual minorities (October, 2011). Traditionally on the periphery of campaigns, there were appeals of the Belarusian Language Association with questions on language equality and actions against destruction of historical monuments (city center of Pinsk, October).

Changes of conditions of activity of the civil society organizations: drift to the worst

Civil society painfully reacted on the package of changes of the legislation limiting freedom of associations and expanding powers of retaliatory bodies, while they have not worsened the real position of public structures, but just fixed the status quo. The new changes have created legal bases for a new coil of reprisals against civil society. In the same logic, it is necessary to consider the introduction of responsibility for legal bodies for infringements of the legislation on the use of the Internet, in particular — the use in their activity of servers outside of Belarus.

The Ebert Fund was closed in December, 2011, which only symbolically underlined the real-life situation that civil society organizations cannot legally operate with financial assets.

³⁹ See: [Art Aktivist](#).



State and development of civil society in Belarus

Analytical report based on monitoring materials

January–March, 2012

Andrei Yahorau,
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General political conditions and circumstances: the postponed possibilities for changes

Civil society activity of unfolded in January-March 2012 in the context of a number of internal and external political factors.

The internal political context was defined by:

- **Unfolding the campaign for elections to the parliament due to be held in autumn 2012.** Traditionally, the election campaigns become the external condition of the revitalization of civil society and democratic forces' activity. No exception was the beginning of 2012, accompanied by sharp debates on the question of participation or non-participation of the democratic forces in the upcoming elections. On the eve of the campaign, the democratic political forces and civil society failed to achieve unity on a common strategy. This means that the run-up to the election campaign is missed and the dynamics of the general political situation before and during the elections will be dictated by the actions of the authorities. Possible changes may occur only after the parliamentary elections in October-November 2012, when the question of consolidation of democratic forces will be relevant again.
- **Continuing the trend of the population' adaptation to the results of the economic crisis.** The state managed to stabilize the economic situation at the level of low economic growth and per capita income, which is reflected in public opinion polls. According to recent polls of the IISEPS (Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies), proportion of the population positively or neutrally evaluating the economic situation has exceeded 50%⁴⁰. It also means reducing the protest electorate and continued distrust in state institutions and the president.
- **Continuing the trend of deterioration of the CSOs' activity and the state of human rights.** Persecutions of democratic activists by the state continue, death penalties against defendants in the case of explosion in Minsk underground were carried out; the right to leave the country's to democratic activists has been limited.

The foreign policy context has been defined by the following factors:

- **The deterioration of relations between Belarus and the EU.** The introduction of a new package of sanctions by the European Council (February, 27-28) has caused a disproportionate reaction of the Belarusian authorities as of the proposal to the official representative of the EU and Poland's ambassador to depart for consultations. The EU in solidarity has withdrawn all its ambassadors. The Belarusian

⁴⁰ See: Dynamics of responses to the question, "How has your personal financial situation changed over the last three months?" and "How will the socio-economic situation in Belarus change in the coming years?" in the **Analytics of the IISEPS, according to a national survey in March 2012**: <http://www.iiseps.org/edata12-3.html>



authorities in response have imposed restrictions to exit from the country to civil society activists and political opposition. Recently there has been observed a more conciliatory rhetoric from both sides, but concrete steps to improve the situation haven't been done.

- **Consolidation of positions of Russia and Belarus, and Kazakhstan with regard to the EU sanctions.** Authoritarian Russia actually supports the position of Belarus, including this regarding restrictive measures on travel bans.
- **Launching the new format of relations of Belarus and the EU as the European dialogue on modernization with Belarusan society** (March, 29). European dialogue creates new potential possibilities for changes, but requires consolidation of Belarusan democratic forces. The participation of the authorities is possible, provided observance of the conditions of liberalization and the release of political prisoners.

Thus, the overall context of **the situation can be characterized as the postponed possibilities for changes**; a new period of the need for living activity will come in the autumn of 2012. For civil society, this means the possibility of solving the problems to enhance their own political positions and organizational development during the period of time pre-election liberalization (summer-autumn 2012).

Development of the National Platform of the EaP CSF: low dynamics

Extinction of dynamics of development of the Eastern Partnership and the general trend of deterioration of the EU-Belarusan relations have reduced the space for the activity of the civil society National Platform. In fact, the development of the National Platform has been focused on issues of institutionalization, attempts to overcome the internal contradictions in a series of informal consultations and responding to external challenges.

The focus of institutional development was aimed at the growth of the Platform's permanent members' number. By the end of March, the number of organizations that have signed a Memorandum of understanding has grown to 38 organizations, but has not yet embraced even those organizations who have been constantly involved in previous conferences of the National Platform. Such situation is largely due to the existing contradictions between the leading parties of the National Platform on the issue of its further development. Informal consultations between the Assembly of NGOs and the International Consortium "EuroBelarus" have identified opportunities for synergy; but so far these have not led to any meaningful results.

The reason for the reaction of the National Platform has become a diplomatic conflict between Belarus and the EU, which has begun in February 2012. On March 2, 2012 members of the civil society National Platform adopted a statement expressing concern over the diplomatic conflict⁴¹. In particular, the statement stressed "the diplomatic arguments about the contradictions between the authorities of Belarus and the EU that distract attention from the truly important aspects of the Belarusan-European relations. Thus, the conflict increases the separation of Belarus from Europe, its further development will lead to deeper isolation of the country in the international arena, will worsen the living conditions and deprive Belarusan citizens of the European prospects. For Belarus to maintain and develop as an independent state, it needs a European perspective, the work on the approach to the norms and standards of the EU, assistance in the modernization". The signatories of the statement called on the parties "to refrain from the further conflict escalation". A positive sign was the accession

⁴¹ See: **Statement of the Belarusan National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum:** http://eurobelarus.info/en/news/society/2012/03/04/statement_of_the_belarusan_national_platform_of_the_eap_csf.html



to the statement of the Belarusian democratic political campaign “Govori pravdu!” (“Tell the truth!”) on March 6, 2012. Also a reference of the European Parliament on the resolution on Belarus (March 14, 2012) to its statement of March 2 states the growth of the total foreign political weight of the National Platform.

Other events that required attention of the National Platforms were the Forum of Belarusian Non-Governmental Initiatives, organized by East European Democratic Centre and Belarusian Schuman Foundation, in cooperation with the Assembly of Democratic Non-Governmental Organizations of Belarus and the International Consortium “EuroBelarus” (Warsaw, March 15-16, 2012), as well as announced on March 29, 2012 the European dialogue on modernization of Belarus. Both events have become platforms for discussion of European support for the development of civil society, as well as the opportunity for coordination and harmonization between civil society and political opposition of Belarus. During the meetings, there has appeared some tendency for a possible dialogue between the National Platform and the democratic political forces grouped in the coalition “six plus”; however, being still very weak.

In the development the National Platform of civil society there still remains a significant disparity between the growth of its foreign influence and its internal political value. Lack of a strategic agreement between the parties of the National Platform significantly hampers its development. The frame of the European dialogue on modernization of Belarus could give new dynamics to the development of the National Platform of civil society, but it can not help solving its internal problems.

The interaction between civil society organizations

The interaction of civil society organizations in Belarus was taking place more against the background of internal conflicts caused by disagreements over the expansion of the EU sanctions. The possibility of further tightening the sanctions by the European Union has caused ambiguity, not only of the Belarusian authorities, but also among the democratic opposition and civil society in Belarus. In early February 2012 in the Belarusian independent media there have been a lot of controversy, provoked by a statement in Brussels' “Office for Democratic Belarus”⁴². The Statement was distributed among the European institutions and caused the polar response of the Belarusian democratic community, from sharp rejection to restrained support. The position of the Office reduced to the necessity of revising the list of persons subject to the prohibition on entry into the EU. It was proposed to eliminate from the list rectors of Belarusian universities, a number of journalists from state media, former officials that currently don't hold their posts, businessman V. Peftiev, close to the entourage of Lukashenko. At the same time, the list should include “the names of those who were involved in the prosecution of human rights activist Ales Bialiatski, the adoption of repressive legislation and amendments to it and others”⁴³. Such measures, according to the authors of the Statement, will prevent the complete isolation of Belarus, as well as accelerate the release of political prisoners.

Proposals of the “Office for Democratic Belarus” were subjected to harsh criticism, both on the content of proposals and on the form of their presentation. In contrast, there appeared a statement by the 11 representatives of Belarusian political exile calling for tougher sanctions⁴⁴. Emotional intensity to the discussion was added by the articles accusatory articles by Nicolai Khalezin (Civil Campaign “Free Belarus Now”), statements

⁴² See: **Statement by the Office for a Democratic Belarus Regarding the Visa Ban:** <http://democraticbelarus.eu/node/14326>

⁴³ See link 42.

⁴⁴ See: **Belarusian representative offices abroad call EU for tougher sanctions for Belarus** (in Russian): <http://eurobelarus.info/news/policy/2012/02/03/usilit-sankcii.html>



of former presidential candidates Vital Rymasheuski (Belarusan Christian Democracy, BCD), Ales Michalevic and several other online publications, condemning the actions of the “Office for Democratic Belarus” and the person of its leader Olga Stuzhinskaya. A more balanced position was taken by those leaders of civil society organizations whose attitude was not so much focused on a critique of the content, but rather on the lack of prior consultations within the country. Because of this the Statement can not be considered, in their opinion, as a common consolidated position of Belarusan civil society, but only as a private initiative of the “Office for Democratic Belarus”⁴⁵. In support of the initiative to review the “black list” has actually just spoken only the Belarusan Institute for Strategic Studies (BISS) that had previously delivered a critical stance regarding the effectiveness of EU sanctions policy⁴⁶. The BISS director Alexei Pikulik, however, stressed that the initiative is of the “Office for Democratic Belarus” “was not implemented in the mode of openness and transparency, and therefore the ODB suffered reputational costs”⁴⁷.

The issue of expansion of sanctions has split European and Belarusan democrats also at the very moment when from a far greater unity of the position was required their part. Especially at the same time when consolidation of the Belarusan and Russian authoritarianism has been taking place as in a negative attitude to political pressure of the EU⁴⁸. The Belarusan regime in the face of Russia gets a strong foreign ally, and in addition, saves some space for maneuvers: in the absence of unity in the democratic camp, the Belarusan authorities will continue to play on the contradictions among European politicians and civil society in the country.

Despite the central place of sanctions in the current policy of the European Union, it would be a huge mistake to consider them separately, in isolation from the broader framework of the Belarusan-European relations. The analysis of the situation will not be complete without taking into account the positions of Belarusan agents for changes and their role in formulating the European policy. Ideally, the actions and policies of Belarusan democrats should be corresponded and strengthen the EU policies (and vice versa). To date it is, unfortunately, almost impossible, both because of internal conflicts among the democratic forces of Belarus and strategic uncertainty in the minds of European politicians. But without attempts to achieve such compliance it is difficult to count on any positive developments in the country.

Certain, but at the same time mild trends towards going out of contradictions have emerged during the Forum of Belarusan Non-Governmental Initiatives (March, 2012). Besides, the need for development of a joint position of the democratic forces under the European dialogue on modernization pushes for the intensification of processes of interaction, but mutual claims and personal ambitions of the participants (both leaders of various social organizations and political parties) still do not allow passing to the format of a full internal dialogue.

⁴⁵ Such position, in particular, was taken by V. Stefanovich (HRC “Viasna”), E. Tonkacheva (Legal Transformation Center) U. Vialichka (IC “EuroBelarus”) and others (see: **Members of the public commented on the initiative of the “Office for Democratic Belarus”** (in Russian): <http://eurobelarus.info/news/society/2012/02/06/predstaviteli-obshchestvennosti.html>; **Reducing the list of banned officials will not change the situation with political prisoners** (in Russian): <http://eurobelarus.info/news/society/2012/02/03/sokraschenie-spiska.html>).

⁴⁶ See: *Dzianis Melyantsou. Where do EU sanctions lead?*: http://belinstitute.eu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1142:2012-01-23-21-09-01&catid=3:eu&Itemid=28&lang=en

⁴⁷ See: *Alexei Pikulik. Witch-hunt in the club of amateur conspiracy theorists* (in Russian): http://naviny.by/rubrics/opinion/2012/02/07/ic_articles_410_176757/

⁴⁸ **Joint statement of the presidents of the Republic of Belarus and Russian Federation. February 24, 2012:** http://mfa.gov.by/en/press/news_mfa/ca20412a595b8bf7.html



On the general conflict background there were heard proposals to merge the two unions of the Polish minority (January, 2012). The informal union refused to negotiate because of the accountability of the Union of Poles recognized by the State, and said it would negotiate only with representatives of the state authorities.

Dialogue between civil society and the state: questions without answers

The dialogue between the civil society and the state has been proceeding in limited forms. In January, a group of non-governmental organizations (Belarusan Helsinki Committee, The Belarusan Association of Journalists, the Assembly of NGOs, the Human Rights Centre “Viasna”, Legal Transformation Centre) addressed to the new Justice Minister Oleg Slizhevsky with proposal of a dialogue on the improvement of legislation relating to non-profit institutions, of establishment of a public council under the Ministry, of possibility of the removal of the article 193.1 of the Criminal Code of Republic of Belarus, of introduction of public control over the institutions of the penitentiary system, including the recommendations of the UN Committee against Torture. In response, the Ministry of Justice limited itself to a formal response, in which it did not exclude the possibility of cooperation in the future, but does not support the current proposal of the organizations. “Thus, we conclude that the planned communication between the registration/regulatory authority and non-profit organizations did not take place”, concluded Olga Smolianko (Legal Transformation Centre)⁴⁹. Similarly got to the end correspondence of the civil initiatives “The right to belief” and “STOP 193.1!” with a number of governmental bodies and both chambers of the Belarusan parliament (January-February, 2012), as well as the appeal of the Belarusan Helsinki Committee with a proposal to enable the public representatives to the work on the Commission on pardon of the convicted to death sentence Dzmitry Kanavalau and Uladzislau Kavaliou (February, 2012).

As before, the chance to interact with the state appears only in cases where questions do not relate to civil and political freedom, do not contradict with the direct interests of the state or the state is directly interested in cooperation with civil society organizations. The rare positive examples of this type can be shown by the progress of consultations of the Ministry of Culture with the Belarusan Voluntary Society for Protection of Monuments of History and Culture (January, 2012). It should be noted that in some cases, the public can achieve mutual understanding with the Ministry of Culture, although not always and not in all matters.

Cooperation of the state with employers' and employers' associations continues (February-March, 2012). In particular, regular consultations are being held in the formats of: Consultation and Coordination Meeting of the business community (with the participation of several ministries), meetings with business groups at the Ministry of Economy, the Public Advisory Council at the Minsk city executive committee, relating questions of participation of state bodies in the XIII Assembly of business circles of Belarus and other. The dialogue touched upon a wide range of issues — from improvement of legislation, improvement of business climate to issues of public-private partnership.

In cases of direct conflicts of interest of the state with interests of citizens or civil society organizations, a full-fledged dialogue usually does not occur (see below “Promotion and protection of interests, realization of the target groups' rights”).

⁴⁹ See: **Non-profit organizations have received a response from the Ministry of Justice** (in Russian): <http://eurobelarus.info/news/society/2012/03/30/otvet-iz-minyusta.html>



International cooperation and interaction: old problems and new tools

Diplomatic conflict, European sanctions, independent trade unions, problem of political prisoners and the execution of death sentences against Dzmitry Kanavalau and Uladzislau Kavaliou were the main topics in the international civil society cooperation (January-March, 2012). Formal structures of the EU and several international organizations have noted a significant deterioration in the human rights situation in Belarus, in particular, it was identified in the annual reports of the Human Rights Watch and Freedom House (January, 2012). The international organization “Reporters without Borders” included Belarus again into list of countries with a maximum limitation of freedom of the Internet (March, 2012).

A feature of this period was considerable attention to the problems of the Belarusian civil society on the part of civil society organizations in Russia. Statements on the situation in Belarus was done by the Moscow Bureau for Human Rights (January, 2012), the Moscow Helsinki Group (March, 2012, addresses against the death penalty), a series of actions against human rights violations in Belarus were held in Moscow (March, 2012), a meeting of Belarusian human rights activists with Valentin Gefer, director of the Human Rights Institute, a member of the Council for Civil Society Development and Human Rights under President of Russia (March, 2012) took place. Increased attention of Russian civil society towards Belarus can be associated with an increase of domestic authoritarian tendencies in Russia and the search for possible contacts with Belarusians, who have long been experiencing similar problems.

Executions against U. Kavaliou and D. Kanavalau (March, 2012), despite the numerous appeals of international organizations and foreign governments and pardon of convicts (UN, PACE, European Union, individual EU countries), shocked the Belarusian civil society and international public. Statements condemning the death penalty and the requirements of the moratorium on the death penalty were made by the international human rights organizations, in particular the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (Poland), Human Rights Watch and others. The similar statements were made by the EU officials and member states, representatives of such authoritative organizations, as the UN, Council of Europe, PACE and OSCE. Did not remain unnoticed the subject of political prisoners, as well. Civil society organizations of the EU countries, political parties (SPD), Belarusian organizations in exile throughout the period organized campaigns of support and solidarity with the Belarusian political prisoners.

At the end of January – February, 2012 the issue for the scandal and violent showdown became the question of revision of restrictive EU sanctions against Belarusian officials and pro-government businessmen. The issue was raised by the Brussels' “Office for Democratic Belarus” that proposed a number of exceptions to persons from the “black list” of the EU, which caused ambiguous response both inside Belarus and abroad. In particular, other offices in the Belarusian exile made an initiative to strengthen the sanctions against Belarus (see above).

The diplomatic conflict between Belarus and the EU (February, 2012) served as a pretext for the reaction on the part of the National Platform of the EaP CSF, which adopted a statement, urging the parties to seek compromises (March, 2012)⁵⁰. The position of the national platform was included in the subsequent documents of the European Parliament during the preparation of its resolution on Belarus (March, 2012)⁵¹.

The aggravation of the situation with trade unions' rights in Belarus was updated by problems of registration and repressions against activists of the independent trade union of workers in the enterprise “Granit” (Mikashевичy,

⁵⁰ See link 41.

⁵¹ See: **European Parliament resolution on the situation in Belarus (2012/2581(RSP))**. Motion for a resolution, 13.03.2012: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=MOTION&reference=B7-2012-178&language=EN>



Brest region). Solidarity with the workers was expressed by the International Federation of Trade Unions, which called for the authorities to stop the discrimination against the independent trade union (February, 2012), and by the Russian Socialist Movement (March, 2012).

The question of revision of the International Ice Hockey Federation' decision to hold the World Hockey Championship in Belarus in 2014 in connection with violations of human rights was the last occasion of the international response. Protests took place in several countries; Belarusian political emigrants in Prague organized a protest against the official sponsor of the championship: the ŠKODA auto concern (February, 2012), activists of women's movement FEMEN in Zurich protested in front of the International Ice Hockey Federation (February, 2012). The European Parliament in its resolution (March, 2012) called for the annulment of the championship in Belarus in connection with the violations of human rights, a number of MEPs made similar statements (including the legendary hockey player in the past, Peter Shchasny).

A special case of international cooperation should be considered the activity of the Bologna Committee under the National Platform of the EaP CSF. The Alternative report⁵² prepared by the Bologna Committee on December 9, 2011 on the readiness of the Belarusian higher education for inclusion in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) influenced the decision of the Working Group of the Bologna Process' member countries (January 18-19, Copenhagen). The Working Group stated that Belarus is currently not in compliance with the principles and values of the Bologna Process on academic freedom, institutional autonomy and self-management in higher education system. It was noted in the conclusion that for the accession to the European Higher Education Area, Belarus should conduct the "necessary reforms"⁵³.

On March 5, at a meeting of the Visegrad Group and the Eastern Partnership foreign ministers in Prague a new initiative was announced called the "Eastern Partnership Visegrad Group" (Belarus was not represented at the ministers' meeting). The aim of the initiative is to support political and economic reforms in six post-Soviet countries of the Eastern Partnership. Under this initiative, International Visegrad Fund will allocate money for the projects, grants and scholarships in order to accelerate the political and economic rapprochement of the Eastern Partnership countries with the European Union. In parallel with the meeting of foreign ministers it was held a meeting of the fourth Working Group of the Civil Society Forum, which was attended by representatives of Belarus.

On March 15-16, the Forum of Belarusian non-governmental initiatives was held in Warsaw, organized by the "East European Democratic Centre" and the Belarusian society of Robert Schumann, in collaboration with the Assembly of Democratic Non-Governmental Organizations of Belarus and the International Consortium "EuroBelarus". The Forum became a platform for exchange of opinions of Belarusian public organizations (70 organizations), international organizations and donor community.

On March 16, the Venice Commission examined the law "On mass events in the Republic of Belarus" for compliance with international standards and elaborated a number of recommendations for Belarus. In particular, it was recognized that "the current regulation of freedom of associations in Belarus raises some serious concerns about compliance with applicable international standards".

⁵² See: **Belarusian Higher Education: Readiness to EHEA Admission. Alternative Report:**
<http://old.eurobelarus.org/content/view/23795/78/>

⁵³ See: **Europe — to Belarus: Let mass events to be held! Will them be allowed?** (in Russian):
<http://www.lawtrend.org/ru/content/about/news/razresatlimassoviemeropriatiazakluchenieVK/>



On March 29, 2012 the European Union launched a new instrument of cooperation with Belarus, the European dialogue on modernization with the Belarusian society. The dialogue process is open to the participation of civil society, political opposition representatives, and, under appropriate conditions, of the Belarusian authorities. From the European Union the dialogue is organized by the European External Action Service and the European Commission with the participation of EU member states. The European dialogue is aimed at articulating a clear vision of modern democratic Belarus, offering a package of reforms needed to modernize the country, determining the capacity and tools to support possible reforms of the EU, including the transition' experience of the EU countries in the process of modernization of Belarus. At present, the dialogue presents rather an "empty frame" for the interaction of civil society, political opposition and the EU bodies. This means that the substantive content of the dialogue will depend, firstly, on the position and activity of the Belarusian civil society.

As in the previous period, Belarusian public and political figures became the winners of various awards and nominations.

It should be noted that, given the high intensity of international contacts in this period, they were mostly reactive in nature, in most cases associated with repressions and human rights violations in Belarus. The Forum of Belarusian Non-Governmental Initiatives and the European dialogue on modernization partly fall out from this context, which set new and promising framework for international cooperation. It is possible to take advantage of these formats and to develop the strength of civil society in Belarus, but this will require greater coherence and coordination of activity. With proliferation of internal conflicts and contradictions (on the National Platform' Strategy, contradictions between civil society and opposition, differences in matters of the EU sanctions), it becomes quite a challenge.

Promotion and protection of interests, realization of the target groups' rights: low-productive activity

During the period a number of civic campaigns and initiatives were unfolded and came out into the public space. Typologically these can be grouped into the following units:

1. **Initiatives-appeals (including campaigns to collect signatures).** Given their rather low efficiency, these initiatives continue to be one of the most common types in the country. We will mention only the most significant. In Brest, activists of the campaign "Tell the truth!" sent more than a thousand signatures to the city executive committee with the requirement to solve the problem of odors in the city (January, 2012). Nearly three thousand signatures in support of the introduction of local border traffic were sent by Brest activists of "Tell the truth!" in the city executive committee and city Board of Deputies (February, 2012). In January, human rights organizations (Belarusian Helsinki Committee, Belarusian Association of Journalists, Assembly of NGOs, Human Rights Centre "Viasna", Legal Transformation Centre) addressed to the Minister of Justice with the proposals of dialogue and of improvement of legislation. Belarusian Helsinki Committee sought to enable the public to the work on the Commission on pardon to sentenced to death sentence of Dzmitry Kanavalau and Uladzislau Kavaliou (February, 2012), and also initiated the appeal to the Attorney General's Office on the issue of tortures of political prisoners. The civic initiatives "The right to belief" and "STOP 193.1!" appealed to a number of state agencies and chambers of the Belarusian Parliament on the abolition of Article 193.1 of the Penal Code (January-February, 2012).
2. **Initiatives to raise funds for political prisoners.** This type of initiative, as a rule, is a manifestation of the positive examples of civic solidarity. Clarity and certainty of their goals in most cases make such initiatives very effective. In January, the campaign ended to raise funds to offset the fine imposed on Ales



Bialiatski by the court. This did not result directly to the release of human rights defender, but withdrew financial claims, which have been the main arguments for the state non-legitimate Bialiatski's retention in custody.

3. **Initiatives of local residents against construction of ecologically dangerous objects or objects worsening living conditions.** It is one of the most common types of initiatives that took place in this period; earlier started and new initiatives continued to unfold: for defend of the Park 40th anniversary of October Revolution (Minsk); a protest of owners and residents of dachas of Smaliavichy villages, threatened with eviction due to the construction of Belarusian-Chinese technology park; a protest of inhabitants of Svietlahorsk against construction of a new chemical plant near the village of Yakimava Slabada; a protest of residents of Uruchcha-2 (Minsk) against the sealing of building of the district; a protest of residents of Kurasoushchyna (Minsk) against the transfer of health center (February-March, 2012); a protest of residents of Bielaziorsk against the construction of plant lead (February-March, 2012, construction suspended) and others. Given rather violent activity and tension of the situation, almost all initiatives of this type can not achieve any significant success. The reasons for this are not only the general conditions of absence of democratic rules of public opinion' consideration, but also serious shortcomings in the organization and management of initiatives by the very citizens. As a rule, initiatives are poorly organized and poorly coordinated, are not based on adequate analysis of the situation, have no clearly defined leadership, etc.
4. **Initiatives to promote the Belarusian language.** Traditional Belarusian initiatives related to the promotion and expansion of the use of Belarusian language. So called "national dictations", organized by the Belarusian school community and the Partnership of Belarusian language, were held in Mahiliou, Hrodna and other towns (February-March); in Brest, it was unfolded a number of actions under the campaign "Nasha mova" ("Our language"; February-March), campaign "Paperwork in Belarusian language" speaking for more linguistic equality, which was supported by the Ministry of Culture (February, 2012).
5. **Protests of workers and trade union initiatives.** Decline in real wages and rising inflation has provoked a number of actions by workers. In particular, in February 2012 workers of BATE managed to achieve solution as to increase wages by 20%. Throughout the period the struggle of the independent trade union of the "Granit" enterprise has been unfolding in Mikashevichy, which has become one of the most important reasons for media attention. Despite the repressions and dismissal of trade union activists, the resistance continues, one of the activists is on hunger strike.
6. **Social initiatives.** In the focus of media attention in this period got the initiative "Food Not Bombs", which activists have been involved in free distribution of food to the poor. As the distribution of food attracts a large number of the poor, the police impede the activities of the initiative in every way. On March 24, more than 100 people were arrested at a charity concert in support of the group "Food Not Bombs". On this issue, Belarusian human rights activists appealed to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention.
7. **Initiatives of a political nature.** In connection with the start of the election campaign in February 2012 two campaigns initiated for election observation, "People's control — for Fair Elections!" (Belarusian Party "The Greens", the Belarusian Popular Front, Movement "For Freedom") and "For Fair Elections" (Belarusian Left Party "A Just World" and others).
8. **Initiatives of symbolic solidarity.** Initiatives of symbolic solidarity with political prisoners, as well as street rallies, performances and picketing were typical of the period, but were not the nature of mass participation.



In general, given sufficiently high level of civic engagement, most initiatives, with rare exceptions, have not been effective in achieving their goals.

Changes in the terms of civil society organizations' activity: further restrictions

Following the expansion of the EU restrictive measures against Belarus and a diplomatic conflict, the information appeared in independent sources that the Belarusian authorities are considering limiting departure from Belarus to individuals who had openly called for imposition of sanctions (February, 2012). These measures were actually soon taken, as in March a number of prominent public and political figures have been denied the possibility of crossing the state border and leaving the Republic of Belarus. Moreover, on March 21, Lukashenko announced the possible introduction of the list of banned the exit persons "at full power" in an interview to the magazine "Russia Today". In fact, leaving the country is currently limited without any legitimate reason. The alarming symptom of the situation became statements of senior functionaries of the Russian Border Guard Service on their intention to close the Russian border for "non-exit persons from Belarus".

According to human rights defenders (Legal Transformation Centre), in January 2012 the Ministry of Justice sent to the Bar Rules a new draft on professional ethics of lawyers, "which are even of more rigid, controlling character of the state in relation to the legal profession". "The bodies of lawyer self-management have essentially excluded themselves from making any draft regulations, which would be aimed at creating conditions for real and not declared independence, both of the institution of the legal profession as a whole and the independence of each lawyer in exercising of professional activities". In this situation, it should be stated that such an institution as "an independent legal profession", there is no in Belarus, neither legally nor in fact⁵⁴.

Thus, we can conclude that in the period under review the general conditions of civil society activity continued to deteriorate.

⁵⁴ See: **Министерство юстиции продолжает лишать адвокатуру независимости:**
<http://www.lawtrend.org/ru/content/about/news/Minustadvokaturanezavisimost/>



Civil society in a mirror of monitoring: trends and tendencies of the last year

Andrei Yahorau,
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What does the annual program monitoring report show about the state and development of civil society? First of all, a very slow development dynamics, as almost all of the major challenges that the Belarusian civil society faces, have remained unresolved. This doesn't mean that positive changes don't occur. Civil society of Belarus continues to be the most promising actor of changes having the greatest potential, but this potential is converted into productive activities only to a small extent. Against the background of political stagnation in the country, it seems that civil society organizations are very active, but this activity does not always guarantee the achievement of desired results. This kind of integrated assessment should not be regarded as a total skepticism and disappointment, but rather as the opposite: this is a statement of the need for greater efforts of civil society in Belarus for changing the situation.

External trends

The most critical obstacle to the Belarusian civil society development is the unfavorable political regime. The government and administration system doesn't promote the creating of independent public activity, but rather strongly impedes it. Hostile rhetoric of the authorities on the "fifth column" in respect of the democratic society turns to the effective practice of suppressing any positive germs in the civil society. There is minimal space in the country for the legitimate activities of independent agents, and it continues to shorten. To deploy any type of actions, independent agents need to win the space over the state, from the public media space to the physical office spaces. In such circumstances, civil society organizations can survive, but they can neither grow nor have a positive impact on resolving of significant issues for the country. The transition of civil society organizations to the political level in order to change the terms of civil society activities is just an urgent need.

Without addressing this problem it becomes impossible to achieve sustainable results in ecology, advocacy, or in work with socially vulnerable groups, i.e. in any thematic spheres of activity.

Throughout the year, the general political terms and circumstances of civil society activity continued to deteriorate. At the same time the very civil society turned out to be incapable of any effective resistance to this trend unfolding. None of the topical issues affecting the whole civil society has been resolved. The most vivid confirmation of this fact was the inability to influence the release of political prisoners and to prevent repressions against civil society activists. All this suggests the need for critical restructuring of relations within civil society in the country. The most immediate task is consolidation of all the social and political forces on the basis of a joint strategy. Pluralism of opinions and "interspecific competition" in the civil society weaken it, and only stabilize the current political regime.

During the past year, the European Union sought to deepen and develop its relations with the civil society in Belarus. That was reflected both in expansion of contacts with the latter, looking for the new instruments for the work in a difficult situation in Belarus, introduction of the new financial instruments for support. This trend is definitely a positive factor for development of the civil society in Belarus. The format of the European dialogue



on modernization⁵⁵ creates good conditions for development for interaction of the EU, civil society and political opposition. In the future, this dialogue can grow into a broad trilateral dialogue with the Belarusian authorities, as well. The main contradictions, which do not allow the Belarusian civil society taking full advantage of the European vector, is the lack of a consolidated activities' strategy and a still poorly expressed subjectivity. The discordance of views in Belarus, concerning EU policies and strategies for change doesn't make it possible to achieve the synergy of actions on the ground and as on the EU strategy. The EU policy is inconsistent with the activities of civil society in Belarus and vice versa. The voice of the consolidated part of civil society (the National Platform) continues to be loud, but still only one of many.

In general, the growing trend of authoritarian tendencies in the region has the negative impact on the overall state of civil society. The deterioration of human rights situation in Ukraine, the obvious rollback to the authoritarianism in Russia, the problem state of civil society in the Eastern Partnership countries (except Moldova) do not create positive samples and reference points for Belarus.

Herewith the authoritarian powers demonstrate the possibility of cooperation and coordinated actions — as in a case if voting on the Declaration on the situation in Belarus at the Eastern Partnership Summit, or with the support of the so-called “travel ban list” for Belarus, the overall confrontation of Russia and the CSTO countries to the EU policy of restrictive measures against Belarus. At the same time, civil societies in the region are not effectively connected and can not provide sufficient resistance to authoritarianism. Over the year, the area of spontaneous civil initiatives was proactive, affecting the most various issues: workers' rights, resistance to destruction of historical monuments, confrontation to cutting parks, illegal housing development, construction of hazardous industries, etc. At the same time, initiatives remains isolated and unable to defend their interests in most cases, and their linkages with organized civil society are weak. The rise of this kind of grassroots civic activity, traditionally escalating on the eve of elections (autumn 2012) could become a positive factor for the civil society development, but the internal state of the amorphous subjectivity does not allow the latter to take advantage of this rise.

Thus, internal processes and the state of civil society in Belarus does not allow or counter the negative trends, or take the full advantage of positive opportunities.

Internal trends

The National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum remains the most powerful and promising site for interaction and consolidation of civil society. However, it must be noted that in the period of 2011-2012 the National Platform failed to cope with its own internal contradictions and disagreements, which has significantly slowed down its development. The prospect of the National Platform development lies in expansion of its activities' policy component and in transition to the level of national goals.

Contraction of the National Platform activities only to the European-Belarusian cooperation issues in terms of a prolonged conflict of the Belarusian authorities with the EU doesn't give the Platform the sufficient space for activities. Legitimate position of the National Platform under the Eastern Partnership allows it at the same time achieving certain positive results, even under current conditions (e.g., results of actions of the Public Bologna Committee). To enhance the internal position of the National Platform it is also required to extend relations with regional civil society sites, to involve a wider range of different civil society organizations in its activities (trade

⁵⁵ See: **European dialogue on modernization with Belarusian society:**
http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/belarus/press_corner/all_news/news/2012/european_dialogue_modernisation_en.htm



unions, employers' associations, churches and other public organizations), to establish regional links with similar sites in Russia and in the Eastern Partnership countries, to provide its representation in the Eastern Partnership structures (the Eastern Partnership Parliamentary Assembly EURONEST, the Conference of Local and Regional Authorities) and international organizations (OSCE, Council of Europe, etc.).

The civil society composition is still perceived in terms of non-governmental organization. That is no longer relevant to the current situation. Neither political parties nor trade unions, nor any other independent agents differ from each other in essence and meaning of the activity; they face the same common challenges and problems. The artificial separation of the political (opposition) and the civil (civil society) sector substantially weakens an independent society in general and creates obstacles and barriers to consolidation. Throughout the year, internal dialogue of civil society was very faintly developing, and positive trends that have emerged in recent time, can not be considered stable.

The dialogue between civil society and the state over the year has developed more in the form of conflict interactions. Almost no attempt of dialogue with the government, on any matters found a positive resolution (possibly, with the exception of the discussion of economic liberalization in cooperation with employers' associations). Singular examples of success of civil society can not disguise the fact of its general weakness and inability to achieve its goals during the dialogue (conflict) with the state. At the same time, the failure to resolve fundamental issues of interaction between civil society and the state at the national level dooms to failure any local initiatives for promoting the public interests.

Thus, the question of consolidation and development of dialogue within civil society of Belarus remains the first and the most important issue on the agenda. Without addressing it we should not expect any significant changes in any other directions.



Application

1. Analysis of civic initiatives in Belarus (April–September, 2011)

George Plaschinsky,
Center for European transformation

The major initiatives

The initiative to support political prisoners Pashtouka.org. Launched in February 2011. The active phase of attracting famous people to the campaign launched from May 2011.

Collecting money and other resources for penalties, support and in charitable purposes. Most part of the fees was for payment of fines to people — victims of demonstrating their civic position, as well as to sick children and victims of the terroristic attack on April 11, 2011.

Digital currency exchanger Prokopovi.ch. Created on April 9, 2011. The active phase of the work was up to September 14, 2011, when the first after the break additional session took place on the Interbank foreign exchange market. The site has become of national importance, has begun to perform the function of the foreign exchange market; according to results of exchange, participants' expectations of the market were estimated.

Initiatives-appeals. The lion's share of all appeals during the present relates to the problems of representation of the Belarusian language in the public sphere and in urban toponymy, as well as facilitating the conditions of detention of political prisoners or their complete release.

Actions of solidarity. They were carried out to support people subject to politically motivated persecutions. Among the major actions there were the collection of applications for change of restraint for Ales Bialiatski and sending postcards and letters to political prisoners.

Initiatives caused by socio-economic reasons. Two major were “Revolution Through Social Networks” (the active phase: June 1 – July 3) and “Stop-Petrol” (April 28, May 4, June 7-8, July 21, August 22, 2011). Largely were due to the socio-economic crisis in the country.

Penetration in the Minsk subway on May 30, 2011. With a high probability, the organizers didn't pursue any serious purpose, but it received a great response and led to a number of dismissals, punishments and public criticism.

The major trends

Civil society in Belarus continues to be under pressure of the Belarusian authorities; this fact influences the course of implementation and effectiveness of most advanced initiatives put forward by civil society. The repressive policy of the authorities against civil society and political opposition after the 2010 presidential election has begun to soften, although it hasn't significantly diminished. This was due to the fact that the Belarusian authorities has restarted to show their interest in the dialogue with the European Union, especially on the eve of the Eastern Partnership Summit in Poznan (September, 2011).



The main common features remained, characteristic of the earlier periods of civil initiatives of the monitoring:

1. **Fragmented civil society**, this is due to the lack of a broad dialogue between public organizations of various types, to their politicized nature (orientation on the power or opposition groups) and the lack of awareness of the community of interests (as is the case with initiatives in the field of sport, which leadership does not want to consider themselves being civil society). Many of the local socio-economic protests (at the factory of “Rechitsa Pivo” (“Rechitsa Beer”), at Belarusian-Polish border crossing points) didn’t coordinate their efforts with the other, although having obviously common goals.
2. **The absence of broad solidarity in civil society**. Many of the campaigns, initiated by certain civil society organizations, are not supported by others (“Revolution Through Social Networks” remained for a long time outside the focus of public and political organizations). However, there was a clear tendency to local solidarity actions (for example, collecting money to pay fines to people — victims of demonstrating their civic position, to collect petitions in defense of Ales Bialiatski).
3. **The gap between the upper and the lower strata**. The initiatives put forward by the lower strata, often do not find support at the leadership of public organizations or institutions of the upper strata. It is most vividly seen on local initiatives that are almost not promoted in the information environment. The opposite is also true: the social organization of the upper strata (network structures, well-known human rights organizations and socio-political organizations) often do not provide broad opportunities for average public’s participation, and if provide, the average public in some cases doesn’t want to include in it due to disinterest or lack of systematical work with it. Here is illustrative the example of “Revolution Through Social Networks” (RTSS): in some point the coordinators became so politicized and ceased feeling contact with members of the group; so they began offering frankly dangerous and failed initiatives (“queues to paddy wagons”, an action for a match between the football clubs “BATE” and “Barcelona”). Moreover, the human resource in the groups in social networks was used in a lopsided way. This is demonstrated by the results of membership in the group “Movement of the Future” in “VKontakte”. Since the transformation of the “Movement of the Future” in RTSS the number of participants the group fell approximately 8 times from 220 thousand to 31 thousand people.
4. **Politicization of civil initiatives** due to prolonged pressure of the authorities, the belief in the possibility of addressing of most problems only by “solution from above”, as well as long-term association of civic initiatives with the opposition political parties and leaders. At the same time, during the observed period due to the defeat of political parties and structures during the elections, most of the protest and civil activity fell on the civil society, “new groups” (the initiative “For the auto!”, “Revolution Through Social Networks”) and individuals (Andrej Kim, Julia Doroshkevich, Dmitry Galko, Anton Motolko). In part, this could be evidence of a tendency to of transition of civil initiatives to the level of “dissent”, where an important role play actions of small groups and individuals having no feedback from the broad opposition-minded to the authorities strata of society.

The main common features of civic initiatives remained, characteristic for the period “after December, the 19th”:

1. The sharp loss of confidence in the authorities and official bodies, especially increased due to the socio-economic crisis.
2. Focusing on the expression of solidarity and assistance to victims who have participated in protest actions (in particular, on December 19, 2011 and in RTSS), and to arrested and accused under the Criminal Code of the RB of involvement in the riots.



3. Increased use of the principle of a network of spreading the information and organization initiatives on the network principle, use of social networks for coordinating initiatives. Using this principle has become even more popular than in the period from December 2010 to February 2011, after the “Arab Spring” and the role of social networks Facebook and Twitter in the uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Syria and Libya, popular through the media impact.
4. The preferential use of resources within the country (civil society) for implementation of the tasks (the active involvement of citizens).
5. High efficiency due to the necessity of implementation of the tasks “here and now”.
6. Setting more specific tasks, the pursuit of proportionality of goals and resources. This refers mainly to initiatives that are initiated through the Internet (social networks) and by youth (e.g., collecting money for paying fees). At the same time, such cases were observed, when the goals and methods of their implementation were inadequate to each other or the same purpose has been blurred at all. For example, the “10 demands” of RTSS, put forward to the government on September 20, 2011, obviously could not be fulfilled, as the next day only a few hundreds of people came out to the streets. It is equally true in relation to the initiative “Marsh of millions” or the original purpose of “Revolution Through Social Networks”, namely: revolutions in Minsk on July 3, 2011.

New characteristic for this period was the conviction of activists that the socio-economic issue as a result of the increasing social and economic crisis will help involving a larger number of citizens affected by the crisis in different initiatives. Besides this, there was a mass conviction of citizens in sharp reducing of the confidence in the authorities, which would have consequences at the political level. Against this background, calls for “a dialogue”, “joint search of the ways of overcoming the crisis”, “restoration of civil peace and accordance”.

The main drawbacks of civic initiatives

The main drawbacks of civil initiatives during this period can be named the following:

- Lack of management, proportionality of objectives and resources (proposals of initially unreachable or blurred unfunded goals);
- Lack of the criteria indicating the effectiveness of an initiative;
- Lack of awareness of the public (especially not reading non-governmental publications);
- Poor reporting of the results of campaigns (in most cases conclusions are not done and results of expert assessments are not widely available);
- Lack of informational and analytical support;
- A small variety of ways of participation for certain groups or in whole;
- Closeness;
- A small number of “non-politicized” activists;
- Lack or plenty of work for initiatives’ coordinators;
- Lack of attention to the initiatives of neutral or the state press;
- Political engagement;



- Insufficient territorial scale (small attraction of activists in the regions to campaigns of national relevance, except for the initiatives “Revolution Through Social Networks” and “Stop-Petrol”);
- Lack of systematic monitoring of activity in this area (and, consequently, absence of information about the initiatives in the lower strata);
- Distrust of the authorities of any level and unwillingness not only to cooperate, but even to use legal means to protect their interests;
- Inability to agree with similar initiatives to improve the general case;
- Lack of use of symbolic resources (famous people, brands), including people known among the non-political community;
- Absence or small number of new authorities in their field of activity;
- Leaders from the lower strata lack the information support;
- Promotion of spontaneous initiatives, which progress is not managed;
- Lack of strategic planning;
- Distrust of civil initiatives on the part of part of citizens because of their association with political opposition and the desire to “disassociate themselves” from the fear of possible reprisals (high level of fear in society could be clearly seen immediately after the mass suppression of the RTSS; the number of people that came out at next actions sequentially decreased);
- Absence or insufficiently systematic or even closed from the public accountability on the results of civic initiatives;
- Attempt to influence the internal problems primarily by attracting attention of external subjects;
- Poor quality of information material (in the case of campaigns related to spreading of information) which is not adapted for the target audience.

The main positive features of civic initiatives

The main positive features of civic initiatives during this period may be marked out to contrast to the negative aspects (drawbacks), but there are those that should be emphasized especially based on the results of studies of empirical data:

- Broad media coverage (separately should be marked out the active role of the Russian media in highlighting of socio-economic crisis in Belarus and actions that followed, in the period from May to July 2011);
- Willingness to a dialogue with government officials and leaders of civic initiatives having similar nature (demonstrated was willingness, inter alia, by RTSS with appeal to civil society and political leaders to establish a certain general committee on protests);
- Use of the existing legislation capacities;
- Broad use of intellectual resources (conducting of a qualitative expert assessments of state and business projects, bills, draft bills, draft bills’ and documentation elaboration);



- Use of symbolic resources (involvement to the initiatives of the “third sector” representatives, known both in opposition and in of loyal to government circles of people (e.g., Andrej Kim and Pashtouka.org);
- Involvement of state media in covering initiatives and issues raised by them;
- Setting clear goals, proportionality of objectives and resources;
- Development and use of high-quality advertisements (in various forms), bright slogans;
- Publication of systematic reports on the progress of the initiative or the results of public monitoring of this or that problem (“For the car!”);
- Solidarity of activists and effective teamwork (RTSS);
- “Road maps” elaborating;
- Addressing of social problems with the use of resources and opportunities of citizens (without proceeding of “conventional” funding, for example, help.roh-roh.net);
- Networking principle of organization and dissemination of information, use of social networks (RTSS, “Stop-Petrol”, videos on YouTube);
- Free participation for every citizen and little need for resources;
- Graphical visualization of the initiative (symbols, T-shirts, flags: “Stop-Petrol”, ShOS (Let him die!), “You live beyond your means!”).

2. General description of civil initiatives (April–September, 2011)

George Plaschinsky,
Center for European transformation

The initiative to support political prisoners Pashtouka.org

Launched in February 2011. The active phase of the campaign for attracting famous people to the campaign launched from May 2011. Subscribers: Orthodox priest Alexander Borisov, musician Yury Shevchuk, TV presenter Michail Schatz, journalist Artemiy Troitsky, journalist Leonid Parfenov, blogger Anton Nosik, musician Alexei Kortnev, writer Viktor Shenderovich, actors Leonid Barats and Rostislav Hait, journalist Boris Vishnevsky, musician Andrei Makarevich, actress Chulpan Khamatova, musician Vasia Oblomov, TV presenter and actor Alexander Pushnoy and Mikhail Efremov.

Collecting money and other resources for paying penalties in charitable purpose

Natalia Ilyinich, a secondary teacher of a school of Talka dismissed for political reasons, received 117 money orders under the action in her support from April 1 to May 11, 2011.



On April, 11-12 2011 citizens spontaneously participated in the collection of donor blood and money to help injured in the terrorist attack in Minsk. The money collection was coordinated by the Minsk city executive committee and the Belarusian Red Cross Society.

On April 17, 2011 the Prokopovi.ch site administration proposed users of the site transferring money to the victims of the terrorist attack in the Minsk underground.

On May 15, 2011 music bands "Troitsa", "Akana" and other cultural workers organized charity concerts in aid to victims of the terrorist attack in Minsk.

On May 24, 2011 musicians Lavon Volski, Vladimir Pugach announced that they've put up for auction their paintings to help a sick child.

On May 25, 2011 passersby stood up for a man, the victim of police; he tried to protect a student free-rider. On May 27 during the day, through the coordination of a photographer Anton Motolko, more than 700 thousand rubles were collected to pay a fine, awarded to the man.

On June 9, 2011 during the day 2,5 million rubles were collected to pay fines for five people, punished for taking part in the campaign "Stop-Petrol".

On June 24, June 29 and July 15, 2011 collecting money was successfully organized through social networks to pay fines to the "silent actions" detainees'. On June 17, Homel residents collected 770 thousand rubles to pay the fine.

On July 3, 2011 citizens organized a massive transfer of essential goods to the Minsk-based detention center on Akrestsina street. On July 7 in connection with the mass arrests functioning of the site help.roh-roh.net was restored; it was designed to help prisoners and gather information about their fate.

On September 12, 2011 the online registration on the site Prokopovi.ch became paid: new members were to transfer 50 thousand rubles for the treatment of children with diseases.

Digital currency exchanger Prokopovi.ch

Created on April 9, 2011. The active phase of the work was up to September 14, 2011, when the first after the break additional session took place on the Interbank foreign exchange market. The site has become of national importance, has begun to perform the function of the foreign exchange market; according to results of exchange, participants' expectations of the market were estimated.

Initiatives-appeals

On April 1, 2011 in the Suharevo district by a parent committee of citizens was created; people wished to have their children educated in Belarusian-language kindergartens.

On May 17, 2011 in Mahiliou 16 citizens' signatures were collected and sent to the Ministry of Information with request to explain the words of Alexander Lukashenko to the head of the European Commission and the Ukrainian leadership.

On 31, 2011 it was reported that the coordinator of the campaign "Book-keeping in the Belarusian language" Ihar Sluchak sent to each of the 110 deputies of the House of Representatives a private proposal to amend the Law "On languages". The head of "Belarusian Language Society" Aleh Trusau, in his turn, addressed to the Traffic Police in the middle of May to organize the issuance of certificates of registration of vehicles in Belarusian language. The very citizens sent to the Traffic Police requests to issue driver's licenses in Belarusian language.



On July 19, 2011 in several Christian communities of Gomel collection of signatures took place under appeal to the leadership of the LAD TV channel with the requirement to remove from broadcasting the program “The Battle of extrasensory individuals”.

On August 4, 2011 residents of two Homel election districts sought a meeting with deputies of these city council districts. The collective appeals were signed by 600 people thanks to activists of the Civil campaign “Our House”.

On August 4, 2011 parents of schoolchildren of agrotown Siniagovoa (district of the Minsk region Staryia Darohi) filed a blanket complaint in the Departments of Education concerning the closing of the local school.

On August 25, 2011 a flash mob was held by citizens sending mass emails to the power structures with requirements to replace Russian-language signs on Belarusian ones in the region of the Belarusian north region Lakeland.

On September 8, 2011 By-Net users began to write in a book of complaints of the new Minsk bus station with the requirement to alter Russian-language signs on Belarusian ones.

On September 21, 2011 it was reported that local authorities of the city of Baranavichy refused activists of the civil campaign “To streets of Baranovichy — the names of the heroes of our time” in renaming of Soviet street to the names of the pilots-heroes.

Actions of solidarity

On April 10, 2011 a photographer and blogger Julia Doroshkevich initiated a campaign of solidarity with a Hrodna journalist Andrzej Poczobut; she urged users to write that they “sign under each article of A. Poczobut and are willing to share responsibility with him”.

After that a blogger Dmitry Galko and Sergei Maloletkin (Orsha, Vitebsk region) held a hunger strike in support of political prisoners in early April, a blogger Jeanne Yamaykina announced April 25, 2011 a “relay hunger strike” in support of political prisoners. The action was supported by 10 people.

On May 31, 2011 two dozen people gathered at the General Post Office to send a postcards to political prisoners.

On June 3, 2011 unknown people helped the family of political prisoner Aliaksandr Malchanau, cleaning his house’s yard.

On June 14, 2011 the student community of the European Humanities University (EHU) required revision of the sentence in respect of a part-time EHU student Nikolaj Dedko, convicted on “case of anarchists”.

On July 22, 2011 the civil initiative “Vyzvalenne” (“Liberation”) created by political prisoners’ relatives, demanded their immediate release.

On September 2, 2011 Ales Bialiatski’s attorney filed 816 petitions of citizens to change the restraint to the defendant, though they were not met. On September 17 representatives of Belarusian intelligentsia with the same result applied to the head of the Department of Punishments’ Execution demanding to stop the pressure on a political prisoner Zmitser Dashkevich.

Initiatives caused by socio-economic reasons

On April 2, 2011 the National Bolsheviks tried to hold a flash mob against the closure of Republican somatic hospital of the DIP Interior Ministry, but they were detained, fined and sentenced for various terms of administrative detention.



On April 28, 2011 traffic policemen prevented the conduct of the campaign “Stop-Petrol 2” on three gas stations. On May 4 in Brest 100 people took part in the campaign against the increase of petrol prices. On June, 7-8 next campaigns “Stop-Petrol” were held in Brest, Mahiliou and Homel. Pedestrians and cyclists supported the action on June 8. As a result, the next day Alexander Lukashenko ordered the halve the quota of fuel for the Administration of the President and the government, and to level down petrol prices, and Belarusan gas stations’ operators totally abolished earlier restrictions on the petrol sale. On July 21 and August 22 the next campaigns “Stop-Petrol” took place; the traffic police blocked for travel the Independence Avenue and the protesters were dispersed in the surrounding streets.

On May 23, 2011 workers of cooking-fermentation plant public corporation “Rechitsa Pivo” held a three-hour preventive strike, and as a result, the evening could get arrested award fees.

On June 1, 2011 the first action under the campaign “RevolutionThrough Social Networks” (RTSS) took place; users of social networks begun walking out on squares. On June 8 on the October Square in Minsk RTSS gathered several hundred people, the same thing happened on 15 and 22 June, when the regions began to join to protest actions. On June 29 actions were held once again, but the organizers began to put forward strange proposals: for example, to stand in queue to the paddy wagon in order “to show that people were more than the paddy wagons”. Also on June 24 RTSS distributed an open letter to Alexander Lukashenko with demand to dismiss the Interior Minister Anatoly Kuleshov. The RTSS action on July 3 failed: out of the three planned actions only one took place, and no revolution happened, to which the organizers have sought for a month. All the actions were accompanied by mass detentions, arrests, beatings and fines. On July 6 the actions had to move from urban centers in different parts of cities, but they failed. On July 14 the coordinator of RTSS Vyacheslav Dianov announced that the format of a further action will be determined by the very participants; they chose the continuation of actions on the October Square. As a result, only dozens of participants came out on July 20. On July 27 the event of the RTSS at the Kamarouka market during working hours did not took place at all: there were almost no participants, and organizers decided to suspend the actions. On September 21 actions resumed, several hundred people gathered in Minsk, but already another event on September 28, timed to a match between the football teams “BATE” and “Barcelona”, failed.

On June 10, 2011 entrepreneurs of the shopping mall “Maximus” refused to conduct a strike on June 15, as the market authorities withdrew the decision of the owner of the complex to break contracts with individual entrepreneurs relating lease of trading places.

On June 12, 2011 in Grodno, about 300 protesters blocked the road leading to the border crossing point “Bruzgi” and entered into a confrontation with police forces because of the entry into force of government decrees N 755 and N 753, relating to the limitation of export goods and fuel abroad. On June 13 a similar event was held in Brest, where 50 people blocked the border crossing point “Warsaw Bridge”, they met with head of the Brest region executive committee. Subsequently, the action participants were demanded to pay for special forces’ service and compensation for customs.

The Internet community “March of millions” planned an action on June 15, 2011 on the central square in Minsk to demand the resignation of Alexander Lukashenko as president, but after the arrest of the event organizer the action didn’t take place.

On June 21, 2011 Chervienski market entrepreneurs with collective calls and meetings made the Minsk city executive committee to promise that the market wouldn’t be liquidated and would get a new site in Leninski district of the capital.



On June 2011, convicted of 13th penal colony of the Vitsebsk region went on hunger strike in protest against violations of law by the administration of the colony and the use of physical force to convicted people. They demanded a meeting with the General Prosecutor of Belarus. On July 29 the General Prosecutor's Office, after the media reports, began checking information on hunger strikes and suicides in this colony.

Penetration in the Minsk subway

On May 30, 2011 in YouTube appeared a video in which young men captured the fact that they can easily get into the Minsk subway at night. As a result, Alexander Lukashenko publicly expressed his dissatisfaction with work of the police and the Ministry of Defence, the Attorney General ordered to conduct checking of works of the Minsk subway. By the order of general director of the state enterprise "Minsktrans" the chief of the metropolitan Nikolay Andreev was dismissed, 12 subway employees were punished, and two policemen were dismissed.