

To: **H.E. Catherine Ashton**, Vice-President, European Commission, and High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

H.E. Štefan Füle, European Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy

21 December 2010

PASOS calls for the EU to actively consult with Belarusian civil society on future engagement of Belarus in Eastern Partnership initiative, and to launch intensive policy dialogue with civil society human rights defenders and independent think-tanks in Belarus

PASOS supports the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum's call for release of detained opposition candidates and human rights defenders and for an independent, international inquiry into the actions of state militia after Belarus presidential election

Dear High Representative,
Dear Commissioner,

Since the Belarusian presidential election on 19 December 2010, several opposition presidential candidates have been detained by the police, while numerous human rights defenders, civil society activists, and Belarusian and international media representatives, have been brutally beaten by state security forces and militia, and hundreds have been arrested in Minsk and other cities around Belarus.

The abuse of human rights and disregard for democratic process during the elections confirm the importance of according civil society the status of "permanent participant" in the meetings and expert panels of the Eastern Partnership initiative to reflect the important investment made by the EU into the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum and the spirit of the joint declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership summit, signed on 7 May 2009 by the EU and six neighbouring countries, including the government of the Republic of Belarus. The signatories agreed that "the Eastern Partnership will be based on commitments to the principles of international law and to fundamental values, including democracy, the rule of law and the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as to, market economy, sustainable development and good governance".

PASOS, as a network of independent think-tanks spanning 27 countries in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia, works to support independent policy actors and to strengthen and open up the policymaking environment in the region. The fact that one of the detained presidential candidates, Andrei Sannikov, has been a participant in PASOS seminars and conferences on three occasions – in Prague, Krynica, and Berlin – highlights the depth of our engagement in the region. In addition, the 17-member Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum includes four representatives of the PASOS network.

PASOS aims to promote and protect democracy, human rights and open society values – including the rule of law, good governance, and economic and social development – by supporting civil society organisations that individually and jointly foster public participation in public policy issues at the European Union level, in other European and global structures, and in the wider neighbourhood of Europe and Central Asia.

Chair: David Král **Executive Director:** Jeff Lovitt

PASOS is a not-for-profit association registered in the Czech Republic

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PASOS supports the call of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum for the Belarusian authorities to provide full access to the EU representation in Minsk and to Belarusian and international human rights organisations to detainees in prison and those with injuries in hospitals, and for the swift release of prisoners detained on 19-20 December 2010. PASOS also joins with the Civil Society Forum in calling for the organisation by the EU of an independent inquiry into the actions of police and security forces during and after the Belarus presidential election.

The 2010 Belarusian presidential elections, held on 19 December 2010, failed to meet international standards for democratic elections, including equitable access to the media for all candidates, the unfair use of state resources to support the incumbent, and the almost total lack of independent or opposition representatives on the Electoral Commission. According to the statement on 20 December 2010 by Tony Lloyd, leader of the short-term OSCE observer mission to Belarus, "the counting process lacked transparency. The people of Belarus deserved better. And, in particular, I now expect the Government to account for the arrests of presidential candidates, journalists and human rights activists."

We, the undersigned, urge the EU to organise an independent inquiry into the actions of the police and special forces in Belarus, and to intensify co-operation with civil society representatives, in particular human rights defenders and independent think-tanks in Belarus in policy dialogue concerning EU relations with Belarus – in particular within the framework of the Eastern Partnership initiative.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jeff Lovitt".

Jeff Lovitt, Executive Director, PASOS (Policy Association for an Open Society)

and the undersigned:

Tevan Poghosyan, Executive Director, International Center for Human Development (ICHD), **Armenia**

Vitali Silitski, Academic Director, Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies (BISS), **Belarus**

David Král, Director, EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy, **Czech Republic**

Agnieszka Łada, Head of European Programme/Analyst, Institute of Public Affairs (IPA), **Poland**

Aaron Presnall, Director of Studies, Jefferson Institute, **Serbia**