

Activities for 2024 - 2025
agreed following the meeting of the Council of Europe Contact Group
on co-operation with Representatives of Belarusian democratic forces
and civil society on 1 December 2023

I. Securing human rights and fundamental freedoms

1)

Activity	“BRINGING THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS TO BELARUS”: AWARENESS RAISING AND CAPACITY BUILDING WORKSHOPS ON EUROPEAN STANDARDS INCLUDING THE ECHR FOR BELARUSIAN LAWYERS AND HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS
Description	<p>A series of up to six 3-day, practice-oriented, workshops (up to 30 participants) on Council of Europe human rights and rule of law standards, with the focus on the European Convention on Human Rights and case law of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) and in areas of expertise of the Venice Commission as appropriate.</p> <p>The purpose is to demonstrate how the ECHR provisions can be used for reforming the relevant legislation and shape the judicial practice when the opportunity is there. The workshops should help prepare Council of Europe-minded lawyers and human rights defenders.</p> <p>Workshops will be organised with the participation of lawyers from the Registry of the ECtHR, members/experts of the Venice Commission and representatives of other Council of Europe standard setting and monitoring bodies, where relevant.</p>
Main partners	Belarusian Helsinki Committee, Human Constanta, Belarusian Human Rights House in Vilnius, Human Rights House Network (Norway), Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (Poland), CEELI Institute (Prague), Belarusian Association of Human Rights Lawyers (Vilnius)
Relevant MAE	DGI
Proposed timeline	Spring 2024- Autumn 2025

2)

Activity	“BRINGING THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS TO BELARUS”: STUDY VISITS ON THE ECHR AND THE RULE OF LAW, INCLUDING THE FUNCTIONING OF DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS (Bar Associations, NHRIs, Equality Bodies, etc.) FOR BELARUSIAN LAWYERS AND CSO ACTIVISTS
Description	<p>Four study visits to Strasbourg and member states of the Council of Europe for Belarusian lawyers in exile and human rights defenders.</p> <p>One study visit to Strasbourg will include in-depth familiarisation with Council of Europe bodies, including work practices of the ECtHR and the Venice Commission.</p>

	Study visits to the member States will include meetings with local/national bar associations and other professional associations of lawyers, lawyers working with ECHR, human rights NGOs, judiciary, National Human Rights Institutions and Equality bodies. Such visits will ensure sustainability and help prepare future actors for the transformation and rebuilding of the legal system of Belarus, including in the context of transitional justice
Main partners	Belarusian Helsinki Committee, Human Constanta, Belarusian Human Rights House in Vilnius, Human Rights House Network (Norway), Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (Poland), CEELI Institute (Prague), Belarusian Association of Human Rights Lawyers (Vilnius)
Relevant MAE	DGI
Proposed timeline	Spring 2024- Autumn 2025

3)

Activity	“BRINGING THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS TO BELARUS”: ONLINE AWARENESS RAISING AND (HELP) TRAINING ON THE ECHR AND OTHER COUNCIL OF EUROPE STANDARDS
Description	<p>Translation into Belarusian of at least two European Programme for Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals (HELP) courses and its tutored implementation for at least two groups of legal professionals and human rights defenders.</p> <p>Up to four one-day online/face-to-face awareness-raising and/or training sessions presenting the Council of Europe HELP Programme and selected courses for Belarusian university students (on Council of Europe rule of law and human rights standards, including social rights). As the HELP courses are available online, they can be accessed by Belarusian students regardless of where they are. In case of need, additional follow-up sessions could be considered.</p> <p>University (law) professors may be interested in participating in these sessions.</p>
Main partners	Belarusian Helsinki Committee, Human Constanta, Belarusian Human Rights House in Vilnius, Human Rights House Network (Norway), Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (Poland), CEELI Institute (Prague), Belarusian Association of Human Rights Lawyers (Vilnius); Centre for Constitutionalism and Human Rights of the European Humanities University (Vilnius)
Relevant MAE	DGI
Proposed timeline	Spring 2024- Autumn 2025

4)

Activity	PROMOTION OF THE ABOLITION OF THE DEATH PENALTY IN BELARUS AMONG BELARUSIAN SOCIETY, INCLUDING DIASPORA – WORKSHOP WITH THE ACTIVE PARTICIPATION OF THE YOUTH FROM BELARUS
Description	<p>A workshop for advocacy for the abolition of the death penalty specifically designed for young Belarusian activists during which they would start preparing a communication awareness raising initiative targeting Belarusian citizens in order to shape a favourable opinion on the abolition.</p> <p>This awareness raising initiative would then be conducted through NGOs and other initiatives and channels available within the country and with the diaspora. It could be launched during the World Day against the death penalty on 10 October 2024.</p> <p>There is no common attitude toward the abolition of the death penalty in the Belarusian society, including the diaspora that now includes a large number of people who were forced to leave Belarus in the wake of the repressions of 2020-2021.</p> <p>In line with the recent Committee of Ministers' decisions on the abolition of the death penalty, there is also a need to involve the youth in this fight. Four participants from Belarus took part in the first workshop for advocacy for the abolition of the death penalty held in June 2023 (activity in the framework of the 2023 action plan).</p>
Main partners	"Viasna" Human Rights Centre, Belarusian Helsinki Committee, RADA and other representatives of Belarusian civil society and democratic forces. International Commission on the abolition of the death penalty (Spain); NGO Ensemble contre la peine de mort/ECPM (France)
Relevant MAE	DGI
Proposed timeline	2024

5)

Activity	SEMINAR "ABOLITION OF THE DEATH PENALTY IN BELARUS – NEXT STEPS"
Description	The purpose of the 1-day seminar is to brainstorm on the possible scenarios of the abolition in Belarus and the immediate steps to be taken by the democratic authorities once change happens (reform of criminal justice system, transitional provisions etc.). Participants would be the key actors for the abolition of the death penalty in Belarus, including political formations, as well as European NGOs who share good practices from across the globe, including representatives of youth-led organisations who continuously engage or launch actions in this field. The seminar will be held in Strasbourg, Vilnius or Warsaw.
Main partners	"Viasna" Human Rights Centre (including its campaign "Human Rights Defenders Against the Death Penalty in Belarus"), Belarusian Helsinki Committee, RADA, International Commission on the abolition of the death penalty (Spain) and other NGOs working on this theme.

Relevant MAE	DGI
Proposed timeline	Autumn 2024

II. Parliamentary Assembly

6)

Activity	STRENGTHENING POLITICAL DIALOGUE WITH DEMOCRATIC FORCES FROM BELARUS
Description	<p>Enhancing the political outreach of Belarusian democratic political forces and civil society while raising greater awareness of the situation in Belarus amongst members of national parliaments.</p> <p>Participation of representatives of Belarusian democratic forces in part-sessions of the Parliamentary Assembly.</p> <p>Meetings between representatives of Belarusian democratic forces, civil society, human rights defenders, independent journalists, academia and relevant Assembly rapporteurs and general rapporteurs (in line with paragraph 18.3 of Assembly Resolution 2433 (2022)).</p> <p>Participation of representatives of Belarusian democratic forces, civil society, human rights defenders, independent journalists, academia in hearings organised by Assembly committees, sub-committees and networks (in line with paragraph 18.2 of Assembly Resolution 2433 (2022)).</p> <p>Seminars on a) the situation in Belarus, including situation of political prisoners and other victims of political repressions and/or b) the situation of Belarusians in exile organised in national parliaments at the initiative of members of the Assembly.</p> <p>Study visits of members of the Coordination Council to the Assembly. Support to young Belarusians carrying out internships/study visit with the Assembly Secretariat (including travel and accommodation costs).</p> <p>Translation of relevant Assembly documents into Belarusian language.</p>
Main partners	Belarusian democratic political forces and civil society.
Relevant MAE	Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
Proposed timeline	2024-2025

III. Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

7)

Activity	LEADING THE CHANGE FOR DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS AT LOCAL LEVEL AND STRENGTHENING POLITICAL DIALOGUE WITH BELARUSIAN DEMOCRATIC FORCES
Description	<p>The proposed activities have been discussed with representatives of the Belarusian democratic forces in exile and are a follow-up to bilateral meetings and the Congress workshop “Leaders for change: promoting democracy and human rights at local level” organised on 14-15 November 2023:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Political support to the Belarusian democratic forces to ensure the involvement of representatives of a plurality of democratic forces from Belarus in relevant activities of the Congress (Sessions, Committees, Bureau) in 2024. - Incorporation of European standards of local democracy into the work of the Belarusian democratic forces to help prepare for the transformation of the local self-government system, through capacity development and expertise on the general concept for local self-government and relevant legislation drafted by the Belarusian Democratic Forces. This entails desk review and a series of online and in-person workshops, including for the “Personnel Reserve”; as well as translation of relevant Congress texts and reports into Belarusian. - Second workshop “Leaders for change: promoting democracy and human rights at local level” to further promote the European Charter of Local Self-Government and its Additional Protocol. It will focus on the roles and responsibilities of local authorities, public ethics, transparency, accountability, and citizen participation.
Main partners	Coordination Council, Belarusian Helsinki Committee, Personnel Reserve for New Belarus campaign coordinator, United Transitional Cabinet
Relevant MAE	Congress of Local and Regional Authorities
Proposed timeline	2024

IV. Acting for equality, diversity and respect

Gender Equality – Violence against women and domestic violence

8)

Activity	CAPACITY BUILDING ACTIVITIES RELATED TO GENDER EQUALITY AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, IN LINE WITH COUNCIL OF EUROPE STANDARDS
Description	<p>Activities would aim to continue increasing knowledge and understanding, among Belarusian democratic forces and civil society, of international and Council of Europe standards on gender equality and on countering violence against women, as well as to promote women’s rights more generally. In practice, the activities should stimulate democratic forces to adopt gender equality and non-discrimination policies within their structures as well as gender mainstreaming and women’s rights as priority topics, and to provide a conduit for those messages to the broader Belarus society.</p> <p>In 2024 the Council of Europe will follow up the online workshop on the Istanbul Convention organised in October 2023. Opportunities will also be seized to continue disseminating information in Belarusian about the Council of Europe gender equality standards and especially the Istanbul Convention and its potential benefits.</p> <p>Activities can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - peer-to-peer sessions on developing gender-informed policymaking; - capacity building/training on topics such as women in public and political decision-making, including for youth leaders (in co-operation with the Youth Department); - adapting and translating further materials to the Belarusian context; - study visit to Strasbourg for relevant multipliers of the democratic forces and civil society (FemGroup and women’s/gender issues related NGOs specifically, members of the Coordination Council and United Cabinet generally); - technical advice to the Contact Group’s Action Plan for 2024, currently being drafted, on gender equality issues. <p>Activities are aimed to empower, motivate and support representatives of civil society, including young people, to take a more active role and to engage in including a gender perspective in political decision and policy making at all levels, promoting women’s fundamental rights as an imperative condition for gender equality and genuine democracy.</p>
Main partners	Feminist Group Belarus, Women/feminist and gender organisations/initiatives working in Belarus and in exile
Relevant MAE	DGII
Proposed timeline	2024

Anti-discrimination, diversity and inclusion

9)

Activity	INITIATIVE TO PROMOTE EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION IN BELARUS
Description	<p>Building on the needs identified in cooperation with Belarusian partners during 2023, activities will continue to promote equality and non-discrimination at the societal level, in line with European standards and the ECtHR case-law. Work will reinforce the capacities of practitioners and activists to advocate for equality at the societal level. Peering and networking with PGG beneficiaries will be ensured by integrating a group of Belarusian participants in the pilot course on ECRI GPR 7 in Strasbourg, planned in person in summer.</p> <p>Ultimately, such activities will result in increased capacities of practitioners to understand and advocate for equality in the society, in line with protected grounds by the Council of Europe. Activists will be also exposed to good practices and sharing with HF/PGG peers.</p> <p>In this context the following specific activities are proposed:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Training for CSO activists, lawyers and other stakeholders based on an adapted version of the HELP course on ECHR Article 14 and training for multipliers of CSOs work in anti-discrimination. This activity is in a hybrid format. It is based on the existing HELP course on ECHR Article 14 and comprises of the completion of the online course and a 2-day in person training for CSOs on how to engage in anti-discrimination topics based on Council of Europe standards. 2. Training for CSO activists, lawyers and other stakeholders focusing on ECRI standards, notably GPRs 2 and 7 as the key ones in terms of setting up independent equality bodies and the baselines of the legal work at national level on antiracism and anti-discrimination. An adapted version of the two online courses on these GPRs will be offered to participants, with trainers' support.
Main partners	Belarusian Helsinki Committee, NGOs dealing with equality matters; democratic forces of Belarus.
Relevant MAE	DGII
Proposed timeline	March 2024 – February 2025

V. Anchoring democratic values in European societies

Freedom of expression and information – safety of journalists

10)

Activity	“STRENGTHENING THE CAPACITIES AND SKILLS OF BELARUSIAN JOURNALISTS IN EXILE”
Description	<p>Following two Workshops for Belarusian journalists in exile organised in 2023 (Strasbourg in March and Warsaw in November), aimed at establishing cooperation with exiled Belarusian journalists, learning about their needs and how the Council of Europe could assist in meeting these needs, the proposed project will follow up on the information collected and will focus on two main Components:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Building capacity (by means of training sessions and seminars) of exiled Belarusian journalists, strengthening their skills on professional reporting, debunking disinformation and media literacy (about 5 activities in total); 2. Targeted meetings (in the form of consultations) in the format Council of Europe-Belarusian media community (and possibly EU and other relevant stakeholders) to better understand the real challenges Belarusian journalists and media actors are facing in a host Council of Europe member States and try to find joint solutions.
Main partners	Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ); Representatives of Belarusian democratic forces and civil society in the Council of Europe Contact Group; European Federation of Journalists (EFJ); Justice for Journalists (JFJ) Foundation.
Relevant MAE	DGII
Proposed timeline	March 2024 – February 2025

Democratic governance and dialogue – civil society

11)

Activity	ROUND TABLE AND CONSULTATIONS ON GOOD DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE
Description	<p>The activity will be aimed at promoting the Council of Europe standards and tools in the area of good democratic governance and providing Council of Europe expertise in the fields of decentralisation, local government and public administration reforms.</p> <p>It will aim at identifying the main needs in terms of reforms, presenting the relevant Council of Europe legal and capacity-building tools. Further emphasising the importance of the involvement of youth in such activities and following the co-management approach developed by the Council of Europe, young activists will be invited to participate in discussions.</p>
Main partners	Belarusian civil society
Relevant MAE	Congress of Local and Regional Authorities
Proposed timeline	2024

12)

Activity	SUPPORT TO BELARUS CIVIL SOCIETY SHADOW REPORTING
Description	<p>The aim of the first activity is to raise awareness by the Belarus civil society on the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. The monitoring of the Convention by GRETA depends on shadow reports by civil society. The next evaluation of Belarus should take place in 2025.</p> <p>The aim of the second proposed activity is to raise awareness of the Belarusian civil society of Council of Europe standards and monitoring mechanisms, to create contacts with practitioners, and to develop support for training, training of trainers and feedback on shadow reporting notably with respect to Council of Europe human rights standards, instruments and monitoring mechanisms.</p>
Main partners	<p>For the first activity - Feminist Group Belarus, Women/feminist and gender organisations/initiatives working in Belarus and in exile.</p> <p>For the second activity - RADA, Belarusian Helsinki Committee, Viasna, (possible involvement of relevant UN human rights mechanisms/ entities such as the UN Youth Envoy, UN Youth Office, UN Special Rapporteurs to be considered)</p>
Relevant MAE	DGII
Proposed timeline	2024 - 2025

Youth

13)

Activity	CAPACITY BUILDING ACTIVITIES ON ADVOCACY AND DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION FOR YOUTH
Description	<p>Seminars for Belarusian youth organisations in exile on advocacy practices and democratic youth participation (based on Council of Europe's expertise), follow-up networking meetings, as well as internships in the relevant bodies of the organisation.</p> <p>A conference on democracy and human rights in times of crisis will develop recommendations to policymakers and discuss ways in which Belarusian youth organisations can co-operate with the Council of Europe and relevant European institutions in the future. Recommendations would be submitted for the attention of relevant Council of Europe bodies, including the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly. The high-level conference on youth for democracy in Belarus, in view of the Reykjavik Summit and experiences arising from the training course, could take place in 2024.</p> <p>Activities will be held at the European Youth Centres in Strasbourg and Budapest (also giving participants the opportunity to meet with different Council of Europe entities). They will cover capacity building for young activists, as well as the involvement of youth in decision-making processes based on the expertise of the Advisory Council on Youth within the Council of Europe and the European Youth Forum.</p>
Main partners	RADA, the Democratic national youth council of Belarus (many of its members in exile), the European Youth Forum
Relevant MAE	DGII
Proposed timeline	2024 - 2025

14)

Activity	SPECIAL PROGRAMME FOR BELARUSIAN LEGAL PROFESSIONALS
Purpose	Building on the success of study visits to the Council of Europe and thematic workshops organised for the Belarusian lawyers, up to 10 legal professionals per year will be supported under this programme to become familiar with the Council of Europe environment and standards. It is envisaged that each programme will be of approximately six months in duration. Belarusian legal professionals will join the Council of Europe in Strasbourg to contribute with their expertise to the activities of the organisation in line with the applicable Council of Europe legal framework. The selection of the candidates will take into consideration their proven expertise, their motivation to apply acquired experience within the Belarusian democratic forces or civil society, knowledge of English and/or French languages. A balance of representation of democratic forces and civil society will be aimed for.
Main partners	Belarusian Helsinki Committee, Viasna, Office of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, Coordination Council, United Transitional Cabinet
Leading MAE	Directorate General Human Rights and Rule of Law (DGI), Directorate General of Democracy (DGII), The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, Parliamentary Assembly.
Proposed timeline	Spring 2024- Autumn 2025

15)

Activity	PUBLIC OUTREACH ABOUT THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE
Purpose	<p>Through public outreach the understanding among the Belarusian citizens will be increased on what the Council of Europe is, what is its role in the European system of multilateral relations, what its core values are, how it is structured, how the Council of Europe activities are related to the daily lives of the Europeans and what the co-operation means for each country.</p> <p>As the first step, the creation of a dedicated webpage about the Council of Europe Contact Group on Belarus is foreseen. The webpage will be a 'hub' for various types of information related to the projects and initiatives carried out by the Council of Europe for Belarusian civil society and media, as well as the relevant work of the Council of Europe institutions and structures. The pilot webpage will be in English.</p> <p>Production of a video featuring Belarusian and the Council of Europe representatives explaining what the Council of Europe does for the civil society and independent media in exile, could be part of the outreach efforts. The film could be promoted on the Council of Europe and Belarusian partners' channels, including civic education ones.</p> <p>Providing financial support to independent Belarusian journalists (4-5 a year) to be able to come and cover Council of Europe events (PACE sessions, the 75th anniversary events) where Belarus will be discussed.</p>

	Organising a study visit for a small group of journalists in exile to the Council of Europe to understand better the functioning of the Council of Europe.
Main partners	Office of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, Belarusian Helsinki Committee, independent media outlets
Leading MAE	Directorate of Communications
Proposed timeline	2024