



Conclusions from the participants of the **Workshop of Belarusian journalists in exile**

We, the participants of the workshop convened on 21-22 March 2023, hosted by the Council of Europe in Strasbourg representing Belarusian media in exile, support mechanisms and journalists' associations and unions in the European countries, the Council of Europe partner organisations, participating in the Platform for the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists, come to the following conclusions.

1. In recent months and years, the government of Belarus has established a legal and political climate that makes it impossible for independent journalists and media to report without fear of reprisal on political and social developments in the country. As a result of the ongoing oppression, the remaining significant and politically influential independent news media, professional journalists and other media actors have either stopped reporting on sensitive issues and/or fled into exile and are currently based in several member states of the Council of Europe.
2. Hundreds of journalists, who recently fled Belarus, still struggle to find media jobs. The online media attempt to reach their audience at home from abroad despite blocking of access to their websites by the authorities. They provide significant input into strengthening the will of the Belarusian civil society for freedom and democracy.
3. The Belarusian media in exile are an important instrument of countering disinformation and propaganda of the Lukashenko regime in Belarus and for their audiences at home and abroad.
4. The oppression of the Belarusian Association of Journalists, Press Club – Belarus, and PEN–Belarus by the Minsk regime through anti-democratic legislation makes their activity possible today only from abroad, in particular thanks to the support provided by the European Federation of Journalists and other professional and media freedom organisations.

We call on the key stakeholders of freedom of speech and democracy in Belarus to engage in particular activities, essential for continuation of our common professional work:

1. *The Council of Europe and other European intergovernmental organizations, national authorities in Europe:*
 - A. provide political and other support to strengthening Belarusian civil society by engaging in pan-European efforts to defend human rights in Belarus, including freedom of expression and freedom of the media;
 - B. engage in drawing international attention to the results of monitoring human rights violations in Belarus, reported, in particular thanks to the monitoring of the Council of Europe's Platform for the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists, in the discussions within the Group of Friends on Media Freedom, and raising the issue at the intergovernmental fora, such as the OSCE human dimension meetings;

- C. consider the need to enable physical security and free professional activity of independent Belarusian media actors in exile in the countries of the Council of Europe as an important regional contribution to the preservation and strengthening of Belarusian civil society;
- D. make use of the professional journalistic associations for the certification (verification) of the professional status of Belarusian journalists and other media actors in exile and their accreditation when applicable;
- E. facilitate visa procedures and relocation for *bona fide* independent media, journalists and members of their families;
- F. coordinate action with internet service providers and telecom industry to facilitate and prioritize dissemination of independent Belarusian media products and counter disinformation and propaganda from totalitarian regimes.
- G. Coordinate and make financial support mechanisms available to independent Belarusian media.

2. *The European and International Federations of Journalists, other partner organizations of the Council of Europe's Platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists:*

- A. express solidarity with their colleagues, who left Belarus because of the ongoing oppression of political freedoms, in establishing professional ties, conducting professional training in European standards and practices of media work, "twinning" of media outlets, providing space and communication facilities, etc.;
- B. centralise and make available to the journalists and the media in exile the existing offers of support programmes, including emergency mechanisms;
- C. consider facilitating the issuing of the national and international press cards and furthering access to information sources in Europe for the Belarusian journalists
- D. Support the distribution of information on Belarus through the independent media channels and bring it to the attention of European media outlets, namely through the Platform.

3. *Civil society organizations in the Council of Europe member states:*

- A. consider strengthening the network of support mechanisms in the countries with strong presence of Belarusian journalists, which would facilitate their meetings, discussions on professional issues, access to the means of their profession, obtaining of legal advice, learning language of the host country, etc.;
- B. promote dissemination of information from and on Belarus, and the situation with the civil and political rights there, with the imprisoned journalists and human rights defenders through projects and activities that would involve participation of Belarusian media actors in exile;
- C. facilitate professional training and fellowships for the journalists in exile.

We call on our colleagues, professional journalists and other media actors from Belarus, to preserve trust of our audiences through respect for ethical standards of journalism:

- respect for the facts;
- use of fair methods to obtain information;
- respect for privacy and the dignity of the persons named in publications;
- refraining from the dissemination of information or opinion that may contribute to hatred or prejudice, avoid facilitating the spread of discrimination on grounds such as geographical, social or ethnic origin, race, gender, sexual orientation, language, religion, disability, political and other opinions;
- solidarity with their colleagues;
- refraining from any activity or engagement likely to put their independence in danger.

Strasbourg, 22 March 2023.