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Open Letter of the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights on the Warsaw Eastern Partnership Summit (29-30 September 2011)

On 29 September 2011, in scope of the Polish Presidency in the Council of the European Union, Warsaw will host the Eastern Partnership Summit. It will be the first meeting of the heads of States and Governments since the inauguration of the new EU initiative towards Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine in 2009. The expected result of the summit is a declaration on the goals of the future cooperation between the signatories of the Eastern Partnership project.

The Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights would like to recall that one of the major goals of the Eastern Partnership is the development of democracy and the protection of human rights. This is especially valid in the context of the recent arrests of human rights activists in Belarus, e.g. during the "silent rally protests", and the transfer by Poland and Lithuania of the bank data of Ales Belyatsky, the head of the Human Rights Center "Viesna", to the Belorussian authorities. A. Belyatsky is kept in detention since August 2011 under the accusation of income concealment. In addition, it is important to highlight that Belarus still maintains the death penalty.

The situation in the other Eastern Partnership member states is also alarming. Particular concerns relate to the arrest on political grounds of Julia Tymoshenko, the previous Prime Minister of Ukraine. She was accused of public funds embezzlement. In Azerbaijan bloggers are regularly persecuted (e.g. "wanted" notice sent after Elnur Madzili on 12 March 2011). Moreover, the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Azerbaijan ordered on 10 March 2011 the Human Rights House Azerbaijan, an independent human rights NGO, to cease all activities immediately. The closure was preceded by numerous searches by police of the NGO premises. In Georgia, on 25 March 2011 on the streets of Tbilisi a demonstration was brutally dispersed, 7 protesters were deprived of liberty. The fact that human rights are violated in those countries is regularly confirmed in the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights.

The above mentioned examples expose the lack of respect for fundamental rights and freedoms, e.g. the right to liberty and security, freedom of assembly and association, freedom

of expression and right to human rights activism. They are also an evidence of the deficit of democracy among the Eastern Neighbors of the European Union.

Therefore, we would like to express our hope that the problem of the lack of respect for democracy principles and the necessity to introduce human rights protection guarantees in the Easter Partnership member states becomes a priority of the upcoming Warsaw Summit.



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