



Plenary sitting

B8-0454/2018

2.10.2018

MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

with request for inclusion in the agenda for a debate on cases of breaches of human rights, democracy and the rule of law

pursuant to Rule 135 of the Rules of Procedure

on Deterioration of media freedom in Belarus, notably the case of Charter 97 (2018/2861(RSP))

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on behalf of the S&D Group

European Parliament resolution on Deterioration of media freedom in Belarus, notably the case of Charter 97 (2018/2861(RSP))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on Belarus
- having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to all human rights conventions to which Belarus is a party,
- having regard to Rules 135(5) and 123(4) of its Rules of Procedure
- Whereas against the background of continued imprisonment of two political prisoners (Mikhail Zhamchuzhny and Dzmitry Paliyenka); the August 24 convictions and sentencing of Henadz Fiadynich and Ihar Komlik (activists of the independent trade union REP) to “restricted freedom” as clear pressure on independent trade unions; the August 7 criminal case opened by the Investigative Committee of Belarus against a number of journalists and editors of a number of Internet resources; police searches of journalists’ apartments and newsrooms of the media outlets, including the leading information portal TUT.BY and the independent news agency BelaPAN; the detention of at least nine journalists, seven of whom were placed in a detention centre for three days as suspects; the numerous instances of pressure on independent journalists and bloggers, and cases of arrests and administrative detention of peaceful protestors, the latest period of 2018 has been clearly marked by a significant deterioration of the human rights situation in Belarus.
- whereas the situation of freedom of media and freedom of speech continues to have continued to deteriorate in Belarus, as evidenced by the severe harassment of independent news portals and journalists such as the ‘BelTA case’, and whereas Reporters without Borders conclude that more than 100 journalists were arrested in 2017, usually while covering opposition protests as well as the harassment of freelance journalists working for independent media outlets based abroad, who cannot get accreditation, has reached unprecedented levels;
- whereas access to a leading independent news website Charter 97.org, which focuses on human rights and opposition causes, named after Charter 97 - a 1997 declaration calling for democracy in Belarus that was signed by journalists, opposition politicians, and rights activists continues to be blocked in the Belarusian internet;
- A. whereas the latest amendments to the Law on Mass Media, adopted in June 2018, extend government control to online media outlets, and whereas the changes to will enter into force on 1 December 2018 will establish further bureaucratic hurdles for websites that want to register as official online media outlets;
- B. whereas websites which according to the new legislation choose not to register, or do not meet the new criteria, cannot file requests for accreditation with government

institutions, and both registered and unregistered online media outlets will also be obliged to register, the names of people who submit comments while the owners of registered online media outlets will be also legally responsible for the content of the comments;

- C. whereas new legislation will require that authors of all posts and comments in online forums be identified and website owners moderate that comments;
- D. whereas Belarus ranks 155th in the Reporters Without Borders' 2017 World Press Freedom Index, which evaluates the level of press freedom in 180 countries each year;
- E. whereas since the beginning of 2018, Belarusian journalists, whose right to gather, store and disseminate information is guaranteed by the Constitution, were fined over 70 times for cooperation with foreign mass media without accreditation totaling over 60 thousand rubles¹;
- F. Whereas Ms Alena Masliukova and Mr Anatoly Zmitrovich have appeared before the Svetlogorsk District Court on charges of "taking part in an unauthorized mass event" and face up to 15 days of administrative detention with the verdict expected on October 3, 2018.
 - 1. Considers the arrests of journalists in August 2018 as repeated harassment of journalists and independent media in Belarus, and calls for all charges against them to be dropped.
 - 2. Reiterates its call on the Belarusian authorities to immediately and unconditionally lift the blockade imposed on the internet access to the news website Charter97.org on the territory of Belarus.
 - 3. Commends the work carried out by the current UN Special Rapporteur on Belarus Mr Mikósz Haraszti, and the draws attention of his successor Ms Anaïs Marin to the manifold abuses of power, curtailment of individual and collective freedoms, repression against civil society, independent trade unions and media as clearly identified in Mr Haraszti's report
 - 4. Calls, in this regard, for the Belarusian authorities to recognise the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on Belarus without delay, and for the European Commission, the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development to make the provision of any further financial or technical assistance to Belarus conditional on the foregoing; whilst preserving the EU's ability to directly fund Belarusian civil society
 - 5. Recalls with alarm the latest Amnesty International report prepared for the 124th session of the UN Human Rights Committee which identifies to Belarus as an abuser of mass surveillance, of its own citizens, civil society and independent media in particular;
 - 6. Strongly regrets the amendments adopted to the media law, which is a tool of tightening control over the internet, and reiterates its strong concern about the further worsening climate for independent and opposition websites and media outlets and

journalists in Belarus

7. Expresses its opinion that independent media does not constitute a threat to the authorities but is an important element to the checks and balances system and hence should be seen by the government as a potential critical partner and not as an enemy.
8. Calls on Belarus to drop all charges against the activists Mikhail Zhamchuzhny and Dzmitry Paliyenka; allow all independent trade unions to play their legitimate and central role in civil society without hindrance
9. Reiterates its calls on the Belarusian authorities to strengthen respect for democratic principles, rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms including respect for truthful and unbiased journalism.
10. Calls on the EU relevant institutions to include in the EU-Belarus Partnership Priorities a strong references to the independence of the media, freedom of speech and assembly, and calls on the EEAS and on the Commission to continue support for civil society organisations in Belarus and abroad; stresses, in this context, the need to support all independent sources of information for Belarusian society, including media broadcasting in the Belarusian language, and from abroad;
11. Calls on the Vice President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to closely monitor the situation of media freedom in Belarus, in cooperation with the Standing United Nations Rapporteur for Belarus;
12. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Vice President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the governments and parliaments of the Member States and the President and the Government of Belarus.

¹ <https://baj.by/en/content/baj-statement-occasion-international-day-journalists-solidarity>