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*Plenary sitting*

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**B8-0455/2018**

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))

**Miguel Urbán Crespo, Marie-Christine Vergiat, Patrick Le Hyaric, Merja Kyllönen, Malin Björk, Barbara Spinelli, Tania González Peñas, Xabier Benito Ziluaga, Estefanía Torres Martínez, Lola Sánchez Caldentey**  
on behalf of the GUE/NGL 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 the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to all human rights conventions to which Belarus is a party,
  - having regard to the European Convention on Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,
  - having regard to Rule 135 of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas the situation of freedom of media and freedom of speech continues to deteriorate in Belarus evidenced by severe harassment of independent news portals and journalists;
- B. whereas, according to Amnesty International, in the last two years more than 100 print, radio and TV journalists and bloggers have been arrested;
- C. whereas access to a leading independent news website Charter 97.org, which focuses on human rights and opposition causes continues to be blocked in the Belarusian internet;
- D. whereas in June, the Prosecutor General's Office proposed a bill that would allow the state to prosecute persons who spread "fake" information on the Internet and the changes will enter into force on 1 December 2018; whereas It followed the April amendments to the country's media law that would tighten government control over news websites and social media networks;
- E. whereas the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Belarus and the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media has expressed the view that these facts are an unacceptable restriction of the freedom of speech and access to information;
- F. whereas Belarus continues to be the only European country where the death penalty is still in use;
- G. whereas laws and regulations governing public association in Belarus remain restrictive, preventing human rights groups or political opposition movements from registering and operating freely;
- H. whereas in July 2017 a vaguely worded law on “protecting children from information harmful for their health and development” entered into force; whereas these provisions may be used to restrict dissemination of neutral or positive information about LGBTI people as “discrediting the institution of the family”; whereas this endangers gender equality;

- I. whereas since 2016, large numbers of asylum seekers, mostly from Russia's North Caucasus republic of Chechnya, but also from Tajikistan and Syria, have tried to apply for asylum in Poland at the border with Belarus; whereas according to various estimates, between 1500 and 2000 asylum seekers - many were vulnerable individuals such as children and victims of torture- had been stranded for months in the city of Brest on the Belarusian side of the border, undertaking multiple unsuccessful attempts to apply for asylum; whereas Belarus lacked a functioning asylum system and repeatedly handed over individuals seeking international protection to authorities of countries where they were at real risk of torture or other ill-treatment;
- J. whereas in recent years, relations between the European Union and Belarus have gone through a number of stages which go from the 2010 application of restrictive measures by the EU to the progress in EU-Belarus relation of these last two years in where the so called Mobility Partnership was concluded and negotiations on a Visa Facilitation and Readmission Agreements are underway; whereas from 2014-2017, the EU's assistance package to Belarus under the European Neighborhood Instrument amounted to €91.5 million which has a special focus on migration seeking externalization of EU border control in order to reduce migration flows to the EU;
- K. whereas under Polish law, the Office of Foreigners, Poland's asylum authority, not the Border Guard Services, is responsible for deciding on asylum applications; whereas asylum seekers do not have access to the needed judicial assistance as no lawyers or NGOs can access the centres in which asylum seekers are interrogated; whereas thereby asylum seekers have been denied access to a normal asylum procedure; whereas sending asylum seekers back to Belarus means exposing them to possible violence, persecution and backflow; whereas the European Commission has failed to look into Poland's denial of access to asylum procedures at its border with Belarus;
1. Expresses deep concern on the shrinking space for free media in Belarus which threatens freedom of suppression and free information;
  2. Recalls the paramount importance of a free internet as an essential basis for freedom of speech and democratic governance; calls, therefore, calls to overturn all undue limitations on online and offline media and to restore access to the Charter'97 website with no restrictions;
  3. Calls on the competent authorities to respect the right to freedom of media and freedom of speech and to ensure that journalists are able to fully exercise their professional duties; to stop arbitrarily targeting journalists via politically motivated prosecutions;
  4. Is concern on the situation of human rights in Belarus; calls, therefore, on the EU to sustain the momentum for the further normalization of the relations with Belarus; reiterates its view that existing differences can be best addressed through enhanced channels of communication and that further engagement of the EU, and notably the European Parliament, in a dialogue with Belarus and in particular its citizens and civil society, as well as with the parliament and various political parties, can bring tangible results and contribute to the independence, sovereignty and prosperity of the country;

5. Deplores the EU-Belarus readmission agreement which only follows EUs migration-related policy objectives, namely the reduction of migration flows to the Union in disregard for human rights and in particular migrants rights and most particularly asylum seekers;
6. Reiterates its general position against death penalty; calls on Belarus to join the global moratorium as a first step towards the abolition of the death penalty;
7. Recalls the paramount importance of promoting gender equality and LGTBI rights;
8. Condemns the Polish border guards' practice of routinely denying people access to the asylum procedure at the border with Belarus which violates the right to asylum under the European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights; deeply deplores the failure of the European Commission to look into Poland's denial of access to asylum procedures at its border with Belarus and its compatibility with Union and international right
9. 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.