

The arrest of political opponents in Belarus

European Parliament resolution of 22 May 2008 on the arrest of political opponents in Belarus

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on the situation in Belarus, in particular that of 21 February 2008¹,
 - having regard to the Commission's declaration on 21 November 2006 of the European Union's readiness to renew its relationship with Belarus and its people within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP),
 - having regard to the EU Presidency Declaration of 28 March 2008 on Belarus,
 - having regard to the EU Presidency statement of 29 April 2008 on the renewed imprisonment and harassment of political opponents in Belarus,
 - having regard to EU Presidency statement of 6 May 2008 on the recent developments in the relationship between Belarus and the United States,
 - having regard to Rule 115(5) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas two Belarusian pro-democratic activists, Andrei Kim and Siarhei Parsyukevich, have been given harsh sentences for taking part in peaceful entrepreneurs' demonstrations on 10 and 21 January 2008,
- B. whereas the continued detention of Aliaksandr Kazulin is a further example of Belarus's disregard for its obligations to respect the principles and commitments of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), of which Belarus is a member,
- C. whereas it has called on the Council and the Commission to make proposals to put further pressure on Lukashenko's regime within international organisations and has demanded that a complete package of specific, targeted sanctions – severely punishing the perpetrators of oppression without adding to the suffering of the citizens of Belarus – be put forward,
- D. whereas it has condemned the use of violence and arrests of large numbers of participants on the occasion of Freedom Day in Minsk and other Belarusian cities on 25 March 2008,
- E. whereas the decision of the government of Belarus to declare 10 United States diplomats personae non gratae and the forced expulsion of the US Ambassador to Belarus are measures that are unjustified and harmful to the interests of the people of Belarus,
1. Deeply regrets that the situation of democracy, human rights and the rule of law is not

¹ Texts adopted, P6_TA(2008)0071.

improving in Belarus; points out that constant arbitrary arrests of members of civil society and opposition activists, notably the recent temporary detention and trial of Aleksander Milinkevich, and the clampdown on the independent media, contradict the recent rhetoric of the Belarusian government concerning their wish to improve relations with the European Union;

2. Condemns the harsh sentences given to Syarhei Parsyukevich and Andrei Kim on 22 and 23 April 2008 in Minsk for their participation in the entrepreneurs' rally of 10 January 2008; at the same time, deplores the reportedly excessive force used by Belarusian security forces against and the arrests of peaceful citizens gathered in Minsk on 25 March 2008 to mark the ninetieth anniversary of the Foundation of the Independent Belarusian People's Republic; calls on the Belarusian authorities to unconditionally abstain from all use of force against the representatives of the democratic opposition;
3. Urges the Belarusian authorities to release immediately and unconditionally the remaining political prisoner, Aliaksandr Kazulin, and to cease using intimidation, harassment, targeted arrests and politically motivated prosecutions against the activists of the democratic opposition and civil society in Belarus;
4. Reiterates that compliance with democratic principles is the key issue for the normalisation of relations with Belarus;
5. Condemns the detention of independent media journalists, searches of their homes and confiscation or destruction of their equipment by Belarusian secret services (KGB) and condemns efforts made by the Belarusian authorities to violate the freedom of the media;
6. Requests the Council and the Commission to provide substantial support for the victims of human rights violation in Belarus; takes the view that increased financial assistance to civil society organisations, in particular free media, is necessary for the promotion of human rights in the country;
7. Recalls that on 21 November 2006 the European Union declared its readiness to renew its relationship with Belarus and its people within the framework of the ENP as soon as the Belarusian government demonstrated respect for democratic values and for the fundamental rights of the Belarusian people;
8. Emphasises that, in order to engage in any substantial dialogue with the EU, Belarus needs to fulfil the remaining conditions laid down in the Commission's 'Non Paper' entitled 'What the European Union could bring to Belarus', which include the release of all political prisoners, the abolition of the death penalty, an assurance of a free media and freedom of expression, the independence of the judiciary and respect for democratic values and for the fundamental rights of the Belarusian people;
9. Condemns the fact that Belarus is the only country in Europe which still has the death penalty, contrary to European and universal values;
10. Deeply regrets the 2002 Law on Freedom of Religion and Religious Organisations, which contravenes international principles of religious freedom and human rights, including those laid out in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and recognises that as result of this legislation, the activities of many religious communities have been restricted and their leaders are being subjected to constant harassment, prosecution, fines,

and imprisonment;

11. Urges the Belarusian authorities fully to implement OSCE standards in the organisation of the forthcoming parliamentary elections scheduled for autumn 2008, and to create the conditions for a free and fair ballot; calls on the government of Belarus to give democratic opposition representatives free access to district electoral commissions, to grant registration to all parliamentary candidates and their observers, and not to create obstacles to a comprehensive and complete international election observation mission;
12. Calls on the Belarusian government to uphold and ensure the protection of all fundamental human rights and ensure Belarus' compliance with international standards, and in particular with Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR);
13. Calls on the Belarusian government to revise the 2002 Law on Freedom of Religion and Religious Organisations and to restore procedures guaranteeing respect for freedom of religion;
14. Expresses solidarity with the united democratic opposition of Belarus and all Belarusian citizens who strive for an independent, open and democratic Belarus based on the rule of law; encourages the leaders of the opposition to demonstrate unity and resolve in the forthcoming parliamentary elections;
15. Calls on the Council and the Commission to take further steps towards the facilitation and liberalisation of visa procedures for Belarusian citizens, as only such action can help to fulfil the main goal of EU policy towards Belarus, namely to facilitate and intensify people-to-people contacts and to democratise that country; urges them, in this context, to consider the possibilities for lowering the cost of visas for Belarusian citizens entering the Schengen territory, which is the only way to prevent Belarus and its citizens from becoming increasingly isolated;
16. Deplores the Belarusian authorities' repeated refusal to grant entry visas to Members of the European Parliament and national parliamentarians in the last couple of years; calls on the Belarusian authorities not to create any further obstacles preventing the European Parliament Delegation for Relations with Belarus from visiting the country to observe the forthcoming general elections and obtain first-hand experience in Belarus;
17. Expresses its solidarity with the United States and its diplomatic service, and calls on the government of Belarus to reconsider its decision and to take immediate steps allowing for a normalisation of the relationship between Belarus and the United States on the basis of mutually beneficial cooperation;
18. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the parliaments and governments of the Member States, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the Parliamentary Assemblies of the OSCE and the Council of Europe, and the government of Belarus.