

P7_TA(2012)0112

Belarus

European Parliament resolution of 29 March 2012 on the situation in Belarus (2012/2581(RSP))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on Belarus, in particular those of 16 February 2012¹, 15 September 2011², 12 May 2011³, 10 March 2011⁴, 20 January 2011⁵, 10 March 2010⁶ and 17 December 2009⁷,
- having regard to the Council decision of 23 March 2012 on the reinforcement of restrictive measures against the Belarusian regime;
- having regard to the Conclusions of the European Council of 1-2 March 2012, expressing its deep concern over the further deterioration of the situation in Belarus,
- having regard to Council Implementing Decision 2012/126/CFSP of 28 February 2012 implementing Decision 2010/639/CFSP concerning restrictive measures against Belarus⁸,
- having regard to the statement of 28 February 2012 by High Representative Catherine Ashton on her decision and that of the Polish Government to recall the Head of the EU Delegation in Minsk and the Polish Ambassador to Belarus respectively,
- having regard to the Council Decision 2012/36/CFSP⁹ of 23 January 2012 amending Decision 2010/639/CFSP concerning restrictive measures against Belarus,
- having regard to Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly resolution 1857 (2012) of 25 January 2012 on the situation in Belarus, which condemned continuous persecution of members of the opposition and the harassment of civil society activists, independent media and human rights defenders in Belarus,
- having regard to UN Human Rights Council resolution 17/24 of 17 June 2011 on the situation of human rights in Belarus, which condemned the human rights violations before, during and after the presidential elections in Belarus and called on the Government of Belarus to end the ‘persecution’ of opposition leaders,
- having regard to the declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit adopted in Prague on 7-9 May 2009 and the Declaration on the situation in Belarus adopted on the occasion of the

¹ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2012)0063.

² Texts adopted, P7_TA(2011)0392.

³ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2011)0244.

⁴ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2011)0099.

⁵ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2011)0022.

⁶ OJ C 349E, 22.12.2010, p. 37.

⁷ OJ C 286 E, 22.10.2010, p. 16.

⁸ OJ L 55, 29.2.2012, p. 19.

⁹ OJ L 19, 24.1.2012, P. 31.

Eastern Partnership Summit in Warsaw on 30 September 2011,

- having regard to the joint statement made by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Visegrad Group, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in Prague on 5 March 2012,
 - having regard to the statement made by the Belarusian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum in Minsk on 2 March 2012,
 - having regard to the decision taken at the Annual Congress of the International Ice Hockey Federation in Berne in May 2009 to hold the 2014 IIHF World Championship in Belarus, despite the persecution of Alyaksandr Lukashenka's political opponents and widespread human rights abuses in Belarus,
 - having regard to Rule 110(4) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas the Prague Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit reaffirms the commitments, inter alia of Belarus, to the principles of international law and to fundamental values, including democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms;
 - B. whereas the political situation in Belarus has been seriously deteriorating since the presidential elections of 19 December 2010, with repressive measures being taken against members of the democratic opposition, the free media, civil society activists and human rights defenders, despite repeated calls from the international community to halt these measure immediately;
 - C. whereas Uladzislau Kavalyou and Dzmitry Kanavalau, who were sentenced to death in November 2011 by the Supreme Court of the Republic of Belarus, were executed in March 2012; whereas in Belarus, under the Lukashenka regime, there is insufficient confidence in the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary, and the judicial processes clearly do not meet internationally recognised standards; whereas the death penalty is an inhuman, ineffective and irreversible act of punishment;
 - D. whereas, on 28 February 2012, underlining the further deterioration in the situation in Belarus, the EU Foreign Ministers decided to add 21 Belarusian officials, responsible for repression of civil society and the democratic opposition, to the list of people subject to the assets freeze and visa ban;
 - E. whereas an EU-Belarus diplomatic conflict of unprecedented scope escalated after the Belarusian authorities requested that the ambassador of the EU and the Polish ambassador leave the country, and recalled their own ambassadors from Brussels and Warsaw in response to the Council decision of 28 February 2012;
 - F. whereas, in this context, Aliaksandr Lukashenka followed up with an offensive personal attack on the German Foreign Minister, with no regard for diplomatic etiquette;
 - G. whereas the ambassadors of the EU Member States in Minsk were all called back to their capitals for consultations, and all EU Member States summoned the Belarusian ambassadors to their foreign ministries;
 - H. whereas a firm commitment by all EU Member States and other democratic countries to act

in a united manner in times of necessity can foster the successful promotion of universal values in such countries as Belarus and bring these countries closer to the path of democratic transition;

- I. whereas any improvement in bilateral relations with the European Union is also conditional upon the release of all political prisoners and progress being made by the Government of Belarus in meeting its OSCE commitments and respecting fundamental human rights, the rule of law and democratic principles;
- J. whereas large numbers of representatives of the Belarusian democratic opposition and civil society activists, including former presidential candidates, as well as prominent human rights defenders, remain in prison on political grounds;
- K. whereas young activists and members of youth organisations have constantly been under pressure or experiencing harassment in many different ways, like Ivan Shyla, a member of 'Young Front', who spent 22 days in jail for last year's campaign of solidarity with Dzmitrij Dashkevich;
- L. whereas on 24 February 2012 a district judge in Vitsyebsk sentenced the opposition activist Syarhey Kavalenka to two years and one month in a low-security correctional institution on a charge of violating probation rules; whereas Kavalenka was arrested on 19 December 2011, on the anniversary of the flawed presidential election; whereas he has been on hunger strike against his unjust sentence for 86 days now and his health condition is critical;
- M. whereas the Belarusian authorities are violating Article 30 of the Belarusian constitution and limiting the right of free movement of citizens; whereas on 1 March 2012 the Belarusian Prosecutor-General's Office announced that Belarusians who backed new foreign sanctions against Belarus could be barred from travelling abroad; whereas three opposition leaders and activists – Anatol Lyabedzka, Alyaksandr Dabravolski, and Viktor Karnyayenka – and human rights defender Valyantsin Stefanovich were not allowed to cross the Belarusian-Lithuanian border between 7 and 11 March 2012;
- N. whereas the Belarusian Ministry of Justice decided on 14 February 2012 to refuse to register the Belarusian Christian Democracy (BCD) party for the fourth time, without any legal reason for doing so; whereas, according to reports, BCD members were for the first time threatened with physical assault if they did not withdraw their signatures as party founders;
- O. whereas thousands of people took part in a Freedom Day peaceful demonstration in Minsk on 25 March 2012 to mark 94 years since the proclamation of the 1918 Belarusian National Republic, and whereas this has shown the readiness of people to defend their position as Belarusian citizens with courage and to express their European aspirations;
- P. whereas, in the Belarus Democracy and Human Rights Act of 2011, unanimously adopted by the US Senate and signed into law by President Barack Obama on 3 January 2012, the United States has called on the IIHF to suspend its plan to hold the 2014 championship in Belarus until the Government of Belarus releases all political prisoners;
- 1. Continues strongly to condemn the deteriorating situation as regards human rights and fundamental freedoms, combined with the lack of deep democratic and economic reforms in Belarus, and will continue to oppose the repression of the regime's opponents in Minsk;

2. Strongly deplors the execution of Uladzislau Kavalyou and Dzmitry Kanavalau despite continuous domestic and international protests and calls on the Belarusian authorities to release the bodies of the two men to their families for burial; calls on the Belarusian authorities to immediately introduce a moratorium on the death penalty;
3. Condemns the continuous persecution of human rights defenders and members of the democratic opposition and the harassment of civil society activists and the independent media in Belarus for political reasons;
4. Demands the unconditional and immediate release of all political prisoners; reiterates that there cannot be any progress in the EU-Belarus dialogue without progress by Belarus in terms of democracy, human rights and rule of law and until all political prisoners, including Ales Bialiatski, Chair of the Human Rights Centre 'Viasna' and Vice-President of the FIDH, two ex-presidential candidates Mikalai Statkevich and Andrei Sannikau, heads of the presidential campaigns of democratic opposition candidates Pavel Seviarynets and Dzmitry Bandarenka, and Syarhey Kavalenka, a political prisoner detained for an alleged breach of house arrest, who has been on a prolonged hunger strike, which has led to a critical deterioration in his health and directly threatens his life, are unconditionally released and their civil rights are fully rehabilitated;
5. Stresses that the decision to withdraw all the ambassadors of the EU Member States from Belarus proves that the Belarusian authorities' attempts to divide the European Union over decisions on sanctions have failed;
6. Emphasises that a firm commitment on the part of all EU Member States and other democratic countries to act in a united manner in times of necessity can help promote universal values in such countries as Belarus and bring them closer to the path of democratic transition;
7. Condemns the offensive rhetoric used by Aliaksandr Lukashenka vis-à-vis the German Foreign Minister;
8. Deplores the foreign travel ban list drafted by the Belarus Government that forbids several opponents and human rights activists from leaving the country; expresses its sympathy to all the people included in this list and calls on the Minsk authorities to put an end to such practices that violate the fundamental freedoms of Belarus citizens;
9. Stresses that, instead of choosing increasing self-isolation, Minsk should make the right choice for its people and open itself to democracy;
10. Calls on the National Ice Hockey Federations of the EU Member States and all other democratic countries to urge the IIHF, including at its next Congress in May in Helsinki, Finland, to re-discuss its earlier decision envisaging the possibility of relocating the 2014 World Ice Hockey Championship from Belarus to another host country until all political prisoners, recognised by international human rights organisations as 'prisoners of conscience', are released and until the regime shows clear signs of its commitment to respect human rights and the rule of law;
11. Welcomes the Council decision of 28 February 2012 to strengthen restrictive measures and to add 21 persons responsible for the repression of civil society and the democratic opposition in Belarus to the list of those targeted by a travel ban and an asset freeze;

12. Welcomes the Council decision of 23 March 2012 to reinforce restrictive measures against the Belarusian regime by adding 12 more persons, benefiting from and supporting the Belarusian regime as well as persons responsible for the repression of civil society and the democratic opposition in Belarus, to the list of those targeted by a travel ban and an asset freeze as well as freezing the assets of 29 entities supporting the regime;
13. Calls on the Council to take stock of the latest developments in EU-Belarus diplomatic relations and of the further deterioration in the situation regarding human rights and basic freedoms in the country and, on this basis, to adopt a decision concerning further restrictive measures, including targeted economic sanctions;
14. Stresses that the European Union and Belarus should have good neighbourly relations and that these should be strongly supported by EU close engagement with civil society and the democratic opposition in Belarus and its support for the democratic aspirations of the Belarusian people;
15. Reiterates its call on the Commission to support, with financial and political means, the efforts of Belarusian civil society, independent media (including TV Belsat, European Radio for Belarus, Radio Racja and others) and non-governmental organisations in Belarus to promote democracy;
16. Stresses the need for increased cooperation between the EU and its eastern neighbours in the framework of the Eastern Partnership, including its parliamentary dimension – the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly – with the shared aim of initiating a genuine process of democratisation in Belarus;
17. 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, the Secretariat of the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Parliament and Government of Belarus.