



TEXTS ADOPTED

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Situation in Belarus

European Parliament resolution of 10 September 2015 on the situation in Belarus (2015/2834(RSP))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions and recommendations on Belarus,
 - having regard to the Eastern Partnership summit held in Riga in May 2015 and to its declaration,
 - having regard to the dialogue on human rights between the European Union and the Republic of Belarus of 28 July 2015,
 - having regard to the release of six political prisoners by the Belarusian authorities on 22 August 2015 and to the following statement by Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini and the Commissioner for Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Johannes Hahn, on the release of political prisoners in Belarus of 22 August 2015,
 - having regard to the forthcoming presidential elections scheduled for 11 October 2015,
 - having regard to Rule 123(2) and (4) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas, despite a noticeable intensification of contacts between Belarus and the EU and the United States, violations of human rights persist in Belarus, including intimidation of human rights defenders, police raids on human rights organisations and seizure of their equipment, and forceful removals from Belarus, as confirmed in the report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus;
- B. whereas the first official visit of Parliament's Delegation for relations with Belarus since 2002 took place in Minsk on 18 and 19 June 2015; whereas the European Parliament currently has no official relations with the Belarusian Parliament;
- C. whereas a significant improvement in the freedom of speech and freedom of the media, respect for the political rights of ordinary citizens and opposition activists alike and respect for the rule of law and fundamental rights are all prerequisites for better relations

between the EU and Belarus; whereas the European Union remains strongly committed to further defending human rights in Belarus, including freedom of speech and media;

- D. whereas progress has been made in cooperation on some sectoral policies such as higher education, vocational training, the digital market, the energy sector, food safety and culture, having a positive impact on starting a constructive debate in Belarusian society on necessary reforms in the country and on awareness about the EU; whereas the EU must make sure, however, that its resources are not used to suppress civil society organisations, human rights defenders, freelance journalists and opposition leaders;
- E. whereas since 1994 no free and fair elections in Belarus have been conducted under electoral legislation in line with internationally recognised standards, and whereas the current law gives an enormous advantage to the incumbent president; whereas the OSCE/ODIHR has deployed its long-term election observation mission throughout Belarus and will coordinate the work of short-term observers;
- F. whereas on 2 April 2015 President Lukashenko signed Decree No. 3 ‘On the prevention of social dependency’, which provides for compulsory labour for unemployed persons under the threat of payment of a special fee to the state budget or administrative liability in the form of a fine or administrative arrest;
- G. whereas on 1 January 2015 a new law regulating all forms of media was introduced; whereas this law enables the government to shut down any mass media outlets, including online media, if they publish content it deems ‘unsuitable’;
- H. whereas the Belarusian authorities have finally released all six political prisoners, including former presidential candidates, after years of denying their existence;
- I. whereas on 13 July and 31 July 2015 the Council revised the restrictive measures towards Belarus and amended the visa-ban and asset-freeze list, removing some officials and companies therefrom; whereas 175 individuals, including Alexander Lukashenko, are currently subject to entry bans and all of them plus 18 economic entities are subject to asset freezes within the EU; whereas an assessment of the EU’s restrictive measures is due to take place in the coming months, taking into account the latest developments and all other factors on the basis of which the restrictive measures were taken;
- J. whereas on 28 July 2015 the EU and the Republic of Belarus held a dialogue on human rights in Brussels focused on a range of issues, which included the establishment of a National Human Rights Institution, freedom of expression, assembly and association, the death penalty, the fight against torture and ill-treatment, and children’s rights;
- K. whereas Belarus played a constructive role in facilitating agreement on the ceasefire in Ukraine;
- L. whereas the conflict in Ukraine has deepened fears in Belarusian society of a destabilisation of the internal situation as a result of a power change;
- M. whereas Belarus remains the only country in Europe to carry out capital punishment;
- 1. Remains deeply concerned by the human rights and fundamental freedoms situation in Belarus, as well as by the shortcomings observed during previous elections by

independent international observers and the active persecution of the opposition leaders after the elections;

2. Welcomes the recent release of the remaining political prisoners; calls on the Belarusian Government to rehabilitate the released political prisoners and to fully restore their civil and political rights; stresses that this could be a potential first step towards improving relations between the European Union and Belarus; points out, however, that similar steps in the past were rather token gestures and neither contributed to improving the situation of Belarusian society nor improved relations with the EU;
3. Calls on Belarus to conduct the upcoming presidential elections in accordance with internationally recognised standards, to give the opposition unfettered access to all government-controlled means of communication and to allow it to participate in the elections on an equal footing, in particular by creating independent election commissions and allowing an adequate representation therein on all levels and a transparent vote count;
4. Expects the authorities to stop the harassment of independent media for political reasons; urges a stop to the practice of administrative prosecution and the arbitrary use of Article 22.9, Part 2, of the Administrative Code against freelance journalists for working with foreign media without accreditation, which restrict the right to freedom of expression and the dissemination of information;
5. Expresses its concern about the recent detention and ongoing criminal prosecution of youth activists Maksim Piakarski, Vadzim Zharomski and Viachaslau Kasinerau on suspicion of ‘malicious hooliganism’ as disproportionate, and strongly condemns the violence they have suffered;
6. Recalls that ten people have been executed in Belarus since 2010, with three executions in 2014 alone and a new death sentence handed down on 18 March 2015; in this context urges Belarus, the only country in Europe still applying capital punishment, to join a global moratorium on the execution of the death penalty as a first step towards its permanent abolition;
7. Calls on the Government of Belarus to respect the recommendations of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on the abolition of elements of forced labour in the country;
8. Draws attention to the situation of national minorities in the country and their cultural organisations, whose leaders have at times been replaced by those preferred by the state authorities, thus violating one of the basic human freedoms: freedom of association;
9. Reiterates its call on the Belarusian authorities to ensure, in all circumstances, respect for democratic principles, human rights and fundamental freedoms, in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the international and regional human rights instruments ratified by Belarus;
10. Notes the holding of the sixth round of consultations between the EU and Belarus on modernisation issues in Brussels on 3 September 2015, when the delegations discussed the prospects for cooperation in key areas, on the basis of agreements reached in 2014 and 2015; urges the EEAS and the Council to ensure that any participation by the authorities in the Dialogue on Modernisation, alongside and on an equal basis with the democratic

opposition and civil society, takes place with full respect for democratic principles, with a view to developing a sustainable competitive economy and fostering democratic reforms, as well as a pluralistic society and the rule of law;

11. Supports the Commission in its policy of ‘critical engagement’ with the Belarusian authorities and expresses its readiness to contribute to it also via Parliament’s Delegation for relations with Belarus; recalls, however, that the EU must remain vigilant with regard to where its resources are allocated and make sure that they do not contribute to worsening the situation of the opposition and civil society;
12. Reiterates its call on the Commission to support, with financial and political means, the efforts of Belarusian civil society, independent media and non-governmental organisations in Belarus to support the democratic aspirations of the Belarusian people;
13. Welcomes the progress observed in sectoral cooperation with Belarus in the areas of higher education, vocational training, the digital market, the energy sector, food safety and culture, among others;
14. Notes the launch in January 2014 of the negotiations on visa facilitation aimed at improving people-to-people contact and encouraging civil society; stresses the need to speed up progress in this regard;
15. Recognises the increase in the use of the Belarusian language in public life; notes the Ministry of Education’s plans to foster the use of the Belarusian language in education, as well as the publication of legislative acts by the Constitutional Court in both Russian and Belarusian;
16. Calls on the European External Action Service and on the Commission to find new ways to support civil society organisations in Belarus; stresses, in this regard, the need to support all independent sources of information for Belarusian society, including media broadcasting in the Belarusian language from abroad;
17. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (VP/HR), the European External Action Service, the Council, the Commission and the Member States.