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Session document

6.7.2005

B6-0411/2005 }
B6-0413/2005 }
B6-0420/2005 }
B6-0424/2005 }
B6-0426/2005 }
B6-0428/2005 } RC1

JOINT MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

pursuant to Rule 103(4) of the Rules of Procedure, by

- Bogdan Klich, Barbara Kudrycka, Laima Liucija Andrikienė, Charles Tannock, Karl von Wogau, Alfred Gomolka and Aldis Kuškis, on behalf of the PPE-DE Group
- Jan Marinus Wiersma, Marek Maciej Siwiec and Joseph Muscat, on behalf of the PSE Group
- Janusz Onyszkiewicz, on behalf of the ALDE Group
- Elisabeth Schroedter, Milan Horáček and Marie Anne Isler Béguin, on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group
- Vittorio Emanuele Agnoletto and Jonas Sjöstedt, on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group
- Anna Elzbieta Fotyga, Konrad Szymański, Rolandas Pavilionis and Inese Vaidere, on behalf of the UEN Group

replacing the motions by the following groups:

- PPE-DE (B6-0411/2005)
- ALDE (B6-0413/2005)
- Verts/ALE (B6-0420/2005)
- GUE/NGL (B6-0424/2005)
- PSE (B6-0426/2005)
- UEN (B6-0428/2005)

on the political situation and the independence of the media in Belarus

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European Parliament resolution on the political situation and the independence of the media in Belarus

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on the situation in Belarus,
 - having regard, in particular, to its resolution of 10 March 2005 on Belarus,
 - having regard to the resolutions of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on the situation in Belarus and, in particular, to its resolution of 28 April 2004 on the persecution of the press in the Republic of Belarus,
 - having regard to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights' resolution of 14 April 2005 on the situation of human rights in Belarus,
 - having regard to the March 2005 report on Belarus of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media,
 - having regard, in particular, to the 'EU action plan for promoting democracy in Belarus' adopted by the European Parliament's Delegation for relations with Belarus on 23 February 2005,
 - having regard to its Sakharov Prize for freedom of thought, which has been awarded to the Belarussian Association of Journalists in December 2004,
 - having regard to the Communication from the Commission of 12 May 2004 on the European Neighbourhood Policy (COM(2004)0373),
 - having regard to the EU sanctions adopted on 2 July 2004 against Belarussian officials following the disappearance of three Belarussian opposition leaders and one journalist,
 - having regard to Rule 103(4) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas, instead of improving, the situation in Belarus has further deteriorated, which has led to a situation where basic human rights are brutally violated, the Lower House is deprived of its legislative rights and economic life is controlled by the President; whereas these violations include imprisonment of members of the democratic opposition and other forms of repression used against them,
- B. whereas the EU has repeatedly condemned the arrest of prominent opposition leaders by the Lukashenko government and whereas no progress has been made in the unsolved cases of a number of disappeared persons,
- C. whereas over the past few years several political parties, 22 independent newspapers, more

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than 50 pro-democracy NGOs of different levels and different political orientations, and several educational establishments have been closed for 'technical' reasons, but it was clear that in every case these organisations were being punished for criticising the President and his policy,

- D. whereas, in April 2005, the UN Commission on Human Rights criticised Belarus on account of persistent reports of harassment and closure of non-governmental organisations, national minority organisations, independent media outlets, opposition political parties, independent trade unions and religious organisations, and harassment of individuals engaged in democratic activities, including in the independent media,
- E. whereas all registration of new newspapers has been stopped by the state authorities, and many existing newspapers have been burdened with fines, which makes it impossible for them to continue publishing,
- F. whereas politically motivated arrests and trials of activists of the democratic movement and independent journalists, and deportations of foreign citizens are continually taking place in Belarus; whereas two journalists from the newspaper 'Pahonia' – Pavał Mažejka and Mikoła Markievič – as well as the editor of the newspaper 'Rabočy', Viktor Ivaškievič, have been sentenced to between 6 and 9 months in prison,
- G. whereas, on 12 May 2005, the leadership of the Union of Poles in Belarus were declared illegitimate by the Belarussian Ministry of Justice, a printing plant under instructions from the government refused to print the Polish weekly 'Głos znad Niemna' and fake issues were printed under the umbrella of the government,
- H. whereas in 1999 WRD correspondent Dźmitry Zavadzki disappeared and the Belarussian authorities appear to be dragging their feet in the investigation; whereas, on 20 October 2004, Vieranika Čarkasava, a journalist from the newspaper 'Solidarność', was murdered and incidents of violence against journalists are becoming more common,
- I. whereas publishing and distribution have been monopolised by the state, and the remaining private publishers face heavy fines if they publish independent newspapers; whereas, as a result, many independent newspapers published abroad, including in Russia, are often confiscated at the border by the Belarussian authorities,
- J. whereas all television and radio programmes, both national and regional, are in government hands, or are controlled by the state,
- K. whereas all cable operators are persecuted for transmitting the foreign channels not approved by the Belarussian Government and on this basis all Ukrainian channels as well as the Polish channel Polonia were banned from broadcasting by Belarussian cable TV operators;
- L. whereas all internet connections are through a state-run corporation which has blocked numerous accounts and www pages,

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- M. whereas, in March 2005, the Representative of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, in a report on the Freedom of the Media, raised serious concerns regarding the grave situation of the independent media in Belarus, in particular the declining number of registrations of independent newspapers and the increased pressure on the media through judicial, extrajudicial, and economic means,
1. Strongly condemns the Belarus regime's indiscriminate attacks on the media, journalists, members of the opposition, human rights activists and any person who attempts freely to voice criticism of the President and the regime, as manifested through arbitrary arrests, ill-treatment of detainees, disappearances, politically motivated persecution and other acts of repression that flout the basic principles of democracy and the rule of law;
 2. Calls on the Council and Commission to create a complex, multi-annual programme of support for the independent media in Belarus which will encompass support for the broadcasting of independent radio and television programmes from abroad, as well as support for independent journalists and newspapers;
 3. Welcomes the project for the creation of a radio network broadcasting from Poland, Lithuania and possibly Ukraine, and calls on the Commission to support its implementation;
 4. Calls on the Council and Commission, in this regard, to provide the necessary assistance as soon as possible to begin the broadcasting of independent radio programmes to Belarus from abroad;
 5. Emphasises that the radio network should be able to use all transmission bandwidths, including on the internet, and should be available on a continuous basis;
 6. Calls on the Council and Commission to assist repressed journalists and their families;
 7. Calls on the Council and Commission to create a programme of scholarships and traineeships for independent journalists, and to create training programmes for young independent journalists;
 8. Calls on the Commission to consult the European Parliament on the implementation of this programme for free and independent media and information to the people of Belarus;
 9. Should the Belarussian authorities fail to improve the situation regarding freedom of speech and the mass media or if there is any further deterioration, the Commission, the Council and Parliament should initiate the procedure to add to the visa-ban list Belarussian authorities involved in persecution of the mass media;
 10. Condemns the government's action against the Union of Poles in Belarus as an attempt to curb the largest non-governmental organisation and one of the few that were not controlled by the government; recalls that respect for minority rights extends to freedom of association

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and recognition of the elected statutory bodies of the organisation; deplores the government's attempt to take control of 'Głos znad Niemna';

11. Is in particular appalled by the recent sentencing to long terms of forced labour of Mikola Statkevich, the chairman of the Belarussian Social Democratic Party ('Narodnaja Hramada'), Paval Seviarynec, one of the Young Front leaders, and Andrei Klimau, a businessman and MP of the 13th Supreme Soviet;
12. Calls on the Belarussian authorities to stop the expulsion of democratic youth from universities and higher-education establishments, and declares its full support for those students who were expelled from such establishments for promoting democratic values and defending human rights and who started the hunger strike on May 25 2005;
13. Welcomes the inauguration of the European Humanities University for Belarussian students in exile in Vilnius, and calls on the Commission and Member States to assist the European Humanities University in the pursuit of its teaching and research programmes;
14. Calls on the Member States to recognise degrees awarded by the European Humanities University as a confirmation of a high level of competence and outstanding academic skills, and calls on European universities to enter into a closer cooperation with the European Humanities University;
15. Emphasises once again that the further development of EU relations with Belarus will also continue to depend on the progress made towards democratisation and reform in the country and access for Belarussians to objective, free and transparent media;
16. Calls on the Council and the Commission to raise the issue of Belarus with the Russian authorities so as to define common action to bring about concrete democratic changes in that country;
17. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Commission, the Council, the parliaments and governments of the Member States, and the Parliamentary Assemblies of the OSCE and the Council of Europe.