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## **MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION**

to wind up the debate on the statement by the Commission

pursuant to Rule 103(2) of the Rules of Procedure

by Bogdan Klich, Barbara Kudrycka, Laima Liucija Andrikiienė, Charles Tannock, Karl von Wogau, Alfred Gomolka and Aldis Kušķis

on behalf of the PPE-DE Group

on support for the independent media in Belarus

**European Parliament resolution on support for the independent 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, in particular, to its resolution of 28 October 2004 on the political situation in Belarus after the parliamentary elections and referendum of 17 October 2004,
  - having regard, in particular, to its resolution of 16 September 2004 on the situation in Belarus,
  - having regard to the final conclusions of the International Election Observation Mission of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly of 9 December 2004,
  - 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 persecution of the press in the Republic of Belarus,
  - 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 was 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 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and in particular to Articles 19 and 21, which guarantee the right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly,
  - 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(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas the Parliamentary Troika concluded that neither the parliamentary nor the presidential elections of 2000 and 2001 were free and fair and that they were preceded by arbitrary action by the government against the political opposition, independent media and election-observing organisations,
- B. whereas the Council of Europe condemned the parliamentary elections and referendum of

17 October 2004 in Belarus as not meeting international standards,

- C. 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,
- D. 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,
- E. whereas over the past few years several political parties and more than 50 pro-democracy NGOs of different levels and different political persuasions and several educational establishments have been closed down for ‘technical’ reasons, but it was clear that in every case these organisations were being punished for criticising the President and his policy,
- F. whereas in April 2004, the UN Commission on Human Rights criticised Belarus on account of continued reports of arbitrary arrests and detention and for harassing non-governmental organisations and opposition political parties and those engaged in democratic activities,
- G. whereas 22 independent newspapers were closed down in the period 2003-2004, and an additional seven were temporarily closed in the period leading up to the parliamentary elections in October 2004,
- H. 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; whereas in April a fine of USD 26 000 was imposed on BDG (Biełarusskaja Diełowaja Gazieta), and Iryna Chalip, a BDG journalist, was fined USD 600, Andrij Shantarovich – the editor of Miestnej Gaziety – and Elena Rovbetskaia – the editor of Birža informacji – were each fined USD 500 for protesting about the closure of their newspapers,
- I. whereas politically motivated arrests and trials of activists belonging to the democratic movement and independent journalists and deportations of foreign citizens are continually taking place in Belarus; whereas two journalists from the newspaper Pahonia – Pavel Mazheika and Nicola Markievich – as well as the editor of the newspaper Raboczyj, Victor Ivazhkievich, have been sentenced to between 6 and 9 months in prison under Articles 367 and 378 of the Belarussian Criminal Code, having been accused of defaming the head of state,
- J. whereas the resolution of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe of 28 April 2004 acknowledged evidence of involvement of top State officials in the abduction and alleged assassination of leading opposition figures in 1999,
- K. whereas in 1999 WRD correspondent Dmitry Zawadzki disappeared and the Belarussian authorities appear to be dragging their feet in the investigation; whereas on 20 October

2004, Weronika Czerkasowa, a journalist from the newspaper Solidarność, was murdered and incidents of violence against journalists are becoming more common; whereas the European Parliament is extremely concerned at the deteriorating level of safety for journalists in Belarus,

- L. whereas publishing has 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 are published abroad; whereas both Dzien and BDG are published in Russia but are often confiscated at the border by the Belarussian authorities,
- M. whereas the system of distribution of the press has been monopolised by the state company Sajuz Pieczati and by the post office, and all private distribution of mass media was banned in 2004,
- N. whereas all television and radio programmes, both national and regional, are in government hands,
- O. whereas the only private radio news station, Radio 101.2, was closed down in 1997, and all remaining private radio stations have had to cede part of their shares to the state and are fully under the control of the regime,
- P. whereas all internet connections are through a state-run corporation which has blocked numerous accounts and www pages,
  - 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 an independent radio programme broadcast from Poland, Lithuania and possibly Ukraine and will support support journalists and independent newspapers, as well as, in the near future, the creation of a satellite television programme for Belarus;
  - 3. Calls on the Council and Commission to create the necessary conditions to begin the broadcasting of an independent radio programme to Belarus from Poland, Lithuania and possibly Ukraine;
  - 4. Emphasises that the radio programmes should be in both Belarussian and Russian, and created by independent journalists from Belarus, which will guarantee the authenticity and independence of the programmes;
  - 5. Emphasises that the radio network should be a private initiative and must not in any way be an organ of any Member State or institution of the European Union;
  - 6. Emphasises that the radio network should be able to broadcast in all transmission bandwidths, including on the Internet, and should be available on a continuous basis;

7. Calls on the Council and Commission to earmark funds available within the EIDHR framework to help support repressed journalists and their families;
8. 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;
9. Emphasises that the creation of the radio network should be part of the support for the remaining independent newspapers and magazines in Belarus, and that special support should be given to the non-registered independent press which operates beyond censorship and state control; considers that support should include distribution, editorial work and publishing of the independent press;
10. Emphasises once again that the further development of EU relations with Belarus will continue to depend on the progress made towards democratisation and reform in the country and access for Belarussians to objective, free and transparent media;
11. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Parliaments and Governments of the Member States and the Parliamentary Assemblies of the OSCE and the Council of Europe.