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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 Graham Watson and Janusz Onyszkiewicz
on behalf of the ALDE 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 to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights' resolution of 14 April 2005 on the Situation of Human Rights in 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 since 1996 neither referenda nor parliamentary or presidential elections had been free and fair and that they were preceded by deliberate and massive 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 blatantly 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 the Belarussian authorities have made no progress in investigating 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 whereas 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, and in June Narodnaja Volja daily was fined EUR 40 000; whereas the entire circulation of Dzień newspaper was confiscated by the Belarussian authorities and reregistration of the newspaper was refused; whereas Andrej Šantarovič – the editor of Miestnaja Gazieta – and Alena Raubieckaja – the editor of Birža informacii – 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 – Pawał 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 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 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 Salidarnaść, 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 Dzień and BDG are printed abroad and 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 Bielsajuzdruk and by the State postal services, and all private distribution of mass media was banned in 2004, while citizens are being persecuted for distributing the independent press,
- N. whereas the terrestrial broadcasting of all television channels, both national and regional, is in government hands,
- O. 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,
- P. whereas the only private radio news station, Radio 101.2, which used to broadcast in Belarussian and had its own news service and analytical programmes, was closed down in 1996, and all remaining private radio stations are under state control, either through ownership or through the threat of administrative or criminal punishment,
- Q. whereas the State-owned Internet provider is controlling all Internet traffic within Belarus and is blocking numerous e-mail accounts and www pages which could serve as sources of alternative sociopolitical information,
- R. whereas by means of persecution and closure of printed media which use the Belarussian language (Svaboda, Rabočy, Pahonia, Dzień), by closing the only Belarussian-language FM station, Radio 101.2, and by almost completely eliminating the use of Belarussian on the main TV channels, the Belarussian authorities are consistently, forcibly and deliberately marginalising the Belarussian language which, according to the census, is regarded as the native language by 74% of the Belarussian population,
- 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 urgently to create a complex, while highly flexible, multi-annual programme of support for the independent media in Belarus which will encompass support for an independent radio programme broadcast from Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and possibly Ukraine and will support journalists and independent newspapers, as well as, in the very near future, the television channel for Belarus broadcasting from abroad;
3. Calls on the Council and Commission to urgently create the necessary conditions to begin the broadcasting of an independent radio programme to Belarus from Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and possibly Ukraine;
4. Emphasises that the radio programmes should be created by independent journalists from Belarus, which will guarantee the authenticity, objectivity 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 by satellite, and should be available on a permanent basis;
7. Calls on the Council and Commission to earmark funds available within the EIDHR and Decentralised Cooperation Instrument framework to help support repressed journalists and their families;
8. Calls on the Council and Commission as a matter of urgency to create a programme of scholarships, traineeships and training programmes for independent Belarussian journalists at leading European mass-media institutions;
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 editorial work, publishing and distribution 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. 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 must immediately initiate the procedure to add to the visa-ban list Belarussian authorities involved in persecution of the mass media and impose economic sanctions on the Belarussian regime;
12. 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.