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MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

to wind up the debate on statements by the Council and Commission

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

by Jacek Protasiewicz, José Ignacio Salafranca Sánchez-Neyra, Charles Tannock, Jacek Saryusz-Wolski, Elmar Brok, Colm Burke, Esther De Lange and Vytautas Landsbergis

on behalf of the PPE-DE Group

on Belarus

European Parliament resolution on Belarus

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on the situation in Belarus, in particular that of 9 October 2008,
 - having regard to the Council Conclusions on Belarus of 13 October 2008 lifting the ban on political contacts with the Belarusian authorities and suspending the visa ban for six months for Belarusian officials, including President Alexander Lukashenko,
 - having regard to the Council’s EU Annual Report on Human Rights 2008 of 27 November 2008,
 - having regard to the Commission’s Communication to the European Parliament and the Council of 3 December 2008 concerning the Eastern Partnership,
 - having regard to the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report of 27 November 2008,
 - having regard to Rule 103(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas the release of the political prisoners has been seen by the EU as a significant step towards the adoption by Belarus of the fundamental values of democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law, and was made one of the preconditions for reviewing the restrictive measures currently applying to certain leading political figures in Belarus and for gradually restoring relations with Belarus,
- B. whereas freedom of speech is another principle which must be respected if relations with Belarus are restored and the suspension of restrictive sanctions is extended beyond April 2009,
- C. whereas the EU is ready to continue the positive policy leading to gradual re-engagement with Belarus if its government demonstrates a willingness to improve conditions with regard to respecting the human rights, guaranteeing freedom of the media, and conducting free and fair elections,
- D. whereas the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission stated in its final report that, although there had been some minor improvements, the elections of 28 September 2008, which took place in a strictly controlled environment with a barely visible campaign and were marked by a lack of transparency in vote counting and in aggregating results from various polling stations, ultimately fell short of internationally recognised democratic standards,
- E. whereas the Belarusian economy faces serious challenges caused by the global financial crisis, which was clearly expressed in President Lukashenko’s New Year address to the

nation,

- F. whereas Lidziya Yarmoshyna, Chair of the Central Election Commission, admitted that the September elections did not receive ‘full and unconditional recognition as complying with international standards from European partners’ and therefore the ‘utmost goal’ of the elections had not been met,
1. Notes that there are no more political prisoners in Belarus, but that Mr Alyaksandr Kazulin, Mr Sergei Parsyukevich and Mr Andrei Kim still do not enjoy all the civic rights guaranteed to all Belarusian citizens by the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus and many others are subjects to various forms of restrictions on their freedom, including Alexander Barazhenka, who was held in custody for weeks awaiting trial for his participation in the January 2008 demonstration;
 2. Expresses its satisfaction that two independent newspapers, *Narodnaya Volya* and *Nasha Niva*, have been given access to registration and distribution through the state-owned network; recalls at the same time that there are still 13 independent newspapers awaiting registration;
 3. Welcomes the consultations by the authorities with the Belarusian Association of Journalists on changes to internet regulations and media law; hopes that this marks the beginning of a genuine dialogue with independent journalists on conditions for media freedom in Belarus;
 4. Welcomes the registration of the Movement for Freedom led by Mr Alexander Milinkevich; expresses at the same time its concerns about the questioning of the legitimacy of the youth wing of the Belarusian Popular Front by the Belarusian Ministry of Justice;
 5. Welcomes the Belarusian President’s recommendation for governmental agencies to consult with the OSCE/ODIHR on changes to the Belarusian election regulations with a view to bringing them into line with international standards;
 6. Recalls that, despite some improvements, the parliamentary elections held on 28 September 2008 in Belarus failed to meet European democratic standards and calls in this context on the Belarusian Government to move towards genuinely democratic elections in the future in accordance with international democratic standards by introducing changes to electoral law and practice, such as:
 - (a) creating fair conditions and opportunities for all candidates to conduct a genuine electoral campaign;
 - (b) ensuring that all parties participating in elections are represented at all election commission levels, in particular at precinct election commission level;
 - (c) ensuring that the votes cast preclude any doubt as to the possibility of fraud in this connection;
 - (d) abolishing the early-voting procedure or, at least, guaranteeing that early votes cast are

subject to a separate procedure from that for ordinary votes cast and that early-voting results are recorded separately in electoral protocols;

7. Urges the Belarusian Government to respect human rights by:
 - (a) making necessary changes to the Belarus Criminal Code by abolishing Articles 193, 367, 368 and 369-1, some of which, in particular Article 193, are cited by Amnesty International and are often misused as a means of repression;
 - (b) refraining from threatening with criminal prosecution students who have been expelled from universities for their civic stance and obliged to continue their studies abroad, including for avoiding military service in Belarus;
 - (c) eliminating all obstacles that prevent proper registration of NGOs in Belarus; not abusing the financial measures such as rent rates to block the possibilities for NGOs to operate efficiently;
 - (d) improving treatment of, and respect for, national minorities, including recognition of the legitimately elected body of the Union of Poles in Belarus, led by Angelika Borys, culture, churches, the education system and the historical and material heritage,in order to end the country's self-imposed isolation from the rest of Europe and in order for relations between the EU and Belarus to improve significantly;
8. Recalls that on 21 November 2006 the European Union declared its readiness to renew its relationship with Belarus and its people within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy as soon as the Belarusian Government demonstrated respect for democratic values and for the basic rights of the Belarusian people; welcomes the ratification bill on the agreement on the establishment of the European Commission's delegation in Minsk;
9. Calls on the Council and the Commission to take further steps towards the facilitation and liberalisation of visa procedures for Belarusian citizens, as such action is crucial to fulfilling the main goal of EU policy towards Belarus, namely to facilitate and intensify people-to-people contacts and to democratise the country; urges them, in this context, to consider the scope for lowering the cost of visas for Belarusian citizens entering the Schengen Area, which is the only way to prevent Belarus and its citizens from becoming increasingly isolated; calls on the Belarusian authorities to end their practice of issuing exit visas to their citizens, in particular children and students;
10. Welcomes the Belarusian authorities' decision temporarily to lift the travel ban on a number of victims of the Chernobyl disaster in order to allow them to participate in rest and recuperation programmes, and hopes that for the longer term a structural solution can be found; urges the Czech Presidency to make it a priority to negotiate an EU-wide agreement with the Belarusian authorities allowing children to travel from Belarus to any EU Member State participating in such rest and recuperation programmes;
11. Calls on the Council and the Commission to consider selective application of the

European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument¹ and the European Instrument for Human Rights and Democracy² to Belarus by extending more support to Belarusian civil society and, in particular, to increase financial aid to the independent media, NGOs and Belarusian students studying abroad; welcomes the financial support given by the Commission to the Belarusian 'European Humanities University' in exile in Vilnius (Lithuania); calls on the Council and the Commission to call on the Belarusian Government, as a sign of good will and positive change, to enable the European Humanities University in exile in Vilnius to return legally to Belarus and re-establish itself in appropriate conditions for its future development in Minsk; calls on the Council and the Commission to grant financial support for the independent Belarusian television channel Belsat;

12. Calls on the Council and the Commission to consider measures to improve the business climate, trade, investment, energy and transport infrastructure and cross-border cooperation between the EU and Belarus, so as to contribute to the well-being and prosperity of the citizens of Belarus, as well as their ability to communicate with and freely travel to the EU in this context; calls on the Commission to finalise a European Commission- Belarus declaration on energy as a basis for further development of energy cooperation covering, inter alia, hydrocarbon transit and energy sector reforms;
13. Expresses its concerns about the beginning of work on building a nuclear power station on the very border with the EU if that facility is of the Russian Chernobyl-type model, which is unacceptable to the EU, and may question the EU's financial assistance to Belarus;
14. Is concerned about reports that at their meeting in Moscow on 22 December 2008 the Presidents of Belarus and Russia discussed the entire range of military-political agreements on strengthening cooperation between the Belarusian and Russian armed forces, and especially the agreement on the single air-defence system which, according to President Lukashenko, will be ready to sign in late January;
15. Calls on the Council and the Commission to consider the participation of the European Investment Bank in investing in Belarusian energy transit infrastructure; stresses the importance of participation by European companies in the process of privatisation in Belarus;
16. Regrets the decision of the Belarusian authorities repeatedly to refuse entrance visas to Members of the European Parliament and national parliamentarians in the last couple of years; calls on the Belarusian authorities not to create any further obstacles preventing the European Parliament Delegation for Relations with Belarus from visiting the country; believes that the lifting of the visa ban for Belarusian officials should be reciprocated by a pledge on the part of the Belarusian Government to grant European legislators full access to its territory and the freedom to meet with civic and political groups;
17. Calls on the Belarusian authorities to respect freedom of religion; condemns the fact that European citizens, including priests, are regularly being expelled from Belarus;

¹ OJ L 310, 9.11.2006, p. 1.

² OJ L 386, 29.12.2006, p. 1.

18. Welcomes the will of the Belarusian nation to safeguard the country's independence and territorial integrity;
19. Condemns the fact that Belarus is the only country in Europe which still has the death penalty, contrary to European values;
20. 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 Community of Independent States and the Parliament and Government of Belarus.