MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

to wind up the debate on the statement by the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

pursuant to Rule 123(2) of the Rules of Procedure

on the situation in Belarus in the light of the upcoming presidential elections 2015
(2015/2834(RSP))

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on behalf of the EFDD Group
European Parliament resolution on the situation in Belarus in the light of the upcoming presidential elections 2015
(2015/2834(RSP))

The European Parliament,

– having regard to its previous resolutions and recommendations on Belarus,
– having regard to the upcoming presidential elections scheduled to take place on 11 October 2015,
– having regard to the first official visit of Parliament’s Delegation for relations with Belarus since 2002, which took place in Minsk on 18 and 19 June 2015,
– having regard to the first round of the Belarus-EU Dialogue on Human Rights, which took place on 28 July 2015,
– having regard to the Belarus Human Rights Council’s Universal Periodic Review of 2015,
– having regard to Rule 123(2) of its Rules of Procedure,

A. whereas on 22 August 2015 the Belarusian President, Alexander Lukashenko, issued a pardon on ‘humanitarian grounds’ to six opposition leaders imprisoned by the authorities;

B. whereas none of the released political opponents could run for the next presidential elections, as the deadline for registering candidates expired the day before they were freed; whereas some of the released political personalities have been placed under police surveillance with severe limitations on their movements, along with the obligation to report regularly to the police;

C. whereas the 2010 presidential elections were marred by censorship, raids and in general by a violent crackdown on the opposition that saw up to 700 opposition activists, including seven presidential candidates, jailed;

D. whereas after the 2010 elections the EU renewed a travel ban prohibiting Lukashenko and 156 of his associates from traveling to Member States; whereas in July 2015 the EU Council removed 26 persons and four companies from its Belarus sanctions list, while at the same time extending the sanctions until 31 October 2015;

E. whereas Belarus is the last country in Europe to make use of capital punishment; whereas the Criminal Code of Belarus states that all executions are to be by ‘firing squad’, meaning that victims are shot in the back of the head after being forced to their knees;

F. whereas in October 2012 the UN Human Rights Committee declared that the practices of the Belarusian Government relating to capital punishment, including carrying out
executions in secret, refusing to release the bodies to the families and the possibility of not communicating the place of burial of those executed to their relatives, violate the human rights of the convicted and their families;

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 in April 2015 President Lukashenko signed Decree No 3, ‘On prevention of social dependency’, the so-called ‘social parasitism law’, which obliges citizens to pay an annual fee of about USD 250 if they are not employed;

I. whereas in the first half of 2015 there were over 30 incidents in which journalists were detained, fined or arrested, in an escalation of harassment of independent journalists;

J. whereas presidential elections will be held on 11 October 2015;

K. whereas on 28 July 2015 the first round of the Belarus-EU dialogue on human rights took place in Brussels, focusing on the establishment of a National Human Rights Institution, the improvement of freedom of expression, assembly and association, the abolition of the death penalty and the fight against inhuman and degrading treatment, as well as the reinforcement of children’s rights;

1. Is worried by the systematic deterioration of human rights in Belarus, the denial of the right to freedom of expression, assembly and association, the arbitrary registration process for civil society organisations, and the use of capital punishment;

2. Welcomes the Belarusian authorities’ declarations calling for normalisation of relations with Europe and the US, but notes that the general situation of human rights in the country did not improve in the first half of 2015;

3. Underlines that such a normalisation should happen in line with the principle of conditionality; invites the Council to make any easing of sanctions against Belarus conditional on concrete progress in the situation of democracy and human rights in the country;

4. Welcomes the presidential pardon granted to the six ‘political prisoners’ as a positive gesture, and sincerely hopes that it may represent a sign of real change for the country and not just a strategic move ahead of the forthcoming presidential elections;

5. Calls on the authorities to rehabilitate the released political prisoners by reinstating their full civil and political rights, and to allow them to reintegrate into and participate in the public life of Belarus;

6. Believes that the release of the six opposition leaders, though positive, represents no more than a ‘half step’ that does not guarantee credible elections in October; calls on the government to ease the restrictions on civic and political rights as a necessary step towards free and fair presidential elections;

7. Calls on the Belarusian authorities to make every effort to hold the elections in an open,
free and democratic manner and according to internationally recognised standards; calls on the authorities to refrain from marginalising their opponents and muzzling the media, so as to allow an environment where every party is actually able to compete on an equal footing;

8. Expects the Government of Belarus to take other meaningful steps to improve humanitarian rights in the country and stop quashing peaceful dissent; believes that major reforms of the judiciary as well as unfettered free speech and free assembly rights would be necessary steps towards a credible democracy;

9. Recalls that over the last decade between two and nine people have been sentenced to death in Belarus every year; urges Belarus to join a global moratorium on the death penalty as a first step towards its universal abolition;

10. Strongly believes in the importance of building links between the EU and Belarus at all levels; is convinced in particular that supporting civil society bodies must be a strategic priority of the EU, and invites the Commission to assist civil society in Belarus, by financial and political means;

11. Praises the positive role of Belarus, especially as regards technical and logistic support, in connection with the negotiations in the Ukraine peace process, and its efforts to relax the tensions in the country;

12. Welcomes the fact that Belarus joined the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area on 14 May 2015, and calls on the country to fulfil the obligations stipulated in the roadmap;

13. 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 (HR/VP), the EEAS, the Council, the Commission and the Member States.