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*Plenary sitting*

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**B8-1232/2016**

16.11.2016

## **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  
(2016/2934(RSP))

**Heidi Hautala, Rebecca Harms, Bronis Ropė, Igor Šoltes**  
on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group

**European Parliament resolution on the situation in Belarus  
(2016/2934(RSP))**

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to its previous resolutions on Belarus,
  - having regard to the parliamentary elections held on 11 September 2016 and to the presidential elections of 11 October 2015,
  - having regard to the statement of the European External Action Service (EEAS) spokesperson of 12 September 2016 on the parliamentary elections in Belarus,
  - having regard to the preliminary statement of the OSCE/ODIHR, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) of 12 September 2016 on the parliamentary elections in Belarus,
  - having regard to the Council conclusions on Belarus of 15 February 2016,
  - having regard to Rule 123(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas in its final report on the 2015 presidential elections in Belarus, the OSCE/ODIHR, together with the Council of Europe Venice Commission, laid out a set of recommendations to be implemented by Belarus before the 2016 parliamentary elections;
- B. whereas the 2016 elections were marked by a number of positive trends, such as the absence of significant constraints on the part of the authorities in the collection of signatures for nominating candidates and conducting campaign activities and a small percentage of refusals to register nominations of groups and candidates; whereas according to the evaluation by the OSCE/ODIHR mission, the 2016 parliamentary elections were efficiently organised;
- C. whereas, nevertheless, a number of long-standing systemic shortcomings remain, including the legal framework restrictions for political rights and fundamental freedoms; whereas counting and tabulation presented a significant number of procedural irregularities and lacked transparency; whereas the Belarusian authorities did not take into account most of the recommendations of the OSCE/ODIHR, which were developed on the basis of observation of earlier campaigns, and the few changes made were unable to contribute to a qualitative change in the nature of the elections towards greater democracy and transparency;
- D. whereas since 1994 no free and fair elections have been conducted in Belarus under electoral legislation compliant with OSCE/ODIHR internationally recognised standards; whereas, for the first time in 20 years, a democratic opposition will be represented in the Belarusian parliament;
- E. whereas in February 2016 the EU ended five years of sanctions against Belarus as a

gesture of goodwill to encourage Belarus to improve its human rights, democracy and rule of law record;

- F. whereas Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections (HRD) and Right to Choose-2016 (R2C), the two Belarusian election-monitoring groups, condemned the latest elections for not meeting a number of key international standards and not being a credible reflection of the will of Belarusian citizens;
- G. whereas the Belarusian observer groups identified concrete evidence of massive nationwide efforts to inflate turnout totals during the five-day early vote period (6-10 September 2016) and on election day (11 September 2016);
- H. whereas the centre-right Belarusian opposition forces presented for the first time on 18 November 2015 a joint cooperation agreement to stand united in the 2016 parliamentary elections;
- I. whereas the first official visit of Parliament's Delegation for relations with Belarus since 2002 took place in Minsk on 18 and 19 June 2015; whereas Parliament currently has no official relations with the Belarusian parliament;
- J. whereas Belarus played a constructive role in facilitating the agreement on the ceasefire in Ukraine;
- K. whereas the conflict in Ukraine has deepened fears in Belarusian society of a destabilisation of the internal situation as a result of a power change;
- L. whereas Belarus is the only country in Europe still to carry out capital punishment; whereas on 4 October 2016 the Belarusian Supreme Court upheld the death sentence against Siarhei Vostrykau; whereas this is the fourth confirmation by the Belarusian Supreme Court of a death sentence in 2016;
- M. whereas the Belarusian authorities have not abandoned the repressive practices against their political opponents: peaceful protesters are still subjected to administrative liability, other civil and political rights are restricted and the country has new political prisoners; whereas the Belarusian authorities have not taken any measures aimed at systemic and qualitative changes in the field of human rights, especially at legislative level;
- N. whereas a significant improvement in freedom of speech and freedom of the media, respect for the political rights of ordinary citizens and opposition activists alike and respect for the rule of law and fundamental rights are all prerequisites for better relations between the EU and Belarus; whereas the European Union remains strongly committed to further defending human rights in Belarus, including freedom of speech and of the media;
- O. whereas according to the new report by the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus, Miklós Haraszti, human rights violations in the country are growing worse, referring, in particular, to an unchanged legal and administrative system of restrictions on human rights;

- P. whereas on 25 October 2016 Belarus adopted its first National Human Rights Action Plan, which was approved by a resolution of the Council of Ministers; whereas according to the Belarusian authorities this plan defines the principal lines of action for implementing the country's human rights commitments;
- Q. whereas Belarus cannot yet be invited to join the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly (PA), established in May 2011 as the parliamentary dimension of the Eastern Partnership;
- R. whereas any country that develops nuclear power must strictly adhere to the international nuclear and environmental safety requirements and standards; whereas the Government of Belarus, which bears exclusive responsibility for the safety and security of nuclear facilities on its territory, must fulfil its obligations to its own citizens as well as to the neighbouring countries; whereas the principles of openness and transparency must be the key background against which any nuclear facility is developed, operated and decommissioned;
1. Acknowledges the steps forward made by Belarus as regards the conduct of the 2016 parliamentary elections compared with previous elections; notes that the opposition will have two representatives in the newly elected Parliament;
  2. Regrets, however, that the elections did not comply with a number of key international standards for democratic and free elections, or with the country's electoral legislation; stresses, in particular, the lack of equal access to state media for all candidates, the lack of impartiality of election commissions, occurrences of abuse of administrative resources in favour of the pro-government candidates, numerous occurrences of forcing voters to participate in early voting and the non-transparency of certain election procedures for observers;
  3. Calls on the Belarusian authorities to resume work without delay on a comprehensive electoral reform as part of the broader democratisation process and in cooperation with international partners; stresses the need to introduce the OSCE/ODIHR recommendations in due time before the municipal elections of March 2018; emphasises that it is key for achieving the full potential of EU-Belarus relations;
  4. Reiterates its call on the Belarusian authorities to ensure, in all circumstances, respect for democratic principles, human rights and fundamental freedoms, in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the international and regional human rights instruments ratified by Belarus;
  5. Welcomes, in this respect, the adoption by the Council of Ministers of Belarus of the Action Plan for the implementation of the recommendations made by the Universal Periodic Review Working Group of the UN Human Rights Council, and expects it to be carried out in full; looks forward to the establishment of a national institution on human rights and hopes it can be fully operational and effective within the shortest time frame possible; calls on the Belarusian authorities to recognise and extend full cooperation to the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus by engaging in a substantive and constructive dialogue and facilitating a visit to the country;

6. Calls on the Belarusian Government to rehabilitate the released political prisoners and to restore their civil and political rights;
7. Expresses its concern that no new political parties have been registered in Belarus since 2000; calls for a less restrictive approach on this issue;
8. Expects the authorities to stop the harassment of independent media for political reasons; urges a stop to the practice of administrative prosecution and the arbitrary use of Article 22.9, Part 2, of the Administrative Code against freelance journalists for working with foreign media without accreditation, which restrict the right to freedom of expression and the dissemination of information;
9. Takes note of the intention of the Belarusian Government to further consider the possible abolition of the death penalty; urges Belarus, the only country in Europe still applying capital punishment, to join a global moratorium on the use of the death penalty as a first step towards its permanent abolition; recalls that the death penalty constitutes inhumane and degrading treatment, has no proven deterrent effect and makes judicial errors irreversible;
10. Calls on the European External Action Service (EEAS) and on the Commission to look for new ways of supporting civil society organisations in Belarus; stresses, in this regard, the need to support all independent sources of information for Belarusian society, including media broadcasting in the Belarusian language, and from abroad;
11. Notes the launch in January 2014 of the negotiations on visa facilitation aimed at improving people-to-people contacts and encouraging the emergence of civil society; stresses the need to speed up the progress in this regard;
12. Supports the Commission in its policy of ‘critical engagement’ with the Belarusian authorities and expresses its readiness to contribute to it also via Parliament’s Delegation for relations with Belarus as long as the commitment of the Belarusian counterpart is genuine, open and result-oriented; calls, in this regard, on the EEAS to define a minimum set of benchmarks in the short and medium term on how to measure the willingness of the Belarusian authorities to step up the engagement with the EU;
13. Attaches great importance and looks forward to the accession of Belarus to the Euronest PA, in accordance with the Constituent Act, as soon as the political conditions are fulfilled, as this accession would be the natural extension of the participation of Belarus in the Eastern Partnership multilateral cooperation framework;
14. Stresses the urgent need to ensure European and international scrutiny of the Ostrovets Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) project, and insists that the following steps are taken: a) conducting the stress-test exercise for the Belarus NPP, as agreed with the Commission on 23 June 2011 by signature of a declaration on the stress tests, b) accomplishing the IAEA SEED mission, in its full scope, for an impartial evaluation of the selected Ostrovets site, alternative sites and site selection criteria, c) ensuring international control of the implementation of the Belarus NPP project in order to prevent possible incidents or accidents; urges, therefore, the Belarusian authorities to immediately suspend the construction of the NPP until the above-mentioned steps and security measures have been implemented;

15. Urges the Council and the Commission to link EU macro-financial support to Belarus with, and make it conditional upon, substantial progress as regards respect for civil liberties and fundamental rights and the constructive actions to be taken by Belarus with regard to the safety of the Ostrovets NPP;
16. Reiterates its commitment to working for the benefit of the people of Belarus, supporting their pro-democratic aspirations and initiatives and contributing to a stable, democratic and prosperous future for the country;
17. 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 (VP/HR), the European External Action Service, the Council, the Commission, the Member States, the OSCE/ODHIR, the Council of Europe and the Belarusian authorities.