



Plenary sitting

B8-1234/2016

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))

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on behalf of the PPE Group

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

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions and recommendations on Belarus,
 - having regard to the parliamentary elections held on 11 September 2016 and to the presidential elections held on 11 October 2015,
 - having regard to the statement by the Chair of its Delegation for relations with Belarus of 13 September 2016 on the recent parliamentary elections in Belarus,
 - having regard to the statement by the European External Action Service spokesperson of 12 September 2016 on the parliamentary elections in Belarus,
 - having regard to the preliminary statement of the OSCE/ODIHR, OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) of 12 September 2016 on parliamentary elections in Belarus,
 - having regard to the Council conclusions on Belarus, in particular those of 16 February 2016 lifting sanctions against 170 individuals and three Belarusian companies,
 - having regard to the European People’s Party statement of 15 September 2016 on recent elections in Belarus,
 - having regard to the statement by the spokesperson of the US Department of State of 12 September 2016 on parliamentary elections in Belarus,
 - having regard to the OSCE final report of 28 January 2016 on the presidential elections in Belarus of 11 October 2015,
 - having regard to the numerous declarations by the Belarusian authorities that some of the OSCE/ODIHR recommendations following the 2015 presidential elections would be implemented ahead of the 2016 parliamentary elections,
 - having regard to the release of six political prisoners by the Belarusian authorities on 22 August 2015 and to the subsequent statement by Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini and the Commissioner for Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Johannes Hahn, on the release of political prisoners in Belarus of 22 August 2015,
 - 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’s Venice Commission, prepared a set of recommendations to be implemented by Belarus before the 2016 parliamentary

elections;

- B. whereas, in order to build better relations with the West, the Belarusian authorities allowed democratic opposition parties to register more easily than in previous elections, and foreign observers were granted better access to the vote count;
- C. whereas, according to the assessment by the OSCE/ODIHR, the 2016 parliamentary elections were efficiently organised, but a number of long-standing systemic shortcomings remain, including legal framework restrictions for political rights and fundamental freedoms; whereas counting and tabulation saw a significant number of procedural irregularities and lacked transparency;
- D. whereas, for the first time in 20 years, a democratic opposition will be represented in the Belarusian parliament;
- E. whereas since 1994 no free and fair elections have been conducted in Belarus under electoral legislation compliant with OSCE/ODIHR internationally recognised standards;
- F. whereas the EU lifted most of its restrictive measures against Belarusian officials and legal entities in February 2016 as a gesture of good will to encourage Belarus to improve its human rights, democracy and rule of law record; whereas in its conclusions on Belarus of 15 February 2016 the Council stressed the need to enhance EU-Belarus cooperation in a number of economic and trade- and assistance-related fields, which opened the possibility for Belarus to apply for EIB and EBRD financing; whereas some visible efforts to address certain long-standing issues ahead of the 2016 elections were noted, while at the same time many unaddressed issues concerning the legal and procedural electoral framework remain;
- G. 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;
- H. whereas the Belarusian observer groups collected concrete evidence of massive nationwide efforts to inflate turnout totals during the five-day early vote period (6-10 September) and on election day (11 September);
- I. 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;
- J. whereas the first 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;
- K. whereas Belarus played a constructive role in facilitating agreement on the ceasefire in Ukraine;
- L. whereas Russian aggression in Ukraine and Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea have deepened fears in Belarusian society of a destabilisation of the internal situation as a

result of a power shift;

- M. 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;
- 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, as stated in the report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus of 21 April 2016, despite a noticeable intensification of contacts between Belarus, the EU and the United States, violations of human rights still persist and no significant change has been noted;
- P. whereas human rights organisations have drawn attention to new methods of harassment of the opposition;
- Q. whereas one of the objectives of Belarus's participation in the Eastern Partnership and its parliamentary branch, Euronest, is to intensify cooperation between the country and the EU;
1. Remains deeply concerned by the shortcomings observed by independent international observers during the 2015 presidential and 2016 parliamentary elections; recognises the attempts to make progress, which is still insufficient; notes that the opposition will have two representatives in the newly elected parliament; considers these, however, to be political appointments, rather than a result of the electoral outcome; notes that consideration of the future legislative proposals submitted by these two parliamentarians will serve as a litmus test of the political intentions of the authorities behind their appointments;
 2. 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 this is key to achieving the desired progress in EU-Belarus relations;
 3. 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;
 4. Calls on the Belarusian Government to rehabilitate the released political prisoners and to restore their civil and political rights;
 5. Expresses its concern that since 2000 no new political party has been registered in

Belarus; calls for a less restrictive approach on this issue; stresses that all political parties must be allowed unrestricted political activities, especially in the electoral campaign period;

6. Urges Belarus, the only country in Europe still applying capital punishment, to join a global moratorium on execution 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;
7. 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;
8. 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 that the Commission and the EEAS should take necessary measures to speed up progress in this regard;
9. Supports the EU in its policy of ‘critical engagement’ with the Belarusian authorities, and expresses its readiness also to contribute to it via its Delegation for relations with Belarus; calls on the Commission to monitor the legislative initiatives closely and to scrutinise their implementation;
10. Urges increased cooperation and transparency regarding the construction of the nuclear power plant in Ostrovets, which will affect its European neighbourhood; stresses the need for comprehensive international supervision of the implementation of this project to ensure that it complies with international nuclear and environmental safety requirements and standards;
11. 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;
12. 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.