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*Plenary sitting*

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**B8-0253/2017**

4.4.2017

## MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

with request for inclusion in the agenda for a debate on cases of breaches of human rights, democracy and the rule of law

pursuant to Rule 135 of the Rules of Procedure

on the human rights situation in Belarus  
(2017/2647(RSP))

**Charles Tannock, Karol Karski, Anna Elżbieta Fotyga, Geoffrey Van Orden, Ryszard Antoni Legutko, Ryszard Czarnecki, Tomasz Piotr Poręba, Zdzisław Krasnodębski, Valdemar Tomaševski, Kazimierz Michał Ujazdowski, Marek Jurek, Branislav Škripek, Arne Gericke, Raffaele Fitto, Jana Žitňanská, Monica Macovei, Urszula Krupa, Ruža Tomašić**  
on behalf of the ECR Group

**European Parliament resolution on the human rights situation in Belarus  
(2017/2647(RSP))**

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to its previous resolutions and recommendations on Belarus and on the Eastern Partnership,
  - having regard to the statement by the Spokesperson of the European External Action Service on the recent protests and arrests in Belarus on 25 March 2017,
  - having regard to the Council's decision made on 27 February 2017 to prolong the restrictive measures against Belarus until 28 February 2018 which include an arms embargo and an asset freeze and a travel ban against four people listed in connection with the unresolved disappearances of two opposition politicians, one businessman and one journalist in 1999 and in 2000,
  - having regard to the Council conclusions on Belarus, in particular those of 16 February 2016 lifting restrictive measures against 170 individuals and three Belarusian companies,
  - having regard to the numerous declarations by the Belarusian authorities that some of the OSCE/ODIHR recommendations following the 2015 presidential elections will be implemented ahead of the 2016 parliamentary elections,
  - having regard to Rule 123(2) and (4) of its Rules of Procedure
- A. whereas in April 2015, President of Belarus Aleksandr Lukashenko signed the Presidential Decree No. 3 “On the prevention of dependency on social aid” that obliges citizens to work more than 183 days a year or to pay a special duty to finance government expenditures which provoked the most massive demonstrations since 2011;
- B. whereas non-payment or partial payment of such a levy entails administrative responsibility in the form of a fine or administrative arrest; whereas almost 500.000 people were fined and most of them did not pay it;
- C. whereas despite the pressure from the state media and security forces before and during Freedom Day, including the presence of armed officers to disperse demonstrations and various attempts by the Belarusian leadership to preventively weaken the protests, thousands of Belarussian citizens gathered in many places in the country to peacefully demonstrate against Lukashenko's regime and its social policies;
- D. whereas the crackdown on March 25 and 26 against dozens of local and international human rights defenders came after hundreds of peaceful demonstrators against the presidential decree had been violently attacked, arbitrarily arrested and deprived of their liberty;

- E. whereas at least 700 people have been detained in Minsk, some of them being accidental spectators;
- F. whereas Mikola Statkevich, a former candidate for president and political prisoner, together with Sergei Kulinich, and Sergei Kuntsevich. were kept in a KGB prison for four days without providing information to their families on their whereabouts;
- G. whereas Uladzimir Nyaklyayew, a former candidate for president in 2010, was illegally detained prior to the rally of March 25 and later was hospitalised due to his health condition;
- H. whereas human rights defender Oleg Volchek was sentenced to thirteen days under detention;
- I. whereas Leonid Sudalenka has drafted and submitted to courts more than 200 complaints on behalf of citizens against the provisions of the Decree in response to notifications that citizens received in the beginning of the year 2017 urging them to pay the fee; whereas, Leonid Sudalenka was also the first lawyer to bring a successful claim against the fee, thus setting a precedent for approximately half a million Belarusians who received a notification to pay a fee to the State; whereas Sudalenka was also brought to court for protesting against the presidential decree;
- J. whereas these arrests followed the preventative arrest of prominent civil society leaders and opposition figures and detention of around 60 human rights observers;
- K. whereas the raids against non-governmental organizations in their own offices were accompanied by physical violence; whereas militia raided also independent media offices like TV Belsat
- L. whereas reports indicate the Internet cut off which is a direct attack on media and freedom of expression and the Belarusian authorities continue to use the entire set of propaganda and power mechanisms applied during the highly politicised 2006 and 2010 elections;
- M. whereas the events of March 25 and 26 show that the Belarusian government restarted its old policies of mass repression of its citizens who exercise their rights provided for by the constitution and international treaties;
- N. whereas on March 28, 2017 the Special Rapporteur of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights' office on human rights in Belarus, Miklós Haraszti, has expressed his shock at the Government's open return to the policy of violent mass repression against peaceful demonstrators, non-governmental organizations, journalists and political opponents;
- O. whereas the freedom of peaceful assembly and association and freedom of expression are fundamental human rights;

- P. whereas the European Parliament has supported the Belarusian civil society for years, among others by awarding the Sacharov Prize to the Belarusian Association of Journalist in 2004 and to Aliaksandr Milinkevich in 2006;
- Q. 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;
- R. whereas, despite some positive changes, Belarus remains a centralised and autocratic state under a ‘soft dictatorship’, where human rights violations continue to be systematically inflicted by state organs against dissenting or protesting individuals, where human rights defenders and journalists continue to be harassed and prevented from carrying out their duties properly, and where representatives of independent or foreign media lacking state-approved accreditation are often detained, prosecuted and/or fined;
- S. whereas Belarus is part of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) and takes part in the ‘Zapad’ joint military manoeuvres with Russia which cover scenarios involving attacks on its western neighbours that include simulating the use of nuclear weapons against Poland; whereas Belarus is to participate next year in ‘Zapad-2017’ with possible further aggressive scenarios and potential negative impact on security and sovereignty of the Republic of Belarus and the region;
1. Strongly condemns the way the Belarusian authorities treated the peaceful demonstrations held on 25 and 26 March in commemoration of the Freedom Day as well as demonstrations which were organised as of 17 February in the whole country against the Presidential Decree on “Preventing Social Dependency”;
  2. 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; urges Belarusian government to respect and uphold the right to freedom of association, assembly, expression and media freedom;
  3. Calls on the Belarusian authorities to release all the people detained during the peaceful protests and drop all the charges against them;
  4. Reiterates its call on the Belarusian Government to rehabilitate the political prisoners released and to fully restore their civil and political rights;
  5. Strongly condemns the policy of the Belarusian Government of using special forces to interfere in the internal affairs of civil society organisations, including those representing national minorities such as the independent NGO ‘Union of Poles in Belarus’;
  6. Calls on the Belarusian authorities to respect rights of national minorities, in particular their right to education in their language and urges them to withdraw from their plans to close schools where children are taught in Polish;

7. Notes with concern that the regime uses administrative tools to intimidate civil society and local communities which oppose government policies as it happens with contested nuclear plant in Ostroviec, including arrests of participants of annual rally “Chernobyl Way” in previous years;
8. Calls on the Belarusian Government to repeal without delay Article 193/1 of the Criminal Code, which penalises the organisation of and participation in the activities of non-registered public associations and organisations, and to allow the full, free and unhampered legal functioning of public associations and organisations; draws the Commission’s attention in particular to the fact that currently, as a result of the application of Article 193/1 and other restrictive measures, there are over 150 Belarusian NGOs registered in Lithuania, Poland, the Czech Republic and elsewhere;
9. Considers that the Belarusian leadership once more has managed to stretch in time the political cycle - liberalization followed by repressions - and moved beyond the electoral campaigns; stresses in this regard the need to revisit the EU policy of critical engagement in light of the recent developments, in particular President’s Lukashenko and state media comments on alleged groups trained in Poland, Ukraine and Lithuania to overthrow the Belarusian authorities, which proved that Belarus under the current regime is unable to cooperate with the EU;
10. Calls on the EEAS and on the Commission to continue and strengthen support for civil society organisations in Belarus and abroad; stresses, in this context, the need to support all independent sources of information for Belarusian society, including media broadcasting in the Belarusian language, and from abroad, such as TV Belsat, Radio Racja, Euradio and RFI/RL;
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.