



Plenary sitting

B8-0263/2017

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 Belarus
(2017/2647(RSP))

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on behalf of the PPE Group

**European Parliament resolution on Belarus
(2017/2647(RSP))**

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions and recommendations on Belarus,
 - having regard to the statement by the Chair of its Delegation for relations with Belarus of 27 March 2017 on the recent events in Belarus,
 - having regard to the statement by the European External Action Service spokesperson of 17 March 2017 on the recent protests and arrests in Belarus and of 25 March 2017 on the run-up to the Freedom Day in Belarus,
 - having regard to the statement by the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly of 24 March 2017 on the recent events in Belarus,
 - having regard to the statement by the OSCE/ODIHR Director of 17 and 26 March 2017 on the recent events in Belarus,
 - having regard to the statement of The UN Human Rights Council Special Rapporteur on human rights in Belarus of 28 March 2017,
 - having regards to the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (FIDH-OMCT) statement of 29 March 2017,
 - 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 OSCE/ODIHR final report of 28 January 2016 on the presidential elections in Belarus of 11 October 2015,
 - having regard to the FIDH and Viasna report on *Forced Labor and Pervasive Violations of Workers' Rights in Belarus*,
 - 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 135 of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas since 17 February mass peaceful protests of thousands of citizens have been taking place in dozens cities across Belarus as a reaction against adoption of the Presidential Decree No. 3 “On the prevention of dependency on social aid” that

introduced a tax on non-employment;

- B. whereas about 700 people tried to march on the Freedom Day of 25 March along Minsk's main avenue, but were blocked by a cordon of riot police, following by arrests, including domestic and foreign journalists reporting on the events;
- C. whereas over 20 cases of harassment of Belsat TV reporters have been recorded since 12 March; whereas on 31 March two Belsat offices in Minsk were searched and equipment was detained by the police;
- D. whereas on 25 March at least 57 persons involved in the monitoring of ongoing peaceful protests, including foreign nationals from France, Germany, Ukraine, and Russia were arrested at the office of the Human Rights Centre "Viasna" in Minsk after masked and armed members of the special police unit stormed the building;
- E. whereas 27 people have been arrested for "preparing mass riots"; whereas they are kept in KGB's and the Interior Ministry's detention facilities; whereas 10 of them were formally charged with training and preparing people for a riot;
- F. whereas massive protests continue to take place throughout the country, several human rights defenders have been arrested and sentenced under Article 23.34 of the Code of Administrative Offences (participating in an unauthorized peaceful assembly) in reprisal for their legitimate monitoring activities;
- G. 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;
- H. 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;
- I. 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;
- J. whereas Belarus is the only country in Europe still to carry out capital punishment; whereas the first death penalty sentence in 2017 was executed on 17 March;
- K. whereas, the Belarusian people have not abandoned their hopes of substantial reforms and a peaceful transformation of their country;
- L. whereas difficult economic situation in Belarus faces further prospects of deterioration, with major sectors still remaining under state ownership and under an administrative command and control system; whereas Belarus' dependence on Russia's economic aid is continuously increasing;

- M. whereas, in its final report on the 2016 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;
- N. 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 the European Parliament currently has no official relations with the Belarusian parliament;
1. Condemns the crackdown on peaceful protesters and repressions following the manifestations on 25 March; stresses that both in the run up to and during the Freedom Day events, and despite international community calls for restraint, the response by the security services was indiscriminate and inappropriate; calls on the Belarusian authorities to investigate allegations of ill-treatment;
 2. Appeals to the Belarusian authorities to immediately release all peaceful protesters still detained; reiterates that the use of force against anyone exercising her/his right to peaceful protest cannot be justified under any circumstances, and that repressions that violate the right to freedom of speech and assembly are contrary to Belarus' international obligations; calls on Belarusian authorities to ensure that peaceful protesters can exercise their freedoms and ensure their psychological and physical integrity;
 3. Reiterates its call on the Belarusian authorities to respect and uphold, in all circumstances, democratic principles, human rights, and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of association, assembly, and expression, in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the international and regional human rights instruments ratified by Belarus;
 4. Supports the people of Belarus in their right to peaceful assemblies and demonstrations; believes that a bottom-up movement is an important step on the way towards democracy in Belarus; urges the government of Belarus to get involved in an open dialogue with its citizens, independent civil society organizations, and independent media;
 5. Urges authorities to guarantee that all human rights defenders in Belarus are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions;
 6. Stresses that several months of efforts on the side of both the European Union and Belarus could be undermined by inadequate reactions from the authorities to the demonstrations; stresses that introducing targeted sanctions against those responsible for mass repressions in Belarus has to be considered in case the situation deteriorates;
 7. Urges the OSCE PA, which plans to hold its 26th Annual Session in Minsk in July 2017 to take into account recent events in Belarus and minimum to ensure involvement of political democratic opposition parties, independent media and civil society organisations;

8. Calls on the Belarusian Government to rehabilitate the political prisoners released and to fully restore their civil and political rights;
9. 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(2) of the Administrative Code against freelance journalists for working with foreign media without accreditation, which restricts the right to freedom of expression and the dissemination of information;
10. Urges Belarus, the only country in Europe still applying capital punishment, and which has recently resumed executions, 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; welcomes, in this context, 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;
11. 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 and for them to be observed by domestic and international observers; emphasises that this is key to achieving the desired progress in EU-Belarus relations;
12. Calls on the EEAS and on the Commission to continue and strengthen support for independent civil society organisations in Belarus and abroad; stresses, in this context, the need to increase its support to all independent sources of information for Belarusian society, including media broadcasting in the Belarusian language, and from abroad;
13. Supports the EU in its policy of 'critical engagement' with the Belarusian authorities, however, believes that a human rights dialogue can only be useful if it's grounded on clearly pre-established commitment to implement a long term road map, and if it includes the civil society;
14. 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;
15. 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, OSCE PA, the Council of Europe and the Belarusian authorities.