



Plenary sitting

B8-0200/2018

17.4.2018

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 situation in Belarus
(2018/2661(RSP))

**Charles Tannock, Anna Elżbieta Fotyga, Raffaele Fitto, Ruža Tomašić,
Branislav Škripek, Monica Macovei**
on behalf of the ECR Group

**European Parliament resolution on the situation in Belarus
(2018/2661(RSP))**

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions and recommendations on Belarus and on the Eastern Partnership,
 - having regard to the Council's decision made on 22 February 2018 to prolong the restrictive measures against Belarus until 28 February 2019 which include an arms embargo, ban on the export of goods for internal repression 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 parliamentary elections held on 11 September 2016, the presidential elections held on 11 October 2015 and the local elections on 18 February 2018,
 - having regard to the statement by the European External Action Service spokesperson of 20 February 2018 on the local elections in Belarus,
 - 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 the Council conclusions on Belarus, especially those of 16 February 2016 lifting sanctions against 170 individuals and three Belarusian companies,
 - having regard to Rule 123 (2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas following the Presidential in 2015 and the parliamentary elections in 2016, Belarus held local elections on 18 February 2018;
- B. whereas international observers were not invited to observe the last local elections while the Belarusian observer groups noted numerous irregularities and lack of transparency; whereas they collected tangible evidence of massive nationwide efforts to inflate turnout totals and carousel voting, the latter being used for the first time in several years;
- C. whereas a number of key recommendations made and systemic shortcomings identified by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and the Council of Europe's Venice Commission following previous elections remained unaddressed;

- D. whereas the Belarusian Electoral Code does not describe the procedure of ballot counting;
- E. whereas that only two independent candidates were elected out of 18 000 deputies nationwide;
- F. whereas a journalist of Belsat TV, Andrus Kozel who was brutally attacked by four police officers when he was covering local elections on February 18 by live-streaming to his Facebook account from a polling station in Minsk;
- G. whereas the international community has not recognized any elections in Belarus as democratic, free and fair since 1994;
- H. whereas, according to human rights defenders, at least 110 people have been arrested around the Belarusian Freedom Day on 25 March 2018; whereas the demonstrators, as usual, tried to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the creation of the Belarusian Democratic Republic and peacefully protest against authoritarian regime in the country;
- I. whereas at least 12 people in Minsk were charged of violation of the procedure for organizing and holding mass events;
- J. whereas one of the prominent Belarusian opposition figure, Nikolai Statkevich, was detained and has been sentenced to 10 days in jail;
- K. whereas at least seven journalists has been violently attacked, including five journalists detained during the coverage of the peaceful assembly in Yakub Kolas Square in Minsk; whereas during the monitoring of the assembly in Yakub Kolas Square police officers detained eight observers of the joint monitoring service of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee and the Human Rights Center "Viasna";
- L. whereas the events during the 2018 Freedom Day once again show that the Belarusian government don't want to retreat its old policies of mass repression of its citizens who exercise their rights provided for by the constitution and international treaties;
- M. whereas the Lukashenko' regime undermines the freedom of expression, association and assembly in the country;
- N. whereas freedom of the media in Belarus remains restricted; whereas 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;
- O. whereas on 24 January the Ministry of Information of Belarus arbitrary blocked access to the leading independent news website chater97.org on the territory of Belarus;
- P. whereas draft amendments to the Law on the Media would pose a new significant threat to the freedom of expression in Belarus, for example, by allowing to ban social media without court ruling and requiring to reveal true identity of persons, who puts information on the online platforms including commentaries sections and internet-

forums;

- Q. whereas on 22 February the police raided the apartment of the parents of independent video blogger Stsiapan Sviatlou; whereas on 5 March independent video blogger Pavel Spiryn was summoned to the police to give explanations on his recent film; whereas Mr. Sviatlou and Mr. Spiryn are at risk of facing criminal charges worth 2 years of imprisonment by 368 article of Criminal Code on "insulting the President";
- R. whereas in the last year the Presidential Decree No. 3 "On the prevention of dependency on social aid", provoked the most massive demonstrations since 2011; whereas in January 2018 President of Belarus Aleksandr Lukashenko replaced the heavily criticized decree by the new one 'On promotion of employment of population', dubbed 'decree on social parasitism' that also obliges unemployed citizens to pay additional charges for public services subsidized by the state;
- S. 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 and which defines the principle lines of action for implementing the country's human rights commitments;
- T. 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;
- U. 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 the situation on human right, democracy and rule of law remains difficult;
- V. whereas on March 28, 2018 the Special Rapporteur of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Right' office on human rights in Belarus, Miklós Haraszti, has stated that he 'see neither changes nor attempts or even plans to end the deprivation of the Belarusian people of their basic rights and fundamental freedoms'; whereas that he considered the last events in Belarus as symbolic and practical rejection by the country's President of any progress on human rights;
- W. whereas Belarus is part of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) and took part in the 'Zapad 2017' joint military manoeuvres with Russia, which carried out without prior notification and covered aggressive scenarios involving attacks on its western neighbors;
1. Reiterates on the Belarusian authorities to immediately start work on reforming the electoral law as part of the broader democratisation process and in cooperation with international partners; urges the need to introduce the relevant OSCE/ODIHR recommendations;
 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;

3. Calls on the Belarusian Government to engage in a constructive dialogue with the opposition and civil society organisations, as well as to cooperate fully with the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus, carrying out long-overdue reforms to protect human rights and strengthen democracy;
4. Strongly condemns the harassment of journalists and independent media in Belarus in the follow up to the municipal elections, including the lawless removal from the polling station and brutal treatment of a journalist of Belsat TV, Andrus Kozel, and the blockage of the news portal Charter 97 among others;
5. Urges the Belarusian authorities to immediately and unconditionally lift the blockage imposed on the leading independent news website chater97.org;
6. Urges the Belarusian authorities to abandon the commencement of the amendments to the Law on the Media which would threaten the freedom of expression;
7. Urges the Belarusian authorities to end the persecution of independent bloggers for practicing free expression;
8. 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;
9. Calls on the Belarusian authorities to respect rights of national minorities in the country, in particular in culture, language and education fields;
10. Urges Belarusian authorities to protect rights of religious minorities in the country;
11. Calls on the EEAS and on the Commission to continue 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 Belsat TV);
12. Expresses its deep concern at the last military exercises ‘Zapad 2017’ which took place in the Belarusian territory and with Belarusian participation as well as on many other recent Russian military exercises concentrated near the East border of the EU and on the Baltic Sea and which had an unprecedented intensity; underlines the maneuver’s negative impact on stability and security in the region and on the sovereignty of the Republic of Belarus itself;
13. Maintains its concerns about the controversial investment of the nuclear power plant in Ostrovets, near the Lithuanian border; calls on the Belarusian authorities to ensure the international safety standards and environmental protection requirements for this construction;
14. Notes with concern that the regime uses administrative tools to intimidate civil society and local communities which oppose government policies as it happens with the contested nuclear plant in Ostrovets, including arrests of participants of annual rally “Chernobyl Way” in previous years;

15. 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;
16. 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.