



Plenary sitting

B8-0457/2018

2.10.2018

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 deterioration of media freedom in Belarus, notably the case of Charter 97 (2018/2861(RSP))

Cristian Dan Preda, Jaromír Štětina, José Ignacio Salafranca Sánchez-Neyra, Thomas Mann, Bogdan Andrzej Zdrojewski, Agnieszka Kozłowska-Rajewicz, Pavel Svoboda, Marijana Petir, Lefteris Christoforou, Csaba Sógor, Željana Zovko, Tomáš Zdechovský, Tunne Kelam, Patricija Šulin, Mairead McGuinness, Adam Szejnfeld, Giovanni La Via, Joachim Zeller, Michaela Šojdrová, Francis Zammit Dimech, Laima Liucija Andrikienė, Dubravka Šuica, Sandra Kalniete, Deirdre Clune, Seán Kelly, Ramona Nicole Mănescu, Ivana Maletić, Francisco José Millán Mon, Romana Tomc, Ramón Luis Valcárcel Siso, Inese Vaidere
on behalf of the PPE Group

European Parliament resolution on deterioration of media freedom in Belarus, notably the case of Charter 97 (2018/2861(RSP))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on Belarus,
- having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to all human rights conventions to which Belarus is a party,
- having regard to Rules 135(5) and 123(4) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas the situation of freedom of media and freedom of speech continues to deteriorate in Belarus evidenced by severe harassment of independent news portals and journalists such as the ‘BelTA case’;
- B. whereas Reporters without Borders conclude that more than 100 journalists were arrested in 2017, usually while covering opposition protests as well as the harassment of freelance journalists working for independent media outlets based abroad, who cannot get accreditation, has reached unprecedented levels;
- C. whereas access to a leading independent news website Charter 97.org, which focuses on human rights and opposition causes, named after Charter 97 - a 1997 declaration calling for democracy in Belarus that was signed by journalists, opposition politicians, and rights activists continues to be blocked in the Belarusian internet;
- D. whereas according to editor in-in-chief of Charter 97, in the month following the blocking, the number of visitors from within Belarus to the Charter 97 website decreased by 70 per cent;
- E. whereas in early August 2018 Belarusian authorities carried out raids in the editorial offices of several independent Belarussian outlets starting by Tut.by and followed by searches in BelaPAN, realty.by, Belaruskaya Navuka, and Kultura. The raids resulted in arrests and detention of journalists, including Tut.by’s editor-in-chief, over allegations they illegally accessed and used online information provided by the state-owned news agency BelTA;
- F. whereas on August 7, the Investigative Committee of Belarus opened a criminal case under Part 2, Art. 349 of the Criminal Code punishable with up two-year jail sentence (illegal access to computer information committed out of other personal interest, which caused substantial harm) against journalists and editors of a number of Internet resources as mentioned in recital D; Whereas there has been cases of putting pressure on journalists and their relatives and forcing them to cooperate with intelligence service and police¹;

PE624.135v01-00

- G. whereas the latest amendments to the Law on Mass Media, adopted in June 2018, extend government control to online media outlets. Whereas the changes, which will enter into force on 1 December 2018 will establish further bureaucratic hurdles for websites that want to register as official online media outlets;
- H. whereas websites which according to the new legislation choose not to register, or do not meet the new criteria, cannot file requests for accreditation with government institutions. Whereas both registered and unregistered online media outlets will also be obliged to register, the names of people who submit comments while the owners of registered online media outlets will be also legally responsible for the content of the comments;
- I. whereas new legislation will require that authors of all posts and comments in online forums be identified and website owners moderate that comments;
- J. whereas Belarus ranks 155th in the Reporters Without Borders' 2017 World Press Freedom Index, which evaluates the level of press freedom in 180 countries each year;
- K. whereas since the beginning of 2018, Belarusian journalists, whose right to gather, store and disseminate information is guaranteed by the Constitution, were fined over 70 times for cooperation with foreign mass media without accreditation totaling over 60 thousand rubles²; Whereas Article 22.9 of the Code of Administrative Violations became an officiant tool to harass independent journalists and media outlets such as; Belsat TV;
1. Considers the arrests of journalists in August 2018 as utterly unnecessary and as an expression of disproportional measure on the side of Belarusian authorities and calls for all charges against them to be dropped;
 2. Strongly condemns the repeated harassment of journalists and independent media in Belarus;
 3. Reiterates its call on the Belarussian authorities to immediately and unconditionally lift the blockade imposed on the internet access to the news website Charter97.org on the territory of Belarus;
 4. Strongly regrets the amendments adopted to the media law, which is a tool of tightening control over the internet;
 5. Reiterates its strong concern about the further worsening climate for independent and opposition websites and media outlets and journalists in Belarus;
 6. Expresses its opinion that independent media does not constitute a threat to the authorities but is an important element to the checks and balances system and hence should be seen by the government as a potential critical partner and not as an enemy;
 7. Reiterates its calls on the Belarusian authorities to strengthen respect for democratic principles, rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms including respect for

truthful and unbiased journalism;

8. Calls on the EU relevant institutions to include in the EU-Belarus Partnership Priorities a strong references to the independence of the media, freedom of speech and assembly;
9. 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;
10. Calls on the Vice President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to closely monitor the situation of media freedom in Belarus;
11. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Vice President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the governments and parliaments of the Member States and the President and the Government of Belarus.

¹ <https://belsat.eu/en/news/tut-by-editor-opens-up-about-police-pressure/>

² <https://baj.by/en/content/baj-statement-occasion-international-day-journalists-solidarity>