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*Plenary sitting*

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**B9-0166/2023**

8.3.2023

## MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

to wind up the debate on the statement by the Commission

pursuant to Rule 132(2) of the Rules of Procedure

on further repression against the people of Belarus, in particular the cases of  
Andrzej Poczobut and Ales Bialiatski  
(2023/2573(RSP))

**Viola von Cramon-Taubadel, Heidi Hautala, Erik Marquardt, Francisco  
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on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group

**European Parliament resolution on further repression against the people of Belarus, in particular the cases of Andrzej Poczobut and Ales Bialiatski (2023/2573(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 the EU Statement on the political prisoners in Belarus at the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Permanent Council No 1408 in Vienna on 26 January 2023,
  - having regard to the report to the UN Human Rights Council of 20 July 2022 of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus, Anaïs Marin, and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) interim oral update of 23 September 2022 on the situation of human rights in Belarus,
  - having regard to the award of the 2022 Nobel Peace Prize to Belarusian human rights advocate Ales Bialiatski,
  - having regard to the International Labour Organization (ILO) decision of 31 October 2022 on item GB.346/INS/13, entitled ‘Consideration of any further measures, including those foreseen in the ILO Constitution, to secure compliance by the Government of Belarus with the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry’,
  - having regard to the statement by the Spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights of 6 January 2023 on trials in Belarus,
  - having regard to the statement by the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights of 3 March 2023 on the conviction of Nobel laureate Bialiatski and other human rights defenders,
  - having regard to Rule 132(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas the EU and its Member States did not recognise the results of the fraudulent presidential elections held in Belarus on 9 August 2020 and have declared the rule of Aliaksandr Lukashenka to be illegitimate; whereas the human rights violations in Belarus have escalated since August 2020, with the number of political prisoners in the country standing at more than 1 400 at the beginning of March 2023; whereas human rights defenders, opposition politicians, members of civil society organisations, independent journalists and other activists are systematically subjected to violent repression; whereas thousands of Belarusians have been forced or otherwise compelled to leave their homeland and seek safety abroad;
- B. whereas reports by UN human rights institutions and civil society organisations

continue to reveal the worsening human rights situation in Belarus, which is exemplified by the systematic tightening of national legislation and eradication of civil society organisations and independent media outlets, the growing number of prisoners believed to have been sentenced on politically motivated charges, and persistent patterns of raids against and arrests, torture or intimidation of people expressing or holding dissenting views; whereas new allegations of arbitrary arrests and detentions, disappearances, torture and ill treatment are continuously emerging;

- C. whereas Human Rights Watch noted in its World Report 2023 that the Belarusian authorities have continued to escalate their crackdown on dissenting voices and eviscerate the vestiges of civil society, confirming that they have prosecuted human rights defenders, journalists, lawyers, opposition politicians, trade union representatives, activists and peaceful protesters, and have brutally suppressed protests against Russia's war on Ukraine; whereas repression against the Polish minority in Belarus has been growing since the beginning of 2021;
- D. whereas amendments to the Belarusian Criminal Code entered into force in January 2022, reintroducing criminal liability for participation in the activities of unregistered organisations; whereas no human rights organisations are currently operating legally in the country; whereas, in May 2022, after new amendments to the Criminal Code entered into force, the authorities extended the application of capital punishment to attempted acts of terrorism, a charge previously used in trials of political activists; whereas, in July 2022, Lukashenka signed into law legislation allowing investigations and trials *in absentia* under 48 articles of the Criminal Code; whereas unfair trials and harsh sentences are pervasive in the Belarusian legal system;
- E. whereas, in October 2022, Lukashenka signed into law Belarus's withdrawal from the First Optional Protocol to the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, blocking the UN Human Rights Committee's mandate to receive and review human rights complaints from individuals in Belarus, one of the last avenues of redress for persecuted Belarusians; whereas this decision entered into force on 8 February 2023;
- F. whereas, in January 2023, the Belarusian regime enacted a law that will strip citizenship from those in exile whom it accuses of so-called extremism-related crimes, a list that now includes more than 2 000 individuals;
- G. whereas, during its ongoing 52nd session, the UN Human Rights Council will consider a report from the OHCHR on the human rights situation in Belarus, as well as the possibility of renewing the OHCHR's mandate relating to the examination of this situation; whereas the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus has expressed concern during the session that the continuously worsening human rights situation in Belarus could fall off the radar, as all independent voices on the issue have been silenced;
- H. whereas Andrzej Poczobut is a leading Polish-Belarusian journalist and political commentator who has consistently scrutinised the Belarusian regime and campaigned for the rights of Belarus's Polish minority; whereas Mr Poczobut was detained in 2006 and 2011 on political charges; whereas Mr Poczobut was detained again on 25 March 2021 and, on 4 October 2022, the Belarusian State Committee for Security

included him on a list of people allegedly involved in terrorist activities;

- I. whereas Mr Poczubut's trial started on 16 January 2023, behind closed doors; whereas, on 8 February 2023, a court in Hrodna sentenced Mr Poczubut to eight years in prison after convicting him of inciting hatred and encouraging action aimed at harming the national security of Belarus;
- J. whereas Ales Bialiatski has spent decades promoting democracy and human rights in Belarus and has represented a beacon of light for these efforts throughout eastern Europe; whereas Mr Bialiatski was imprisoned between 2011 and 2014 following allegations of tax evasion; whereas Mr Bialiatski was jailed again in 2021, without trial or conviction, in the wake of the massive pro-democracy demonstrations that followed the 2020 presidential elections; whereas he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2022 while in prison;
- K. whereas, on 9 February 2023, Mr Bialiatski and three of his colleagues from the Viasna Human Rights Centre, namely Valiantsin Stefanovich, Uladzimir Labkovich and Zmitser Salauyou, stood trial, with a caged enclosure being used to hold the defendants present in the courtroom in Minsk; whereas Mr Salauyou was tried *in absentia*; whereas Mr Bialiatski's request for the court proceedings to be held in Belarusian instead of Russian was rejected;
- L. whereas, on 3 March 2023, Mr Bialiatski was sentenced to 10 years in a penal colony for alleged involvement in smuggling by an organised group and financing of group activities grossly violating public order; whereas Mr Stefanovich, Mr Labkovich and Mr Salauyou were respectively sentenced to nine years, seven years and eight years in a penal colony;
- M. whereas, on 6 January 2023, the OHCHR described Mr Bialiatski's trial as 'simply politically motivated', expressed grave concern over the trial and called for the charges to be dropped and for the immediate release of Mr Bialiatski and his Viasna colleagues;
- N. whereas, on 3 November 2021, Leanid Sudalenka, a lawyer from the Homiel branch of Viasna, and Tatsiana Lasitsa, a Viasna volunteer, were respectively sentenced to three years and two and a half years in prison; whereas Nasta Loika, a co-founder of the human rights organisation Human Constanta and a former Viasna member, was arbitrarily detained in Minsk and repeatedly sentenced to 15 days in jail for purported petty hooliganism, and is now being charged under at least two articles of the Belarusian Criminal Code, one of which concerns the violation of public order, while the other remains unknown;
- O. whereas Larysa Shchyraakova, a Belarusian who quit journalism in 2021 following threats of arrest, was detained on 7 December 2022; whereas, on 9 January 2023, the trial of the journalists Maryna Zolatava and Liudmila Chekina commenced behind closed doors following charges of inciting hatred and making statements that were detrimental to national security, while three other defendants in the case, fellow journalists Volha Loyka, Alena Talkachova and Katsiaryna Tkachenka, are being tried *in absentia*; whereas, on 19 January 2023, a court in Brest sentenced Darya Losik, the wife of jailed Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty journalist Ihar Losik, to two years in prison on charges of facilitating extremist activity;

- P. whereas, in January 2023, the Belarusian journalist Yekaterina Yanshina was detained for 15 days for reporting on a court case in Minsk; whereas, on 6 February 2023, security forces detained the Belarusian journalist Anastasia Sharkevich for attending a protest and allegedly promoting ‘destructive content’ online;
- Q. whereas, on 27 February 2023, the leader of democratic Belarus and President of the United Transitional Cabinet, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, was tried *in absentia* in Minsk, as were Pavel Latushka, Maryia Maroz, Volha Kavalkova and Siarhei Dyleuski; whereas the prosecutor demanded 19-year prison sentences for Ms Tsikhanouskaya and Mr Latushka and 12-year prison sentences for Ms Maroz, Ms Kavalkova and Mr Dyleuski; whereas, that same day, the opposition activist Siarhei Tsikhanouski was sentenced to an additional one and a half years in prison;
- R. whereas, on 28 February 2023, the Belarusian Supreme Court considered, behind closed doors, the appeals of Viasna activists Marfa Rabkova and Andrei Chapiuk, as well as eight political prisoners in the Revolutionary Action case; whereas only the sentences of Rabkova, Chapiuk and the activists Akihiro Hayeuski-Hanada and Aliaksandr Frantskevich were commuted, with their respective terms of imprisonment being reduced by three months;
- S. whereas, at the beginning of March 2023, there were over 1 400 political prisoners in Belarus and 2 350 people had been declared ‘extremists’; whereas, in 2022, Lukashenka’s regime made at least 1 200 political convictions on criminal charges and 215 print media outlets were shut, while more than 1 000 NGOs have been liquidated in Belarus since 2020;
- T. whereas charges of extremism, terrorism and criminal libel continue to be used to prosecute critics of the Belarusian Government; whereas the State Committee for Security has significantly expanded its ‘List of organisations and individuals involved in a terrorist activity’, which currently contains around 1 000 names, including 256 Belarusians, among them leading opposition figures such as Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and Pavel Latushka and the prisoners of conscience Maria Kalesnikava and Maksim Znak;
- U. whereas the Belarusian authorities often resort to surveillance, online censorship and disinformation, deploying technology to control the population; whereas such a repressive practice represents another step towards digital authoritarianism and the suppression of people’s digital rights in Belarus, resulting in the escalating intimidation of citizens and the shrinking of civic space;
- V. whereas, more than two years on, there is no indication that the Belarusian authorities are investigating the thousands of reports of police brutality filed since the protests in August 2020 or the killings of protesters; whereas the widespread impunity for human rights violations perpetuates the desperate situation of the Belarusian people; whereas the absence of the rule of law impedes their right to a fair trial; whereas Belarus is the only country in Europe to still carry out capital punishment;
- W. whereas, on 24 February 2022, the Russian Federation launched an illegal, unjustified and unprovoked war of aggression against Ukraine, including from the territory of Belarus; whereas the Belarusian regime has allowed Russian nuclear-capable Iskander

missile systems onto its territory; whereas scores of Belarusian citizens have been prosecuted for expressing support for Ukraine, criticising the government for supporting Russia's war or reporting on the movement of Russian troops and military equipment within Belarus;

- X. whereas activists in Belarus continue to put up fierce resistance to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, as well as to Russia's continued encroachment on Belarusian sovereignty, such as by sabotaging military logistics hubs and destroying Russian surveillance planes stationed near Minsk;
1. Insists on the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners, including Andrzej Poczobut and Ales Bialiatski, and the dropping of all charges against them;
  2. Continues to stand firmly in solidarity with the people of Belarus, as well as the forces that are demanding and fighting for a free and democratic Belarus; reiterates its non-recognition of the election of Aliaksandr Lukashenka as the President of Belarus, and denounces the continuing repression of democratic forces and civil society in Belarus;
  3. Demands an immediate end to the violence and repression employed by the Belarusian authorities against peaceful protesters, democratic forces, opposition politicians, the independent media, human rights defenders, members of civil society organisations, academics, trade unions, lawyers and other Belarusian citizens;
  4. Calls for unequivocal support to be given to Belarusian democratic forces, for the current, illegitimate Lukashenka regime to be ousted from office, and for new elections to be held in a free and fair manner, underpinned by an independent and free media and a strong civil society;
  5. Insists on the need to ensure fundamental freedoms and human rights, the rule of law and a functioning independent judiciary in Belarus and to cease all repression, persecution, sexual and gender-based violence, and enforced disappearance; calls for an end to discrimination against women and vulnerable groups, including persons belonging to minorities, persons with disabilities and LGBTQI persons;
  6. Urges the Belarusian authorities to stop systematically using torture, ill treatment and other inhumane practices against prisoners, to effectively investigate all cases of torture and extrajudicial executions, especially those that have taken place since August 2020, and to provide compensation and rehabilitation to the victims of torture;
  7. Reiterates its call on the Belarusian authorities to immediately commute all death sentences and establish a moratorium on the use of the death penalty, as the first step towards its full and permanent abolition;
  8. Condemns the Belarusian regime's acts of transnational repression against Belarusians, including the attempt to forcibly repatriate the Olympic athlete Krystsina Tsimanouskaya and the arrest of the journalist Raman Pratasevich, along with Sofia Sapega, after the regime violated international law by diverting a Ryanair flight to land in Belarus;
  9. Reiterates its condemnation of the decision by the Belarusian regime to withdraw from

the Aarhus Convention, an international agreement that safeguards the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment;

10. Acknowledges the establishment of the Mission for Democratic Belarus in Brussels and the growing collaboration between parliamentary caucuses for democracy in Belarus; calls on the Commission and the Member States to engage in regular dialogue with Belarusian democratic forces;
11. Welcomes the ILO decision of 31 October 2022 on item GB.346/INS/13, entitled 'Consideration of any further measures, including those foreseen in the ILO Constitution, to secure compliance by the Government of Belarus with the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry'; calls for appropriate sanctions against Belarus in line with Article 33 of the ILO Constitution;
12. Condemns, in the strongest possible terms, Belarus's involvement in Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, and demands that Belarus stop enabling and supporting the regime in Moscow;
13. Regrets the fact that the EU's 10th sanctions package against Russia and supporters of its illegal aggression against Ukraine did not include new dedicated sanctions against Belarus; reiterates its call for the sanctions against Belarus to be aligned with those against Russia, and for individual sanctions against those people who aid and abet the Belarusian regime, given Belarus's role in the war against Ukraine and the Belarusian Government's unprecedented levels of repression against its own people;
14. Calls on the Council and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to explore further measures beyond sanctions and to develop a coherent and comprehensive approach towards Belarus in the long term, which should be closely coordinated with like-minded countries and international organisations; calls for the European External Action Service (EEAS) to take the lead in coordinating this coherent policy with the Member States and other EU institutions; calls on the Commission and the Member States to provide adequate support for the work of the International Special Envoy for the Implementation of EU Sanctions in order to address all loopholes and improve the effectiveness of the implementation of all sanctions;
15. Calls on the Commission, the Council and the Member States to act on the continued need to engage with and support civil society activists, human rights defenders, opposition activists, trade union representatives and the independent media in Belarus, as well as those in exile; reiterates its call for a targeted EU assistance programme to support the victims of political repression and police violence by monitoring the situation and trials of individual political prisoners on the ground, easing visa requirements, improving asylum processes, issuing emergency visas and providing temporary shelter in EU Member States for those seeking refuge from Belarus; commits to stepping up its own democracy support activities; calls on the EU Delegation to Belarus to continue to monitor, as closely as possible, all trials in Belarus relating to politically motivated cases;
16. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to prepare rules and procedures to deal with cases where human rights defenders and other civil society activists are stripped of



their citizenship in Belarus, as well as to provide support to those Belarusians residing in the EU whose identity documents are about to expire and who have no means of renewing them, since they cannot return to Belarus;

17. Welcomes the Commission's comprehensive plan of economic support for a democratic Belarus, but demands that the funds must be immediately accessible in order to support the crucial work of civil society organisations, the independent media, trade unions and the Belarusian opposition in exile, as well as those fleeing the oppressive regime;
18. Calls on the Commission, the Member States and the EEAS to cooperate with international partners, such as the OSCE Moscow Mechanism and the UN Human Rights Council, as well as human rights defenders and civil society representatives on the ground, to ensure the monitoring, documentation and reporting of human rights violations and subsequent accountability and justice for victims; reiterates its support for the International Accountability Platform for Belarus; supports further discussions about setting up an international tribunal in The Hague for human rights violations in Belarus; calls on the International Criminal Court to initiate pre-trial proceedings against the Belarusian regime with regard to its crimes against humanity and complicity in war crimes;
19. Encourages the Member States and the EEAS to support the reinforcement of the mandate and office of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus and the OHCHR examination of the human rights situation in Belarus, so that the Special Rapporteur and the OHCHR can receive and effectively process individual complaints from the citizens of Belarus, who do not have any other international remedy; expresses its support for the call by international and Belarusian civil society organisations on 13 February 2023 for member and observer states of the UN Human Rights Council to establish an independent investigative mechanism to complement and follow up on the work of the existing OHCHR examination, and calls for this mechanism's work to be sufficiently resourced and funded;
20. Calls on the Member States and the EU Delegation to the UN in New York to campaign against Belarus's bid for the Eastern European Group's non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council for 2024 to 2025;
21. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to take steps to ensure that businesses operating in Belarus, both foreign and domestic, exercise particular diligence and uphold their responsibility to respect human rights throughout both their operations and their supply chains, in accordance with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights;
22. Deplores the visit by Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó to Belarus on 13 February 2023, which was an unmistakable show of support for the regime in Minsk, running absolutely counter to the EU's policy in relation to Belarus, Russia and the war of aggression against Ukraine;
23. Notes with concern the continuing integration between Russia and Belarus across several fields, particularly in the form of the progressive militarisation of Belarus and the wider region, which poses a challenge to the security and stability of the European continent, as exemplified by the deployment of Russian nuclear-capable Iskander



missile systems on Belarusian territory;

24. 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, the Council, the Commission, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the UN, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the authorities of Belarus.