



Plenary sitting

B9-0168/2023

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))

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on behalf of the ECR 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 Council conclusions of 12 October 2020,
 - having regard to the European Council conclusions of 21 and 22 October 2021,
 - having regard to the reports drawn up by independent international and Belarusian human rights organisations,
 - having regard to the reports of 4 May 2021 and 20 July 2022 by Anaïs Marin, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus for the UN Human Rights Council and the call by UN experts of 10 October 2022 for the immediate release of jailed Nobel prize winner Ales Bialiatski and other rights defenders in Belarus,
 - having regard to the report of 4 March 2022 of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on the situation of human rights in Belarus in the run-up to the 2020 presidential election and in its aftermath,
 - having regard to the G7 Foreign Ministers' statement of 4 November 2022 on Belarus,
 - having regard to the statement by the Representative on Freedom of the Media of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe dated 13 July 2022 on the persistent imprisonment of journalists and media workers in Belarus,
 - having regard to the statement by the European External Action Service Spokesperson of 7 October 2022 on the court ruling of 7 October 2022 against independent media representatives,
 - having regard to Rule 132(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas following the unfair and falsified August 2020 presidential elections, Lukashenka's regime has continued its repression against the people of Belarus, with civil society representatives, human rights defenders, journalists, opposition activists and many others being persecuted for political reasons; whereas criminal prosecution remains one of the most severe and widespread forms of repression; whereas draconian laws and court sentences are still being widely used by the usurper Lukashenka;
- B. whereas more than 40 000 Belarusians are estimated to have been detained at some point for protesting against the regime, while human rights defenders have documented

hundreds of cases of torture and ill-treatment, with several people still missing and others having been found dead; whereas according to the Viasna Human Rights Centre at least 1 456 Belarusian are unfairly imprisoned and are facing extremely severe punishments for their desire to live in a free and democratic country; whereas thousands of people have had to flee the country out of fear of persecution;

- C. whereas arbitrary arrests of individuals for exercising their civil rights continue, with many arrests every day; whereas Viasna reported 258 such arrests in February 2023, as well as 195 cases of politically motivated administrative persecutions, while judges handed down 31 terms of administrative imprisonment and 11 fines in the same period;
- D. whereas on 8 February 2023, a regional court in Grodno sentenced Andrzej Poczobut, a journalist and Deputy Chair of the Union of Poles in Belarus, to eight years' imprisonment in a hard labour penal colony; whereas Poczobut had been charged with 'calling for actions that threaten the national security of Belarus' and 'inciting hostility and conflict' after he was arrested on 25 March 2021 along with other members of the Union of Poles' leadership, and is the only one who has formally been tried; whereas Maria Tyszkowska, Irena Biernacka and Anna Paniszewa, who were detained with him, were released from prison in 2021 and deported to Poland, while the Union of Poles President Angelika Borys has been under house arrest since last March;
- E. whereas the politically motivated show trial of Andrzej Poczobut and its verdict are clear examples of the anti-Polish actions of the Lukashenka regime targeting the Polish minority; whereas the systematic discrimination against the Polish minority in Belarus has been going on for many years and includes recent decisions by the Belarusian regime aiming to eliminate education in the Polish language, searches of Polish leaders' homes and the destruction of Polish cemeteries and the graves of poets, writers, insurgents and soldiers of the Home Army;
- F. whereas Lukashenka has widened his campaign against human rights activists and journalists; whereas on 3 March 2023, the Lieninski District Court of Minsk ruled that it had been fully proven that human rights defenders were guilty of 'smuggling by an organised group' and 'financing of group actions grossly violating the public order'; whereas the judge in a sham trial sentenced the Viasna founder and Chair, Nobel Peace Prize laureate Ales Bialiatski, to 10 years in a medium-security penal colony; whereas this judge also handed down long prison sentences in a prison colony to Viasna Deputy Chair and International Federation for Human Rights Vice-President Valiantsin Stefanovich, to Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections campaign coordinator Uladzimir Labkovich and to human rights defender Zmitser Salauyou (*in absentia*); whereas all of them were also punished with substantial fines; whereas judge Maryna Zapasnik refused to hold the trial in the Belarusian language instead of Russian and denied Bialiatski's request for an interpreter, which demonstrates the anti-Belarusian policy of Lukashenka's regime;
- G. whereas the charges against Andrzej Poczobut and Ales Bialatski are widely considered to be politically motivated and aimed at silencing independent voices and suppressing freedom of expression and association;
- H. whereas on 6 March 2023, the leader of the Belarusian democratic forces, Sviatlana

Tsikhanouskaya, and other members of the Coordination Council (Pavel Latushka, Volha Kavalkova, Maryia Maroz, and Siarhei Dyleuski) were convicted by Lukashenka's regime *in absentia*, with Tsikhanouskaya receiving a 15-year sentence, Latushka an 18-year sentence and Kavalkova, Maroz and Dyleuski 12-year sentences for 'conspiracy to seize power in an unconstitutional manner' and 'creating an extremist formation and publicly calling for the seizure of power';

- I. whereas the sentences were pronounced days after a Belarusian court extended the 18-year prison term of Tsikhanouskaya's husband, Siarhei Tsikhanouski (of the 'Country for Life' YouTube Channel) by 18 months on a charge of 'blatantly violating a penitentiary's inner regulations';
- J. whereas Mikalai Statkevich (of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party (People's Assembly)) and Pavel Seviarynets (of Belarusian Christian Democracy) have already spent more than 1 000 days in prison;
- K. whereas the Lukashenka's regime has persecuted non-governmental organisations, human rights organisations and has continued criminal persecution of democratic activists such as Leanid Sudalenka, Marfa Rabkova, Andrei Chapiuk and Nasta Loyka;
- L. whereas on 17 October 2022 in a politically motivated case in Belarus, political prisoner Mikalai Autukhovich received an unprecedentedly harsh sentence of 25 years in a high-security penal colony, while 11 other people were sentenced to prison sentences of up to 20 years;
- M. whereas from January to October 2022, the Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ) documented 93 cases of arbitrary detention, raids, fines and administrative arrests of journalists, with 28 of them were behind bars on bogus criminal charges ranging from 'insulting the President' to 'treason' and 'conspiracy to seize state power'; whereas according to the BAJ, by October 2022, at least 29 independent media outlets had been designated 'extremist' and shut down by the authorities; whereas as a result of the total crackdown on independent media, freedom of speech no longer exists in Belarus, with the regime exercising full surveillance of the internet;
- N. whereas the regime has continued its acts of repression against lawyers in retaliation for expressing views on rights issues, representing clients in politically motivated cases, and speaking out against the war in Ukraine; whereas since August 2020, at least 70 attorneys have lost their licences following arbitrary decisions by the Justice Ministry or politically motivated disbarment procedures; whereas in 2022, seven attorneys faced politically motivated criminal charges and continued to face administrative charges, detentions, searches, and harassment;
- O. whereas political prisoners are subject to additional repression; whereas this takes the form of holding political prisoners in conditions that are prohibited according to Belarus's international obligations, subjecting them to disciplinary penalties for bogus reasons, placing them in punishment cells, upgrading the security level of some political prisoners and arbitrarily extending their term of imprisonment, violating political prisoners' right to correspondence and depriving them of family visits on far-fetched pretexts;

- P. whereas political prisoners, such as Palina Sharenda-Panasiuk, an activist of the European Belarus Civic Campaign, are subjected to inhuman treatment such as cold temperatures, hunger and sleep deprivation; whereas as of the end of February, there was no information about Palina Sharenda-Panasiuk's whereabouts;
- Q. whereas Lukashenka's authorities have raided the offices of several independent trade unions, detaining at least 14 of their leaders and members on charges of 'organisation of activities gravely violating public order'; whereas in July 2022, the Supreme Court of Belarus shut down four major independent trade unions and the Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions;
- R. whereas the Lukashenka regime continues to adopt measures restricting the rights of the Belarusians living abroad; whereas, in 2022 and 2023, 58 people were arrested after returning to Belarus for their participation in the 2020 protests or for sharing content on social media deemed 'extremist';
- S. whereas despite thousands of cases of police brutality, including the killing of protesters, being reported since August 2020, the regime has been actively promoting and rewarding those responsible for these acts;
- T. whereas Lukashenka continues his policy of russification of Belarus with the strategic aim of marginalising and destroying expressions of Belarusian national identity, including language and culture, by means of arbitrary arrests and detentions and by meting out especially brutal treatment to cultural figures, such as writers, artists and musicians, and in general to people who speak Belarusian in public; whereas this policy also involves banning national and historical symbols of Belarus, such as the white-red-white flag and the *Pahonia* (the true historical coat of arms of independent Belarus), and the closure of publishing houses, private schools and Belarusian language courses;
- U. whereas those expressing anti-war sentiments or engaging in other protest activities continue to be persecuted; whereas since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Belarusians have been protesting against the war, people have been holding rallies and organising pickets, disrupting railway traffic to slow down the movement of Russian military equipment, disseminating information about military actions and joining the Ukrainian forces to fight the aggressor;
- V. whereas Belarus is the only country in Europe to apply capital punishment and whereas recently it has announced that executions of political opponents of the regime will be carried out;
- W. whereas since 2021 Lukashenka has been continuing its hybrid attacks on the EU by weaponising migrants and human trafficking;
- X. whereas the Lukashenka regime in Belarus is directly enabling and supporting the Russian military aggression against Ukraine, inter alia, by allowing Russia to attack Ukraine from Belarusian territory, including through the launch of ballistic missiles, facilitating the stationing and transport of Russian military personnel, as well as the storage, supply and transport of military equipment and weapons, including heavy weapons, by allowing Russian military aircraft to fly from and over Belarusian airspace into Ukraine and providing refuelling points;

- Y. whereas Putin's strategy towards Belarus means the isolation of Belarusian society from the free world in order to completely occupy and incorporate Belarus into the Russian Federation;
- Z. whereas on 1 March 2023, the Mission of Democratic Belarus was opened in Brussels in a ceremony attended by Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya;
1. Reaffirms its solidarity with the people of Belarus who continue to stand up for a sovereign, free and democratic Belarus, risking their freedom and more and more frequently their lives, and demands the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners and all arbitrarily detained persons, arrested or sentenced on politically motivated grounds, and for all charges against them to be dropped, as well as for their full rehabilitation and financial compensation for damages incurred due to their illegitimate detention; demands an end to state violence; acknowledges the choice of the people of Belarus to elect Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya as their democratic leader;
 2. Rejects categorically the interference of the Russian Federation in the internal affairs of Belarus, especially after the rigged presidential elections of 2020, when the Russian Federation provided all necessary support to the Lukashenka regime to crush the peaceful protests and drown the nation by means of draconian repression;
 3. Condemns the unjust sentence handed down by the court of a totalitarian state to Andrzej Poczobut; calls for the cessation of actions targeting the Polish minority and for the immediate and unconditional release of Andrzej Poczobut, as well as of other members of the Union of Poles;
 4. Demands the immediate and unconditional release of Nobel Peace Prize laureate Ales Bialiatski, as well as of all other human right defenders and political prisoners in Belarus;
 5. Condemns the recent decisions by the Lukashenka authorities aiming to shut down Polish schools and eliminate education in the Polish language, as well as to destroy Polish cemeteries and heritage;
 6. Demands firmly and steadfastly that Belarus complies with the applicable principles of international law and agreements;
 7. Underlines that the usurper Lukashenka and his entourage should be removed from power and brought to trial for their crimes against the people of Belarus; calls for the Member States and the EU to take all necessary action in international institutions and to initiate proceedings at the International Criminal Court or other appropriate international tribunals or courts to support the investigation and prosecution of the actions related to the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine as war crimes and crimes against humanity perpetrated by those politically responsible in Belarus, in particular Aliaksandr Lukashenka; supports the work of the International Accountability Platform for Belarus; invites the International Red Cross and other organisations to work to improve the conditions of political prisoners;
 8. Rejects the legitimacy and legality of the international agreements Lukashenka has signed since he lost the presidential elections of 2020, especially those signed with

Russia undermining the sovereignty of Belarus and subjugating its governance to increasingly wide-ranging and tight control by the Kremlin;

9. Condemns the misuse of Belarusian territory, airspace and infrastructure by Russia to launch a full-scale invasion on Ukraine on 24 February 2022 and its continued use of Belarusian territory to pursue its war, against the will of the Belarusian people but with the consent and active participation of the Lukashenka regime; demands the immediate withdrawal of the Russian troops which arrived in Belarus before the invasion against Ukraine and whose presence on the territory of Belarus has since expanded; underlines that Lukashenka and his entourage are responsible for the crime of aggression against Ukraine; welcomes actions taken by the Belarusian society to oppose the use of the territory of Belarus for the Russian invasion of Ukraine; expresses its support for the Kastuś Kalinoŭski Regiment fighting against Russian imperialism in Ukraine;
10. Condemns Lukashenka's efforts to eradicate Belarusian culture and russify the nation; calls for the EU to support independent Belarusian cultural organisations, such as theatres, choirs, schools, folk bands, artists, and to support the revival of the Belarusian language;
11. Reiterates that the people of Belarus are represented by the Leader of Democratic Belarus, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, the United Transitional Cabinet of Belarus and the Coordination Council; calls for the EU and the international community to take steps to allow the people of Belarus, who are currently deprived of a voice at high-profile events where Belarusian interests are discussed and decided on, to be represented at these events; underlines that as she is the legitimate representative elected by the Belarusian people, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya must be invited to such events in order for Belarusian interests to be represented; supports the United Transitional Cabinet and the Coordination Council; supports the goals of these democratic representative organisations, which aim to defend the independence and sovereignty of the Republic of Belarus, end the de facto occupation of Belarus, restore constitutional legality and the rule of law, develop and implement measures to thwart the illegal retention of power, ensure the transition from dictatorship to democracy, create conditions for fair and free elections, and develop and implement the solutions needed to secure a democratic change in Belarus and the Euro-Atlantic future of the country;
12. Welcomes the establishment of the Contact Group in the Council of Europe in cooperation with Belarusian democratic forces and civil society; calls for the EU institutions, Member States and international organisations to formalise cooperation with the democratic representatives of Belarus;
13. Welcomes the recent opening of the Mission of Democratic Belarus in Brussels in the presence of Belarusian leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya;
14. Underlines the importance of the drafting of the Memorandum of Understanding with Democratic Belarus represented by Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya;
15. Welcomes the support of the EU and its Member States, in particular Poland and Lithuania, which have provided support and protection to the people of Belarus who were forced to flee the country and calls on the Commission to back these efforts further;

16. Categorically rejects the recognition of Lukashenka's law to deprive Belarusians of citizenship and calls on the Commission to continue its support for the efforts of the United Transitional Cabinet of Belarus to resolve the problems of Belarusians who have been forced to leave Belarus, including the issuing of an officially recognised travel document valid for international travel to Belarusian citizens and the issuing of emergency visas to leave Belarus if needed;
17. Calls on the Commission to enhance capacity-building support for Belarus's independent trade unions, free media, civil society and pro-democracy activists, both in Belarus and in exile; calls on the Commission and the Member States to continue to provide support to Belarusian civil society, independent media and democratic political parties and structures, including the Coordination Council and the United Transitional Cabinet; calls on Belarusian democratic forces to maintain and promote unity based on the objective of a free, democratic, and independent Belarus;
18. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to provide support and protection to human rights defenders and civil society in Belarus, who will be facing a severe crackdown, including by issuing emergency visas to leave Belarus if needed;
19. Strongly condemns the repression, torture and ill-treatment of the peaceful people of Belarus, the crackdown on trade unions leaders and the suppression of the media and the internet; encourages the International Labour Organization to invoke Article 33 of its constitution in response to the gross violation of labour unions' rights and the repression against trade union leaders ;
20. Calls for all sanctions issued against Russia to be strictly mirrored for Belarus and for all future rounds of sanctions to be implemented appropriately; calls for the inclusion on the sanctions list of all the representatives of Lukashenka's undemocratic regime, such as judges, prosecutors, militia and KGB officials as well as propagandists and others who serve as tools for the dictator to oppress the people of Belarus and facilitate Russia's war of aggression; calls for the inclusion of potash, the regime's main source of income, on the sanctions list;
21. Welcomes warmly the opening of the Mission for Democratic Belarus in Brussels; calls for the EU institutions to provide substantial support, both financial and technical, to the Mission and to involve it in projects focused on Belarus and its civil society;
22. Calls on the Commission to establish a task force that will open a policy dialogue with the representatives of Democratic Belarus in order to work on a comprehensive multi-sectoral agreement that will be the foundation of cooperation with a democratic Belarus once the current regime is no longer in power; reiterates that this should be coupled with a financial and administrative resources plan to be implemented in order to conduct and finance necessary reforms in the country once that is possible (a Marshall Plan for Belarus);
23. Calls for the institutionalisation of Democratic Belarus's participation in the Eastern Partnership and for support for the newly established Mission of Democratic Belarus in Brussels; call for the representatives of the people of Belarus to be invited to the next European Political Community Summit; calls for an EU envoy for Democratic Belarus to be appointed;

24. Supports the celebration of 25 March, the anniversary of the proclamation of Belarusian independence in 1918, as the International Day of Solidarity with Democratic Belarus;
25. 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 Commission, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the G20, the United Nations, the International Labour Organization, the International Red Cross, the Republic of Belarus, the Russian Federation and to the representatives of the Belarusian democratic forces.