

ORAL QUESTION WITH DEBATE O-0123/08

pursuant to Rule 108 of the Rules of Procedure

by Jan Marinus Wiersma, Justas Vincas Paleckis and Adrian Severin, on behalf of the PSE Group,
Jacek Protasiewicz
to the Commission

Subject: EU approach to Belarus - entrance visa

Following the parliamentary elections in Belarus on 29 September 2008, the EU Troika invited Belarusian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Martinov for a meeting in the margins of the GAERC in Luxembourg on 13 October, which decided temporarily to suspend visa restrictions for Belarusian officials for six months to encourage dialogue with the Belarusian Government.

In its resolution P6_TA(2008)0470 of 9 October 2008, the European Parliament indicated that it could endorse this decision and other initiatives of the Council and the Commission to strengthen its engagement with Belarus as part of an approach based on strict positive conditionality. The Parliament also called on the Belarusian authorities to remove obstacles to MEPs being granted visas for Belarus.

1. Can the Commission indicate which initiatives it has taken since 13 October to strengthen dialogue with Belarus and, if so, to which concrete results these have led?
2. Has the Commission formulated explicit benchmarks for a possible extension of the lifting of the visa ban, such as reform of the Law on Mass Media as suggested by the European Parliament in its resolution? Does the Commission intend to accompany its dialogue with the authorities by full engagement of the democratic opposition?
3. Is the Commission aware that, contrary to statements by the Belarusian Embassy in Brussels, MEPs are still being denied visas for Belarus? Does the Commission agree that a lifting of the visa ban for Belarusian officials should be reciprocated by a pledge on the part of the Belarusian Government to grant EU legislators full access to the country's territory and the freedom to meet with civic and political groups? Is the Commission prepared to raise this issue in its dialogue with the Belarusian authorities?
4. Is the Commission aware of the fact that the Belarusian Government is regrettably continuing to obstruct children's holiday programs for victims of the Chernobyl disaster? Has the Commission taken action vis-à-vis the Belarusian authorities to end this obstruction?

Tabled: 12.11.2008

Forwarded: 14.11.2008

Deadline for reply: 21.11.2008