

ORAL QUESTION WITH DEBATE O-0066/09

pursuant to Rule 108 of the Rules of Procedure

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

Subject: Six-month evaluation of EU-Belarus dialogue

1. A number of criteria have been developed to help define the EU's requirements for a six-month period of temporary suspension of the travel restrictions imposed on certain officials of Belarus in October 2008. What is the progress achieved by the government of Belarus in the following areas:
 - reform of Belarus' electoral legislation to provide guaranteed representation of opposition members on election commissions at all levels and to ensure the transparency and accountability of the vote count;
 - providing equal rights to all media outlets by lifting the ban on dissemination of independent print media through the state-owned distribution networks of "Sayuzdruk" (system of kiosks) and the Belarusian state postal service "Belposhta"; repealing Articles 367, 368, 369, and 369(1) of the Criminal Code, which are often misused to persecute journalists for their professional activity;
 - guaranteeing freedom of association and assembly by repealing Article 193(1) of the Criminal Code on criminal liability in respect of activity on behalf of unregistered public associations, political parties, and foundations;
 - guaranteeing political rights and freedoms by discontinuing the practice of politically motivated dismissals from jobs and universities and stopping persecution for avoiding military service against students expelled from universities for their civic stance?
2. The Council has decided to conduct an in-depth review of the restrictive measures by the end of the nine-month period of further suspension of the visa-ban sanctions, and, provided there are further positive developments in Belarus, is ready to consider the possibility of lifting the restrictive measures.

What are the concrete criteria and benchmarks that need to be respected by Belarus regarding liberalisation of political and social life in the country for consideration of lifting the restrictive measures?

3. What kind of incentives would the Commission be willing to offer Belarus in order to help progress on democracy, human rights and the rule of law? Is the Commission considering a plan of action that would speed up the process of Belarus' reintegration into the European family of democratic nations?
4. Is the Commission planning to reinforce the EC delegation in Belarus by increasing the number of staff and to grant the EC Minsk team more responsibility in the implementation of the EU's policies toward Belarus?
5. Is the Commission considering actively engaging in public dialogue and information campaigns, explaining to the Belarus public and to key interest groups, through the media, exchanges, conferences and seminars, the benefits of integration into Europe for Belarus?

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