

WRITTEN QUESTION P-1607/09
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to the Commission

Subject: Refusal to register Belsat TV bureau

The Belarusian foreign ministry is refusing to register a Belsat TV bureau in Belarus. Belsat is the only independent television channel covering Belarus that reaches the country. On 15 January 2009 the European Parliament called on the Council and Commission to urge the Belarusian Government to officially register Belsat in Belarus.

The application for registration lodged on 22 December 2008 satisfied all formal requirements. The Belarusian foreign ministry is basing its decision to reject the application on a government order issued on 25 December 2008, i.e. three days after the channel lodged the registration papers. That order laid down additional requirements for applications from foreign broadcasters seeking permission to open a bureau in Belarus.

The real reason for the refusal is that the Belarusian authorities are unwilling to register a bureau run by this independent channel.

This attitude is out of step with the confidence-building process between Belarus and the European Union. It is particularly shocking in the light of Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner's visit in March and the review of compliance with human rights standards that the EU is to conduct in April.

Tougher media laws came into force in Belarus on 8 February 2009. Some of the journalists working with Belsat TV have already been warned by the KGB or have been fined.

What action does the Commission intend to take in this matter?

Will the refusal to register a Belsat TV bureau in Belarus have an influence on the EU authorities' future conduct towards that country?