

Belarus

European Parliament resolution on Belarus

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on the situation in Belarus, in particular that of 16 September 2004¹ and that of 28 October 2004 on the political situation in Belarus after the parliamentary elections and referendum of 17 October 2004²,
- having regard to Opinion No 314/2004 on the referendum of 17 October 2004 in Belarus, adopted by the Council of Europe's Venice Commission at its 60th Plenary Session on 8-9 October 2004,
- having regard to the final conclusions of the International Election Observation Mission of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly of 9 December 2004,
- having regard to the resolutions by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on the situation in Belarus and, in particular, to its Resolution 1372 (2004) of 28 April 2004 on the persecution of the press in the Republic of Belarus,
- having regard to the declaration of the Head of the OSCE Office in Minsk of September 2004 on the prison sentences passed on two members of the Belarus opposition accused of defaming the President of Belarus,
- having regard, in particular, to the 'EU action plan for promoting democracy in Belarus' adopted by the European Parliament's Delegation for relations with Belarus on 23 February 2005,
- having regard, in particular, to its resolution of 11 February 2003 on relations between the European Union and Belarus: towards a future partnership³,
- having regard to its Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought, which was awarded to the Belarusian Association of Journalists in December 2004,
- having regard to the Communication from the Commission of 12 May 2004 on the European Neighbourhood Policy (COM(2004)0373),
- having regard to the resolution on the situation of human rights in Belarus adopted by the UN Commission on Human Rights on 15 April 2004,

¹ *Texts Adopted* of that date, P6_TA(2004)0011.

² *Texts Adopted* of that date, P6_TA(2004)0045.

³ OJ C 43 E, 19.2.2004, p. 60.

- having regard to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and in particular to Articles 19 and 21 which guarantee the right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly,
 - having regard to the EU sanctions adopted on 2 July 2004 against Belarusian officials following the disappearance of three Belarusian opposition leaders and one journalist,
 - having regard to Rule 115(5) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas the Parliamentary Troika concluded that neither the parliamentary nor the presidential elections of 2000 and 2001 were free and fair and that they were preceded by arbitrary action by the government against the political opposition, independent media and election-observing organisations, which constituted serious disrespect for democratic principles,
 - B. whereas, instead of improving, the situation in Belarus continues to deteriorate, which has led to a situation where human rights and the rights of minorities are blatantly violated, the Lower House is deprived of its legislative rights, and economic life is controlled by the President; whereas these violations include imprisonment of members of the democratic opposition and other forms of repression against them, the de-registration of political parties in the run-up to the elections, harassment and intimidation of opposition candidates and the banning of representatives of opposition parties at polling stations,
 - C. whereas the EU has repeatedly condemned the arrest of prominent opposition leaders by the Lukashenko government and whereas no progress has been made in the unsolved cases of a number of disappeared persons,
 - D. whereas Mikhail Marynich, ex-Minister for Foreign Economic Relations, former Ambassador and presidential candidate in the mid-2001 elections, was sentenced to 5 years' imprisonment, which, on 18 February 2005, was reduced to 3 years and 6 months,
 - E. whereas over the past few years several political parties and more than 50 pro-democracy NGOs of different levels and different political persuasions, 25 independent mass media entities and several educational establishments have been closed down for 'technical' reasons, but whereas it was clear that in every case these organisations were being punished for criticising the President and his policy,
 - F. whereas politically motivated arrests and trials of activists belonging to the democratic movement and independent journalists and deportations of foreign citizens are continually taking place in Belarus; whereas in September 2004 two members of the Belarus opposition, Valery Levonevsky and Alexander Vasilyev, were sentenced to two years in prison on a charge of defaming the President of Belarus,
 - G. whereas the ongoing peaceful protests by small shopkeepers have been met with intimidation by the government and the organisers of these strikes have been detained and fined,
 - H. whereas the resolution of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe of 28 May 2004 acknowledged evidence of involvement of top State officials in the abduction

and alleged assassination of leading opposition figures in 1999, and whereas in May 2004 the Council of Europe rejected an application from Belarus to renew its special status with the organisation, which had been suspended when President Lukashenko dissolved Parliament in 1997,

- I. extremely concerned at the decision of the Belarusian authorities to revoke the licence to operate as a legal entity of the internationally recognised European Humanities University in Minsk, which is a remarkable example of academic freedom and the pursuit of true European values in teaching and research programmes, with dire consequences for the academic future of hundreds of students and teachers,
- J. whereas in April 2004 the UN Commission on Human Rights criticised Belarus on account of continued reports of arbitrary arrest and detention and for harassing non-governmental organisations and opposition political parties and those engaged in democratic activities,
 - 1. Strongly condemns the systematic and increasing harassment and intimidation carried out by State officials, in particular the Ministry of Information, against journalists, editors and media outlets that are critical of the President of the Republic or the Government of Belarus; equally condemns indiscriminate attacks against members of the opposition, human rights activists and any person who attempts freely to voice criticism of the President and the regime, as manifested through arbitrary arrests, ill-treatment of detainees, disappearances, politically motivated persecution and other acts of repression that flout the basic principles of democracy and the rule of law;
 - 2. Believes that the trial of Mr Marynich was politically motivated and that the conviction was a politically motivated abuse of the judicial system which is further evidence of the lack of judicial independence in Belarus, betraying a general lack of respect for the rule of law and an overall climate of political repression;
 - 3. Calls on the Belarus authorities to release Mikhail Marynich immediately and unconditionally;
 - 4. Calls on the Belarus authorities to release immediately Valery Levonevsky, Alexander Vasilyev and all other imprisoned political opponents of the regime;
 - 5. Reiterates its call for the immediate release of Professor Bandazhevsky, a medical academic specialising in nuclear medicine who was sentenced to eight years' imprisonment on 18 June 2001 for his open criticism of the State authorities related to scientific research into the Chernobyl nuclear reactor disaster of 1986;
 - 6. Calls for an independent investigation to be opened under a neutral investigator regarding the case of the disappearance of Yuri Zakharenko, the former Minister of the Interior, Victor Gonchar, former Vice-President of the Parliament of Belarus, Anatoly Krasovsky, a businessman, and Dmitry Zavadski, a cameraman for the Russian TV channel ORT;
 - 7. Calls on the Belarus authorities to allow peaceful protests by small shopkeepers, and to release from prison the organisers and leaders of these protests;

8. Regards President Lukashenko's extension of his presidential term by referendum as a further confirmation of the authoritarian way in which he rules the country;
9. Points out that Belarus is the only European country without contractual relations with the EU due to massive human rights violations and calls on the Council to condemn the current Belarus regime as a dictatorship and President Lukashenko as a dictator;
10. Calls on the Council and the Governments of the Member States to identify and freeze the personal assets of President Lukashenko and those other senior members of the regime who ensure the continuation of the dictatorship;
11. Calls on the Council and the Governments of the Member States to add further names to the list of representatives of the Belarusian authorities subject to the visa ban, so as to prevent them from entering the territory of the EU Member States;
12. Notes that all relevant rules of the UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees which apply to political refugees and of European agreements on the granting of asylum are also applicable to the victims of the Lukashenko regime;
13. Calls on Belarus to bring the actions of its police and security forces into conformity with its obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;
14. Calls on the Belarus authorities to immediately cease the harassment of all educational institutions in the country and to respect the basic principles of academic freedom, teaching autonomy and tolerance in education;
15. Calls for the creation of a special educational programme to grant scholarships, especially for students from the European Humanities University (EHU) in Minsk, who would like to study in the European Union, and financial support for academic institutions which are prepared to host these students, and calls for the creation of an ad hoc procedure to allow the transferability of credits earned by students at the EHU;
16. Stresses that a policy of sanctions against Belarus will target only the authorities of that country and will not in any way affect Belarusian society, as proposed in the 'EU action plan for promoting democracy in Belarus' recently adopted by the European Parliament's Delegation for relations with Belarus;
17. Supports the strengthening of civil society in Belarus and welcomes the decision of the Commission to finance projects in Belarus under the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR);
18. Points out that no diplomatic and political efforts should be spared to bring Belarus back to the European family, thereby enabling it to play the important role which it should in the development of the European Neighbourhood Policy;
19. Emphasises once again that the further development of EU relations with Belarus will continue to depend on the progress made towards democratisation and reform in the country;

20. Urges the Commission, the Council and the governments of the Member States to draw up an action plan for further ways to increase support - together with other democratic countries and international institutes - for all remaining democratic forces in Belarus and to assist more effectively those people in Belarus civil society working for democratic changes in Belarus;
21. Supports the creation of alternative and accessible information sources such as TV and radio stations in the neighbouring countries (Poland and/or Lithuania) with a view to overcoming the isolation of Belarus and reaching as many of its people as possible;
22. Is disappointed by the silence of the Commission following last week's EU-Russian Troika concerning any discussions that may have taken place about the human rights situation in Belarus, particularly the issues of political disappearances and the ruthless suppression of freedom of speech, this being particularly deplorable as the Troika was supposed to consider 'democracy and human rights in the common neighbourhood of the EU and Russia';
23. Calls on the EU institutions to insist that human rights issues should be a standing item on the agenda of all future EU-Russia meetings, and believes that the situation in Belarus should also feature on the agenda of all regular consultations between the EU and Russia;
24. Calls on the Council and the Member States to hold an independent investigation into the political disappearances in Belarus, and to set up a fund to help the families of the disappeared persons and other victims of the Belarus regime;
25. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Governments and Parliaments of the Member States, the Government and Parliament of Belarus and the Parliamentary Assemblies of the OSCE and the Council of Europe.