

P7_TA(2009)0117

Belarus

European Parliament resolution of 17 December 2009 on Belarus

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on the situation in Belarus, in particular that of 2 April 2009 on bi-annual evaluation of the EU-Belarus dialogue¹,
 - having regard to the conclusions on Belarus reached by the General Affairs and External Relations Council at its meeting of 17 November 2009, involving a further suspension of the application of the visa ban on certain Belarusian officials, including President Alexander Lukashenko, and the extension of the restrictive measures until October 2010,
 - having regard to the Commission Communication of 3 December 2008 concerning the Eastern Partnership (COM(2008)0823),
 - having regard to the Declaration on the Eastern Partnership issued by the European Council at its meeting of 19-20 March 2009 and to the Joint Declaration issued at the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit of 7 May 2009,
 - having regard to the Commission statement of 21 November 2006 on the European Union's readiness to renew its relationship with Belarus and its people within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP),
 - having regard to the EU Presidency statement in the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) on the death penalty in Belarus of 29 October 2009,
 - having regard to Rule 110(4) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas the Council in its above mentioned conclusions of 17 November 2009 recognises that new possibilities have opened up for dialogue and deepened cooperation between the European Union and Belarus with the aim of fostering genuine progress towards democracy and respect for human rights, and reaffirms its readiness to deepen the European Union's relations with Belarus, subject to further progress towards democracy, human rights and the rule of law, and to assist the country in attaining these objectives,
- B. whereas the European Union sees Belarus as a partner on issues ranging from energy security, to transport, cultural cooperation, the environment and food safety,
- C. whereas the Council, after evaluating developments in Belarus following the decision taken on 16 March 2009 in accordance with the terms set out in its Common Position 2009/314/CFSP, has decided to extend the restrictive measures against certain Belarusian officials but to suspend the application of the restrictions on travelling to the EU, both until October 2010,
- D. whereas some positive steps, such as the release of a number of political prisoners and the

¹ Texts adopted, P6_TA(2009)0212.

authorisation to distribute two independent newspapers, have been taken since October 2008,

- E. whereas, in response to the positive steps taken by Belarus, the Commission has already entered into an intensified dialogue with that country in fields such as energy, the environment, customs, transport and food safety,
- F. whereas the Council included Belarus in its decision of 20 March 2009 on the Eastern Partnership Initiative, which the Commission launched in its above-mentioned communication of 3 December 2008 with a view to stepping up cooperation with a number of eastern European countries; whereas one of the objectives of Belarus's participation in the Eastern Partnership Initiative and its parliamentary branch Euronest is to intensify cooperation between the country and the EU, including its people-to-people dimension,
- G. whereas the International Federation of Journalists, on the basis of the report of its fact-finding mission to Minsk of 20-24 September 2009, carried out in collaboration with several international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), has not identified any significant progress in the area of media freedom in Belarus,
- H. whereas Belarus has committed itself to consider the recommendations made by the OSCE and its Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) regarding improvements to its electoral law in order to bring it into line with international standards for democratic elections and to consult about the proposed amendments with the OSCE; whereas the National Assembly of Belarus has recently passed a reform of the Electoral Code without prior consultation of the OSCE,
- I. whereas Belarus remains the sole European country still using the death penalty; whereas further death sentences have been pronounced in recent months,
- J. whereas on 2 November 2009 the Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko stated that 'relations with the European Union as a powerful consolidated partner are one of the fundamental factors in securing Belarus's independence and sovereignty, as well as economic, scientific and technological development',
 - 1. Supports the Council's decision to extend the restrictive measures against certain Belarusian officials but at the same time to further suspend the application of the travel restrictions until October 2010;
 - 2. Stresses that the increased political dialogue and the establishment of the Human Rights Dialogue between the European Union and Belarus must lead to concrete results and substantial progress in the fields of democratic reforms and respect for human rights and the rule of law;
 - 3. Welcomes the constructive and active participation of Belarus in the Eastern Partnership, an initiative aimed at strengthening democracy and the rule of law and promoting European cooperation; regards Belarus's participation in the Eastern Partnership as a way forward to promote further dialogue with the European Union and deeper rapprochement based on a readiness and commitment on the part of Belarus to attain these objectives; welcomes trilateral cooperation between Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine in the framework of the Eastern Partnership, with priority given to projects on integrated border management, transport and transit, the common cultural and historical heritage, social security and energy

security;

4. Calls on the Commission to draft a proposal on a joint interim plan for Belarus setting priorities for reforms inspired by the action plans developed in the framework of the ENP in order to revitalise the suspended ratification procedure for the EU-Belarus Partnership and Cooperation Agreement; takes the view, in this respect, that the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the EU and Belarus, which has been frozen since 1997, should be reactivated once all the political reforms have been completed and implemented;
5. Calls on the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development to consider increasing their financial assistance to Belarus, paying special attention to the situation of small and medium-sized enterprises, while reviewing their mandate in order to encourage the transition of Belarus towards democracy, a pluralistic society and a market economy; believes that this possible financial support should be made contingent on the achievement of substantial progress in the areas outlined below;
6. Calls on the Commission to consider measures to improve the business climate, trade, investment, energy and transport infrastructure and cross-border cooperation between the European Union and Belarus; takes note of the efforts and achievements of Belarus in countering the effects of the financial and economic crisis and boosting the economy by easing investment barriers and reforming property rights and the private sector;
7. Stresses that the efforts made to tackle corruption, increase transparency and strengthen the rule of law, which are fundamental to attracting more foreign investment, have not been sufficient;
8. Calls on the Commission to prepare recommendations for the possible adoption of directives on visa facilitation and readmission agreements with Belarus once the relevant conditions have been met; believes that such action is crucial to achieving the main goals of EU policy towards Belarus, namely enhancing people-to-people contact, making Belarus part of European and regional processes and rendering the democratisation process in the country irreversible;
9. Urges the Council and the Commission, in this context, to consider the scope for reducing the cost of visas for Belarusian citizens entering the Schengen Area and simplifying the procedure for obtaining visas; underlines that the long-term objective is visa-free travel between the European Union and Belarus; urges the Belarusian authorities to sign the visa-free travel agreement for border zone inhabitants with neighbouring EU countries;
10. Strongly condemns the recent denials of entry visas to Agnieszka Romaszewska, a director of TV Belsat, professors from Bialystok University, Christos Pourgourides, a Member of the Cyprus Parliament, and Emanuelis Zingeris, a Member of the Lithuanian Parliament;
11. Calls on the Council and the Commission, should Belarus make significant progress during the next year and fulfil the relevant criteria, to consider lifting the travel ban on a permanent basis, as well as taking measures to facilitate economic and social progress and speeding up the process of Belarus's integration into the European family of democratic nations;
12. Notes that new impetus should be given to mutually fruitful dialogue between Belarus and the European Union through interparliamentary cooperation within Euronest; notes that Belarus will be invited to participate fully and on an equal basis in the Euronest Assembly -

the parliamentary dimension of the Eastern Partnership - as soon as free and fair elections to the Belarusian Parliament take place and considers that until then interim provisions should be applied;

13. Is of the opinion that all EU Member States and their governments should pursue a coherent stance in their relations with third countries based on the Common Positions agreed in the Council; also considers that the European institutions should follow a joint strategy and combine efforts in pursuing concrete results in the EU's relations with Belarus; calls on all representatives of the European Union and Member States to hold political meetings with representatives of the democratic opposition, particularly when visiting Belarus;
14. Urges Belarus to continue to cooperate with the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights at the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE/ODIHR) on the electoral code and expects the new Electoral Law to be in line with international standards and to enter into the force before the local elections planned for spring 2010;
15. Insists that clear and significant progress towards democratisation is expected within the next year in order for the sanctions to be completely lifted and that the conditions for full re-engagement with Belarus should be:
 - ensuring respect for freedom of expression by bringing the Media Law into line with the recommendations contained in the report of the International Fact-Finding Mission to the Republic of Belarus of 20-24 September 2009;
 - guaranteeing freedom of association and assembly by repealing Article 193-1 of the Belarus Criminal Code, which makes activity on behalf of unregistered public associations, political parties and foundations a criminal offence;
 - allowing the registration of all political parties and civil society organisations;
 - safeguarding freedom of religion for religious denominations other than the Orthodox Church, in particular to let New Life Church operate freely;
 - to avoid hampering the activities of organisations already operating in Belarus, for example by raising rents (as was the case regarding the Belarusian Popular Front) or imposing illegal taxes on projects carried out using EU grants (for example, the Belarusian Helsinki Committee);
 - creating favourable conditions for the operation of NGOs and independent media;
 - guaranteeing political rights and freedoms by discontinuing the practice of politically motivated acts of intimidation, in particular dismissals from jobs and universities (as was the case regarding Tatsyana Shaputska, expelled from her university for participation in an Eastern Partnership civil society forum in Brussels);
 - stopping prosecutions, for allegedly avoiding military service, of students who have been expelled from universities for their civic stance and are being forced to obtain their education abroad;
 - reviewing all the cases of forcible conscription which have violated the legal rights of several young activists, such as Franak Viačorka, Ivan Šyla and Zmiter Fedaruk, and

which are tantamount to State-practised hostage-taking;

16. Notes with regret that, after initial positive steps undertaken by the Belarus Government, no further essential progress has been made in the field of human rights and fundamental freedoms; recalls in this respect the continued repression of political opponents and the refusal to register political parties (Belarusian Christian Democracy), NGOs ('Viasna') and independent media (TV Belsat); calls on the Belarusian authorities to review the sentences involving restrictions on their freedom imposed on the participants in a peaceful demonstration held in January 2008 and the imprisonment of Artsyom Dubski; points out that Amnesty International regards all these persons as prisoners of conscience; calls for the immediate release of the entrepreneurs Mikalai Awtukhovich and Uladzimir Asipenka, who have been held in pre-trial detention for eight months;
17. Calls on the Government of Belarus immediately to establish a moratorium on all death sentences and executions with a view to abolishing the death penalty (as provided for by UN General Assembly Resolution 62/149 of 18 December 2007 on a moratorium on the use of the death penalty), to commute without delay the sentences of all prisoners currently on death row to terms of imprisonment, to bring domestic legislation into line with the country's obligations under international human rights treaties and to ensure that the internationally recognised standards for fair trials are rigorously respected;
18. Urges the Belarusian authorities to initiate unbiased and transparent investigations into the kidnappings of young activists (Artur Finkevic, kidnapped on 17 October 2009, Nasta Palazhanka and Dzianis Karnou, both on 5 December 2009, Uladzimir Lemesh, on 27 November 2009, Zmitser Dashkevich, on 5 December 2009, and Yauhen Afnahel on 6 December 2009) and the recent death of Valiantsin Dounar, a Belarusian Popular Front member and activist, and to publish the results of the investigations;
19. Calls on the Belarusian authorities to respect the rights of national minorities in accordance with the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities of 1 February 1995; in that connection, urges the Belarusian authorities to recognise the Union of Poles in Belarus led by Angelika Borys, who was re-elected as its chairwoman at the Congress of the Union of Poles on 15 March 2009;
20. Urges the Belarusian authorities to develop genuine dialogue with representatives of the democratic opposition; emphasises, therefore, the importance of defining the role and working methods of the Public Advisory Council;
21. Calls on the Commission to make full and effective use of the possibilities to support civil society and democratic developments in Belarus via the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights and stresses at the same time that support for democratic opposition must be an integral part of the gradual re-engagement process with Belarus;
22. Calls on the Commission and the governments of the Member States to grant financial support to TV Belsat and to urge the Belarusian Government officially to register Belsat in Belarus; calls on the Belarusian Government, as a sign of goodwill and positive change, to enable the Belarusian European Humanities University (EHU) in exile in Vilnius (Lithuania) to return legally to Belarus on the basis of genuine guarantees that it will be able to operate freely and re-establish itself under suitable conditions for its future development in Minsk, in particular by allowing it to re-establish its library in Minsk by providing the premises and creating the conditions which will enable it to make the extensive collections

in Belarusian, Russian, English, German and French open and accessible to all;

23. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the parliaments and governments of the Member States, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the Parliamentary Assemblies of the OSCE and the Council of Europe, the Secretariat of the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Parliament and Government of Belarus.