Resolution on Belarus

2008/2534(RSP) - 21/02/2008 - Text adopted by Parliament, topical subjects

Following the debate on 21 February 2008, the European Parliament adopted a joint resolution on the same date on the political situation in on Belarus and deeply regrets that the situation of democracy, human rights and the rule of law is not improving there. It recalls that it has repeatedly condemned the failed presidential, parliamentary and local elections in Belarus, and points out that continuous arbitrary arrests of members of civil society and opposition activists, notably the temporary detention of Aleksander Milinkevich, and the clampdown of the independent media, contradict the recent rhetoric of the Belarusian Government concerning their wish to improve relations with the EU.

Parliament emphasises that in order to engage in any substantial dialogue with the EU, Belarus needs to fulfil the remaining conditions laid down in the "non-paper" entitled "What the European Union could bring to Belarus", which include the release of all political prisoners, the abolition of the death penalty, an assurance of a free media and freedom of expression, the independence of the judiciary and respect for democratic values and for the basic rights of the Belarusian people. Members condemn the fact that Belarus is the only country in Europe which still has the death penalty.

With regard to political prisoners, Parliament expresses its regret over the sentencing of the journalist Aliaksandr Zdvizhkov to three years' imprisonment, considering that punishment to be unjustly harsh, and calls on the Belarusian Government to reconsider the decision. It takes note of the recent release of several democratic opposition activists including the leaders of the Youth Movement of the Belarusian Popular Front and Young Front (Malady Front). At the same time, Parliament condemns the arrests of these activists, who were detained for 15 days in prison and faced expulsion from university, following peaceful demonstrations on 16 January 2008 in Minsk to mark the day of solidarity with imprisoned Belarusian opposition activists and the families of missing prominent Belarusians. The Belarusian authorities are asked to release immediately and unconditionally the remaining political prisoner, Alyaksandr Kazulin, and stop using intimidation, harassment, targeted arrests and politically motivated prosecutions against the activists of the democratic opposition and civil society in Belarus;

Belarus is also asked to do the following:

-revoke Decree No 70 of 8 February 2008, provisions of which violate the right to education of Belarusian citizens by creating barriers to entry into higher education institutions;

-implement Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (standards in the organisation of the forthcoming parliamentary elections scheduled for 28 September 2008;

-give democratic opposition representatives access to district election commissions, to grant registration to all parliamentary candidates and their observers, and not to create obstacles for a comprehensive and complete international election observation mission.

Parliament goes on to call on the Council and the Commission to take further steps towards the facilitation of visa procedures for Belarusian citizens, as only such action can help to fulfil the main goal of EU policy towards Belarus, namely to facilitate and intensify people-to-people contacts and to democratise that country. The Council, the Commission and the international community as a whole must extend more support to the civil society of Belarus and, in particular, increase financial aid to the independent media, to non-governmental organisations and to Belarusian students studying abroad. Parliament expresses solidarity with the united democratic opposition of Belarus and the leader of that movement, Aleksander Milinkevich, and all Belarusian citizens who strive for an independent, open and democratic Belarus.

It deplores the decision of the Belarusian authorities to refuse repeatedly entrance visas to the Members of the European Parliament and national parliamentarians in the last couple of years. It also condemns the restrictions imposed by the Belarusian authorities on foreign clergy, aimed at limiting their access to the country to serve religious organisations, and calls on the Belarusian authorities to cease these restrictions.