

Resolution on the situation in Belarus after the parliamentary elections of 28 September 2008

2008/2640(RSP) - 09/10/2008 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

Following the debate which took place during the sitting of 8 October, the European Parliament adopted by 597 votes to 31, with 22 abstentions, a resolution on the situation in Belarus after the parliamentary elections of 28 September 2008. The resolution had been tabled for consideration in plenary by the EPP-ED, PES, ALDE, Greens/ALE, and UEN groups.

Whilst Parliament expresses its satisfaction on the release of political prisoners Mr Alyaksandr Kazulin, Mr Sergei Parsyukevich and Mr Andrei Kim between 16 and 20 August 2008, it regrets that the significant progress which the EU had hoped for, in the interests of the Belarusian people, in the democratic development of Belarus did not materialise. The OSCE Election Observation Mission concludes that despite some minor improvements, the 28 September 2008 parliamentary elections in Belarus ultimately **fell short of international standards**. Parliament believes that the parliament elected in Belarus is of questionable democratic legitimacy.

It is concerned that the opposition-staged rally on 28 September 2008 in Minsk was termed a gross violation of public order by the interior ministry, and is also concerned by reports that information on the rally will be submitted to the Office of the Prosecutor-General for legal review. The Belarusian authorities are asked to respect the **fundamental rights of freedom of assembly and expression**, as defined by the Belarusian constitution;

While the EU has taken note of the recent release of several democratic opposition activists and harboured hope of an improvement in the organisation of the elections, the persistent failure to organise free and fair elections will be a further set-back for Belarus and will remain a **serious challenge to relations between Belarus and the EU**. Parliament calls on the Belarusian Government to do the following :

- confirm its statements about willingness to improve cooperation with the EU and to create more favourable conditions for discussions between the EU and Belarus;
- move towards genuinely democratic elections in accordance with international democratic standards by introducing certain changes to electoral law and practice, such as creating fair conditions and opportunities for all candidates to conduct a genuine electoral campaign;
- respect human rights by, inter alia, making necessary changes to the Belarus Criminal Code, eliminating all obstacles that prevent proper registration of NGOs, and improving the treatment of national minorities.

Parliament calls on the Council and the Commission to do the following :

- continue the dialogue with and devise a policy vis-à-vis Belarus, containing benchmarks, timetables, a revision clause and adequate financial resources;
- consider a selective review and possible suspension of existing restrictive measures, with a view to providing advantages for ordinary citizens and promoting the development of a free society;

- not to lift the visa ban on those directly involved in violating democratic election standards and human rights;
- take further steps towards the facilitation of visa procedures for Belarusian citizens, as this is crucial to fulfil the main goal of EU policy towards Belarus, namely to facilitate people-to-people contacts and to democratise the country;
- consider selective application of the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument and the European Instrument for Human Rights and Democracy to Belarus by extending more support to Belarusian civil society and to increase financial aid to the independent media, NGOs and Belarusian students studying abroad;
- ask the Belarusian Government to enable the European Humanities University in exile in Vilnius to return legally to Belarus and re-establish itself in adequate conditions for its future development in Minsk, and to grant financial support for the independent Belarusian television channel Belsat;
- consider measures to improve the business climate, trade, investment, energy and transport infrastructure and cross-border cooperation between the EU and Belarus.

Parliament regrets the decision of the Belarusian authorities repeatedly to refuse entrance visas to members of the European Parliament and national parliamentarians in the last couple of years.

Members welcome the approach taken so far by the Belarusian authorities, despite enormous pressure, not to recognise the unilateral independence declared by South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Lastly, Parliament condemns the fact that Belarus is the only country in Europe which still has the death penalty, contrary to European values.