Resolution on the EU strategy towards Belarus

2009/2503(RSP) - 15/01/2009 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

Following a debate which took place during the sitting of 14 January 2009, the European Parliament adopted by 551 votes to 15 with 31 abstentions a resolution on the EU strategy towards Belarus. The resolution had been tabled for consideration in plenary by the EPP-ED, PES, ALDE, UEN, and Greens /ALE groups.

Parliament welcomed the decision by the Belarusian authorities to register the "For Freedom" movement headed by former Belarusian presidential candidate Aliaksandr Milinkevich. It also welcomed the decision by the Belarusian authorities to allow the printing and distribution of the two independent newspapers, Narodnaia Volia and Nasha Niva , as well as the release of political prisoners in Belarus. However, the resolution notes the fact that there are still 13 independent newspapers awaiting registration, and it deplores the fact that certain activitists do not enjoy all the rights guaranteed to Belarusian citizens by the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus. Parliament also criticises the fact that some other activists remain subject to various forms of restrictions on their freedom.

Members state that, in order to significantly improve relations with the EU, Belarus should (1) remain a country without political prisoners, (2) guarantee freedom of expression for the media, (3) continue to cooperate with the OSCE on reform of the electoral law, (4) improve conditions for the work of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and (5) guarantee freedom of assembly and political association.

Parliament urges the Belarusian Government to respect human rights by enacting a series of specific measures:

-making vitally needed changes to the Belarus Criminal Code by abolishing certain Articles which are often misused as a means of repression;

-refraining from threatening criminal prosecution, including for avoiding military service in Belarus, against students expelled from universities for their civic stance;

- eliminating all obstacles to the proper registration of NGOs in Belarus;

- improving the treatment of and respect for national minorities, including recognition of the legitimately elected body of the Union of Poles in Belarus.

Parliament stresses that the **democratic opposition** must be part of the process of gradual re-engagement with Belarus.

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

- take further steps to liberalise visa procedures for Belarusian citizens, as such action is crucial to fulfilling the **main goal of EU policy towards Belarus**, namely intensifying people-to-people contacts that in turn facilitate the democratisation of the country;

- consider applying the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument and the European Instrument for Human Rights and Democracy to Belarus selectively by extending more support to Belarusian civil society, to urge the Belarusian Government, as a sign of goodwill and positive change, to enable the

Belarusian "European Humanities University" in exile in Vilnius (Lithuania) to return legally to Belarus, to grant financial support to the independent Belarusian television channel Belsat, and to urge the Belarusian Government to officially register Belsat in Belarus;

- to consider measures to improve the business climate, trade, investment, energy and transport infrastructure and cross-border cooperation between the EU and Belarus;

- consider the participation of the European Investment Bank in investing in Belarusian energy transit infrastructure;

Parliament calls on the Belarusian authorities to observe international safety standards during the process of building a new nuclear power plant, and ratify the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Additional Protocol to the Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement. The Commission must monitor compliance by Belarus with the IAEA recommendations and the requirements of the Convention on Nuclear Safety and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and on the effects the operation of the nuclear power plant could have on neighbouring EU Member States.

The resolution deplores the repeated decisions by the Belarusian authorities over the last couple of years to refuse entrance visas to Members of the European Parliament and national parliamentarians. It calls on the Belarusian authorities not to create any further obstacles which serve to prevent its Delegation for relations with Belarus from visiting the country.

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