Resolution on bi-annual evaluation of the EU-Belarus dialogue

2009/2567(RSP) - 02/04/2009 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

Following the debate which took place during the sitting of 25 March 2009, the European Parliament adopted by 594 votes to 19 with 38 abstentions a resolution on the bi-annual evaluation of the EU-Belarus dialogue The resolution had been tabled by the EPP-ED, PES, ALDE, UEN and Green/ALE groups.

Parliament states that it supports the decision of the Council to extend for one year the restrictive measures against certain Belarusian officials and at the same time to maintain the suspension of the application of travel restrictions imposed on certain officials of Belarus for a nine-month period. It continues to be concerned about the human rights situation in Belarus and the recent cases of violations in this area; looks forward to the launching of a human rights dialogue with Belarus in the near future;

Whilst welcoming the increased high-level EU-Belarus dialogue, Parliament believes that intensification of the political dialogue between the EU and Belarus must be conditional on the lifting of restrictions on freedom and cessation of violence against participants in opposition protests and human rights activists. MEPs call specifically for the immediate release of Mikalai Autukhovich, Yury Liavonau and Uladzimir Asipenka and Artsiom Dubski and for a review of the "restricted freedom" sentences imposed on 11 persons who participated in a demonstration which took place in January 2008.

Parliament calls on the Government of Belarus to use the next 9 months to demonstrate substantial progress in the following areas:

reform of Belarus's electoral legislation to provide guaranteed representation of opposition members on election commissions at all levels;

- providing equal rights to all media outlets by lifting a ban on dissemination of independent print media through state-owned distribution networks;
- guaranteeing freedom of association and assembly by repealing Article 193-1 of the Belarus Criminal Code;
- guaranteeing political rights and freedoms by discontinuing the practice of politically motivated dismissals from jobs and universities;
- stopping persecution for avoiding military service of students expelled from universities for their civic stance, and reviewing the recent cases of the forcible army conscription of several young activists.

Should Belarus fulfil these criteria during the period of 9 months, the Council and Commission must consider lifting the travel ban on a permanent basis, as well as speeding up the process of Belarus's reintegration into the European family of democratic nations.

Parliament also calls on Belarus to do the following:

- immediately establish a moratorium on all death sentences with a view to abolishing the death penalty and commute the sentences of all prisoners currently on death row;
- recognise the Union of Poles in Belarus led by Angelika Borys, who was re-elected as its Chair at the Congress of the Union of Poles on 15 March 2009;

The Council and Commission, as appropriate, are asked to do the following:

- take further steps to liberalise visa procedures for Belarusian citizens, and consider the scope for reducing the cost of visas for Belarusian citizens entering the Schengen Area and simplifying the procedure for obtaining visas;
- make full use of the possibilities to support civil society and democratic developments in Belarus via the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), and fully inform Parliament how the funding from the EIDHR is spent;
- grant financial support to the independent Belarusian television channel Belsat, and to urge the Belarusian Government to officially register Belsat in Belarus;
- consider measures to improve the business climate, trade, investment, energy and transport infrastructure and cross-border cooperation between the EU and Belarus.

Lastly, the Belarusian Government is urged 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 re-establish itself for its future development in Minsk.