Resolution on the situation of civil society and national minorities in Belarus

2010/2573(RSP) - 10/03/2010 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

Following the debate which took place during the sitting of 24 February 2010, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the situation of civil society and national minorities in Belarus.

The resolution was tabled by the ECR, S&D, Greens/ALE, ALDE, and EPP groups. It expresses its grave concern at the recent human rights violations in the Republic of Belarus against members of civil society, especially members of the Union of Poles, and declares its solidarity with citizens unable to enjoy their full civil rights.

Condemning the police action and legal measures taken against the Union of Poles in Belarus and the attempts by the authorities to impose a new leadership on the Polish community, Parliament states that it attaches great importance to the liberalisation of political and civic life in Belarus. It underlines that further violations of human rights and the rule of law in Belarus may lead to the revision of the EU's position towards Belarus, **including re-imposition of the sanctions**.

Members cite the facts that on 15 February 2010, 40 activists, mainly members of the Union of Poles in Belarus (UPB), were arrested in Belarus, including Angelika Borys its Chairwoman, in order to prevent them from taking part in the trial concerning the Polish House in Ivyanets. The Belarusian authorities have used the police forces against the members of the UPB in Hrodna in 2005 and in Ivyanets in 2010. They condemn the police and legal action against the Union of Poles and any attempts by the Belarusian authorities to impose a new leadership on the Polish community, and demand that the Belarusian authorities re-legalise the Union of Poles in Belarus (UPB) led by Angelika Borys and ensure that its properties are returned to them in due time.

Dialogue with Belarus: Parliament reiterates its interest in an open and structured dialogue with Belarus on condition that the democratisation of the political system in Belarus leads to concrete results and reflects respect for human rights and the rule of law. It urges Belarus to abide by its OSCE and international commitments in terms of the protection of the rights of its minorities. It calls at the same time on the authorities to improve the conditions for the functioning of civil society, especially with regard to freedom of expression and assembly, the situation of independent media, including access to the internet, and the registration of NGOs, with a view to preparing and allowing a free and fair electoral process for the municipal elections on 25 April, and the freedom to register political parties such as the Belarusian Christian Democracy (BDC). Belarus is urged to release political activists and prisoners of conscience.

The resolution underlines that the EU dialogue with Belarus can be mutually beneficial and recalls that the EU has already demonstrated considerable openness to engagement with Belarus, expressed also in Belarus's inclusion in the Eastern Partnership. The success of this engagement is conditional on steps towards democratisation and the upholding of human rights, including minority rights, by the Government of Belarus. Members point out that, if the Belarusian authorities adhere to fundamental human rights and democracy-related criteria, Belarus will benefit from the following items:

- the conclusion and ratification of the EU-Belarus Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA);
- the effective utilisation of EU financial instruments such as European Investment Bank (EIB) instruments and the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI);

- the extension of European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) financing to projects in Belarus, involving state entities;
- restoration of Generalised System of Preferences (GSP+) to Belarus;
- obtaining another tranche of the stabilisation loan from International Monetary Fund (IMF);
- the resumption of negotiations on Belarus's accession to the WTO;
- the support for the extension of the OECD programme to Belarus.