Resolution on the situation in Belarus

2011/2514(RSP) - 20/01/2011 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

Following the debate which took place during the sitting of 19 January 2011, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the situation in Belarus.

The resolution had been tabled by the EPP, S&D, ALDE, ECR, and Greens/ALE, groups.

In line with the findings of the Preliminary Conclusions of the SCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA), Members consider that the Presidential elections of 19 December 2010 failed to meet international standards of free, fair and transparent elections. This vote is yet another missed opportunity for a democratic transition in Belarus and Members call for new elections to be held on the free and democratic conditions according to the OSCE standards. They note that over 700 persons were detained for their participation in the demonstration on 19 December in Minsk, most of whom have been released after serving short administrative sentences while 24 opposition activists and journalists, including 6 presidential candidates, have been charged for organising mass disorder accompanied by violent attacks and armed resistance that could carry prison sentences of up to 15 years.

Members condemn the use of brutal force by the police and KGB services against the protesters on Election Day, and strongly condemn the arrest and detention of peaceful protesters and most of the presidential candidates, the leaders of the democratic opposition, as well as great number of civil society activists, journalists, teachers and students. Parliament calls for an independent and impartial international investigation into the events under the auspices of the OSCE, and for politically motivated charges to be dropped.

Parliament calls on the Council, the Commission and the EU High Representative (HR) to review EU policy towards Belarus including consideration of targeted economic sanctions and the freezing of all the macrofinancial aid provided via IMF loans as well as lending operations by the EIB and EBRD programmes. It underlines that the orientation of the ENP and national assistance for Belarus should be redirected in order to ensure appropriate support for civil society, and reiterates the importance of the effective use of the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights. The resolution also calls for the immediate re-application of the visa ban on the Belarusian leading authorities and a freeze on their assets. The visa ban should be expanded to the state officials, members of judiciary and security officers who can be considered responsible for the vote-rigging and post-election brutal repressions and arrests of the members of the opposition. Parliament points out the sanctions should remain in force minimum until all political prisoners and detainees are released and exempted from charges. It welcomes the good example of the Polish Government which imposed its own travel restrictions to the representatives of the Minsk regime and at the same time simplified access to the EU for the Belarusian citizens.

Members also call on the Commission, and Council as appropriate to:

- support, with all financial and political means, the efforts of Belarusian civil society, independent media (including TV Belsat, European Radio for Belarus, Radio Racja and others) and non-governmental organisations in Belarus to promote democracy and oppose the regime;

- halt ongoing cooperation and to withdraw its assistance provided to the state-owned media in Belarus;

- develop a mechanism of registration of NGOs that are denied registration in Belarus for political reasons, in order to enable them to benefit from the EU programmes;

- continue and increase financial aid to the European Humanities University (EHU) based in Vilnius, Lithuania, to increase the number of scholarships for Belarusian students, repressed for their civic activities and expelled from universities and to contribute to the ‘Solidarity with Belarus’ donors‘ conference in Warsaw (2/02/2011) and the conference in Vilnius (3-4/02/2011);

- consider the possibility of suspending Belarusian participation in the Eastern Partnership activities no later than at the Eastern Partnership summit in Budapest if it there is not an acceptable explanation and considerable improvement of the situation in Belarus, but this suspension not apply to NGOs and civil society;

- intensify work on the negotiations directives for the readmission agreement an for visa facilitation, which include affordable visa fees order to enhance people-to-people contacts.

Members regret the move on the part of the Russian Federation in recognising the elections and description of the repression as an internal affair. They recommend that the European Commission engage in dialogue, consultations and political coordination with the non-EU neighbours of Belarus, who traditionally have special relations with that country and are also partners of the EU, namely Russia and Ukraine, in order to maximise the efficiency of EU policy towards Belarus and to cooperate in properly balancing the reaction against the democratic deficit and human rights violations in Belarus with the need to avoid the latter's international isolation.

Lastly, Parliament states that it expects EU Member States not to weaken the EU action with bilateral initiatives with the Belarusian regime that undermine the credibility and effectiveness of the European foreign policy.