Resolution on Belarus (in particular the cases of Ales Mikhalevic and Natalia Radina)

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The European Parliament adopted a resolution on Belarus (in particular the cases of Ales Mikhalevic and Natalia Radina).

The resolution was tabled by the S&D, ALDE, Greens/EFA, EPP, and ECR groups.

The resolution highlights the cases of Ales Mikhalevich, a former presidential candidate mprisoned in the aftermath of the post-election protests, and only released after signing a commitment to collaborate with the Belarusian KGB, and Natalia Radina, editor of the opposition Charter 97 website, who was arrested in December 2010 and charged with organising and participating in mass unrest that followed the presidential elections. She too was released from the KGB pre-trial detention centre and then forbidden to leave her home town until the investigation into her case is completed. Both have given an account of the torture to which the political prisoners were subjected in order to coerce them to confess and accept evidence of their guilt.

Parliament condemns the lack of respect shown for the fundamental rights of freedom of assembly and of expression by the Belarusian authorities and condemns in the strongest terms the use of torture against prisoners as a form of inhuman treatment that is unequivocally forbidden in international law and is absolutely unacceptable in a European country that is one of the EU's closest neighbours. It denounces the climate of fear and intimidation faced by political opponents in Belarus, the repression of civil-society activists and the free media which followed election day, including mass searches of private apartments and offices of media outlets. It urges the Belarusian authorities to carry out a thorough and impartial investigation into allegations of torture of political prisoners and to identify and prosecute individuals involved in such practices.

Noting Council Decision 2011/69/CFSP concerning restrictive measures against certain officials of Belarus, Members call on the Council, the Commission, the EU High Representative and other EU partner countries to consider extending the restrictive measures to cover prosecutors, judges and KGB representatives connected to human rights abuses in Belarus unless the repression in that country is immediately brought to an end and considerable progress is made on human rights and fundamental freedoms. The Council should also examine the possibility of introducing smart and targeted economic sanctions on Belarusian government-owned companies. Parliament reiterates that, unless the Belarusian Government takes immediate steps towards democratisation and upholding human rights, the process of engagement between the EU and Belarus will be put on hold, including Belarus's participation in the Eastern Partnership. Furthermore, and despite the political consequences for EU-Belarus relations of the post-electoral clampdown on the opposition, the EU needs to intensify its assistance to Belarusian civil society, including in the form of visa facilitation.

Parliament goes on to condemn the decision taken by the Minsk City College of Lawyers to withdraw the licences of some of the lawyers of those accused in the criminal case brought on the charge of mass riot, and calls on the Minsk City College of Lawyers to revoke that decision. It also condemns the dismissal of the Chairman of the Minsk City Bar Association for expressing his concern about the ministry's decision to revoke the licences of four lawyers involved in a so-called riot case as unfounded and as proof that there is a real threat to the independence of the judiciary and to the independence of every individual lawyer.