Resolution on Belarus: the arrest of human rights defender Ales Bialatski

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The European Parliament adopted a resolution on Belarus: the arrest of human rights defender Ales Bialatski.

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

It strongly condemns the recent arrest of and allegations against Ales Bialiatski, Chair of the ‘Viasna’ Human Rights Centre, and the Belarusian authorities' failure to respect the fundamental rights of freedom of assembly and expression. It recalls that Bialiatski was arrested in Minsk on 4 August 2011 on the formal charge of large-scale tax evasion and indicted on 12 August 2011 under the Belarusian Criminal Code. Members deplore the fact that the Belarusian authorities consistently refuse to grant legal status to independent human rights organisations in the country, making it impossible for them to operate by introducing repressive laws intended to silence civil society activities, and then use the threat of criminal sanctions to intimidate human rights defenders. In this context, and given the unprecedented crackdown on civil society in Belarus following the presidential elections in December 2010, **Members believe that the criminal case against Ales Bialiatski is politically motivated and intended to obstruct his legitimate work** as a human rights defender. Accordingly, they call for **Ales Bialiatski to be immediately and unconditionally released from custody** and for the investigation and all the charges against him to be dropped.

Parliament calls on the Council, the Commission and the High Representative to **step up their pressure on the Belarusian authorities, further expanding the visa ban and asset freeze list** to include those involved in the arrest and prosecution of Ales Bialiatski. It stresses that potential EU engagement with Belarus should be subject to strict conditionality and made contingent on a commitment by Belarus to respect democratic standards, human rights and the rule of law, as stated in the Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit of 7 May 2009, which was co-signed by the Belarusian Government. In the light of the continuous, unprecedented repression of the opposition and civil society in Belarus, **the EU needs to support democracy-building in Belarus** and to find new ways to assist Belarusian civil society and the independent media in raising awareness among the public.

Members call on the Belarusian authorities:

- to repeal Article 193-1 of the Belarus Criminal Code, which prohibits the organisation of or participation in the activities of non-registered public associations, as this provision is at odds with international standards on freedom of association and represents a breach by Belarus of its OSCE and UN obligations;
- to comply with all the provisions of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and to ensure that democratic principles, human rights and fundamental freedoms are respected in all circumstances, in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and with the international and regional human rights instruments ratified by Belarus;
- to revise Belarusian law, in particular on freedom of association and freedom of expression, to bring it into line with international standards, and, in the meantime, to refrain from any further misuse of the law;
- to guarantee proper legal and medical assistance for all political prisoners and to release them immediately and unconditionally, clearing them of all charges and restoring their civil rights in full.

Lastly, Parliament calls on the Eastern Partnership Summit to be held in Warsaw on 28-29 September 2011 to increase assistance for and engage effectively with the Belarusian democratic opposition and civil society organisations in order to encourage and strengthen their efforts to secure democracy.