

Resolution the situation in Belarus after the parliamentary elections of 23 September 2012

2012/2815(RSP) - 26/10/2012 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution on the situation in Belarus after the parliamentary elections of 23 September 2012.

The resolution was tabled by the S&D, ECR, Greens/EFA, EPP, ALDE and GUE/NGL groups. It deeply regrets that the conduct of parliamentary elections in Belarus once again failed to meet many of the basic standards set by the OSCE, resulting – notwithstanding some minor improvements in the elections' legal framework – in unfair, non-free, non-transparent and unbalanced consultations. Parliament states that it is evident that with no democratic opposition candidates elected to the national parliament, and with many political prisoners still in jail, the Belarusian authorities ignored the numerous calls of the international community, and decided instead to take another step away from democracy and to further isolate their country.

Believing that the parliament elected in Belarus falls short of democratic legitimacy, the European Parliament will continue its policy of not recognising it, both in its bilateral relations with Belarus and within the framework of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly. Parliament regrets that the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly does not at this stage have grounds to invite the official representatives of the legislative body in Belarus to take their seats in the Assembly, and that their absence deprives the Eastern Partnership of an important tool for bringing Belarus closer to the EU's democratic values.

They urge the Belarusian authorities to:

review their actions, improve and upgrade the electoral legislation and conduct new, free and fair parliamentary elections in line with international standards;

immediately and unconditionally to release, and rehabilitate, all political prisoners, without coercing them into signing false confessions and pardon pleas, and to respect their own people by protecting their basic freedoms and allowing them to enjoy their basic rights.

Parliament calls on the Council and the Commission to support initiatives aimed at **developing Belarusian civil society**, which could result in increasing citizens' political participation, and raise awareness of the need for change. It stresses the need to create a **consistent and long-term programme of support and strengthening of Belarusian opposition organisations**, and to offer and expand the dialogue with Belarusian civil society, and believes that the attempt to empower Belarusian citizens is a vital milestone and the most effective way towards democracy and rule of law in Belarus.

It also calls on the Council, the Commission and the EEAS, as appropriate, to:

- continue the dialogue with – and devise a clearer policy vis-à-vis – Belarus, subject to strict positive conditionality based on a gradual step-by-step approach and equipped with benchmarks, timetables, a revision clause and adequate financial resources;
- take further steps, unilaterally if necessary, towards the facilitation and liberalisation of visa procedures for Belarusian citizens, as such action is crucial to fulfil the main goal of EU policy towards Belarus, namely to facilitate and intensify people-to-people contacts and to democratise the country;

- consider the scope for lowering the cost of visas for Belarusian citizens entering the Schengen Area, which is the only way to prevent Belarus and its citizens from becoming increasingly isolated. Members **deplore the foreign travel ban list** drafted by the Belarus Government that forbids several opponents and human rights activists from leaving the country;
- support, with 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;
- give increased attention to the protection of digital freedoms in Belarus which are enablers of other human rights, particularly freedom of expression and freedom of assembly;
- consider measures to improve the business climate, trade, investment, energy and transport infrastructure and cross-border cooperation between the EU and Belarus, so as to contribute to the well-being and prosperity of the citizens of Belarus, as well as their ability to communicate with and freely travel to the EU in this context.

EU Member States are asked to avoid using the existing visa procedures in ways that contradict or go against the Council and Commission's efforts to strengthen Belarusian civil society.

Furthermore, in the light of a number of recent incidents pertaining to cooperation between Belarusian and EU authorities, Members stress the need to improve the EU's internal cooperation and information-sharing significantly, and to refrain immediately from cooperating with the Belarusian authorities in the field of police training in order to prevent any further endangerment of Belarusian civil society activists.

Members go on to call on international sports organisations to take into account the human rights situation in the country when granting Belarusian authorities the honour to host high-profile international sports events, in order to apply pressure to the regime until it shows clear signs of its commitment to democratic principles and fundamental freedoms.

Recalling that Belarus is the only European country which still carries out capital punishment, Parliament urges Belarus to introduce an immediate moratorium on executions and to immediately announce a **moratorium on the death penalty** as a first step towards complete abolition.

Lastly, Parliament regrets the decision of the Belarusian authorities repeatedly, in the past couple of years, to **refuse entry visas to Members of the European Parliament** and to national parliamentarians, and calls on the Belarusian authorities not to create any further obstacles that prevent the European Parliament Delegation for relations with Belarus from visiting the country.