Resolution on Belarus

2018/2661(RSP) - 19/04/2018 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution on Belarus.

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

Members regretted the Belarusian authorities' **disproportionate reaction** to opposition activists' efforts to organise an unauthorised rally on the Freedom Day celebrations of 25 March 2018, which led to dozens of arrests, including of opposition leaders and former presidential candidates Mikalai Statkevich and Uladzimir Niakliaev. They stressed that any **serious backtracking** by Belarus in terms of democracy and respect for fundamental freedoms, including more detentions of political prisoners, should in each case **bring about a clear reaction from the EU** in its relations with Belarus.

Parliament recalled that Belarus held **local elections on 18 February 2018**, following the presidential elections in 2015 and the parliamentary elections in 2016. However, Belarus did not address the longstanding recommendations by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the Venice Commission in the field of electoral legislation and processes. According to foreign diplomatic and Belarusian observers, the local elections only reconfirmed the shortcomings noted.

Members called upon the Belarusian authorities to:

- release of Mikhail Zhamchuzhny and Dzmitry Paliyenka, two civil society activists currently detained for political reasons;
- resume work on **comprehensive electoral reforms**, as part of the broader democratisation process;
- lift restrictions and ease **registration procedures for political parties** in Belarus;
- allow all political parties to conduct **unrestricted political activities**, especially during election campaigns;
- repeal Article 193/1 of the Criminal Code of Belarus, which **criminalises** participation in the activities of unregistered organisations;
- engage in a constructive dialogue with the democratic opposition and with civil society organisations, with a view to guaranteeing citizens' freedoms and rights, in particular the right to association and a framework for free and independent media;
- abandon the amendments to the Law on the Media, which, if adopted, would threaten freedom of expression, and end the persecution of independent bloggers.

Members regretted that the current human rights dialogue is **not yielding concrete results** and urges the EU Special Representative for Human Rights to find ways to promote the full protection of human rights in Belarus;

Parliament went on to note that the EU lifted most of its restrictive measures against Belarusian officials in February 2016 as a gesture of goodwill designed to encourage Belarus to improve its records on human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Furthermore, Parliament has been supporting Belarusian civil society for years, by awarding the Sakharov Prize to the Belarusian Association of Journalists in 2004 and to Alaksandr Milinkievich in 2006, amongst other things.

Members called on the EEAS and the Commission to **continue support for civil society** organisations and find ways to consult with them about the ongoing EU-Belarus dialogue and negotiations.

Lastly, Parliament called for the **renewal of the mandate** of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus and invited the EU Special Representative for Human Rights to cooperate with the UN Special Rapporteur in order to improve the situation in the country.