Proposal for a Recommendation to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on relations with Belarus

2020/2081(INI) - 28/09/2020 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted an own-initiative report by Petras AUŠTREVIIUS (Renew, LT) on a European Parliament recommendation to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on relations with Belarus.

Members made a series of recommendations to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy:

Post-election situation

Members recommended supporting the decision of the EU and its Member States not to recognise the fraudulent election results announced by the Belarusian Central Electoral Commission and not to recognise Aliaksandr Lukashenko as the legitimate President of the country once his current term of office expires on 5 November 2020 at the latest, and to call on him to respect the will of the Belarusian people and resign peacefully.

The report called for recognition of the Coordinating Council (CC) initiated by Sviatlana Tsikhanukhaya as the legitimate representative of the people demanding democratic change and freedom in Belarus, insisting that the Belarusian regime should enter into dialogue with it. It also deplored the persecution of CC members and demanded that all legal actions taken by the authorities against them be dropped and that all detained and arrested persons be released.

Members also recommended:

- support the CC's efforts for a peaceful and democratic transition of power;

- an immediate end to violence, cruel repression, torture and repression against peaceful demonstrators;

- implementing sanctions agreed by EU Foreign Ministers and the European Council and to impose visa bans and financial sanctions, including the freezing of assets, against representatives of the regime, sanctioned persons and their family members;

- taking a stand in support of the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Belarus and reject any external interference by any third state, including Russia, in particular in the Belarusian state media and security forces;

- develop a comprehensive programme for Belarus after the new presidential elections and organise a donor conference for democratic Belarus to support future efforts to reform and restructure the economy.

Political situation in Belarus and human rights

Members recommended calling for free and fair elections to be held before a transparent and inclusive constitutional reform process is put in place, subject to public consultation with all relevant stakeholders in Belarusian society.

The report stressed the need to amend the national legislation of Belarus in order to ensure fundamental civil rights and freedoms, such as freedom of assembly, association, expression and opinion, as well as freedom of the media, compliance with international agreements and the OSCE Guidelines on Freedom of Peaceful Assembly.

It also called for condemnation of (i) the ongoing application of the death penalty in Belarus, (ii) the continued intimidation and persecution of human rights defenders, opposition figures, peaceful demonstrators and civil society activists, (iii) the persistent discrimination and stigmatisation against people with disabilities, people living with HIV, minorities, LGBTQI people and families of detainees throughout Belarus; (iii) the suppression of the Internet and the media and the intimidation and mass withdrawal of accreditations for journalists in order to stop the flow of information on the situation in the country.

Economic and sectoral cooperation

Members recommended reminding Belarus that the EU is its second largest trading partner and that intensified economic relations could provide a much-needed balance to Belarusian external trade, which remains highly dependent on Russia and the Eurasian Economic Union. They also stressed the importance of continuing the process of Belarus' accession to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) as it will encourage modernisation and diversification of the economy, contribute to the creation of a more stable business environment in the country and facilitate rules-based trade with the EU.

The report also stressed the importance of:

- expressing the EU's concern about widespread systemic corruption in Belarusian public institutions and state-owned enterprises;

- encouraging Belarus' energy diversification and the reduction of its dependence on Russia by importing oil and gas from new suppliers, including via the EU territory;

- encouraging Belarus to strengthen its environmental cooperation with the EU on green transformation, energy efficiency, sustainability and climate neutrality;

- exploring the possibilities of visa-free travel to Belarusian citizens so that people-to-people contacts are not held hostage to the undemocratic principles of the Belarusian authorities;

- supporting cross-border cooperation and movement between Belarus and neighbouring EU Member States;

- intensifying efforts to ensure that young people in Belarus can benefit from better-quality education through increased academic mobility and opportunities to study in the EU via the Erasmus+ programme.