Resolution on the prosecution of the opposition and the detention of trade union leaders in Belarus

2022/2664(RSP) - 19/05/2022 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution on the prosecution of the opposition and the detention of trade union leaders in Belarus.

The text adopted in plenary was tabled by the EPP, S&D, Renew, Greens/EFA, ECR groups and Members.

On 14 December 2021, leading Belarusian opposition figures Siarhei Tsikhanouski and Mikola Statkevich, laureates of the European Parliament's 2020 Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought, and Ihar Losik, Artsyom Sakau, Uladzimir Tsyhanovich and Dzmitry Papou were sentenced to long prison terms on trumped-up charges of trying to seize power, inciting hatred and social unrest, and extremism. Siarhei Tsikhanouski, who was arrested in May 2020 after announcing his intention to run for the presidency against Belarus's long-time dictator Aliaksandr Lukashenka and has remained in detention ever since, was sentenced to 18 years in prison.

Furthermore, at least 18 trade union leaders and representatives of Belarus's independent trade union movement were arrested on 19 April 2022 and charged under Article 342 of the Criminal Code related to the organisation and preparation of actions that grossly violate public order or active participation in such actions, thereby leading either to arrest, deprivation of liberty for two to five years or imprisonment of up to four years.

In the past two months, attacks on trade union activists and leaders have intensified, primarily in relation to many of them having stood up against Belarus's support for the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, as well as their long-standing support for democracy and opposition to the Lukashenka regime.

On 4 May 2022, the Council of the Republic approved an amendment to Article 289 of the Criminal Code, introducing the death penalty for '**attempted acts of terrorism**', a move going against the global trend of abandoning the death penalty, while more than 30 political prisoners have been charged or sentenced to long prison terms under the same provision of the Criminal Code and other representatives of the democratic opposition or political activists are wanted on 'terrorism' charges. Belarus is the only country in Europe to still carry out capital punishment.

The Belarusian authorities have closed down at least 275 civil society and human rights organisations and blocked several independent media outlets over war reporting, citing the spread of 'extremist materials' and 'false information'.

Parliament reaffirmed its solidarity with the people of Belarus who continue to stand up for a sovereign, free and democratic Belarus, risking their freedom and more and more frequently their lives, and demanded the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners and all persons arbitrarily detained, arrested or sentenced on politically motivated grounds, and for all charges against them to be dropped, as well as for their full rehabilitation and financial compensation for damages incurred due to their illegitimate detention.

Condemning the recent arrest and detention of trade union leaders and representatives by the Belarusian authorities, the Commission is called on to to **enhance capacity-building support** to Belarus'

independent trade unions, free media, civil society, and pro-democracy activists both in Belarus and in exile.

The resolution called for the organisation of **new free and fair elections** under international observation by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

The Belarusian authorities are called on to:

- immediately abolish the death penalty in perpetuity;

- immediately and unconditionally release all trade union leaders and representatives who have been detained and to drop all charges against them;

- put an end to the intimidation of independent trade union leaders and activists and to the disruption of the functioning of independent trade unions in Belarus;

- remove all impediments, of both a legal and practical nature, to the organisation of, and participation in, independent trade unions;

- lift all restrictions in law and practice that impede the right to strike and demonstrate and to re-establish immediately the legal status of the independent trade unions.

Russian military aggression against Ukraine

Parliament expressed deep concern about the risks posed by Belarus abandoning its neutrality, hosting Russian armed forces and conducting joint military exercises. It noted Russia's increased role in Belarus, including its financial influence, which raises serious doubts about Belarus's ability to make sovereign decisions.

Members are also appalled by the support provided by the Lukashenka regime for Russia's unprovoked war in Ukraine, including through the so-called referendum that reinstates the country's nuclear status, but also by allowing the movement of troops and weapons, the usage of the country's airspace, refuelling and the storage of military ammunition. They firmly condemned the Russian military's use of Belarusian territory. They considered **Belarus to be jointly responsible for the attack**, bearing all the legal consequences deriving from international law.

Parliament called on the Member States and the Commission to ensure that the necessary measures are in place to strengthen resilience to all forms of foreign interference that could be perpetrated by Lukashenka' s regime, including, but not limited to, cyberattacks and disinformation in the context of Russia's ongoing aggression against Ukraine. It also called for increased direct support to the Belarusian opposition, civil society, human rights defenders, trade union representatives and independent media organisations within and outside Belarus.