Resolution on further repression against the people of Belarus, in particular the cases of Andrzej Poczobut and Ales Bialiatski

2023/2573(RSP) - 15/03/2023 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 557 votes to 25, with 40 abstentions, a resolution on further repression against the people of Belarus, in particular the cases of Andrzej Poczobut and Ales Bialiatski.

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

Ever since peaceful protests broke out after the massively falsified presidential election of 9 August 2020, the Lukashenka regime has been continuing its acts of repression against the people of Belarus, with civil society representatives, human rights defenders, journalists, opposition activists and many others being harassed, persecuted, arrested, tortured and convicted for expressing opposition to the regime, to the systematic human rights violations or to the regime's support for Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

As of March 2023, there were more than 1 450 people on the list the Viasna Human Rights Centre keeps of Belarusian political prisoners, including the Sakharov Prize and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Ales Bialiatski. Andrzej Poczobut, a journalist and a member of the Union of Poles in Belarus, was arrested on 18 March 2021, and later sentenced to three years in prison on charges of 'publicly insulting the President of Belarus' and 'inciting ethnic hatred'. The charges against Andrzej Poczobut and Ales Bialiatski are widely considered to be politically motivated and aimed at silencing independent voices and suppressing freedom of expression and association.

Moreover, the Lukashenka regime has taken increasingly repressive measures against the national minorities in Belarus, in particular the Polish and Lithuanian minorities, including the closure of schools teaching in the national minority languages, as well as measures against the organisations representing these minorities, such as the Union of Poles in Belarus.

Members reiterated their solidarity with the people of Belarus who continue to stand up for a sovereign, free and democratic Belarus, risking their freedom and their lives. They demand an immediate end to the repression by state authorities against the people of Belarus, 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.

Parliament denounced the detention and sentencing of Andrzej Poczobut and the sentencing of Ales Bialiatski, Valiantsin Stefanovich, Zmitser Salauyou and Uladzimir Labkovich, as they highlight the regime's efforts to suppress all civic engagement for the defence of human rights and all independent journalistic work in the country. The resolution called for their **immediate and unconditional release**, as well as their full rehabilitation and compensation.

Parliament called on the Belarusian authorities to:

- respect the human rights obligations of all Belarusian citizens, including the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and association;

- immediately commute all death sentences and establish an immediate moratorium on the use of the death penalty, as the first step towards its full and permanent abolition;

- end discrimination against women and vulnerable groups, including persons belonging to minorities, persons with disabilities and LGBTQI persons.

As for the EU and Member States, Parliament called for:

- strengthened EU sanctions against individuals and entities responsible for the repression in Belarus;

- enhanced capacity-building support to Belarus's civil society, free media, independent trade unions, and prodemocracy activists both in Belarus and in exile;

- support and protection to human rights defenders and civil society in Belarus who are facing a severe crackdown, including by issuing emergency visas to leave Belarus if needed.

The Commission is called on to establish a task force that will open a policy dialogue with the representatives of democratic Belarus in order to work on a comprehensive multisectoral agreement that will be the foundation of cooperation with a democratic Belarus, once the current regime is no longer in power. This should be coupled with a financial and administrative resource plan, which should be implemented in order to carry out and finance the necessary reforms in the country once this is possible.

Lastly, Members expressed serious concerns about the nuclear safety situation at the Belarusian Nuclear Power Plant and Belarus's plans to further expand its nuclear capacities.