Relations with Belarus

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The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted an own-initiative report by Petras AUŠTREVIIUS (Renew, LT) on relations with Belarus.

Belarusian society continues to be exposed to systemic human rights violations and crimes against humanity committed by the Lukashenko regime. More than 1 500 people are still imprisoned for political reasons, and around 300 000 Belarusian citizens have fled the country because of persecution or fear of persecution.

Continuous repression by the Lukashenka regime and EU support for repressed persons

The report condemned in the strongest terms the unabated repression and the systematic and widespread human rights violations continuously committed by the Lukashenka regime, including manifold cases of mistreatment and torture, as well as the incommunicado detention of and inadequate medical assistance provided to political prisoners and other persons prosecuted on politically motivated grounds, such as journalists, human rights defenders, independent trade union activists and others.

Members demanded that the Lukashenka regime end this spiral of violence, torture, repression and propaganda against dissenting voices and perceived critics, immediately and unconditionally release all political prisoners and all persons arbitrarily detained, declare a universal amnesty for all those arrested on political grounds since 2020 and enable the peaceful transfer of power after the organisation of free and fair elections.

The report called on the Commission and the Member States to continue enabling human rights defenders, lawyers and civil society organisations to provide services to political prisoners and their families, particularly social aid, healthcare and public defence.

Involvement of the Lukashenka regime in Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine

The report condemned in the strongest possible terms the Lukashenka regime's involvement in Russia's war aggression against Ukraine It condemned, in this regard, the regime's massive provision of ammunition and military hardware to the Russian aggressors, particularly the manufacture of components for the Russian military, as well as the stationing of Russian troops in Belarus and their training by Belarusian instructors, the welcoming of Russia's illegal and state-sponsored terrorist organisation the Wagner Group and the threat to join the aggression.

Noting that the vast majority of Belarusians disapprove of this multifaceted involvement in Russia's war of aggression, Members expressed their full support for the Belarusian activists who are resisting the aggressors within Belarus.

The report denounced the illegal transfer of more than 2 150 children, including orphans, from Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine to so-called recreational camps in Belarus, where they are subjected to Russification and indoctrination. While supporting Ukrainian prosecutors' investigation into the role of Belarus in the forced deportations, Members consider Lukashenka as responsible for these war crimes as Vladimir Putin and Maria Lvova-Belova and therefore called on the ICC to consider issuing a similar international warrant for Lukashenka's arrest.

By enabling Russia's unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine, the Lukashenka regime has become an accomplice in the crimes committed by Russia, which implies responsibility for the destruction and damage caused to Ukraine. The report called, therefore, for the EU institutions and the Member States to take all the actions necessary to enable the criminal prosecution of Belarusian officials who are complicit in the crime of aggression, war crimes, crimes against humanity and crimes of genocide committed against Ukraine.

Members called for Russia and Belarus to be put on the EU's high-risk third-country list regarding combating money laundering and the financing of terrorism.

The International Olympic Committee and other international sports federations are urged not to allow athletes from Belarus and Russia, many of whom support or have even participated in Russia's unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine, to compete in the Paris 2024 Olympic Games or any other international sports events.

Sovereignty of Belarus and protection of its language and national culture

Members regretted the fact that Belarus has become a satellite state of Russia and condemned the actions of the two regimes, which might lead to the eventual absorption and annexation of Belarus by Russia. They condemned the deployment of Russian tactical nuclear weapons under Russian command on Belarusian territory, in blatant violation of Belarus's nuclear-free status.

The report called for the EU and the Member States to maintain unity in addressing the multifaceted threats posed by the regime of Aliaksandr Lukashenka to the EU, in particular the continued and growing state-engineered instrumentalisation of migration. It strongly condemned the use of migration for political ends by the Belarusian authorities and sees this as a purposefully orchestrated reprisal by the Lukashenka regime against EU Member States' for their support for the democratic forces of Belarus.

Members reminded all EU businesses operating in Belarus of its previous call to exercise particular diligence and uphold their responsibility to respect human rights. They expressed solidarity with the Belarusians seeking to protect and nurture their national identity, particularly through efforts to spread the use of the Belarusian language. They also urged the Belarusian regime to end its discrimination and violence against all minorities, in particular ethnic, religious and sexual minorities.

Support for democracy and European aspirations

Belarus has historical ties with the rest of Europe and shares the heritage of European culture and identity. It should remain a part of the European political, cultural and economic space. Members support the declarations about the European aspirations of Belarusians made by the leaders of Belarusian democratic political parties. They called for the EU institutions and Member States to develop a more ambitious and comprehensive strategy, coupled with a broad economic plan, that would provide support for the Belarusian democratic forces with a view to fostering a democratic transition in the country and upholding Belarus's independence and sovereignty.

The report also stressed the need to:

- improve EU communication with the people in Belarus to provide them with information and counter disinformation and propaganda by the state-controlled media;

- simplify the procedures for obtaining visas and residence permits for those fleeing Belarus for political reasons;

- continue and broaden support for the cultural and educational activities of Belarusian civil society and academic institutions, including those aimed at supporting the Belarusian language and the independent media;

- establish an operational dialogue with the representatives of the democratic forces of Belarus to bring to a successful conclusion the work on the adoption of a roadmap for implementing the economic and investment package of EUR 3 billion already planned by the Commission to meet the democratic aspirations of the Belarusian people.