# EU/Belarus relations: prospects for a future partnership

2002/2164(INI) - 23/01/2003

The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Pedro MARSET CAMPOS (EUL/NGL, E) on relations between Belarus and the EU. Concerned at the increasing isolation into which Belarus is sinking, the committee issued an appeal to the authorities of that country to make economic and political reforms so that a partnership and cooperation agreement can be finalised with the EU. Echoing the view - reiterated by Parliament since 1996 - that no bilateral agreement should be signed until the Belarus authorities show they have a clear intention of respecting human rights, the report criticised the authoritarian course charted by President Lukashenko and attacked the repressive policies of his regime. The Belarus authorities were urged to restore the procedures for guaranteeing respect for human rights and freedoms, including freedom of religion and freedom of the press, and the principles governing the rule of law. MEPs also called for the abolition of the death penalty. The report issued an appeal to the government of Belarus to urgently address the issue of giving meaningful powers to the national Parliament. It also called on the people of Belarus to participate in the forthcoming local elections in March 2003, which were important for the country's return to democracy. The Belarus Government was urged to allow international observers to scrutinise those elections. The committee expressed concern at the increasing impoverishment of the population as a result of bad economic management and called on the country's authorities to move towards a market economy and create a more favourable environment for foreign investment. It also stressed that the resumption of dialogue between the EU and Belarus - suspended since 1996 - was in the interests of both parties in that it could help guarantee stability and security in that part of Europe. It was particularly important now that enlargement was drawing ever closer. MEPs also reaffirmed their support for the humanitarian aid programmes for victims of the Chernobyl disaster, which has affected 30% of the territory of Belarus, and wanted more funds to be allocated to them. Lastly, they stressed that, for reasons of consistency and credibility, the EU must apply the same political, social and economic conditions to its relations with each of the other CIS Member States as it applies vis-à-vis Belarus.