EU/Belarus relations: prospects for a future partnership

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The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report drafted by Pedro MARSET CAMPOS (EUL/NGL, Spain) on the deteriorating conditions in Belarus. (Please refer to the document dated 23/01/03.) Parliament condemned the regime's indiscriminate attacks on the media, journalists, members of the opposition, human rights activists and any person criticising the President and the regime. There are arbitrary arrests, ill-treatment of detainees, disappearances, politically motivated persecution and other acts of repression that flout the basic principles of democracy and the rule of law. The Belarus authorities must implement the economic reforms needed for transition from an obsolete centrally planned economy to a market economy. They must also establish a legal framework that is more conducive to foreign investment in view of the increasing impoverishment of large swathes of Belarus society, which are suffering the effects of poor economic management. Parliament urged various bodies to play their parts: - the Commission is asked to develop a specific strategy within its 'Wider Europe' proposal for democratisation and the development of a social market economy in Belarus. This strategy should be based on positive results of the TACIS programme in Belarus. - the EU and its Member States should step up contacts with reform-minded forces in all areas of Belarus society (NGOs, churches, entrepreneurs, trade unions, cultural, university and economic spheres and non-governmental human rights organisations) and with the democratic opposition parties, and provide them with assistance and support; - Russia could exert a moderating influence on the Minsk Government, encouraging it to embrace democratic change, given the strong historical, cultural, economic and political ties between these two countries. This issue should be raised during the regular political dialogue with Russia, so that the most appropriate course of action can be identified. The formation of a union between Russia and an undemocratic Belarus would be contradictory; - the Troika should pursue its joint efforts to bring a favourable influence to bear on moves to restore democracy in Belarus, since at present it is the only body through which communication with the Lukashenko regime is possible; - the Commission is asked to initiate an official investigation into freedom of association in Belarus and, on the basis of this investigation, if necessary, to implement the procedures for temporary withdrawal of GSP trade preferences provided for in Regulation 2820/98/EC; - understanding and knowledge of the EU is important. The Commission is asked to promote the broadcasting of television or radio programmes from neighbouring candidate countries, such as Lithuania and Poland, which could be received throughout Belarus territory.