Resolution on the situation in Belarus

2004/2575(RSP) - 16/09/2004 - Text adopted by Parliament, topical subjects

The European Parliament adopted by 499 votes to 20 with 26 abstentions a resolution on Belarus.

The resolution had been tabled by the PES, GUE/NGL, Greens/ALE, EPP-ED, ALDE, and UEN groups.

Parliament notes that the situation in Belarus has further deteriorated to a situation where human rights are violated with contempt, the Lower House is deprived of its legislative rights, and economic life is ruled by the President. It strongly condemns the Belarus regime's indiscriminate attacks on the media, journalists, members of the opposition, human rights activists and any person who attempts freely to voice criticism of the President and the regime, as manifested through 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. Members call on the Belarus authorities to guarantee that the parliamentary elections of 17 October 2004 will be free, fair, equal, accountable and transparent and to ensure that the Parliament thus elected is given meaningful powers. They reject as undemocratic the steps undertaken to eliminate major democratic opposition parties, including making the Labour Party illegal and the official "warning" given to the Belarusian National Front, which may be the first step towards its “delegalisation”.

The resolution calls upon the people of Belarus to participate in the forthcoming parliamentary elections. It strongly urges the central election committee to provide all political movements in the country with equal access to the committee and the same chances to field candidates. Parliament appeals to the Belarus government to allow international observers to monitor the elections in order to guarantee that they are carried out in a free and fair manner. It recognises the great importance of these elections for the reestablishment of democracy in Belarus and the reintegration of Belarus within the international democratic community.

Members emphasise once again that the further development of EU relations with Belarus will continue to depend on the progress made towards democratisation and reform in the country. They call on the EU Council Presidency to press the Belarus authorities to allow a delegation from the European Parliament to be sent to Belarus to observe the elections on 17 October 2004 and to create the conditions for independent observation. Parliament urges the Commission to make the most of the current spontaneous "people to people" exchange programmes between Belarusian communities of Chernobyl children and some municipalities in EU Member States. It calls, in this connection, for the creation of a dedicated framework through which to support those Belarus municipalities sincerely committed to democratic values.

Noting that President Lukashenko has decided that a referendum will be held at the same time as the election asking for the removal of an article in the constitution that limits the presidential term to a maximum of two consecutive periods of five years in office, Parliament considers President Lukashenko's attempts to seek an extension of his presidential term by referendum as a further confirmation of the authoritarian way in which he rules the country. It urges President Lukashenko to respect the conditions of the Belarus Constitution as regards the maximum term of office for the President of the Republic and to refrain from holding a referendum on this issue.

Parliament goes on to express its deepest concern at the at the decision of the Belarusian authorities to revoke the licence to operate as a legal entity of the internationally recognised European Humanities University in Minsk, which is a well-structured academic institution which has developed significant cultural cooperation activities with EU countries and embodies the principles of academic freedom and

teaching autonomy. It expresses similar concern at the closure of the Jakub Kolas school, the only secondary school where all courses were taught in the Belarusian language. The Belarus authorities are asked to stop the harassment of all educational institutions in the country and to respect the basic principles of academic freedom, teaching autonomy and tolerance in education.