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Belarus

Greens/EFA motion for resolution

Tabled by ***Rebecca Harms, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, Elisabeth Schroedter, Werner Schulz, Barbara Lochbiler*** *and* ***Heidi Hautala***
On behalf of the Greens/EFA Group

The European Parliament,

 having regard to its previous resolutions on Belarus,

 having regard to the GAERC Conclusions on Belarus of 17th November 2009 further extending the restrictive measures provided for by Common Position 2006/276 CFSP while suspending their application until October 2010,

_ having regard to the Declaration by the European Council on the Eastern Partnership;19-20 March 2009 and to the Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit held in Prague on 7th May 2009

_ having regard to the EU statement in the OSCE on death penalty in Belarus of 29th October 2009,

 having regard to Rule 110(2) of its Rules of Procedure,

A. whereas the Council in its conclusion of 17 November 2009 recognises opening of new possibilities for dialogue and deepened cooperation between the EU and Belarus with the aim of fostering genuine progress towards democracy and respect for human rights, and reaffirms its readiness to deepen the relations with Belarus subject to further progress towards democracy, human rights and the rule of law and to assist the country in attaining these objectives,

B. whereas some positive steps, such as the release of most political prisoners, took place since October 2008 while at the same time concerns remain on the insufficient progress on the freedom of expression, of assembly and political association,

C. whereas the International Federation of Journalists in collaboration with several international NGOs based on its report of the fact-finding mission in Minsk (20 - 24 September 2009) has not observed any significant progress in the area of the media freedom in Belarus,

D. whereas Belarus participation in the Eastern Partnership must include both the stepping-up of cooperation between the country and the EU at institutional level and its people-to-people dimension; whereas at the first meeting between EU foreign affairs ministers and the six Eastern Partnership countries Belarus' foreign minister declared that there is an important potential in this initiative but there is the need to speed up project activities,

E. whereas Belarus committed itself to consider the recommendations made by OSCE/ODIHR regarding improvements to its electoral law in order to bring in into line with international standards for democratic elections and to consult the proposed amendments with the OSCE, whereas the National Assembly of Belarus has recently passed a reform of the Electoral Code without prior consultation of the OSCE,

F. whereas Belarus remains the sole European country still using the death penalty, whereas new death sentences were pronounced in recent months,

G. whereas in response to the first encouraging steps taken by Belarus, the Commission has already entered into an intensified dialogue with that country in fields such as energy, the environment, customs, transport and food safety and confirmed its readiness to further expand the scope of those talks,

H. whereas on 30 November the Italian Prime Minister paid an official visit to Belarus thus being the first EU head of government to go to Minsk over the last 10 years; whereas during this visit the Italian Prime Minister with his statements legitimised the elections that brought to power Lukashenko and failed to meet with the representatives of the opposition,

1. Takes note of the decision of the Council to extend the restrictive measures against certain Belarusian officials and at the same time to maintain the suspension of the application of travel restrictions imposed on certain officials of Belarus for a twelve-month period;
2. Stresses that the increased political dialogue and the establishment of Human Rights Dialogue between the EU and Belarus must lead to concrete results and substantial progress in the fields of democratic reforms and the respect for human rights and the rule of law;
3. Supports the decision by the Council to launch negotiations on visa facilitation with Belarus and considers this a fundamental step with a view to stepping-up people-to-people contacts and facilitate relations between local communities and municipalities;
4. Considers Belarus participation in Eastern Partnership an important step forward with a view to promoting further dialogue and deepening relations on the basis of Belarus' readiness and commitment to attain the objectives of this initiative; takes note, in this regard, of the willingness to cooperate shown by the Belarus' authorities during the talks;
5. Notes that the Council invited the Commission to make a proposal for a joint interim plan to set priorities for reforms, inspired by the Action Plans developed in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy, to be implemented with Belarus;
6. Takes the view, in this respect that the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the EU and Belarus, on freeze since 1997, should be unblocked once all the political reforms have been completed and implemented;
7. Regrets that, after some initial limited positive steps undertaken by the Belarus government, no further progress took place in area of human rights and fundamental freedoms; expresses its concern, in this respect, at the continued repression against political opponents, artists and journalists and the refusal to register political parties, NGOs and independent media;
8. Calls on the Belarusian authorities to review the restricted freedom sentences imposed on participants of peaceful demonstration in January 2008 as well as the case of imprisonment of Mr. Artsyom Dubski, who are according to the Amnesty International prisoners of conscience; calls for the immediate release of entrepreneurs Mikalai Awtukhovich and Uladzimir Asipenka held in the pre-trial detention for 8 months;
9. Firmly condemns the reiterated use of the death penalty in Belarus and points out that this runs

counter to the statements by the Belarusian authorities during the past years to gradually restrict the capital punishment; calls on Belarus to introduce a moratorium on the use of the death penalty with a view to its abolition; expects that this issue will be efficiently tackled in the framework of the recently established Human Rights Dialogue between Belarus and the EU;

10. Insists that a clear and significant progress on the way to democratisation must be achieved within the next year in order for the sanctions to be completely lifted and that the conditions for full re-engagement with Belarus should be:
    - the respect for freedom of expression, association and assembly and the release of all remaining political prisoners;
    - freedom of registration for political parties and creation of favourable conditions for operation of NGOs and independent media,
    - meaningful changes to the electoral law in line with the OSCE/ODIHR recommendations that ensure free, fair and transparent local elections in Spring 2010 including access to the media for all the political parties during the campaign;
11. Calls on the Commission to make full and effective use of the possibilities to support civil society and democratic developments in Belarus via the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights and stresses at the same time that the support for democratic opposition must be an integral part of the gradual re-engagement process with Belarus;
12. Stresses that the visit of the Italian Prime Minister to Minsk has undermined the consistency and the coherence of the EU common policy towards Belarus; calls, in this respect, on the Member States to improve the coordination of their actions towards this country and to step up consultation before taking important bilateral initiatives with Belarus;

13. Takes note of the efforts and achievements to counter the effects of the financial and economic crisis and boosting the economic sector by easing investment barriers, reforming property rights and the private sector;

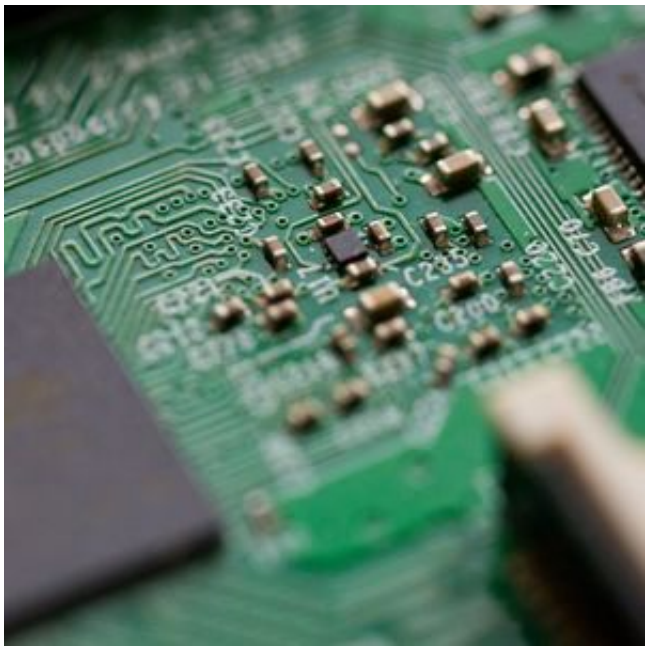
14. Stresses that efforts against corruption, measures for more transparency and the strengthening of the rule of law, which are fundamental for more foreign investments, are not sufficient;

15. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the parliaments and governments of the Member States, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the Parliamentary Assemblies of the OSCE and the Council of Europe, the Secretariat of the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Parliament and Government of Belarus.

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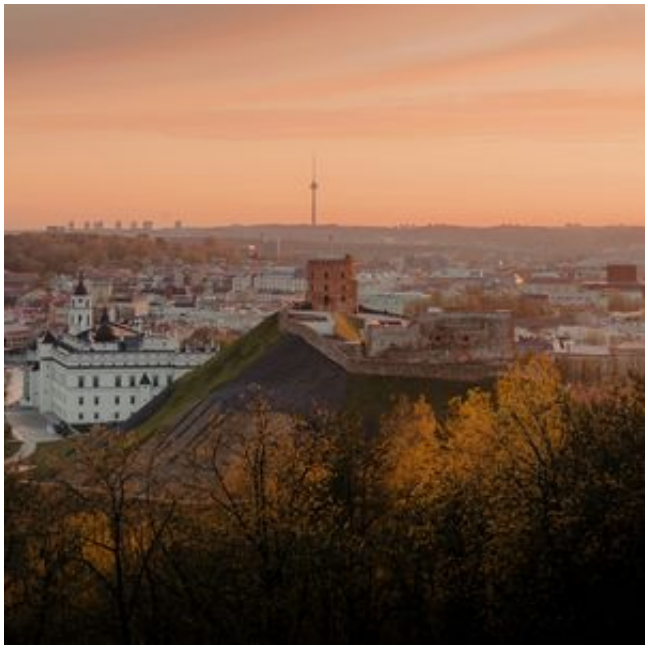
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