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EU strategy towards Belarus

Greens/EFA motion for a resolution

Tabled by ***Elisabeth Schroedter, Hélène Flautre and Milan Horá?ek***

on behalf of the Greens/EFA Group

The European Parliament,

 having regard to its previous resolutions on the situation in Belarus, in particular that of 9 October 2008,

 having regard to theDeclaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on Council Common Position 2008/844/CFSP of 10 November 2008 amending Common Position 2006/276/CFSP concerning restrictive measures against certain officials of Belarus,

 having regard to the OSCE/ODIHR final report on the parliamentary elections held in Belarus on 28 September 2008,

 having regard to the Council conclusions of 13 October 2008 on Belarus,

 having regard to the report on the visit by the Delegation for relations with Belarus to Vilnius from 27 to 29 October 2008,

 having regard to the Commission declaration of 21 November 2006 on the European Union's readiness to renew its relationship with Belarus and its people within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP),

 having regard to Rule 103(2) of its Rules of Procedure,

A. whereas the Council, in its conclusions of 13 October 2008, confirmed hopes of a gradual re-engagement with Belarus and its readiness to develop a dialogue with the Belarusian authorities, and with all those participating in the democratic debate, with the aim of fostering genuine progress towards strengthening democracy and respect for human rights in that country,

B. whereas, in order to foster dialogue with the Belarusian authorities and the adoption of positive measures to strengthen democracy and respect for human rights, the Council has decided that the travel restrictions imposed on certain leading figures in Belarus, with the exception of those involved in the disappearances which occurred in 1999 and 2000 and of the President of the Central Electoral Commission, will not apply for a period of six months which may be renewed,

C. whereas, in response to the positive 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 technical talks, which are beneficial for both sides,

D. whereas the Commission has launched the 'Eastern Partnership Initiative' to step up cooperation with the eastern European countries that are part of the European Neighbourhood Policy, including Belarus subject to fulfilment by that country of specific criteria relating to democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law,

E. whereas Belarus has shown an interest in the Eastern Partnership project, and whereas Belarus is the only European country which has no contractual relations with the EU,

F. whereas the Belarusian authorities have imposed a one-year 'restricted freedom' sentence on opposition activist Alyaksandr Barazenka in response to his role in a demonstration held in 2008,

1. Supports the efforts by the Council and Commission to re-open dialogue with the Belarus authorities; takes the view that the future development of relations must be subject to strict positive conditionality based on a gradual, step-by-step approach, incorporating benchmarks, timetables and a revision clause and drawing on adequate financial resources; expresses the hope that Belarus will quickly meet all the conditions that will enable the country to benefit from all the opportunities offered by and play an active role in the development of the European Neighbourhood Policy;

2. Welcomes the decision by the Belarusian authorities to register the 'For Freedom' movement headed by former Belarusian presidential candidate Aliaksandr Milinkevich and expects the Belarusian authorities to register the Human Rights Centre 'Vesna';

3. Takes note of the decision by the Belarusian authorities to allow the printing and distribution of the two independent newspapers, *Narodnaia Volia* and *Nasha Niva*, and to discuss international Internet media standards; hopes that suitable conditions will also be created for the work of other independent media in Belarus;

4. Takes note of Belarus' readiness to discuss in detail the OSCE/ODIHR recommendations regarding improvements to the electoral law and looks forward to the start of such talks;

5. Points out that, if relations between the EU and Belarus are to be fully normalised, it is essential that Belarus remains a country which has no political prisoners, respects freedom of expression, association and assembly and improves the conditions under which non-governmental organisations can work;

6. Welcomes the decision by Belarus to lift a travel ban on a number of children living near the failed Chernobyl nuclear plant;

7. Urges the Belarusian Government to make substantial changes to the Belarus Penal Code by abolishing Articles 193, 367, 368 and 369-1, some of which, in particular Article 193, are often misused as a means of repression, and to refrain from threatening with criminal prosecution, including for avoiding military service in Belarus, those students who have been expelled from universities for their civic stance and obliged to continue their studies abroad;

8. Calls on the Council and Commission to take further steps to simplify and liberalise visa procedures for Belarusian citizens, as such action is crucial to fulfilling the main goal of EU policy towards Belarus, namely that of facilitating and intensifying people-to-people contacts and democratising the country; urges

the Council and Commission, in this context, to consider the scope for reducing the cost of visas for Belarusian citizens entering the Schengen Area, which is the only way to prevent Belarus and its citizens from becoming increasingly isolated; calls on the Belarusian authorities to end their practice of issuing exit visas to their citizens, in particular children and students;

9. Calls on the Council and Commission to consider applying the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument and the European Instrument for Human Rights and Democracy to Belarus selectively by extending more support to Belarusian civil society and, in particular, to increase financial aid to the independent media, NGOs and Belarusian students studying abroad; welcomes the financial support given by the Commission to the Belarusian 'European Humanities University' in exile in Vilnius (Lithuania); calls on the Council and Commission to urge the Belarusian Government, as a sign of goodwill and positive change, to enable the 'European Humanities University' in exile in Vilnius to return legally to Belarus and re-establish itself under conditions suitable for its future development in Minsk; calls on the Council and Commission to grant financial support to the independent Belarusian television channel Belsat;

10.Calls on the Council and Commission, in this context, to consider measures to improve the business climate, trade, investment, energy and transport infrastructure and cross-border cooperation between the EU and Belarus, so as to contribute to the well-being and prosperity of the citizens of Belarus and enhance their ability to communicate with and freely travel to the EU;

11.Deplores the repeated decisions by the Belarusian authorities over the last couple of years to refuse entry visas to Members of the European Parliament and national parliamentarians; calls on the Belarusian authorities not to create any further obstacles which serve to prevent its Delegation for relations with Belarus from visiting the country;

12.Welcomes the approach taken so far by the Belarusian authorities, despite enormous pressure, of not recognising the unilateral declarations of independence issued by South Ossetia and Abkhazia;

13.Points out that Belarus is the only country in Europe which still has the death penalty and calls on the Minsk authorities to abolish a practice that runs counter to European values;

14.Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the governments and parliaments 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 Community of Independent States and the Government and Parliament of Belarus.

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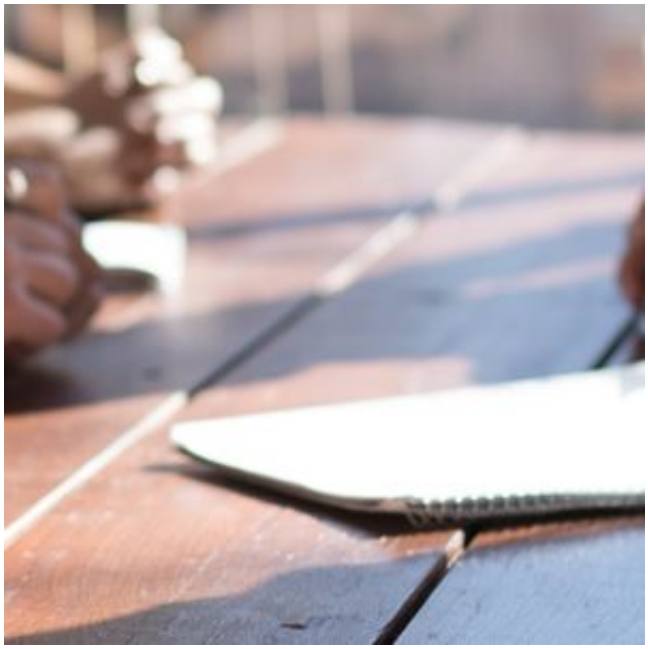

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