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Situation in Belarus

Greens/EFA motion for a resolution

Tabled by Elisabeth Schroedter, Joost Lagendijk and Marie Anne Isler Béguin

on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group

The European Parliament,

☐ having regard to its previous resolutions,

☐ having regard to the European Neighbourhood Policy, which aims to extend peace and stability to countries bordering the EU, with a view to closer cooperation and to sharing the values of democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights and civil liberties,

☐ having regard to the OSCE's 1999 Istanbul summit declaration,

☐ having regard to the declaration by the Dutch Presidency on behalf of the EU on the revoking of the licence of the European University in Minsk by the Belarusian authorities,

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

A. having regard to the forthcoming elections of the lower chamber of the Parliament in Belarus, which will take place on 17 October,

B. whereas alongside the parliamentary elections a referendum will be held on allowing President Alexander Lukashenko to stand again for the presidency and amending the constitution to remove the limit of two terms for presidents,

C. pointing out that, according to international observers, the previous elections fell short in a number of areas including pluralistic representation of election bodies, restrictive procedures for the election of candidates and excessive regulation of campaign activities, and that there is a real fear that the voting will not be conducted fairly this time either,

D. pointing out the willingness for cooperation with the OSCE shown by the Belarusian authorities in December 2003 in the form of their agreement to an extension of the mandate of the OSCE Office in Minsk until 31 December 2004,

E. welcoming the invitation by President Alexander Lukashenko for the ODIHR to monitor the election process,

F. stressing the importance of the four criteria established in 2000 by the Parliamentary Troika as the benchmarks for democratic elections and the main conditions for the democratisation process in Belarus, which include transparency of the election process, access for opponents to the State-run mass media, non-discrimination against political opponents, and meaningful functions and powers for the parliamentary body,

G. highlighting the widespread human rights violations which have taken place in recent years, as pointed out by the OSCE and other international bodies, under the rule of Lukashenko, with his strict control of the State apparatus, the secret services, the judiciary, the mass media and law enforcement bodies,

H. deeply worried by the recent series of repressive acts against the opposition, including searches of offices, arrests of participants at rallies in Minsk and Grodno, and the renewal of criminal proceedings against the head of the United Civic Party for slandering Lukashenko,

I. extremely concerned 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 remarkable example of academic freedom and the pursuit of true European values in teaching and research programmes, with dire consequences for the academic future of hundreds of students and teachers,

J. having regard to the resolution of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe of 28 May which acknowledged evidence of involvement of top State officials in the abduction and alleged assassination of leading opposition figures in 1999,

K. stressing the increasing political isolation of Belarus, the only Eastern European country with which the EU has not yet signed a partnership and cooperation agreement,

L. underlining the fact that Belarus is included in the European Neighbourhood Policy, but at present is not benefiting from the offer of increased cooperation owing to the lack of democracy and the rule of law in the country, despite the hope of Belarusian citizens for increased cooperation with the European Union,

M. pointing out the sluggish economic situation, with part of the country still suffering from the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster,

1. 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;

2. Expresses, nevertheless, its great interest in the latest developments such as the reintroduction of basic rights and the rule of law in Belarus, points out that the maintenance of democratic norms and human rights is the main condition for normalisation of relations with neighbouring countries, renews the offer of large-scale assistance for Belarus with restoring democracy, and considers that the forthcoming elections of the lower chamber of the Parliament could be a step forward on the way to normalising relations with the EU;

3. Calls 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;

4. Deplores the actions of the Belarusian authorities in establishing a registration system aimed at

eliminating independent candidates from the electoral lists;

5. 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; appeals to the Belarus President and his State apparatus to stop their interference in the election process;

6. Consider President Lukaschenka's attempts to seek an extension of his presidential term by referendum as further confirmation of the authoritarian way in which he rules the country, and appeals to him to respect the constitutional limits of the presidential terms;

7. Calls on the government of Belarus not to miss once again the opportunity of closer relations with the EU through the development of a genuine partnership within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy, which depends upon the values of democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law being fully shared;

8. Calls on the authorities in Belarus to carry out comprehensive, impartial and open investigations into the 'disappearance' of opposition activists and to bring to justice those who are implicated in forced disappearances and/or summary executions, and fully supports the measures proposed by the UN Commission on Human Rights with regard to the situation in Belarus;

9. Calls on the Member States to take appropriate action against the failure to recognise the right to freedom of opinion and expression and the establishment of a pluralist society in Belarus, and to consider refusing to issue visas to Belarusian judges, prosecutors, policemen and vice-chancellors of universities or other persons who have acted illegally at any time against democratic opposition or NGOs by not recognising their right to freedom of opinion and expression;

10. Expresses its deepest concern at the closure of the European Humanities University, 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;

11. Expresses its interest in participating in monitoring the election within the Parliamentary Troika in order to show Belarusian society its interest in a democratic future for the country;

12. Welcomes the decision of the UN Commission on Human Rights to appoint a Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Belarus and the objective of developing a human rights education programme for all sectors of society;

13. 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; calls, in this connection, for the creation of a dedicated framework through which to support those Belarus municipalities sincerely committed to democratic values;

14. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the government and parliament of Belarus, the Council of Europe and the OSCE.

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