

## **P7\_TA-PROV(2010)0055**

### **Situation of civil society and national minorities in Belarus**

#### **European Parliament resolution of 10 March 2010 on the situation of civil society and national minorities in Belarus**

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to its previous resolutions on the situation in Belarus, in particular that of 17 December 2009<sup>1</sup>,
  - having regard to the conclusions on Belarus reached by the General Affairs and External Relations Council at its meeting of 17 November 2009, involving a further suspension of the application of the visa ban on certain Belarusian officials, including President Alexander Lukashenko, and the extension of the restrictive measures until October 2010,
  - having regard to the outcome of the 2996th Foreign Affairs Council meeting of 22 February 2010 and to the statement by the High Representative, Lady Ashton, on the situation of the Union of Poles in Belarus of 16 February 2010,
  - having regard to the Declaration on the Eastern Partnership issued by the European Council on 19 March 2009 and to the Joint Declaration issued at the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit of 7 May 2009,
  - having regard to the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities of 1 February 1995,
  - having regard to the international principles and standards concerning national minority rights, particularly those contained in the international conventions on human rights, such as the Helsinki Final Act of 1 August 1975 (Section 1.VII), the Document of the Copenhagen meeting on the Human Dimension of 29 June 1990 and the Charter of Paris for a New Europe of 21 November 1990,
  - having regard to its debate on Belarus on 24 February 2010 and to the European Parliament ad hoc delegation mission to Belarus on 25-27 February 2010 and its findings,
  - having regard to Rule 110(4) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas, on 15 February 2010, 40 activists, mainly members of the Union of Poles in Belarus (UPB), were arrested in Belarus, including Angelika Borys (Chairwoman of the UPB), Igor Banczer (Spokesman of the UPB), Mieczyslaw Jaskiewicz (Vice-Chairman), Andrzej Poczobut (President of the UPB Supervisory Board) and Anatol Lebedzka, the leader of the opposition United Civil Party in Belarus, in order to prevent them from taking part in the trial concerning the Polish House in Iyvanets; whereas by 20 February all the activists were released,
- B. whereas the UPB under the Chairmanship of Angelika Borys, who has been democratically elected twice in 2005 and in 2009, is not recognised by the state authorities and has been

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<sup>1</sup> Texts adopted, P7\_TA(2009)0117.

facing regular harassment and persecutions since 2005 and whereas its members are being repeatedly accused of illegal activities and facing criminal charges,

- C. whereas the Belarusian authorities have used the police forces against the members of the UPB in Hrodna in 2005 and in Ivyanets in 2010,
- D. whereas the Belarusian authorities have prevented the representatives of the UPB who were called to appear at the court session as witnesses for Mrs Teresa Sobol, Chairwoman of the local branch of the UPB in Ivyanets, from attending the trial,
- E. whereas the discrimination against the Union of Poles, the largest NGO operating in Belarus, which is led by Angelika Borys, is symptomatic of the general treatment of civil society and the democratic opposition in Belarus,
- F. whereas the 'Polonica', a Hrodna-based company headed by Angelika Borys, the only source of funding for the UPB, has been fined 71 m roubles for allegedly violating tax regulations and is now in danger of bankruptcy,
- G. whereas the Belarusian authorities consider Stanislaw Siemaszko to be the legitimate leader of the Union of Poles and declare support for the organisation under his leadership, considered illegitimate by the Polish community,
- H. whereas the representatives of the European Institutions, including Mr Jerzy Buzek, the President of the European Parliament, Baroness Ashton, Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and Mrs Cecilia Malmström, Commissioner for Home Affairs, as well as the Polish Parliament and the French Foreign Ministry, have expressed their concern about the recent actions of the Belarusian authorities against the UPB and have condemned the use of the police against its members,
- I. whereas those actions of the Belarusian authorities are contrary to international standards for protection of national minorities set out, inter alia, in the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities of 1 February 1995, while Belarus has intensified its actions against membership of this organisation,
- J. whereas the Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit, co-signed by Belarus, states in paragraph 1 that: 'The participants of the Prague Summit agree that the Eastern Partnership will be based on commitments to the principles of international law and to fundamental values, including democracy, the rule of law and the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms',
- K. whereas the European Council in its conclusions as of 17 November 2009 recognises that new possibilities have opened up for dialogue and deepened cooperation between the European Union and Belarus, with the aim of fostering genuine progress towards democracy and respect for human rights, and reaffirms in this context its readiness to deepen the European Union's relations with Belarus, subject to further progress towards democracy, human rights and the rule of law, as well as to assist the country in attaining these objectives,

1. Expresses its grave concern at the recent human rights violations in the Republic of Belarus against members of civil society, especially members of the Union of Poles, and declares its solidarity with citizens unable to enjoy their full civil rights;
2. Condemns the police and legal action against the Union of Poles and any attempts by the Belarusian authorities to impose a new leadership on the Polish community; demands that the Belarusian authorities re-legalise the Union of Poles in Belarus (UPB) led by Angelika Borys and ensure that its properties are returned to them in due time;
3. Reiterates its interest in an open and structured dialogue with Belarus on condition that the democratisation of the political system in Belarus leads to concrete results and reflects respect for human rights and the rule of law;
4. Urges Belarus to abide by its OSCE and international commitments in terms of the protection and promotion of the rights of its minorities; calls at the same time on the authorities to improve the conditions for the functioning of civil society, especially with regard to freedom of expression and assembly, the situation of independent media, including access to the internet, and the registration of NGOs, with a view to preparing and allowing a free and fair electoral process for the municipal elections on 25 April;
5. Repeats its call in recent resolutions, in particular those of 15 January and of 17 December 2009, to guarantee freedom of speech and association and to ensure the freedom to register political parties such as the Belarusian Christian Democracy (BDC), religious freedom and the creation of conditions conducive to the activity of civil society entities NGOs (such as 'Viasna') and independent media in Belarus;
6. Urges the Belarusian authorities to release political activists such as Andrei Bandarenko and prisoners of conscience such as Ivan Mikhailau and Aristyom Dubski, to withdraw restrictive measures against civil society campaigners such as Tatiana Shaputsko, a participant in the Eastern Partnership's Civil Society Forum, and to refrain from measures aiming to control the content of the Belarusian sites of the World Wide Web;
7. Underlines that the EU dialogue with Belarus can be mutually beneficial and believes that Belarus can be supported in obtaining maximum benefits from the Eastern Partnership, in particular in the most effective use of funds allocated under this programme to infrastructure, energy and social projects and by application of other EU instruments and policies, provided the Belarusian authorities commit themselves to real changes in the area of freedoms, democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights, and in particular the rights of national minorities;
8. Recalls that the European Union has already demonstrated considerable openness to engagement with Belarus, expressed also in Belarus's inclusion in the Eastern Partnership; recalls that the success of this engagement is conditional on steps towards democratisation and the upholding of human rights, including minority rights, by the Government of Belarus;
9. Points out that, if the Belarusian authorities adhere to fundamental human rights and democracy-related criteria, Belarus will benefit from the following items:
  - the conclusion and ratification of the EU-Belarus Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA),

- the effective utilisation of EU financial instruments such as European Investment Bank (EIB) instruments and the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI),
  - the extension of European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) financing to projects in Belarus, involving state entities,
  - restoration of Generalised System of Preferences (GSP+) to Belarus,
  - obtaining another tranche of the stabilisation loan from International Monetary Fund (IMF),
  - the resumption of negotiations on Belarus's accession to the WTO,
  - the support for the extension of the OECD programme to Belarus;
10. Attaches great importance to the liberalisation of political and civic life in Belarus and underlines that further violations of human rights and the rule of law in Belarus may lead to the revision of the EU's position towards Belarus, including reimposition of the sanctions;
11. 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.