

Situation in Belarus

Resolution adopted by the EPP Political Assembly, Copenhagen, Denmark,
4th-5th September 2017

1. Being concerned by the deteriorating democratic development, the continuing and increasing violation of human rights and the difficult situation for political opposition, independent trade-unions, civil society, journalists and other freedom defenders in Belarus;

2. Stressing that the Belarus has committed itself to upholding the principles enshrined in the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, which include respect of human rights and main liberties, such as freedom of thought, conscience, faith and opinion;

3. Regretting that the nature of human rights violations in Belarus remain structural and endemic, underscored by the centralization of the legislative and executive powers in the office of the President, whose decrees are a key legislative mechanism in the country, undermining the role of Parliament;

4. Regretting that elections in Belarus, including the October 2015 presidential election and the September 2016 parliamentary elections, have been neither free nor fair;

5. Deploring the restrictions placed on freedom of assembly, including a near de facto ban on picketing, demonstrations and meetings by civil society and opposition groups in Belarus;

6. Deeply regretting the lack of media freedom in Belarus, including increasing instances of harassment of journalists, restrictive laws with regard to broadcasting and internet freedom, as well as selective application of justice with regard to independent journalists;

7. Taking into account the fact that during the 26th session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in Minsk in June 2017 the representatives of the Belarusian authorities declared their readiness for a dialogue with civil society and political opposition, as well as the understanding of the need to observe human rights in the Republic of Belarus. However, no positive steps have been taken in this direction. On the contrary, after the end of the session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the repression of civil society resumed with renewed vigour. In particular, political activists were again fined and arrested;

- Independent journalists were again detained and fined while implementing their professional activities;

- On August 2, 2017, a search was carried out at the offices of the Belarusian Radio and Electronic Industry Workers' Union (REPAM) and the Belarusian Independent Trade Union (BITU). As a result of the searches, computers and financial documents were seized, Gennady Fedynich and Mikalai Zimin, leaders of the trade unions, were detained and then released, and the accountant of the REPAM, Ihar Komlik, was placed in custody. Criminal cases were brought against Gennady Fedynich and Ihar Komlik.

In terms of freedom of organisation: in August 2017 the public association «Social-Christian Movement» was denied legal registration for the second time.

8. Taking into account the statements of the leaders of the international trade union structures that with the attack on independent trade unions the Belarusian authorities grossly violated the ILO Convention No. 87, «On Freedom of Association», ratified by Belarus, which guarantees the inviolability of trade union offices, and the obligations of the Belarusian authorities to provide Belarusian trade unions with unhindered access to help from fraternal trade union organizations from other countries,

The European People's Party:

1. Condemns the recent mass arrests in Belarus and the authorities' violations of the right to demonstrate,
2. Condemns the adoption of a series of repressive laws in Belarus, restricting fundamental rights to freedom of assembly, expression and association, and giving additional powers and immunity from prosecution to State Security Committee (KGB) officers,
3. Calls on the Government of Belarus to immediately release and rehabilitate all political prisoners in Belarus, including Dzmitry Paliyenko, Mikhail Zhamchuzhny, Aliaksei Zhalnou and Ihar Komlik, including those given suspended sentences and those whose freedom of movement has been limited, immediately and unconditionally, and to guarantee the full restoration of their civil and political rights,
4. Reiterates its call on the authorities to implement the recommendations of the International Labour Organization with regard to trade unions, and to stop the repressions and prosecution of the leaders and activists of REPAM and BITU, to fulfill the obligations arising from the Convention 87 of the ILO, as well as the implementation of the 12 recommendations of the ILO on the restoration of the rights of workers and trade unions in the country,
5. Calls on the authorities in Belarus to abolish Article 193.1 of the Criminal Code, which envisages a punishment of up to two years for "acting on behalf of an unregistered organization," and violates the right to freedom of association, as well as other OSCE commitments. Expresses concern about the issuance by the Ministry of Justice of Belarus of politically motivated warnings of the United Civil Party, the Movement «For Freedom», the BPF party, which allow the authorities to begin the liquidation procedures for these organizations. Also expresses concern about the lack of progress in registering the party «Belarusian Christian Democracy», "Social-Christian Movement" and other public associations of Belarus.
6. Urges the Government of Belarus to respect its OSCE commitments with regard to freedom of assembly and freedom of expression, and to liberalize both legislation and practices, allowing citizens the right to public protest both online and offline,
7. Urges the Government of Belarus to immediately withdraw all issued death sentences, and to work to abolish the death penalty,
8. Urges the Government of Belarus to undertake necessary measures in order to ensure that future elections will be free and fair, including the time before, during and after the election,
9. Considers it necessary to maintain dialogue - within clear guidelines - with representatives of the Belarusian authorities and to use all existing possibilities to promote democratic reforms, in order to improve the situation in Belarus. Based on the principle of subsidiarity and the right of every citizen to take part in decision making, this dialogue has to be part of a round table, with an active presence of the representatives of the Belarusian opposition, in order to exercise their natural right to decide about the future of their country,
10. Calls on the international financial institutions, governments and businesses to take into account the provisions of this Declaration when conducting cooperation with the authorities of Belarus,
11. Confirms its support to fully include Belarus into the structures of the Eastern Partnership, including the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly, as soon as parliamentary elections in Belarus are considered democratic, free and fair by the international community, including the OSCE.

12. Calls on its member organizations to monitor the situation in Belarus as much as possible and to strengthen cooperation with the observer members of the EPP and civil society organisations in Belarus.

13. Expresses deep concerns about the military exercises of the Russian Federation and of Belarus which represent a challenge and threat to security for the region of Eastern Europe.

Rue du Commerce 10
1000 Brussels
T +32-2-2854140
E connect@epp.eu

**If you have any question
you would like to ask
please contact us.**