

P5_TA-PROV(2003)0042

EU-Belarus relations

European Parliament resolution on relations between the European Union and Belarus: towards a future partnership (2002/2164(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its resolution of 24 October 1996¹ on the situation in Belarus, in which it decided that no further steps would be taken towards ratification of the partnership and cooperation agreement until clear signals had been given by the Belarus authorities of their intention fully to respect basic democratic and human rights,
- having regard to its resolution of 12 December 1996 on the situation in Belarus²,
- having regard to its resolution of 10 April 1997 on the union treaty between Belarus and the Russian Federation³,
- having regard to its resolution of 12 June 1997 on obstruction of non-governmental humanitarian relief organisations in Belarus⁴,
- having regard to the decisions concerning Belarus taken at the Sixth Meeting of the Ministerial Council of the OSCE in Copenhagen on 18-19 December 1997 and at the Istanbul Summit on 18-19 November 1999,
- having regard to its resolution of 19 February 1998 on arbitrary arrests in Belarus⁵, expressing its concern at the severe beating of Yuri Khashchevatsky, a film director and member of the ‘Charter 97’ movement,
- having regard to its resolution of 16 July 1998 on the situation in Belarus⁶, pointing out that the Government of Belarus had taken measures, or allowed measures to be taken, affecting the residences of the ambassadors of 22 countries,
- having regard to the UN Economic and Social Council resolution of 19 August 1998 on the human rights situation in Belarus,
- having regard to its resolution of 11 March 1999 on the situation in Belarus⁷,

¹ OJ C 347, 18.11.1996, p. 168.

² OJ C 20, 20.1.1997, p 141.

³ OJ C 132, 28.4.1997, p. 224.

⁴ OJ C 200, 30.6.1997, p. 179.

⁵ OJ C 80, 16.3.1998, p. 250.

⁶ OJ C 292, 21.9.1998, p. 155.

⁷ OJ C 175, 21.6.1999, p. 256.

- having regard to its resolution of 7 October 1999 on the situation in Belarus¹ expressing its concern regarding the disappearance of Mr Victor Gonchar, Mr Anatoly Krasovsky and Mr Yuri Zakharenko,
 - having regard to the September 2001 report of the international fact-finding mission of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders,
 - having regard to its resolution of 5 July 2001 on Belarus² adopted prior to the 2001 presidential elections, and to the reports of the Parliamentary Troika (OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly and European Parliament) published after the 2000 general election (30 January 2001) and the 2001 presidential election (4 October 2001),
 - having regard to the reports and proposals concerning the EU strategy on Russia,
 - having regard to the declarations by the EU Presidency of 4 June and 17 September 2002 on Belarus-OSCE relations,
 - having regard to its resolution of 13 June 2002 on the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group (AMG) Mission in Belarus³,
 - having regard to its resolution of 4 July 2002 on the freedom of the press in Belarus⁴,
 - having regard to the declaration on Belarus made by the EU Presidency on 16 October 2002,
 - having regard to the report of the ad hoc mission of the European Parliament that visited Minsk in November 2002,
 - having regard to Rule 163 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Security and Defence Policy (A5-0024/2003),
- A. whereas in its abovementioned resolution of 24 October 1996 it decided that no further step would be taken towards the ratification of the partnership and cooperation agreement until clear signals had been given by the Belarus authorities of their intention to respect human rights as described by the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the Charter of Paris as common European values and until the fundamental principles of a democratic state had been restored,
- B. having regard to its undertaking in 1999 to draw up a report on Belarus with the aim of helping to improve relations between the EU and Belarus and supporting Belarus to create the basis for the coming into effect of the partnership and cooperation agreement, as agreed to in Article 2 thereof,

¹ OJ C 107, 13.4.2000, p. 107.

² OJ C 65 E, 14.3.2002, p.373.

³ P5_TA(2002)0329.

⁴ P5_TA(2002)0379.

- C. whereas, instead of improving, the situation in Belarus has reached a point where human rights are violated with contempt, the Lower House is deprived of its legislative rights and economic life is commanded by the President,
- D. whereas the Parliamentary Troika concluded that neither the parliamentary nor the presidential elections of 2000 and 2001 were free and fair,
- E. whereas Belarus is an important link between the EU and Russia and acts as a gateway for increasing trade in both directions,
- F. whereas, however, it is undesirable that there should be a complete freeze in relations, and whereas prospects for normalisation of the situation in Belarus are closely linked to the development of the country's relations and trade with the EU and, therefore, to the EU's presence being felt in the lives, and in relation to the activities, of citizens and decision-makers in Belarus,
- G. whereas Belarus can further develop its close economic ties with Russia only by improving its relations with the EU, in the light in particular of the strengthening of relations between the EU and Russia,
- H. whereas concluding a partnership agreement with Belarus as part of the EU strategy on Russia and neighbouring countries would further the cause of peace and regional stability, although this is admittedly improbable whilst the current regime is in power,
- I. whereas, according to the US State Department, Belarus, which is amongst the world's ten biggest arms exporters and whose armaments industry is closely linked to Russia's military industrial complex, is involved in illegal weapons sales and also trains the Iraqi military in operating S-300 missile systems,
- J. whereas the 2001 presidential election maintaining President Lukashenko in power has not been recognised as free and fair by any international body but was disputed by the domestic opposition, foreign governments and the EU and was preceded by arbitrary action by the government against the political opposition, independent media and election-observing organisations,
- K. whereas President Lukashenko's move towards authoritarianism has been reflected in the adoption of methods to harass the opposition, silence criticism and establish a network of patronage in all areas of government,
- L. whereas the EU has repeatedly condemned the arrest of prominent opposition leaders by the Lukashenko government and, having seen no significant progress in the unsolved cases of a number of disappeared persons, has therefore asked for effective investigations,
- M. regretting the decision of the government of Belarus not to extend the visa of the Acting Head of the OSCE's Advisory and Monitoring Group (AMG) in Belarus, Andrew Carpenter,

- N. having regard to the decision of 14 Member States to refuse to grant a visa to a number of important Belarusian personalities because of the attempts to close down the OSCE's Assistance and Monitoring Group in Belarus,
 - O. having regard to the deterioration of democratic freedoms, the lack of respect for human rights and the difficulties faced by the media, including foreign media, in independent reporting; concerned about the growing interference of the government in the activities of the labour unions,
 - P. having regard to the establishment (since the end of 1994) and expansion of a pyramid structure controlling all aspects of social and political life, ranging from administrative bodies to the furthest corners of national life,
 - Q. whereas the creation of the single economic area aspired to by Russia and supported by the EU will be difficult to achieve with a Belarus that is resistant to reform,
1. Expresses concern at the increasing and dangerous self-imposed isolation from the West and from the East into which Belarus is sinking as a result of the authoritarian and anti-democratic course charted by its President, which may make the country a focus for instability and turmoil in the region as a whole;
 2. Expresses concern at the stagnation in the economic and political reform process that Belarus must pursue if it is to move towards democracy and a market economy; expressly calls on the Belarus authorities to revise their repressive human rights policy and to restore the procedures for guaranteeing respect for human rights and freedoms, including freedom of religion and freedom of the press, and the principles governing the rule of law;
 3. Calls on the government of Belarus, as a matter of urgency, to confer meaningful powers on the national Parliament;
 4. Strongly condemns the 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; strongly deplores the repression of religious leaders and followers of different faiths as a result of the new law on religion;
 5. Urges the President and Government of Belarus to ensure that an independent judicial system can operate; calls on the Belarus authorities to abide by the international commitments they have entered into regarding freedom of the media, freedom of association and freedom of speech, to revise the provisions of the Penal Code pertaining to the exercise of such freedoms and fully to observe the UN Convention on Torture;
 6. Calls on the Belarus authorities to implement the economic reforms needed for a transition from an obsolete centrally planned economy to a market economy and to establish a legal framework that is more conducive to foreign investment; regrets the increasing impoverishment of large swathes of Belarus society, which are suffering the

effects of poor economic management and of the limited scope for obtaining assistance from international financial institutions wary of the situation in Belarus;

7. Calls for the abolition of the death penalty, which Belarus continues to enforce in spite of considerable pressure on the part of the EU, the Council of Europe and human rights organisations;
8. Stresses that the renewal of dialogue between the EU and Belarus – which is conditional upon Belarus complying with the terms and conditions laid down in the partnership and cooperation agreement suspended in 1996 – is in the interest of both parties, with a view to guaranteeing stability and security in this region of Europe, and is of particular importance as EU enlargement approaches;
9. Strongly urges the Commission to develop a specific strategy within its ‘Wider Europe’ proposal for democratisation and the development of a social market economy in Belarus; considers that this strategy should be based on positive results of the TACIS programme in Belarus, as approved by Council Decision 98/1/EC, Euratom of 18 December 1997 on a TACIS Civil Society Development Programme for Belarus in 1997¹; considers that this strategy should cover, in particular, the following matters: the strengthening and development of various forms of civil society, including trade unions and employers’ federations, support for the development of free and diversified media, measures to establish a democratic, Europe-oriented university system and support for the development of a stable sector comprising small and medium-sized enterprises; considers, moreover, that this strategy should include partnership programmes enabling members of civil society in Belarus to gain experience of democracy in neighbouring European countries and to put to good use the experience thus acquired;
10. Calls on the Commission, in order to prevent any cracks from appearing in the economic or social structure at the future eastern border of the enlarged EU and to curb smuggling and immigration, to develop Community financial programmes and support for the western regions of the new neighbours to the East, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova, on the same scale as those already being implemented in the eastern regions of the neighbouring candidate countries;
11. Considers it both worthwhile and necessary for the EU and its Member States to step up contacts with reform-minded forces in all areas of Belarus society (NGOs, churches, entrepreneurs, trade unions, cultural, university and economic spheres and non-governmental human rights organisations) and with the democratic opposition parties, and to provide them with assistance and support;
12. Calls on the Commission to use the existing democracy support programmes to provide greater financial support to those NGOs working to strengthen civil society and independent media in Belarus, a particularly difficult task in the present circumstances; welcomes the allocation of EUR 10 million for the Small Projects Programme (under the Country Action Programme for Belarus, 2000-2003), particularly as local and regional authorities in Belarus can be strengthened by means of the small and very small projects carried out under this programme;

¹ OJ L 1, 3.1.1998, p. 6.

13. Notes with regret that Belarus is no longer one of the target countries of the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR 2002-4), as the European Commission has established that the necessary conditions for the implementation of this programme in the recipient country have not been met (in particular as a result of Presidential Decree No 8); also regrets the fact that, for the above reasons, Belarus will not be included in the forthcoming call for proposals under the TACIS Institution Building Partnership Programme (IBPP); calls on the Government of Belarus in particular to revoke without delay Presidential Decree No 8 and to create the conditions that would allow projects cofinanced by the EU to promote democracy and human rights (EIDHR, Tacis IBPP) to be successfully implemented;
14. Considers it appropriate to coordinate these efforts at regional and international level, specifically with international bodies, such as the OSCE and the Council of Europe, and the United States, so as to ensure consistency in all actions undertaken to foster democratic change in Belarus and thus heighten their potential impact;
15. Calls upon the Commission and the Council to launch, as soon as the basic conditions are fulfilled, a structured dialogue between Belarus and the EU in order to increase cooperation in the field of Justice and Home Affairs, especially with a view to combating organised cross-border crime, in particular as regards trafficking in human beings and the smuggling of illegal migrants;
16. Considers that Russia could exert a moderating influence on the Minsk Government, encouraging it to embrace democratic change, given the strong historical, cultural, economic and political ties between these two countries; calls for this issue to be raised during the regular political dialogue with Russia, so that the most appropriate course of action can be identified; emphasizes that the formation of a union between Russia and an undemocratic Belarus would be contradictory;
17. Calls upon the people of Belarus to participate in the local elections to be held in March 2003; strongly urges the central election committee to provide all political movements in the country with equal access to the committee and the same chances to put up candidates; appeals to the Belarus government to allow international observers to monitor the elections in order to guarantee that they are carried out in a free and fair manner; recognises the great importance of the forthcoming local elections for the reestablishment of democracy in Belarus and the reintegration of Belarus within the international democratic community;
18. Strongly supports the humanitarian aid programmes for the victims of the Chernobyl accident, the dramatic impact of which is still being felt to this day due to the long-lasting effect of radiation, and which has affected 30% of Belarus' territory, thereby considerably curtailing economic activity in the country, and calls upon the Commission and the Council to allocate more funds to these programmes in order to provide the Belarusian population living in contaminated areas with the most generous assistance possible, thereby showing EU solidarity and ensuring the visibility of the EU in the region;
19. Stresses that Belarus serves as a country of origin and transit for trafficking in women and calls on the Belarus government to take effective measures in cooperation with international organisations and NGOs to combat such trafficking by pursuing prevention programmes, training police and judicial personnel and prosecuting traffickers, and to

ensure that victims and witnesses of trafficking are guaranteed effective protection, support and rehabilitation;

20. Emphasises that Belarus needs to redouble its efforts to stop the illegal trafficking and transit of weapons of all sorts, as they pose a serious threat to security and stability, not only in the region but also beyond;
21. Urges the Troika to pursue its joint efforts to bring a favourable influence to bear on moves to restore democracy in Belarus, since at present it is the only body through which communication with the Lukashenko regime is possible;
22. Acknowledges the opening of the OSCE Office in Minsk as of 1 January 2003 and calls upon the Belarus Government to closely cooperate with this Office so that its important tasks of promoting the democratic reforms and the rule of law can be fulfilled in the best conditions; regrets, however, that the OSCE mandate has been seriously limited, which makes its work, and consequently that of the Troika, much more difficult;
23. Calls on the Belarus authorities to respect trade union rights, and in particular the right of association guaranteed under the ILO conventions ratified by Belarus;
24. Calls on the Council and the Commission to take all necessary steps vis-à-vis the Belarus authorities with a view to re-examination of the legal case and imprisonment of Professor Yuri Bandazhevsky;
25. Confirms its decision, set out in the abovementioned resolution of 24 October 1996, not to ratify the partnership and cooperation agreement between the EU and Belarus until clear steps are taken by the Belarus Government towards firmly establishing democratic rights and freedoms and the principles of the rule of law;
26. Calls on the Commission to initiate an official investigation into freedom of association in Belarus and, on the basis of this investigation, if necessary, to implement the procedures for temporary withdrawal of GSP trade preferences provided for in Regulation (EC) No 2820/98;
27. Emphasises that there is an urgent, strategic need to conduct among civil society in Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova a presentation, information and awareness-raising campaign relating to the EU and its activities, programmes and values, in particular by opening an extensive network of European information centres in these three future neighbouring countries of the enlarged EU;
28. Calls on the Commission to propose to Belarus that its pupils and students participate in Community education and cultural programmes such as Leonardo, Socrates, and Youth and Culture 2000, thus creating awareness among the younger element of the population, who will provide the next generation of the country's civil society and leadership, of the policies and values of the EU, of which Belarus will shortly become a neighbour;
29. Draws the Commission's attention to the existence of ecological 'euroregions' between certain candidate countries and Belarus, such as the Bialowieska nature reserve, which is of prime importance for the European continent's natural heritage and biodiversity, and stresses that the preservation of these natural resources and assets on either side of the

expanded EU's eastern border will not be fully achieved and effective unless Belarus is able to participate in Community environmental programmes and legislation such as Natura 2000 and the Habitats and Birds directives;

30. Expressly urges the Commission to set up for the benefit of Belarus children from regions affected by radiation a specific programme of courses of treatment in EU hospitals and health centres, and to organise assistance and medical follow-up for them, as the health of this young generation is particularly at risk and vulnerable to the effects of radioactivity;
31. Stresses the need to open and expand Belarus citizens' horizons in terms of access to the media and to information so as to allow greater knowledge and understanding of what the EU stands for; to that end calls on the Commission to promote the broadcasting of television or radio programmes from neighbouring candidate countries, such as Lithuania and Poland, which could be received throughout Belarus territory;
32. Stresses that it is necessary, for reasons of consistency and for the credibility of the EU, that the same political, social and economic conditions are applied to its relations with each of the other Member States of the CIS as it applies vis-à-vis Belarus;
33. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and Commission, the Parliaments of the Member States and the Government and Parliament of Belarus.