



European Parliament welcomes Belarusian opposition leader Milinkevich

Belarus opposition leader Alexander Milinkevich was welcomed by European Parliament president Josep Borrell on Wednesday in the public gallery of Parliament's plenary room in Strasbourg. Mr Borrell praised the courage and perseverance of the Belarusian opposition and say that the European Parliament will continue to support human rights and democracy in Belarus.

Foreign Affairs Committee chairman Elmar Brok and Bogdan Klich, chairman of the EP delegation for relations with Belarus, called for action in a joint statement. *"The time for words, nice gestures and reflection is over. The people of Belarus need our full support and engagement."*

Messrs Brok and Klich called *"for an immediate and substantial increase of the visa ban list"* and welcomed the fact that at the latest EU summit Belarus president Lukashenko had been added to the list. *"That list should not contain several dozen names, but hundreds. Those from the local to the national level of administration who have been involved in violating international democratic standards (...) should also be included"* as well as *"authorities representing universities from which students have been expelled for taking part in peaceful demonstrations."* At the same time the visa regime for Belarusian citizens should be eased. The issue should also be addressed at the next EU-Russia summit and at G-8.

Mr Milinkevich said during his visit that *"the moral support of Europe is what the Belarusian people are in great need of today"*, adding that it is in the interest of the European Union *"to strengthen and elaborate its support for the democratic process and the emerging civil society in Belarus"*.

Mr Milinkevich was invited by EP president Borrell to discuss the aftermath of the presidential elections held in Belarus on 19 March as well as possible consequences for EU policies. Mr Milinkevich will address a joint meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee and the Delegation for relations with Belarus on Thursday morning.

For further information:

Marjory van den Broeke

Tel: +32 498 98 35 86; E-mail: mvandenbroeke@europarl.eu.int

Service Service de Presse / Press Service

Direction des Médias / Directorate for the Media

Directeur - Porte-parole / Director – Spokesperson : Jaume DUCH GUILLOT