



STATEMENT

by the European Parliament ad hoc delegation to the presidential elections in Belarus on 19 March 2006

Brussels, 20 March 2006. Yesterday the people of Belarus have once again been deprived of their fundamental right to participate in free, fair and democratic elections.

The vote took place in an atmosphere of fear and threat, against a background of the Belarusian authorities threatening violence against peaceful demonstrators and death sentences for those manifesting their freedom of expression and assembly.

Moreover, the massive wave of arrests of the opposition leaders and nearly 500 of their supporters, the crackdown on independent media and NGOs, the restrictions on the rights of independent and democratic candidates and the refusal to allow observers from the European Parliament to enter the country have clearly demonstrated that the conduct of the electoral campaign in Belarus was anything but fair and democratic.

We therefore claim that Mr Lukashenko cannot be recognised as the legitimate president of Belarus.

We stand for the Belarusian people's indisputable right to elect their leader in a truly democratic manner. The presidential elections should therefore be repeated in full accordance with international norms.

We welcome the impressive mass demonstrations against the non democratic nature of the elections showing the desire of a large part of the society to restore democratic rights and political freedom in their country, thus revealing a huge democratic potential in Belarus. This is a victory over fear.

The European Union (EU), for its part, should strengthen its policy towards Belarus, aiming to isolate the regime, but extend more support to the civil society of Belarus.

We call on the European Commission to propose the necessary steps to extend the EU travel ban list for high ranking Belarusian officials and at the same time to ease the visa procedures for members of Belarus civil society and the non-governmental community. It should also create additional educational exchanges programmes for Belarusian youth.

Furthermore, we call on the Council of the EU, which is assembling in Brussels today, to send a strong and clear message to the regime of Alexander Lukashenko, underlying that it does not accept this breach of human rights and democratic values on European soil.

We encourage the Council to work closely with our international partners, principally the United States of America, in working together to push forward democratic change in Belarus. We believe that the Russian Federation should also assume its large share of the responsibility for promoting democracy in its neighbour.

The European Union, together with the Council of Europe and the OSCE, should work in the framework of their privileged partnership in pulling together the resources necessary to support the forces of democracy in Belarus, and particularly in the post-election period.

The international community should remain fully engaged and put the question of Belarus high on the list of its key priorities. At this crucial time the Belarusian people who yesterday in Minsk bravely and peacefully demonstrated their strong belief in democracy and freedom, now need the wholehearted and committed support of the international community.

The delegation is headed by Bogdan KLICH (Poland, PES). Other Members of the delegation are Monika BEŇOVÁ (Slovakia, PES), Šarūnas BIRUTIS (Lithuania, ALDE), Ryszard CZARNECKI (Poland, NI), Barbara KUDRYCKA (Poland, EPP-ED), Joseph MUSCAT (Malta, PES), Elisabeth SCHROEDTER (Germany, Greens/ALE)

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