

# Resolution on the situation in Belarus

2012/2581(RSP) - 22/03/2012

Against the background of the further deterioration of the situation in Belarus, the Council debated the situation and adopted conclusions. It reiterates its grave concern about the continued lack of respect for human rights, democracy and rule of law in Belarus, and regrets that further repressive measures have taken place. As the political prisoners have not been released, **the Council decided to designate 12 additional persons responsible for serious violations of human rights or the repression of civil society and democratic opposition, to the list of those subject to travel restrictions and assets freezes.** The Council also decided to designate further businessmen and companies benefitting from or supporting the regime and will agree further such designations at upcoming Council meetings if all Belarusian political prisoners are not released. The EU's restrictive measures remain open and under constant review.

The EU calls for:

- the immediate release and rehabilitation of all remaining political prisoners, stating that it is deeply concerned about reports of torture and inhumane prison conditions of political prisoners, such as of former presidential candidates Andrei Sannikaw and Mikalay Statkevich;
- Belarus to join a global moratorium on the death penalty as a first step towards its universal abolition;
- the end of all harassment of members of the opposition, human rights defenders, journalists and civil society, and not to hinder their freedom of movement.

The EU also **condemns the suppression of non-violent protests** and the systematic use of the judicial system as a means of repression, including against peaceful protesters. It is furthermore strongly concerned about the introduction of new legislation that will further restrict the Belarusian citizens' freedoms of assembly, association and the free flow of information on the internet, as well as the provision of support to civil society.

The Council again urges Belarus to:

- respect internationally recognised diplomatic immunities and privileges of EU diplomatic representations and their personnel in Minsk and to stop the ongoing harassment and intimidation ;
- follow up on its previously announced intention to initiate a national dialogue with civil society and the opposition to pave the way for the holding of parliamentary elections in 2012 in line with international norms and standards ;
- cooperate within the OSCE in view of a re-opening of the OSCE field presence in Belarus, and to adhere to and implement OSCE commitments across all three dimensions, in particular in the area of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

In the context of the upcoming 2014 World Ice Hockey Championship, the EU will keep International and National Ice Hockey Federations informed about its deep concerns as regards the lack of respect by Belarus for human rights, the rule of law and democratic principles. The EU reiterates its readiness to launch negotiations for visa facilitation and readmission agreements which would enhance people-to-people contacts to the benefit of the Belarusian population at large, and strongly regrets the unconstructive

position of the Belarusian authorities in not responding so far to the letter sent in June 2011 inviting them to start negotiations. In order to facilitate the issuing of visas to the Belarusian public, the Council welcomes the fact that the EU Member States will strive to make optimal use of the existing flexibilities offered by the Visa Code, in particular the possibilities to waive and reduce visa fees for certain categories of Belarusian citizens or in individual cases. The Council recalls the possibilities of facilitating movement of persons living in border areas, and calls on the authorities of Belarus to take the necessary steps for the entry into force of all local border traffic agreements with its neighbouring EU member states in accordance with the EU acquis on local border traffic.

The Council reiterates its commitment to the policy of critical engagement, including through dialogue and the Eastern Partnership, and recalls that the development of bilateral relations is conditional on progress towards respect by Belarus for the principles of democracy, the rule of law and human rights. The EU remains willing to assist Belarus to meet its obligations in this regard.

These decisions come in addition to already existing measures: more than 200 individuals are already subject to a travel ban and a freeze of their assets within the EU. Moreover, the assets of three companies linked to the regime are already frozen while exports to Belarus of arms and material for internal repression are prohibited.