

Resolution on Belarus, in particular the case of Andrzej Poczobut

2012/2702(RSP) - 05/07/2012 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution on Belarus, in particular the case of Andrzej Poczobut.

The text adopted in plenary had been tabled by the EPP, S&D, ALDE, Greens/EFA, ECR groups and Jaroslav PAŠKA (ELD, SK).

Mr Poczobut, the correspondent of the Polish daily newspaper ‘Gazeta Wyborcza’ and also a prominent Polish-Belarusian minority activist and chairman of the Council of the Union of Poles in Belarus, was arrested in the town of Grodno, Belarus on 21 June 2012 and charged on grounds of so-called libel against President Alyaksandr Lukashenka, under the Criminal Code of Belarus, for twelve articles published on the ‘Charter 97’ and ‘Belarusian Partisan’ websites on last year’s underground bombing trial. He was subsequently acquitted on the charge of insulting the President but found guilty of defaming the President. Parliament notes that Mr Poczobut’s case is **part of a broader pattern of longstanding harassment of civil society, the Polish minority and human rights defenders**, following the presidential elections in December 2010, leading to a dramatic decline in human rights and civil and political liberties in Belarus. It notes several cases of systematic harassment of representatives of civil society in Belarus.

Members strongly condemn the recent arrest of, and allegations against, Andrzej Poczobut, and express deep concern over the **deteriorating situation of human rights defenders in Belarus**, condemning all threats against journalists and individuals making use of their right of freedom of expression. They call on the **Fourth Eastern Partnership Foreign Ministers’ meeting on 23-24 July in Brussels** to examine and discuss the deteriorating human rights situation in Belarus and the case of Mr Poczobut. Given the unprecedented crackdown on civil society in Belarus following the presidential elections of December 2010 and their aftermath (in which at least 21 reporters were beaten and 27 journalists were detained, 13 of them being sentenced to ten to fifteen days in custody), Parliament believes that **the case against Mr Poczobut is politically motivated** and is intended to obstruct his legitimate work as a journalist and national minority leader.

It deplores the fact that the Belarusian authorities are making it impossible for journalists to operate, by introducing repressive laws aimed at silencing civil society activities and using the threat of criminal sanctions to intimidate human rights defenders and minority activists.

Under these circumstances, Parliament stresses that **any potential EU engagement with Belarus is subject to strict conditionality** and is contingent on a commitment by Belarus to respect human rights and the rule of law, as stated in the Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit of 7 May 2009, cosigned by the Belarusian Government.

It calls on the Council and the Commission to step up their engagement with Belarusian civil society organisations and to promote greater people-to-people contact. It also calls on Member States to **evaluate the efficiency of the existing restrictive measures against Belarus** (see [Council Regulation \(EU\) No 354/2012](#)) and to consider broadening the existing sanctions by expanding the list of Belarusians subject to a visa ban and asset freeze.

Furthermore, those EU Member States that are currently members of the UN Human Rights Council are asked to make every effort in that body to establish, for at least two years, a countryspecific mandate, such as a special rapporteur, for the situation of human rights in Belarus. Parliament stresses that such a

mechanism would also play an important role in independently documenting abuses and monitoring the implementation of recommendations issued by the various UN mechanisms, in particular those formulated in the High Commissioner's most recent report.

It reiterates the need to enhance the relationship and political dialogue between the EU and its eastern neighbours in the framework of the Eastern Partnership, including its parliamentary dimension, the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly, with the common goal of ensuring democratic reform in Belarus.

Members urge the Belarusian authorities:

- with a view to the 2012 parliamentary elections, to pursue the process of reforming electoral law and practice, by taking into account the full set of recommendations of the OSCE/ODIHR and the European Commission for Democracy through Law, while also acting in line with all international democratic norms and standards;
- to reform the law and to bring Belarusian legislation, in particular that on freedom of association and expression, into line with international standards, and to eliminate the practice of censorship and self-censorship, and to refrain from further misuse of the law such as jailing political opponents, silencing journalists, harassing independent defence lawyers and operating internet control measures;
- to repeal the amendments to a number of legislative acts adopted by the Parliament in October 2011 that further restrict the freedoms of association, assembly, opinion and expression;
- to put an end to the short-term arbitrary detentions and arbitrary travel bans which appear to be aimed at intimidating human rights defenders, the media, the political opposition and civil society activists and at preventing them from doing their work;
- to put an immediate end to all forms of pressure on journalists and media workers and to withdraw all charges against journalists prosecuted for their professional activities, and to take measures to rehabilitate them.