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# **DRAFT RECOMMENDATION TO THE COUNCIL, THE COMMISSION AND THE EUROPEAN EXTERNAL ACTION SERVICE**

on EU Policy towards Belarus  
(2013/2036(INI))

Committee on Foreign Affairs

Rapporteur: Justas Vincas Paleckis

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# PROPOSAL FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RECOMMENDATION TO THE COUNCIL, THE COMMISSION AND THE EUROPEAN EXTERNAL ACTION SERVICE

## on EU Policy towards Belarus

(2013/2036(INI))

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to its resolution of 26 October 2012 on the situation in Belarus after the parliamentary elections of 23 September 2012<sup>1</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 29 March 2012 on the situation in Belarus<sup>2</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 12 May 2011 on Belarus<sup>3</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 20 January 2011 on the situation in Belarus<sup>4</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 12 September 2012 on the Annual Report from the Council to the European Parliament on the Common Foreign and Security Policy<sup>5</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 14 December 2011 on the review of the European Neighbourhood Policy<sup>6</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 7 April 2011 on the review of the European Neighbourhood Policy - Eastern Dimension<sup>7</sup>,
- having regard to the conclusions of the Foreign Affairs Council of 15 October 2012 and to the Council Regulation of 06 November 2012 on restrictive measures in respect of Belarus<sup>8</sup>,
- having regard to Rule 97 of its Rules of Procedure,
- having regard to the recommendation of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (A7-0000/2013),

A. whereas since 1994 no free and fair elections in Belarus have been conducted under electoral legislation in line with international standards;

B. whereas in 2008-2010, EU-Belarus relations had gained a positive momentum, but the brutal crackdown following the Presidential elections led to their deterioration;

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<sup>1</sup> Texts adopted, P7\_TA(2012)0410.

<sup>2</sup> Texts adopted, P7\_TA(2012)0112.

<sup>3</sup> Texts adopted, P7\_TA(2011)0244.

<sup>4</sup> OJ C 136 E, 11.5.2012 p.57.

<sup>5</sup> Texts adopted, P7\_TA(2012)0334.

<sup>6</sup> Texts adopted, P7\_TA(2011)0576.

<sup>7</sup> Texts adopted, P7\_TA(2011)0153.

<sup>8</sup> OJ L 307/1, 7.11.2012.

- C. whereas recent restrictive legislative amendments led to further repression against civil society, including human right defenders, independent media and defence lawyers; whereas, however, an improvement of the situation of human rights was discernible in 2012;
- D. whereas the European Dialogue on Modernisation with Belarusian society launched in 2012 has had a positive impact on the development of civil society in Belarus;
- E. whereas there are still political prisoners in Belarus;

1. Addresses the following recommendations to the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy / Vice-President of the Commission (HR/VP), the EEAS, the Council, the Commission and the Member States: that they should
  - a. reiterate the need for the unconditional and immediate release and rehabilitation of the political and civic rights of all remaining political prisoners to be a prerequisite for a gradual lifting of EU restrictive measures and for a substantial upgrade in EU-Belarus relations;

*On political dialogue*

- b. use Lithuania's Presidency and the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius as unique opportunities to improve relations with Belarus, including with a view to restarting the political dialogue on, *inter alia*, democratic reforms and respect for the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- c. consider the suspension of key officials from the EU visa ban list with a view to broadening the main and essential diplomatic communication channel with Belarus, also in view of the Eastern Partnership summit;
- d. prepare a strategic 'roadmap', inspired by the Joint Interim Plan, including both priority areas for reforms in Belarus and proposals on enhanced political dialogue, which could eventually lead to a relaunch of negotiations on a new comprehensive agreement; in the same vein, consult the European Parliament on the inclusion of new proposals concerning interparliamentary relations, both bilaterally and within the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly;
- e. ensure, in line with Article 24 TEU, the unreserved support of the Member States for the EU's position on Belarus and the compliance of their bilateral relations with the EU's actions;
- f. increase contacts with officials in order to foster openness of mind towards the EU and to enhance EU-Belarus cooperation;
- g. encourage the authorities to fully participate in the Dialogue on Modernisation aimed at developing a competitive economy, a pluralistic society and the rule of law;
- h. encourage civil society and the political opposition to increase their involvement in this Dialogue and further support it through enhanced financial assistance and expertise;

- i. envisage all available policy options with the view to ensure that Belarus:
  - fully implements electoral code reforms on the basis of OSCE/ODIHR recommendations;
  - lifts all restrictions imposed on the democratic opposition;
  - fully modernises the judiciary in line with international standards;
  - works towards the abolition of the death penalty;
  - reforms its Criminal Code and in particular article 193(1) on participation in unregistered organisations;
  - allows access for representatives of the relevant international organisations and members of families to all Belarusian prisons;
  - removes any existing obstacles to NGO registration;
  - guarantees effective freedom of and access to the media;
  - creates an independent and fully functional ombudsman;
  - ensures equal opportunities for, and the inclusion and non-discrimination of, all minorities;

***On economic and energy cooperation***

- j. make use of the constructive EU-Belarus technical dialogue on macroeconomic developments and financial issues to achieve a credible commitment by Belarus to gradual macroeconomic and structural reforms including gradual and socially responsible privatisation of state-owned enterprises; price, trade and banking system liberalisation; the development of an appropriate social safety net and the fight against corruption;
- k. further emphasise that the above reforms would also facilitate European investments and international loans as well as the negotiations for WTO accession;
- l. offer technical assistance to create favourable business environment with the view to establish a level playing field and equal opportunities for all companies, and especially SMEs;
- m. encourage Belarus to implement ILO recommendations, in particular concerning the freedom of association, registration and activities of independent trade unions;
- n. call on Belarus to enforce the highest international safety standards for the construction of nuclear power plants, optimising expertise and financing from all available international instruments;
- o. assist in developing a diversification of energy resources and supply routes in Belarus

and share EU best practices in carrying out international and regional ‘green economy’ projects, with support for energy efficiency and renewable energy sources;

- p. promote further regional cooperation including through Eastern Partnership initiatives with Belarus, in particular in terms of trade, energy, environment and transportation;

***On border management***

- q. strengthen EU-Belarus cooperation on border management and the fight against cross-border crime and in particular assist Belarus in developing its transit system, modernising customs and border control procedures and fully implementing the EU Integrated Border Management concept;
- r. provide further training for the Belarus border management agency in line with the Schengen acquis;
- s. consider increasing its financial assistance with a view to introducing up-to-date border control systems and modern infrastructure on the EU side;
- t. launch an EU-Belarus Mobility Partnership and encourage Belarus to take an active part in the Eastern Partnership Panel on Migration and Asylum;

***On civil society and people-to-people contacts***

- u. increase the share of projects with greater benefit to and visibility for the population at large, which would foster citizens’ understanding of EU policies and stress the advantages of its model and expertise;
- v. intensify technical and financial support to civil society organisations, independent NGOs, independent media, human rights defenders and trade unions based in Belarus or in the Member States; also significantly upgrade the communication and dissemination of EU information in order to develop citizens’ understanding of the EU’s approach to fundamental rights and freedoms and the need for social and economic progress;
- w. consider unilaterally facilitating the issuing of visas and reducing their cost from EUR 60 to an affordable level for Belarusian citizens, and making full use of the existing flexibilities offered by the Visa Code, including the waiver or reduction of fees for short-stay visas; also consider unilaterally reducing or waiving the visa fees for long-stay visas;
- x. call on the Belarusian authorities to start negotiations with the EU on visa facilitation and readmission agreements with the long-term view of a visa-free regime to promote people-to-people contacts and take urgent measures on implementing local border traffic agreements with Poland and Lithuania;
- y. seek to provide more education and research opportunities in the EU for Belarusians, including the provision of further support for the European Humanities University, and to develop and support education and vocational programmes within Belarus;
- z. actively seek opportunities to engage with Belarus in a dialogue on implementing

profound reforms of its higher education system in order to develop, in particular, academic freedom, institutional autonomy and student participation with the aim of eventually joining the European Higher Education Area (the Bologna Process) in 2015.

2. Instructs its President to forward this recommendation to the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy / Vice-President of the Commission (HR/VP), the EEAS, the Council, the Commission and the Member States.