

Emergency Resolution adopted by the EPP Congress, Bonn, 9-10 December 2009

Belarus

The European People's Party:

- Is concerned about the current situation in Belarus, one of the closest neighbours of the European Union, which is still internationally recognized as the last authoritarian regime in Europe;
- Supports the decision of the Council on 16-17 November 2009 to extend the restrictive measures against certain Belarusian officials and at the same time to maintain the suspension of the application of travel restrictions imposed on certain officials of Belarus for a twelve-month period with a clear goal to achieve a real progress in the areas of human rights, mass media freedom, political freedoms as well as democratic developments;
- Is, however deeply, concerned, after a year of the intensification of the EU-Belarus dialogue, about the flaws in human rights areas, such as:
 - Politically motivated intimidations and convictions
 - Denials in registrations of political parties and civic organizations, such as Belarusian Christian Democracy party (BCD) and human rights watchdog "Viasna"
 - Repressions against those participating in peaceful political actions and gatherings of political parties and civic society organizations
 - Creating obstacles against free and regular operation of organizations and political parties, such as Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) or Belarusian Helsinki Committee and others
- Welcomes the establishment of the Human Rights Dialogue, underlines its importance and believes it will contribute to the actual and positive developments in the area of civic and political freedoms in Belarus;
- Supports and expresses its solidarity with the democratic opposition in Belarus by:
 - supporting, after extensive consultations with its partners from the opposition, the EU policy of re-engagement into EU-Belarus dialogue, aimed at preserving the independence of Belarus and facilitation of the democratization processes in Belarus
 - having the BPF and United Civic Party (UCP) as observers to the EPP
 - having nominated Aleksandr Milinkevich for the award of the Sakharov prize for Freedom of Thought granted to him by the European Parliament in 2006;
- Is concerned about the circumstances of the recent death of Valiantsin Dounar, one of the members and activists of the BPF, who was spreading the independent newspapers at the day of the "accident" on 20 November 2009 in Marna Gortsya; has doubts about the recent conclusions of the police, made without any investigation, that his death was caused by an accident;
- Notices with regret, by referring to the report of the fact-finding mission in Minsk (20 - 24 September 2009) conducted by the International Federation of Journalists in collaboration with several international NGOs, that there no significant progress in the area of the media freedom in Belarus is observed;
- Appreciates and encourages the work of the various European NGOs as well as the solidarity manifested by the International community towards Belarus;

- Is convinced that one of the most essential ways to restore democracy in Belarus is through holding truly democratic elections that would be internationally recognized as free and fair elections;

In this regard, the European People's Party:

- Encourages the democratic opposition in Belarus to continue their fight and endeavours in contributing to the positive democratic developments in the country;
- Calls on the Belarusian authorities to review the restricted freedom sentences imposed on participants of peaceful demonstration in January 2008 as well as the case of imprisonment of Mr. Artsyom Dubski, who are according to the Amnesty International prisoners of conscience;
- Urges, in turn, the Government of Belarus to use the next twelve months to demonstrate actual progress in the following areas:
 - guaranteeing political rights and freedoms by discontinuing the practice of politically motivated intimidations, in particular dismissals from jobs and universities (recent case of Tatyana Shaputko and recent cases in BCD); stopping persecution for allegedly avoiding military service of students expelled from universities for their civic stance and or being forced to acquire education abroad; reviewing all the cases of the forcible army conscription contradicting the legal standards of several young activists, such as Franak Viačorka, Ivan Šyla and Zmiter Fedaruk, which is tantamount to state-practised hostage taking;
 - guaranteeing freedom of association and assembly by repealing Article 193-1 of the Belarus Criminal Code providing for criminal responsibility for activity on behalf of unregistered public associations, political parties and foundations; allowing the registration of the political parties (such as BCD) and civil society organisations (for instance Viasna); safeguarding freedom of religion, in particular to let New Life Church operate freely; to not impose difficulties to the activities of organisations already operating in Belarus, such as increasing prices for rent or imposing not legitimate taxes on the projects realised from EU grants (e.g. case of Belarusian Helsinki Committee)
 - adjusting the Media Law to the recommendations of the International Fact-Finding Mission to the Republic of Belarus report, 20-24 September 2009, in particular in the following aspects: providing equal rights to all media outlets by lifting a ban on dissemination of independent print media through state-owned distribution networks; establishing clear criteria for accreditation of journalists and for allocation of the broadcasting licenses and frequencies; officially registering TV Belsat in Belarus; allowing journalists to freely assume their duties during the public events; reforming the Law on Counteraction to Extremism and articles of the Criminal Code (368, 369, 369-1, 193-1) relating to defamation;
 - in this context, while observing with deep concern the recent intensification of another form of politically motivated intimidations in Belarus, such as repeated kidnappings of youth activists, Artur Finkevic (kidnapped on 17 October 2009), Nasta Palazhanka and Dzianis Karnou (on 25 March 2009), Uladzimir Lemesh (on 27 November 2009), Zmitser Dashkevich (on 5 December 2009) and Yauhen Afnahel (on 6 December 2009) for their political and civic activities, strongly urge Belarusian authorities to stop such kind of practices and urgently initiate an unbiased and comprehensive investigation of all these cases;
- Calls on the Belarusian authorities to adopt in due time the changes in the Electoral Code in line with all the recommendations of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights at the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE/ODIHR);
- Demands that the Prosecution Office of Belarus launches the objective criminal investigation of the circumstances of the death of Valiantsin Dounar, BPF activist, and thereafter communicates the

results of the investigation to the attention of Belarusian civil society, as well as, by referring to the Article 21 of the Law of Belarusian Republic on "Political parties", to BPF party;

- Strongly recommends the situation in Belarus to be put high up on the agenda of the European Union;
- Urges the EU officials and EU political leaders to include the Belarusian democratic opposition and civil society in all aspects of EU-Belarus dialogue and cooperation with Belarus; in this context particularly expects them to regularly meet and consult with the opposition while visiting Belarus as well as while reviewing EU policies towards this country; strongly encourages EU leaders to back up the participation of the Belarusian opposition in EURONEST until the parliamentary elections in Belarus are internationally recognized as free and fair;
- Encourages the EU, namely the Commission, to prepare recommendations for possible adoption of directives on the visa facilitation and readmission agreements with Belarus once the relevant conditions are met. Believes that such action is crucial to fulfil the main goal of EU policy towards Belarus, namely enhancing people-to-people contact, making Belarus part of European and regional processes and rendering the democratisation process in the country irreversible;
- Calls on the Belarusian authorities, in its turn, to respect the visa reciprocity principle and strongly condemns the recent denials of issuing entry visas for TV Belsat director, professors from the Bialystok University, for the Member of the Cyprus Parliament, Christos Pourgourides and the Member of the Lithuanian Parliament, Emanuelis Zingeris;
- Calls on the EU to make full and effective use of the possibilities to support civil society and democratic developments in Belarus via the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) as well as maintain their support of independent broadcasting and education facilities in neighbouring EU member states;
- Invites the European Investment Bank and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development to consider increasing their financial assistance for Belarus, with special regard to the situation of small and medium enterprises; at the same time believes such assistance should be subject of conditionality based on real progress in freedom and democracy;
- Calls on the Commission and European foundations to grant financial support to civic society organizations of Belarus and the TV Belsat in particular;
- Calls on the Belarusian Government, as a sign of goodwill and positive change, to enable the Belarusian 'European Humanities University' (EHU) in exile in Vilnius (Lithuania); in particular, calls on the Belarusian government to respect the right of minorities to live and function without political and administrative pressure and, in this context, expects the Belarusian authorities to recognize the Union of Poles led by Andzelika Borys as the democratic representation of the biggest minority in Belarus;
- Encourages Belarusian authorities to develop the genuine dialogue with the representatives of the democratic opposition; emphasises therefore the importance of defining the role and procedures of work of the Public Advisory Council.