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## TEXTS ADOPTED

*Provisional edition*

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### **P9\_TA-PROV(2020)0231**

#### **Situation in Belarus**

#### **European Parliament resolution of 17 September 2020 on the situation in Belarus (2020/2779(RSP))**

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to its previous resolutions on Belarus, in particular those of 4 October 2018 on the deterioration of media freedom in Belarus, notably the case of Charter 97<sup>1</sup>, of 19 April 2018 on Belarus<sup>2</sup>, of 6 April 2017 on the situation in Belarus<sup>3</sup>, of 24 November 2016 on the situation in Belarus<sup>4</sup> and of 8 October 2015 on the death penalty in Belarus<sup>5</sup>,
- having regard to the launch of the Eastern Partnership in Prague on 7 May 2009 as a common endeavour of the EU and its six Eastern European Partners Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine,
- having regard to the Joint Declarations of the Eastern Partnership Summits of 2009 in Prague, 2011 in Warsaw, 2013 in Vilnius, 2015 in Riga and 2017 in Brussels,
- having regard to the presidential elections held in Belarus on 9 August 2020,
- having regard to the declarations by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on behalf of the European Union on the presidential elections, notably those of 11 August 2020 and 17 August 2020,
- having regard to the statements by the High Representative/Vice-President, in particular those of 7 August 2020 ahead of the presidential elections and of 14 July 2020 on the non-registration of presidential candidates, to the joint statement by the High Representative/Vice-President and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada of 26 August 2020 as well as to the joint statement by the High Representative/Vice-President and the Neighbourhood and Enlargement Commissioner of 10 August 2020 on the presidential elections,

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<sup>1</sup> OJ C 11, 13.1.2020, p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> OJ C 390, 18.11.2019, p. 100.

<sup>3</sup> OJ C 298, 23.8.2018, p. 60.

<sup>4</sup> OJ C 224, 27.6.2018, p. 135.

<sup>5</sup> OJ C 349, 17.10.2017, p. 41.

- having regard to the statement of the President of the European Parliament of 13 August 2020 and that of the leaders of the five political groups of 17 August 2020 on the situation in Belarus following the so-called presidential elections of 9 August 2020,
  - having regard to the main outcome of the extraordinary meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council of 14 August 2020 and the conclusions of the President by the European Council on 19 August 2020 on the situation in Belarus following the presidential elections of 9 August 2020,
  - having regard to the statements by the VP/HR of 7 September 2020 on arbitrary and unexplained arrests and detentions on political grounds, and of 11 September 2020 on the escalation of violence and intimidation against members of the Coordination Council,
  - having regard to the EU Global Strategy and the revised European Neighbourhood Policy,
  - having regard to the statements by the EEAS Spokesperson, in particular those of 19 June 2020 on recent developments ahead of the presidential elections and of 18 November 2019 on parliamentary elections in Belarus,
  - having regard to the Council decision of 17 February 2020 to prolong the 2004 EU embargo on arms and on equipment that could be used for internal repression regarding Belarus<sup>1</sup>,
  - having regard to the ODIHR statement of 15 July 2020 on not deploying an election observation mission to Belarus due to the lack of an invitation,
  - having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to all human rights conventions to which Belarus is a party,
  - having regard to the report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus of 10 July 2020,
  - having regard to the statement of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of 17 July 2020 and to the OSCE ODIHR's previous reports on elections in Belarus,
  - having regard to the statements of the UN Secretary-General of 10 and 14 August 2020 on the post-election developments in Belarus,
  - having regard to Rule 132(2) and (4) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas no new political party has been registered in Belarus since 2000, despite repeated attempts; whereas the Belarusian Central Electoral Commission denied registration as candidates in the 2020 presidential elections to regime-critical politicians, who had reportedly collected more than 100 000 signatures, as prescribed by the national legislation, underlining the disproportionate and unreasonable barriers to candidacy, contrary to OSCE commitments and other international standards;
- B. whereas the presidential campaign was already marked since early May 2020 by a nationwide crackdown on peaceful protesters, civil society activists, bloggers and

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<sup>1</sup> OJ L 45, 18.2.2020, p. 3.

journalists, as well as by severe intimidation of political activists, their families and supporters; whereas more than 650 peaceful protesters, journalists and civic activists have been detained across the country for protesting against the regime;

- C. whereas the Belarusian electoral processes fell short of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) guidelines that call for respect for fundamental freedoms, equality, universality, political pluralism, confidence, transparency and accountability, despite Belarus being an OSCE participating state;
- D. whereas the electoral process could not be observed by an OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission due to the Belarusian authorities' deliberate failure to issue a timely invitation;
- E. whereas systematic irregularities and violations of international electoral standards were reported during polling, including intimidation of voters, denial of their right to vote and falsification of protocols from the precincts on a massive scale; whereas independent domestic observers, including those who monitored early voting in the Belarusian presidential elections, have been detained across the country after documenting numerous violations of electoral law;
- F. whereas the Central Election Commission of Belarus announced incumbent President Aliaksandr Lukashenka as the winner of the so-called elections;
- G. whereas credible nationwide reports and grassroots social media initiatives demonstrate large-scale electoral fraud in favour of the incumbent Aliaksandr Lukashenka, and many Belarusians consider Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya to be the winner;
- H. whereas unprecedented peaceful protests expressing a desire for democratic change and respect of fundamental freedoms and human rights started immediately after the announcement of the so-called election results and continue until today, as hundreds of thousands gather on the streets of Belarus with peaks during weekends in Unity Marches, demonstrating the level of discontent and mobilisation of Belarusian society;
- I. whereas protests have been accompanied by widespread strikes in industrial plants, including major state-owned enterprises in various economic sectors, companies, schools, universities, cities, towns and villages, all over the country;
- J. whereas the European Union and its Member States did not recognise the results of the presidential elections due to substantial doubts about the fairness of the election and widespread reports of falsification; whereas incumbent President Lukashenka's current term ends on 5 November 2020;
- K. whereas the Belarusian protests are of a scale previously unseen, and are nationwide and intergenerational, with the visible leadership of women;
- L. whereas the Belarusian authorities reacted to the legitimate and peaceful protests with disproportionate violence; whereas the response of the security forces to peaceful protests has been very harsh, with frequent use of excessive, unnecessary and indiscriminate force, such as the heavy use of tear gas, batons, flash grenades and water cannons; whereas the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights reports that close to 6 700 persons were detained in recent weeks while exercising their right to freedom of peaceful assembly; whereas experts have received reports of at least 450 cases of torture,

sexual violence, rape and ill-treatment of people deprived of their liberty, while several people are missing and have been found dead, including Alyaksandr Taraykouski, Konstantin Shishmakov, Alexander Vikhor and Gennady Shutov, since 9 August 2020;

- M. whereas a Coordination Council was established to provide a temporary institutional partner for a national dialogue process aimed at organising new elections that would be held according to international standards and under ODIHR election observation; whereas several thousand people have since expressed their support to its calls for new elections, and all leading members of the Coordination Council have been harassed, interrogated or arrested (Liliya Ulasava, Maksim Znak, Siarhei Dyleuski, Maria Kalesnikava); whereas ongoing harassment and threats have led leading members of the opposition, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, Veranika Tsapkala, Pavel Latushka and Volha Kovalkova to seek refuge in the European Union; whereas another leader, Maria Kalesnikava, was abducted on 7 September 2020 by masked men in an unmarked van in the middle of the day from a street in Minsk; whereas Nobel Prize laureate, Sviatlana Aleksijevic, is the only member of the Presidium of the Coordination Council who remains free in Belarus; whereas serious concerns regarding her safety persist despite the exceptional support she has received from European diplomats;
- N. whereas the European Council of 19 August 2020 decided to impose sanctions against a substantial number of individuals responsible for violence, repression and the falsification of the election results in Belarus, prohibiting them from entering the EU and freezing their financial assets in the EU;
- O. whereas the electoral campaign and presidential elections took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, the effects of which were consistently denied by the Belarusian political leadership and authorities, leading to journalists, medical staff and ordinary people stepping in to share crucial information about the pandemic and necessary precautionary measures, thereby demonstrating people's societal engagement and the vitality of the Belarusian civil society;
- P. whereas on 27 August 2020 the President of the Russian Federation stated his support for the Belarusian authorities in their repression of legitimate civic discontent by offering the deployment of special police forces; whereas on 21 August 2020 Mr Lukashenka announced the replacement of striking and resigned journalists working in state media with so-called Russian media specialists; whereas Russia, China, and Turkey were among the first states to congratulate Mr Lukashenka on his fraudulent election victory;
- Q. whereas the Belarusian authorities continue their violent crackdown on independent Belarusian reporters and citizen journalists and engage in deliberate attempts to hamper objective reporting in order to quell domestic and international concern and condemnation, including through the withdrawal of the press accreditation of more than a dozen international reporters on 29 August 2020;
- R. whereas the human rights situation in Belarus continued to deteriorate during the election campaign and after the elections; whereas the environment for the work of human rights defenders has continuously deteriorated, with human rights defenders being systematically subjected to intimidation, harassment and restrictions to fundamental freedoms; whereas Belarus is the only country in Europe to still carry out capital punishment;

1. Underlines that the European Parliament, in line with the position of the European Council, rejects the results of the so-called presidential elections that took place in Belarus on 9 August 2020, as they were conducted in flagrant violation of all internationally recognised standards; will not recognise Aliaksandr Lukashenka as president of Belarus once his current term of office expires;
2. Condemns, in the strongest possible terms, the Belarusian authorities for their violent repression of peaceful protests for justice, freedom and democracy in the wake of the fraudulent August 9 2020 presidential elections; calls for an immediate halt to the violence, for the immediate and unconditional release and dropping of all charges against all persons detained for political reasons, before and after the so-called 9 August 2020 elections, including all persons detained for their participation in protests against the election results or against the violence used by the authorities or for their expressions of support to these protests;
3. Condemns the ongoing intimidation, persecution and disproportionate use of force towards participants in strikes, members of the Coordination Council and other opposition figures, civil society activists, independent journalists and bloggers; demands the immediate and unconditional release of all those arbitrarily detained before and after the falsified 9 August 2020 elections, including Pavel Sevyarynets, Mikalaj Statkievich, Maria Kalesnikava, Andrei Yahorau, Anton Radnianskou and Ivan Krautsou; demands that all prosecutions on political grounds be stopped;
4. Welcomes the Coordination Council as an interim representation of the people demanding democratic change in Belarus that is open to all political and social stakeholders;
5. Supports a peaceful and democratic transition of power as a result of an inclusive national dialogue in full respect of the Belarusian people's democratic and fundamental rights; reiterates, in this respect, the calls by the Belarusian people for the organisation of new, free and fair elections to take place as soon as possible under international supervision, led by the OSCE/ODIHR and in accordance with internationally recognised standards;
6. Expresses its unequivocal support for the people of Belarus in their legitimate demands and aspirations for free and fair elections, fundamental freedoms and human rights, democratic representation, political participation, dignity and the right to choose their own destiny; acknowledges that the current protest movement in Belarus is based on the general and broad demand for the democratisation of Belarus whose people must enjoy the same fundamental rights of democracy and freedom as all other citizens on the European continent;
7. Calls on the Commission, the VP/HR and the Council to provide assistance to Belarus' democratic opposition, including the Coordination Council led by Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya;
8. Expresses its appreciation for the important contribution made by the brave women of Belarus, led by Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, Veranika Tsapkala and Maria Kalesnikava, and their supporters in voicing and representing the legitimate demands of the Belarusian people; notes that many Belarusians consider Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya to be the winner of the presidential elections and Belarus' president-elect;

9. Demands the immediate release of the arrested members of the Coordination Council, Liliya Ulasava, Maksim Znak, Siarhei Dyleuski and Maria Kalesnikava; insists that any national dialogue must take place with the full and unhampered participation of the Coordination Council; welcomes the protection extended to Sviatlana Aleksijevic by representatives of EU Member States and other like-minded countries;
10. Deplores in the strongest possible terms the appalling acts of violence against and cruel repression and torture of peaceful protesters and detainees; calls for an independent and effective investigation into the protest-related deaths of Alyaksandr Taraykouski, Alexander Vikhor, Artsyom Parukou, Gennady Shutov and Konstantin Shishmakov;
11. Calls for a stop to all ill-treatment and torture, for the introduction of a specific definition of torture into Belarus's Criminal Code in line with international human rights standards, and for legislative changes to criminalise enforced disappearance;
12. Insists on the need to ensure citizens' rights to freedom of assembly, association, expression and opinion, as well as media freedom, and thus lift all restrictions in law and practice that impede these freedoms; strongly condemns the ongoing application of the death penalty and calls for its immediate and permanent abolition and, pending this, an effective right to appeal against death penalty sentences;
13. Fully supports Belarusian workers and independent trade unions and calls on the Belarusian authorities and employers to respect the fundamental rights of Belarusian workers to strike without risk of dismissal, arrest or other reprisal, in line with ILO Conventions 87 and 98; supports the call by the International Trade Union Confederation addressed to the International Labour Organisation for urgent intervention against the arrests and sentencing of leaders of strike committees and independent trade union activists to protect their freedom of assembly and association; expresses its support for the coordinating role played by the Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions;
14. Strongly supports EU sanctions against individuals responsible for the falsification of the election results and the repression in Belarus, including Aliaksandr Lukashenka; calls on the Council to implement without delay, and in close coordination with international partners, broad and effective sanctions against all Belarusian perpetrators of election fraud, violence and repression in Belarus; calls on the Council to follow the example of the Baltic States, which included Lukashenka in their sanctions list, in enlarging the initially proposed group of persons targeted by sanctions to include a substantial number of both high and middle-ranking officials as well as entrepreneurs known for supporting the regime or dismissing their employees for participation in strikes; calls on the VP/HR and the Council to explore the possibility of including Russian citizens who are directly involved in supporting the Lukashenka regime in Belarus;
15. Strongly welcomes the proposal by the OSCE Chairperson-in-office in coordination with his successor to assist Belarus in organising a dialogue process; insists that the Belarusian authorities accept the offer extended to them by the current and incoming OSCE Chairpersons-in-office;
16. Urges the EEAS and the Commission to prepare a comprehensive review of EU policy towards Belarus, aiming to support the people of Belarus and their democratic aspirations, as well as civil society, human rights defenders, independent unions and independent media; calls for an increase in EU funding to the Belarusian civil society, while freezing

any EU fund transfers to the current Belarusian Government and state-controlled projects and stopping EIB, EBRD and other loans to the current regime; urges the EU to organise a donors' conference for democratic Belarus, bringing together international financial institutions, G-7 countries, EU Member States and institutions, and others willing to pledge a multi-billion Euro financial package to support future reform efforts and the restructuring of the economy;

17. Calls on the EEAS to suspend negotiations on the EU-Belarus Partnership Priorities until free and fair presidential elections have taken place;
18. Urges the government to strengthen the healthcare system and to provide Belarusian citizens with all relevant and life-saving information about the pandemic in a transparent and inclusive manner; emphasises the need to improve the access, availability and quality of healthcare in places of detention, in particular given the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the working conditions of medical staff, given reports of police preventing help for injured protesters and arresting medical workers;
19. Encourages EU Member States to facilitate and accelerate the establishment of a humanitarian corridor and the procedure for obtaining visas for those fleeing Belarus for political reasons or for those who require medical treatment as a result of violence perpetrated against them, and to offer them and their families all necessary support and assistance; calls on the Commission to proceed swiftly with the effective implementation of EU financial assistance to support civil society and victims of repression and to mobilise greater resources for their physical, psychological and material support;
20. Calls on the EU to further enhance people-to-people contacts by supporting Belarusian independent NGOs, CSOs, human rights defenders, media representatives and independent journalists, by creating additional opportunities for young Belarusians to study in the EU and by continuing support for the European Humanities University; asks the Commission to urgently set up a scholarship programme for students and scholars exmatriculated from Belarusian universities for their pro-democratic stance;
21. Underlines the need for a comprehensive investigation into the crimes committed by the regime against the people of Belarus and emphasises its resolve to contribute to such investigations;
22. Condemns the suppression of the media and the internet, as well as the intimidation of journalists and bloggers in order to stop the flow of information on the situation in the country; underscores the right of the people of Belarus to have unhindered access to information; calls on the EU to use the European Endowment for Democracy and other instruments in order to support these outlets and journalists who are subject to repression by the regime;
23. Calls on the Commission, the Member States and the EEAS to provide full support to the efforts of the UN Human Rights Council and the OSCE Moscow Mechanism to ensure documentation and reporting by international organisations of human rights violations and subsequent accountability and justice for victims;
24. Underlines the importance of countering the spread of disinformation in Belarus concerning the EU, its Member States and institutions, as well as disinformation on the situation in Belarus within the EU, as well as other forms of hybrid threats undertaken by

third parties; warns the regime against any attempts to use national, religious, ethnic and other minorities as a proxy target, diverting the attention of society from the electoral fraud and the subsequent massive protests and repression; condemns the refusal to allow the return to the country of the head of the Catholic Church of Belarus, Archbishop Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz;

25. Condemns the hybrid interference of the Russian Federation in Belarus, notably delegating so-called media experts to the Belarusian state media and advisors to the military and law enforcement agencies, and calls on the Government of the Russian Federation to halt any covert or overt interference in the internal processes of Belarus; urges the Russian Federation to respect international law and the sovereignty of Belarus; warns that Aliaksandr Lukashenka has no political or moral mandate to enter into any further contractual relations on behalf of Belarus, including with Russian authorities, which could threaten the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Belarus;
26. Underlines the importance of keeping the developments in Belarus a priority for the EU; recalls the need for the EU to be united and persistent in its response to the situation in Belarus;
27. Deplores the fact that Belarus has already loaded nuclear fuel into the first reactor of the Astravyets nuclear power plant and is planning to start producing energy in November 2020, without fully implementing the stress test recommendations, which is even more concerning in these times of high political instability;
28. Calls on the national ice hockey federations of the EU Member States and all other democratic countries to urge the International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) to withdraw its decision to hold the 2021 World Ice Hockey Championship partially in Belarus until the situation and, in particular, the state of human rights in the country have improved;
29. Reiterates its call on the EU Council to establish a comprehensive, effective and timely EU-wide restrictive measures mechanism (the so-called Magnitsky list) that would allow for the targeting of any individual, state and non-state actors, and other entities responsible for or involved in grave human rights violations and abuses, without any further delay;
30. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and the authorities of the Republic of Belarus and the Russian Federation.