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Relations with Belarus

European Parliament resolution of 13 September 2023 on relations with Belarus (2023/2041(INI))

(C/2024/1761)

The European Parliament,

— having regard to its previous resolutions on Belarus,

— having regard to the Council conclusions of 12 October 2020 and 21 and 22 October 2021 on Belarus,

— having regard to the joint declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit of 15 December 2021 in Brussels,

— having regard to the G7 Foreign Ministers' statement of 4 November 2022 on Belarus,

— having regard to the statement by High Representative Josep Borrell of 3 March 2023 on the sentencing of Ales Bialiatski and other Human Rights Defenders, and to the statement by High Representative Josep Borrell of 17 January 2023 on the trials against opposition leaders and journalists in Belarus,

— having regard to the reports of 4 May 2022 and 20 July 2022 of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, Anaïs Marin, addressed to the UN Human Rights Council, to the call by UN experts of 10 October 2022 for the immediate release of jailed Nobel Peace Prize winner Ales Bialiatski and other rights defenders in Belarus and to the comment by UN Human Rights spokesperson Ravina Shamdasani of 3 March 2023 on sentencing of human rights defenders in Belarus,

— having regard to Belarus's declaration of independence from the Soviet Union of 25 August 1991,

— having regard to the Declaration of State Sovereignty of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic of 27 July 1990,

— having regard to the Belavezha Accords ratified on 10 December 1991 by the Supreme Council of Belarus, which proclaimed that the Soviet Union had ceased to exist,

— having regard to the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus, adopted on 15 March 1994,

— having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Charter of the United Nations, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and all other human rights conventions to which Belarus is party,

— having regard to the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action of 25 June 1993,

— having regard to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons,

— having regard to the Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances,

— having regard to the Human Rights Watch World Report 2022 on Belarus,

— having regard to the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime,

— having regard to the Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings second evaluation report, adopted on 28 June 2022, concerning the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings by Belarus,

— having regard to the reports of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights of 4 March 2022 and 3 February 2023 on the situation of human rights in Belarus in the run-up to the 2020 presidential election and in its aftermath,

— having regard to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Moscow Mechanism report of 11 May 2023 on the serious threat to the OSCE human dimension in Belarus since 5 November 2020,

— having regard to the International Civil Aviation Organization fact-finding mission investigation report of July 2022 entitled 'Event involving Ryanair flight FR4978 in Belarus airspace on 23 May 2021',

— having regard to Resolution 2495 (2023) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe of 27 April 2023 entitled 'Deportations and forcible transfers of Ukrainian children and other civilians to the Russian Federation or to temporarily occupied Ukrainian territories: create conditions for their safe return, stop these crimes and punish the perpetrators',

— having regard to International Labour Organization (ILO) Decision GB.347/INS/14(Rev.1) of 20 March 2023 and its resolution of 12 June 2023 concerning the measures recommended by the Governing Body under Article 33 of the ILO Constitution on the subject of Belarus,

— having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure,

— having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (A9-0258/2023),

A. whereas, three years on from the fraudulent presidential elections of 9 August 2020, the illegitimate regime of Aliaksandr Lukashenka is exacerbating its systematic repression against the Belarusian people, which extends to all segments of society, including vulnerable and marginalised individuals; whereas the courts have sentenced more than 3 000 persons to various punishments on politically motivated charges and more than 1 500 persons remain imprisoned on political grounds, while thousands of others are tortured in order not to admit having such a status and live under the continuous pressure of intimidation, threats and possible arrest and fabricated charges; whereas Lukashenka's regime has carried out hundreds of political convictions on criminal charges, including stripping almost 100 Belarusian lawyers of their licences, shut hundreds of media outlets and deregistered more than 1 000 non-governmental organisations (NGOs); whereas numerous media entrepreneurs and journalists have been forced to flee Belarus and relaunch their activities in exile, primarily in Lithuania and Poland; whereas over 30 journalists and media workers remain imprisoned on bogus criminal charges; whereas four major independent trade unions and the Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions have been shut down and at least 14 of their leaders and members have been imprisoned; whereas released political prisoners face extreme discrimination, with the regime prohibiting them free movement and preventing them from accessing the labour market, their bank accounts and other financial assets; whereas the actions of the regime and the denial of medical care and legal aid have resulted in the death of political prisoners including Vitold Ashurak, Dzmitry Dudoits, Aliaksandr Vikhor, Mikalai Klimovicz, Dzmitry Sarokin and Ales Pushkin; whereas around 300 000 Belarusians have fled the country in recent years alone for fear of a similar fate;

B. whereas the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights reports on the situation in Belarus have compared the repression perpetrated by the Lukashenka regime to crimes against humanity;

C. whereas May and June 2023 respectively marked three years since the Belarusian opposition blogger Siarhei Tsikhanouski and Viktar Babaryka were arrested on politically motivated charges amid their bids for the Belarusian presidency; whereas Palina Sharenda-Panasiuk, a political prisoner and an activist from the European Belarus civil campaign, decided to renounce her Belarusian citizenship in protest against the torturous imprisonment conditions and after filling in a formal application, she was escorted to undergo a psychiatric examination and her location has been unknown ever since;

D. whereas at least 1 300 children with disabilities in Belarus are being held in institutions that have problems with proper diagnoses, education or social reintegration and lack public accountability and transparency;

E. whereas the international community, including the EU and its Member States, did not recognise the results of the fraudulent presidential elections and do not recognise Aliaksandr Lukashenka as president of Belarus; whereas the Belarusian authorities have failed to conduct effective investigations into the widespread allegations of torture and other ill treatment of peaceful protesters by law enforcement officers in August 2020 following the fraudulent presidential vote;

F. whereas the regime is eliminating the last remainders of political pluralism in the country, including through the upcoming so-called re-registration of political parties, which is likely to lead to the elimination of all parties but those who support the regime; whereas the new constitution of February 2022 creates new undemocratic institutions that only serve the purpose of securing the regime's grip on power and strips the Parliament of the last semblance of a voice over the political process;

G. whereas amendments to the Belarusian criminal code entered into force in January 2022, reintroducing criminal liability for participation in the activities of unregistered organisations; whereas no human rights organisations are currently operating legally in the country; whereas further amendments to the criminal code entered into force in May 2022, through which the authorities expanded the application of capital punishment to attempted acts of terrorism, a charge previously used in trials of political activists; whereas, in July 2022, Lukashenka signed into law legislation that allows investigations and trials in absentia under 48 articles of the criminal code; whereas, in January 2023, the Lukashenka regime enacted a law that will strip citizenship from those in exile whom it accuses of so-called extremism-related crimes — a list that now includes more than 2 000 individuals;

H. whereas the Lukashenka regime is dangerously undermining the sovereignty of Belarus by turning it into a satellite state of Russia and allowing Belarus to be absorbed by Russia into a so-called union state, making the risk of direct occupation extremely high, against the clear will of the majority of Belarusians; whereas Lukashenka has suggested a union state pact between Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan to share nuclear weapons;

I. whereas the Lukashenka regime is further destructing manifestations of the national identity of Belarusians, including the nation's language and culture; whereas it is pursuing an aggressive policy of Russification through arbitrary detentions and especially the brutal treatment of cultural figures, including writers, artists and musicians, and people who speak Belarusian in public, as well as by banning national and historical symbols of Belarus, such as the white-red-white flag and the Pahonia coat of arms, and closing publishing houses, private schools and Belarusian language courses;

J. whereas the Lukashenka regime continues to marginalise ethnic, religious and sexual minorities, in particular Lithuanian and Polish ethnic communities, by persecuting their leaders, such as Andrzej Poczobut, closing Lithuanian and Polish educational institutions, eliminating education in their ethnic languages and destroying Polish memorial cemeteries; whereas it also continues to repress religious communities and individuals, in violation of the right to freedom of religion and belief; whereas numerous Roman Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox and Greek Catholic priests and pastors have been subjected to various forms of persecution, ranging from fines to lengthy imprisonment; whereas the Belarusian Orthodox Church in many cases serves the interests of the regime, including supporting Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine; whereas the late Archbishop of Hrodna, Artemy Kishchanka, who was the only hierarch of the Moscow-subordinate Belarusian Orthodox church — the Belarusian Exarchate — to condemn the violence used by the Lukashenka regime against peaceful protesters in 2020, was sent into retirement, during which he was subjected to harassment that affected his health and hastened his death;

K. whereas LGBTI individuals in Belarus face further systemic discrimination and violence; whereas Belarus might introduce LGBTI 'propaganda' legislation similar to that in Russia; whereas Belarusians living, working or seeking refuge in Russia are among the most vulnerable to transnational repression by the Belarusian authorities;

L. whereas the Belarusian authorities often resort to surveillance, online censorship and disinformation, deploying technologies to control the population; whereas such a repressive practice represents another step towards digital authoritarianism and the suppression of the digital rights of persons in Belarus, resulting in the escalating intimidation of citizens and the shrinking of civic space;

M. whereas in October 2022, Belarus withdrew from the First Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights as of 8 February 2023, thereby blocking the UN Human Rights Committee's mandate to receive and review human rights complaints from individuals in Belarus; whereas this left Belarusians devoid of international protection, with neither the UN Human Rights Council nor the European Court of Human Rights able to consider the complaints of Belarusians;

N. whereas the illegitimate Lukashenka regime is actively supporting and has become fully complicit in Russia's unjustified war of aggression and war crimes against Ukraine; whereas the regime is directly enabling and supporting the Russian military aggression against Ukraine and Russia's use of means of terrorism, as demonstrated by the rerouting of Ryanair flight FR4978 in May 2021 and the announcement welcoming Russia's state-sponsored terrorist organisation, the Wagner Group; whereas the majority of Belarusians are against their country's participation in this war and have demonstrated it by organising peaceful protests that have resulted in arrests, prosecution and police misconduct, sabotaging the transport of Russian military equipment and joining or supporting Belarusian regiments fighting alongside the Ukrainian armed forces; whereas, as the only country in Europe and Central Asia to enforce the death penalty, any resistance to Belarus's involvement in Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine is being deterred through the use of capital punishment; whereas the complicity of Lukashenka's regime in Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has been emphatically denounced by the EU and NATO and has given rise to a common approach between the organisations based on similar or even joint assessments, and EU-NATO cooperation needs to be strengthened accordingly;

O. whereas, on 27 April 2023, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe unanimously denounced the deportation, re-education and Russification of Ukrainian children, some of whom have been sent to the Dubrava camp, owned by Belaruskali; whereas these crimes in which the Lukashenka regime is complicit may amount to genocide;

P. whereas the Lukashenka regime poses a direct threat to the EU and its citizens' security; whereas this is evidenced by its acceptance of the deployment of Russian tactical nuclear weapons on its territory, its refusal to implement nuclear safety requirements at the Belarusian Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) in Astravyets, its orchestrated hijacking of a civilian flight, Ryanair FR4978, its continued instrumentalisation of migration and human trafficking, its aggressive war rhetoric since August 2020 and its promotion of an increased Russian military presence in Belarus through permanent joint manoeuvres;

Q. whereas the Lukashenka regime continues to force migrants from non-EU countries across its borders with Latvia, Lithuania and Poland; whereas migrants in Belarus face torture and other ill treatment by border guards and other officials, obstacles to claiming asylum, and refoulement;

R. whereas the Belarusian democratic forces led by Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya have a well-established structure that is continuously garnering international recognition, including the recent formation of the United Transitional Cabinet, the renewed Coordination Council and the Mission of Democratic Belarus in Brussels; whereas the United Transitional Cabinet, the members in the diaspora of various democratic opposition parties and other Belarusians play a vital role in continuing to provide active support for political prisoners, their families and activists still in Belarus;

S. whereas Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and the leaders of democratic political parties have publicly declared the European aspirations of Belarusians;

T. whereas, in response to the ongoing repression, the EU and its Member States have adopted a number of restrictive measures against the Lukashenka regime, including sanctions against 195 individuals and 34 entities guilty of direct involvement in human rights violations and of aiding the regime; whereas the EU and its Member States have allocated over EUR 100 million to support the people of Belarus and their democratic aspirations;

U. whereas the Lukashenka regime is curbing the effect of Western sanctions on Belarus by using Russia-provided assistance, such as the use of Russian transport and port infrastructure to export Belarusian goods, preferential access to the Russian market and the postponement of debt payments to Russia, as well as by circumventing the sanctions;

V. whereas, as a result of the Western sanctions, Belarus's GDP shrank by 4,7 % in 2022, a decline only half as large as had been expected; whereas EU imports from Belarus in 2022 fell by more than half compared to previous years, from EUR 6,54 billion in 2021 to EUR 3,19 billion; whereas Belarus's exports to Russia increased by over 40 % from USD 16,3 billion in 2021 to USD 23 billion in 2022; whereas Belarus's exports to China almost doubled in 2022;

W. whereas the Lukashenka regime is restoring the centrally planned economic model of the Soviet era, particularly through the regulation of retail prices, maintaining state-owned companies' industrial production at a high level even if there is no demand and a crackdown on private business, including banning foreign investors from selling their stakes in companies in Belarus and imposing regulations allowing the confiscation of private property; whereas Belarus has failed to abide by the key findings of the 2004 ILO Commission of Inquiry and the Lukashenka regime has continued to persecute trade unionists;

X. whereas, as a result of EU support, hundreds of Belarusians are currently receiving scholarships and many more are taking part in online training to strengthen their professional skills and will be engaged in professional exchanges;

Continuous repression by the Lukashenka regime and EU support for repressed persons

1. Condemns in the strongest terms the unabated repression and the systematic and widespread human rights violations continuously committed by the Lukashenka regime, including manifold cases of mistreatment and torture, as well as the incommunicado detention of and inadequate medical assistance provided to political prisoners and other persons prosecuted on politically motivated grounds, such as journalists, human rights defenders, independent trade union activists and others; equally condemns the exertion of pressure on those prosecuted by deliberately arresting and sentencing their relatives and revoking the licences of their lawyers; continues to stand in solidarity with the brave people of Belarus and members of civil society organisations who stand up for a sovereign, free and democratic Belarus where justice, peace and human rights prevail, risking their freedom and lives;

2. Demands that the Lukashenka regime end this spiral of violence, torture, repression and propaganda against dissenting voices and perceived critics, immediately and unconditionally release all political prisoners, their family members and all persons arbitrarily detained, declare a universal amnesty for all those arrested on political grounds since 2020 and enable the peaceful transfer of power after the organisation of free and fair elections;

3. Calls on the Belarusian authorities to put an immediate end to the cruel, inhuman and degrading pre-trial detention and imprisonment conditions for political prisoners, including the denial of medical treatment, basic hygiene products and access to lawyers and family members; condemns the practice of 'chain arrests', or unjustified extensions of pre-trial detention for minor offences or on trumped-up 'extremism' charges; is deeply concerned that the imprisoned democratic opposition leaders Viktar Babaryka and Maria Kalesnikava have been secretly transferred to a hospital without any information being provided about their health condition; is equally concerned about the long-standing lack of information about the condition of the opposition politicians Siarhei Tsikhanouski, Mikalai Statkevich and Maksim Znak, the journalists Ihar Losik, Katsiaryna Bakhvalava (pen name: Andreyeva) and Andrzej Poczobut, the last of whom is also one of the leaders of the Polish minority in Belarus, and the activist from the European Belarus civic campaign, Palina Sharenda-Panasiuk;

4. Calls on the Lukashenka regime to immediately provide the necessary medical treatment to and guarantee proper medical supervision of all political prisoners with serious diseases and health issues, including Maria Kalesnikava, Viktar Babaryka, Ales Bialiatski, Ryhor Kastusiou, Iryna Melkher, Halina Dzerbysh, Henadz Fiadynich, Marfa Rabkova, Vasil Berasneu, Viachaslau Areshka, Uladzimir Hundar, Uladzimir Matskevich, Mikalai Statkevich, Alena Hnauk, Andrei Voinich, Aliaksandr Fiaduta, Mikita Zalatarou, Dzmitry Zalomski, Aliaksei Hubich, Vadzim Hurman, Antanina Kanavalava, Andrei Skurko, Darya Afanasieva, Arsenii Maiseichyk, Ihar Mints, Pavel Hancharyk, Siarhei Batura, Viachaslau Dashkevich, Daniil Kastsiukevich, Mikhail Khamitsevich, Palina Sharenda-Panasiuk, Andrzej Poczobut, Kseniya Lutskina, Maryna Markevich, Yauhen Liulkovich, Volha Tsybulskaya, Volha Zalatar, Artsiom Bayarski, Pavel Kuchynski, Uladzimir Malakhouski, Ruslan Slutski, Alena Maushuk, Larysa Kuzmenka, Kiryl Palcheuski, Yury Prakharenka, Siarhei Verashchahin, Viachaslau Rahashchuk, Aliaksandr Kapshul, Raman Karanevich, Vital Melnik, Aksana Zaretskaya and Viktoryia Kulsha;

5. Calls on the Belarusian authorities to allow diplomats and international organisations, including independent medical foundations, in particular the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), to visit political prisoners so that they can assess their condition and provide aid; calls on the Commission, the EU Member States and international institutions such as the ICRC and UNICEF to continue to provide systematic and comprehensive support for Belarusian political prisoners and members of their families who are in a vulnerable financial situation, as well as for political prisoners who have served their sentences, including financial support and assistance with medical and psychological rehabilitation;

6. Demands an independent investigation into and expert report on the deaths of political prisoners in the regime's custody and the death of activist Raman Bandarenka in November 2020, which was caused by a vicious beating, allegedly by plain-clothed police officers or their proxies;

7. Calls on the Lukashenka regime to refrain from any kind of harassment, including of former political prisoners who have now been released; urges the regime to allow these former prisoners to live their lives in freedom and give them full access to the labour market and social life, as well as their bank accounts and assets; expresses deep concern over the alleged use of the forced labour of inmates in Belarusian penal colonies, in particular by suppliers to major EU-based companies; calls on all EU-based companies to terminate relations with any Belarusian suppliers that use forced labour in their supply chains, even those that are not yet subject to restrictive measures, and calls on the Council to impose sanctions on any Belarusian companies that use forced labour in their supply chains; welcomes the recent adoption of the ILO resolution concerning the measures recommended by the Governing Body under Article 33 of the ILO Constitution on the subject of Belarus's systematic violation of freedom of association, suppression of the democratic trade union movement and continued persecution of independent trade union leaders and activists, and calls on the ILO member countries to act accordingly;

8. Reiterates that the Lukashenka regime's unilateral withdrawal from the Eastern Partnership policy, announced on 28 January 2021, has no legitimacy as it does not reflect the true will of the Belarusian people and their aspirations for a free and democratic state;

9. Reiterates its condemnation of the decision by the Lukashenka regime to withdraw Belarus from the Aarhus Convention, an international agreement that implements the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment;

10. Calls for the EU institutions and Member States to explore the possibility of allowing representatives of the Belarusian democratic forces, particularly Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, the legitimate representative of the Belarusian people, and civil society to take up the empty seats previously occupied by representatives of the Belarusian authorities in bilateral and multilateral forums, in particular within the framework of the Eastern Partnership policy; calls on the Commission to include independent, non-regime-affiliated Belarusian experts as national representatives for Belarus in cooperation programmes such as EU4Climate, EU4Environment and other initiatives; encourages the Foreign Affairs Council to extend a standing invitation to Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, as the leader of the Belarusian United Transitional Cabinet, to attend any of its meetings that concern Belarus; calls on the leaders of the Member States, as well as the political leaders of the other participating states of the European Political Community, to include the Belarusian democratic forces in the European Political Community, for instance by giving them observer status;

11. Denounces politically motivated 'show trials' and trumped-up charges aimed at instilling fear in representatives and supporters of the democratic forces, civil society, independent media outlets, free trade unions, human rights defenders, and national, religious and sexual minorities; condemns the decision by the Belarusian authorities of 23 August 2023 to declare the prominent Viasna Human Rights Centre and all its branches an 'extremist organisation' and calls for the immediate release of its Chairman and founder, the Nobel Peace Prize and Sakharov Prize laureate Ales Bialiatski, and of his colleagues Valiantsin Stefanovich, Uladzimir Labkovich, Marfa Rabkova and Andrei Chapiuk; further denounces, in particular, the sentencing to long prison terms of Henadz Fiadynich, Vasil Berasneu, Viachaslau Areshka, Maryna Zolatava and Liudmila Chekina, as well as the sentencing in absentia of leading figures of the democratic forces, such as Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, Pavel Latushka, Maryia Maroz, Volha Kavalkova, Siarhei Dyleuski, Valery Tsapkala, Stsiapan Putsila and Yan Rudzik, on spurious charges of 'conspiracy to seize power' or 'forming extremist organisations'; condemns the continued incarceration of the democratic opposition leaders Pavel Sevyarynets and Mikalai Statkevich; condemns the Lukashenka regime's acts of transnational repression against Belarusians abroad, as well as Russia's facilitation of and active cooperation in this repression; urges the regime to immediately stop removing and threatening to remove children from the custody of their parents as a way of punishing the parents for protesting or being politically active; encourages the Council and the Commission to identify novel avenues to work towards the release of all political prisoners in Belarus;

12. Urges the Belarusian authorities to immediately commute all death sentences and establish an immediate moratorium on the use of the death penalty, as the first step towards full and permanent abolition;

13. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to continue enabling human rights defenders, lawyers and civil society organisations to provide services to political prisoners and their families, particularly social aid, healthcare and public defence; calls on the EU's and its Member States' diplomats, despite the difficulties that exist, to engage with and support civil society representatives, human rights defenders, independent media outlets, pro-democracy groups and the families of political prisoners in Belarus;

14. Calls on the Commission, the Member States and the European External Action Service to cooperate with international partners, such as the OSCE Moscow Mechanism and the UN Human Rights Council, as well as human rights defenders and civil society representatives on the ground, on the monitoring, documentation and reporting of the grave human rights violations and crimes against humanity that are taking place in Belarus, in order to ensure subsequent accountability and justice for the victims; highlights the valuable work of NGOs inside and outside Belarus that are documenting cases of torture and thus laying important groundwork for the future prosecution of crimes committed by the Lukashenka regime; reiterates its support for the International Accountability Platform for Belarus;

15. Reiterates its call for the EU Member States to prepare the ground for the criminal prosecution of Belarusian officials who are responsible for or complicit in electoral fraud, grave human rights violations and crimes against humanity, under the accepted principles of extraterritorial and universal jurisdiction; echoes the call from the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights for all UN member states to consider working towards accountability in this way; supports further discussions about the possible establishment in The Hague of an international tribunal for human rights violations in Belarus;

Involvement of the Lukashenka regime in Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine

16. Condemns in the strongest possible terms the Lukashenka regime's involvement in Russia's unjustified, illegal and unprovoked war of aggression against Ukraine and its promotion of hate speech, disinformation and propaganda echoing Moscow's bellicose rhetoric; condemns, in this regard, the regime's massive provision of ammunition and military hardware to the Russian aggressors, particularly the manufacture of components for the Russian military, as well as the stationing of Russian troops in Belarus and their training by Belarusian instructors, the welcoming of Russia's illegal and state-sponsored terrorist organisation the Wagner Group, the threat to join the aggression, combined with the stationing of troops next to the Belarus-Ukraine border, which binds Ukrainian troops there, and the use of Belarusian territory, airspace and infrastructure as a staging ground to launch the invasion, as well as for continued missile attacks on military and civilian targets in Ukraine; notes that the vast majority of Belarusians disapprove of this multifaceted involvement in Russia's war of aggression; expresses its full support for the Belarusian activists who are resisting the aggressors within Belarus by disturbing railways and other supply lines used by the Russian military, for Belarusian cyber-partisans and for the volunteers, in particular the Kastuś Kalinouski and former Pahonia regiments, who are bravely fighting alongside the armed forces of Ukraine to repel the aggressors; fully supports the provision of assistance to these resisters;

17. Denounces the illegal transfer of more than 2 150 children, including orphans, from Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine to so-called recreational camps in Belarus, where they are subjected to Russification and indoctrination; strongly condemns the involvement of the Belarus Red Cross in the illegal deportation of Ukrainian children; supports Ukrainian prosecutors' investigation into the role of Belarus in the forced deportations and considers that the actions of Lukashenka himself and his regime may also amount to the crime against humanity of 'deportation or forcible transfer of population' under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC); considers Lukashenka as responsible for these war crimes as Vladimir Putin and Maria Lvova-Belova and therefore calls on the ICC to consider issuing a similar international warrant for Lukashenka's arrest; calls on the Council to expand the list of individuals targeted by the EU's sanctions to include those involved in forced deportations of Ukrainian children to Belarus;

18. Calls for greater synergies and coherence between the EU's Strategic Compass and NATO's Strategic Concept, in particular with regard to their implementation, with a view to countering Russia's aggression against Ukraine and the complicity of Lukashenka's regime in this conflict; underlines the importance of stepping up EU-NATO cooperation in dealing with all the relevant aspects of Belarus's involvement in Russia's war against Ukraine; considers it necessary to develop a common strategy for preserving the independence of Belarus, including international support to this end and for the country's transition to democracy, with the participation of the EU and international institutions such as the OSCE, the Council of Europe and the G7;

19. Considers that, by enabling Russia's unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine, the Lukashenka regime has become an accomplice in the crimes committed by Russia, which implies responsibility for the destruction and damage caused to Ukraine; deems, furthermore, that the special international tribunal on the crime of aggression perpetrated by Russia against Ukraine must have jurisdiction to investigate not only Putin and the Russian political and military leadership, but also the Belarusian leadership; calls, therefore, for the EU institutions and the Member States to take all the actions necessary to enable the criminal prosecution of Belarusian officials who are complicit in the crime of aggression, war crimes, crimes against humanity and crimes of genocide committed against Ukraine; welcomes, in this regard, the steps taken towards the establishment of an ICC country office in Ukraine; calls for the EU and its Member States to find legal pathways for seizing assets of the Belarusian leadership and related Belarusian entities involved in the Russian war effort and, if possible, using them to support the reconstruction of Ukraine;

20. Calls for the EU and its Member States to broaden and strengthen the scope of their sanctions (restrictive measures) and to adopt a new set of sanctions against Belarus and Russia and the individuals and legal entities responsible for or complicit in the grave human rights violations in Belarus, under the Russia and Belarus sanctions regimes and the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Mechanism (EU Magnitsky Act), including sanctioning judges, prosecutors, law enforcement, prison and penal colony officials, propagandists and agents of the infamous KGB and the Main Directorate for Combating Organised Crime and Corruption (GUBOPiK/HUBAZiK);

21. Calls for mirroring the existing sanctions against Russia against Belarus; insists that Belarusian potash, which is the main source of the regime's income, should remain on the list of sanctions and should not be transported via EU territory, especially as Belarus's main potash producer, Belaruskali, is directly involved in the illegal transfer, Russification and indoctrination of Ukrainian children; calls for the EU and its Member States to urgently increase their capacity to assess the real effect of sanctions and possible collateral damage, in order to ensure the full implementation of all restrictive measures concerning Belarus and Belarusian individuals and thwart any circumvention schemes, as well as to provide adequate support for the work of the EU Special Envoy for the Implementation of EU Sanctions on addressing all loopholes and improving the effective implementation of all sanctions;

22. Calls for Russia and Belarus to be put on the EU's high-risk third-country list with regard to combating money laundering and the financing of terrorism; calls for a list to be drawn up of direct relatives of those linked to the criminal Lukashenka regime who are enjoying the hospitality of EU countries; calls for the immediate review of their entry visas and residency status; urges the International Olympic Committee and other international sports federations not to allow athletes from Belarus and Russia, many of whom support or have even participated in Russia's unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine, to compete in the Paris 2024 Olympic Games or any other international sports events;

23. Regrets the fact that some Member States are lobbying for the sanctions against Belarusian potash producers, including Belaruskali, to be lifted, and calls on the Member States to identify common approaches to the challenges posed by the sanctions; condemns those third countries that are helping Russia and Belarus to circumvent the sanctions in place and asks the Commission and the Member States to consider secondary sanctions against those third countries; deplores the official visit by Hungary's Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade to Minsk in February 2023, which contradicts the EU's policy on Belarus, Russia and the war of aggression against Ukraine; calls on the Council and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to explore further measures beyond sanctions and to develop a coherent and comprehensive long-term approach towards Belarus, in close coordination with the EU's partners;

Sovereignty of Belarus and protection of its language and national culture

24. Notes with great concern the rampant political, economic, military and cultural subordination of Belarus to Moscow; regrets the fact that Belarus has become a satellite state of Russia and condemns the actions of the two regimes, which might lead to the eventual absorption and annexation of Belarus by Russia; denounces the Lukashenka regime's historical revisionism and its attempts to justify its crimes, in particular the repression of the Belarusian people and the war of aggression against Ukraine; condemns the deployment of Russian tactical nuclear weapons under Russian command on Belarusian territory, in blatant violation of Belarus's nuclear-free status, which was revoked following the fraudulent constitutional referendum of 27 February 2022; reiterates its condemnation of such deployment, which is in violation of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and may trigger further nuclear redeployments in the region; calls for the EU, its Member States and NATO to take all possible steps to deal with this deployment; deplores Lukashenka's threatening rhetoric about the possible use of nuclear weapons; calls for the EU to work in cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency and the European Nuclear Safety Regulators Group to ensure nuclear safety at the

Belarusian NPP in Astravyets and regrets the fact that the second reactor at the Belarusian NPP was launched without the nuclear safety concerns raised by the international community having been properly addressed; calls for the EU institutions and the Member States not to recognise any agreements signed by the Lukashenka regime with Russia that cede Belarus's sovereignty against the will of the people;

25. Calls for the EU and the Member States to maintain unity in addressing the multifaceted threats posed by the regime of Aliaksandr Lukashenka to the EU, in particular the continued and growing state-engineered instrumentalisation of migration, which deliberately causes human suffering at Belarus's borders with Latvia, Lithuania and Poland and beyond; strongly condemns the use of migration for political ends by the Belarusian authorities and sees this as a purposefully orchestrated reprisal by the Lukashenka regime against EU Member States' for their support for the democratic forces of Belarus, with the aim of destabilising those Member States; is concerned about the humanitarian situation along Belarus's borders with EU Member States; calls on the EU Member States in question to abide by EU law, as upholding basic European norms, international law and respect for the dignity of every human life, especially in the face of challenges, is at the core of the democratic European project in which the EU also wishes Belarus to partake; stresses the need to guarantee the right to asylum, while providing humane and dignified reception conditions for migrants and asylum seekers stranded at the border;

26. Is of the opinion that the arrival in Belarus of the Russian private military company the Wagner Group creates potential security risks for Ukraine, Belarus's EU neighbours and the EU as a whole; reiterates its call on the Council to add the Wagner Group to the EU's terrorist list and calls for the EU and its Member States to continue to monitor the activities of the Wagner Group and to reinforce the protection of the EU's borders in order to prevent any provocations by the Wagner Group or attempts by Wagner Group mercenaries to cross into the EU, as well as to continue to combat the increasing smuggling of goods from Belarus;

27. Notes Belarus's growing economic dependence on Russia and other non-democratic countries, including China; deplores the fact that Belarus is returning to the centrally planned economic model of the Soviet era, which will further isolate the country from the world market and lead to a lag in innovation and modernisation and a continuous brain drain, all of which is contrary to the interests of the Belarusian people, who have shown increasing entrepreneurial initiative in recent years;

28. Reminds all EU businesses operating in Belarus of its previous call to exercise particular diligence and uphold their responsibility to respect human rights, in accordance with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights; asks such businesses to refrain from any new investment in the country and to publicly protest to the Belarusian authorities against the continuing repression of workers and citizens in general;

29. Calls on the Commission and the EU Member States to continue to support small and medium-sized enterprises in Belarus, given that they have played an important role in backing the pro-democracy movement in Belarus, both during and since the 2020 presidential elections;

30. Expresses solidarity with the Belarusians seeking to protect and nurture their national identity, particularly through efforts to spread the use of the Belarusian language; deplores the recent sentencing of the art manager Pavel Belavus to 13 years in prison for his endeavours to promote the Belarusian language and culture; commits to increasing its communication in Belarusian, notably by translating its reports and resolutions on Belarus and Eastern Partnership policies into the language, and calls on the other EU institutions to follow;

31. Urges the Belarusian regime to end its discrimination and violence against all minorities, in particular ethnic, religious and sexual minorities; condemns the Belarusian authorities for targeting the country's ethnic Lithuanian and Polish communities, particularly through the recent decisions aimed at liquidating Lithuanian and Polish schools and eliminating education in the Lithuanian and Polish languages; calls on the Belarusian authorities to respect the rights of the Lithuanian and Polish minorities, including the right to education in the Lithuanian and Polish languages; condemns the arrests of Andżelika Borys, Andrzej Poczobut and other members of the Polish community; considers the charges of 'inciting hatred' and 'rehabilitation of Nazism' that were brought against Andżelika Borys to be political and devoid of any merit or legal value, and takes note that she has been cleared of these charges;

32. Strongly condemns the persecution of religious communities in Belarus, including the persecution of both clerics and laity who, in their religious activities, refuse to support the position of the Lukashenka regime and express disagreement with its policies; denounces, in this regard, the sentencing of the Orthodox priest Siarhei Rezanovich, his wife and son to 16 years in prison, the pressure exerted on the late Orthodox Archbishop, Artemy Kishchanka, as well as the regular arrests of members of the clergy, including the imprisonment in May 2023 of the Catholic priests Viachaslau Adamovich, Andrei Kulik and Aliaksandr Shautsou and the catechist Uladzislau Beladzed; condemns also the confiscation of churches from Catholics in Minsk and the prohibition of any political activity in the framework of Protestant evangelism;

33. Urges the Lukashenka regime to immediately end its persecution of and discrimination and violence against LGBTI individuals and to ensure their full protection and inclusion in society; supports the efforts of LGBTI organisations in Belarus in advocating for legal reforms that ensure equal rights and protection for all individuals;

34. Deplores the lack of anti-discrimination legislation regarding persons with disabilities in Belarus, as well as the forced closure in 2021 of the country's leading disability rights organisation, the Office for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; deplores the problems that children with disabilities in Belarus face with regard to proper diagnoses, education and social reintegration and the lack of public accountability and transparency of the institutions where these children are held; underlines the need for deinstitutionalisation and for the repeal of Law No 183-Z of the Republic of Belarus of 30 June 2022 on the rights of disabled persons and their social integration, which discriminates against children and adults with disabilities, limiting their access to primary, secondary and higher education depending on their degree of disability; is appalled that the Belarusian authorities continue to place persons with different disabilities in the same facilities and to fail to provide any groups with specialised care, that more than 10 000 persons with disabilities who live in 'psychoneurological' institutions are deprived of their legal rights, and that courts have designated directors of these institutions as their legal guardians; underlines the need to repeal provisions allowing the involuntary deprivation of liberty;

Support for democracy and European aspirations

35. Highlights the fact that Belarus has historical ties with the rest of Europe and shares the heritage of European culture and identity, and that, based on the aspirations of the Belarusian people, it should remain a part of the European political, cultural and economic space; warmly acknowledges and supports the declarations about the European aspirations of Belarusians made by Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and the leaders of Belarusian democratic political parties; calls for the EU institutions and Member States to develop a more ambitious and comprehensive strategy, coupled with a broad economic plan, that would provide support for the Belarusian democratic forces, including opposition political parties, civil society activists, human rights defenders, independent artists, independent trade unions and free media outlets both inside and outside Belarus, with a view to fostering a democratic transition in the country and upholding Belarus's independence and sovereignty; calls for comprehensive capacity-building programmes, training on legal expertise for the drafting of legislation and on digital and personal security, mentoring initiatives, traineeships and other educational opportunities to empower these actors and nurture their potential;

36. Calls for improved EU communication with the people in Belarus in order to provide them with information and counter disinformation and propaganda by the state-controlled media; urges the EU Member States to foster contacts between their own populations and the Belarusian people, and to coordinate their actions in order to alleviate the difficulties faced by democratic forces and opposition political parties, civil society activists and other Belarusian citizens in exile, for example in the process of obtaining residence permits and opening bank accounts and in the context of visa application procedures in Belarus and in third countries, including as a result of the incorrect application of the sanctions regime; stresses that the Belarusian people should not be equated with the Lukashenka regime and that Belarusians living in exile should not be discriminated against on the basis of the regime's involvement in the war against Ukraine; deplores the Lukashenka regime's deliberate expulsion or non-renewal of the accreditation of diplomats from the EU, its Member States and other countries, in order to limit their support for persecuted Belarusians and their ability to issue visas; acknowledges the work of EU civil society organisations in supporting their Belarusian counterparts and assisting Belarusians during the process of relocation, and calls for the EU and its Member States to further enable their work;

37. Encourages the Member States to further simplify the procedures for obtaining visas and residence permits for those fleeing Belarus for political reasons or those who require medical treatment as a result of violence perpetrated against them; calls on the Commission and the Member States to prepare rules and procedures to deal with cases in which human rights defenders and other civil society activists are stripped of their citizenship in Belarus, as well as to provide support for those Belarusians residing in the EU whose identity documents are about to expire and who have no means of renewing them, since they cannot return to Belarus;

38. Calls on the Council to review and update its conclusions on Belarus by focusing on the pre-emption and containment of security risks posed by the Lukashenka regime, effective EU public policy and engagement with the people of Belarus, including those in exile, structured cooperation with Belarusian democratic forces and civil society and support for the victims of the Lukashenka regime;

39. Welcomes the opening in Brussels of the official Mission of Democratic Belarus on 1 March 2023; further welcomes the creation of the United Transitional Cabinet as the central executive body of the democratic movement, which, together with the Coordination Council, a unified representative body of Belarusian democratic society, should be treated by the international community as the democratic representatives of the people of Belarus; calls for the signing of an agreement to formalise and systematise cooperation between the European Parliament and Belarusian democratic forces and civil society, including the United Transitional Cabinet and the Coordination Council; stresses the need for the Council and the Commission to maintain international attention on and support for the pro-democracy movement in Belarus, which has shifted in the wake of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine; calls on the Commission and the Council to be prepared for various scenarios, such as the (forced) replacement of Lukashenka or Russia's de facto annexation or occupation of Belarus, and to consult with the United Transitional Cabinet regarding these scenarios;

40. Welcomes the Commission's approval of the support programme 'EU4Belarus: Supporting societal resilience and human capital development', which aims to support the democratic aspirations in Belarus; considers that such support is essential in order to preserve the changes in Belarusian society that emerged from the peaceful pro-democracy movement during the 2020 presidential elections; insists that EU4Belarus funds be strategically channelled into activities to support the European aspirations of the people of Belarus;

41. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to continue and broaden support for the cultural and educational activities of Belarusian civil society and academic institutions, including those aimed at supporting the Belarusian language and the independent media; highlights the importance of supporting digitalisation and the creation of spaces for the pro-democracy civic and political participation of Belarusians; calls on the Commission and the Member States to continue to support Belarus's independent media, which were decimated after the 2020 presidential elections and had to relocate and rebuild their activities; asks the Commission and the Member States, in this regard, to strengthen the capacity of Belarusian-language media outlets, including the likes of Charter 97, Radio Racyja, Euroradio, Belsat TV, Naša Niva and Novy Čas, and to pay particular attention to new outlets such as NEXTA, Malanka and Zerkalo (formerly TUT.BY); welcomes the relocation of Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty and the opening of its office in Lithuania, which provides credible media coverage for the audience in Belarus;

42. Highlights the importance of continuously strengthening links and cooperation between Belarus, on the one hand, and young people and the academic community in the EU, on the other; welcomes the EU's allocation of financial resources to provide educational opportunities for Belarusian students and professionals, particularly through the EU4Belarus MOST + ('mobility scheme for targeted people-to-people contacts') project; expects that such support will be continued and that Belarusians will be substantially included in EU programmes, such as Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe; calls, moreover, for continuous support for Belarusian independent academic institutions, including the European Humanities University in Vilnius;

43. Insists that a significant proportion of EU financial support should continue to be channelled through flexible and impartial EU mechanisms, such as the European Endowment for Democracy (EED), which would ensure good targeting of and accountability for civil society organisations, independent media outlets and pro-democracy groups; calls for more low-threshold funding for NGOs inside and outside Belarus; suggests that the EED should strengthen its focus on Belarus, while the Member States should provide the EED with more means to support the democratic forces of Belarus;

44. Supports the preparations for an EU-led international donor conference to assist the democratic forces of Belarus; calls for the EU to engage on an operational level with the representatives of the democratic forces of Belarus in order to conclude the work on the adoption of a road map for the implementation of the EUR 3 billion economic and investment package already envisaged by the Commission as a way of embracing the democratic aspirations of the Belarusian people; calls for political dialogue between the EU and the democratic forces of Belarus in order to achieve a joint vision on the above-mentioned support plan; highlights the need for a substantive public discussion in order to build public support for considerable EU involvement;

45. Expresses its concern about the transparency, freedom and fairness of the 2024 parliamentary and local elections in Belarus, in particular in the light of new legal restrictions on political parties and statements by the Central Election Commission questioning the importance of international election observation and the role of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights; condemns the creation of unbearable conditions for and restrictions on the activities of opposition democratic parties in Belarus; condemns, in particular, the new law on political parties adopted in February 2023, which is clearly aimed at hindering and deterring the activities of democratic forces by imposing additional restrictions and the obligation to register with the Ministry of Justice; takes the view that this law deliberately attempts to formally liquidate democratic parties and prevent them from taking part in the 2024 parliamentary elections and will ultimately lead to the de facto banning of any political party in opposition to the regime; calls on the national political parties of the Member States and European political parties and foundations to further develop their cooperation with and support for democratic political parties in Belarus;

46. Calls on the leadership of the Belarusian democratic forces to maintain unity and to continue to employ innovative methods to inform and engage with the people of Belarus, particularly within the country, in order to maintain their trust and faith in democratic change and mobilise them in the upcoming elections;

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47. 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, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations Secretary-General, the International Labour Organization, the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the representatives of the Belarusian democratic forces, the International Red Cross, the International Olympic Committee, the Union of European Football Associations, the Fédération Internationale de Football Association, the International Ice Hockey Federation, the International Tennis Federation, the Association of Tennis Professionals, the Women's Tennis Association and the de facto authorities of the Republic of Belarus.