



**AS/Pol/Inf (2020) 09**

27 August 2020

Apdocinf09\_20

## **Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy**

### **The situation in Belarus following Presidential elections on 9 August 2020**

Compendium of statements

President of the Parliamentary Assembly, 10 August 2020

Chairperson of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy, 13 August 2020

Secretary General of the Council of Europe, 14 August 2020

President of the Venice Commission, 14 August 2020

President of the Parliamentary Assembly, 18 August 2020

Joint Statement: Chairman of the Committee of Ministers; President of the Parliamentary Assembly and the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, 26 August 2020

President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, 26 August 2020

# **Presidential election in Belarus: PACE President applauds the courage and determination of Belarus people, especially women, and calls on authorities to respect human rights and rule of law standards**

10/08/2020 President

Following the Presidential election in Belarus, PACE President Rik Daems made the following statement:

“I have been following closely the Presidential election in Belarus as well as the events of last night following the closing of the vote – I deeply regret that this election was far from being free and fair.

Candidates were not able to run and campaign freely, there have been severe restrictions on freedom of assembly and freedom of expression - including widespread detentions of peaceful protesters, activists and journalists - and the integrity of early voting has been called into question.

The events of last night – including the use of force by the police and the military as well as the detention of protestors – aggravate my concerns. I urge the authorities to show utmost restraint and to ensure unhindered exercise of fundamental human rights and freedoms in accordance with Belarus’ international obligations and commitments. Freedom of expression and of peaceful assembly are an essential pillar of democratic societies and a necessary condition for a pluralist and democratic political process.

I particularly applaud the courage and determination of Belarus’s women, who have actively participated in the political process as leaders, campaigners and engaged voters, despite sexist remarks that have been voiced throughout the campaign. Such dismissive language, as PACE has repeatedly made clear, has no place in modern politics.

The Assembly has long urged the authorities in Belarus to move towards a ‘truly competitive political system’ in which parties and candidates can register and campaign without hindrance, and voters can make free and informed choices.

Belarus applied to join the Council of Europe in 1997 but, due to lack of democratic progress, this process has been frozen for some years. Nevertheless, the rights and freedoms of the Belarusian people remain close to our hearts and, despite the fact that this election has been deeply disappointing, we continue to look forward to the day when European democratic values fully prevail in Belarus.

Therefore, the Assembly will follow the situation closely, in particular through its Political Affairs and Democracy Committee.”

# Belarus: Stop Violence and engage in dialogue, says Cheryl Gillan

13/08/2020 Political Affairs and Democracy

The Chairperson of PACE Political Affairs Committee, Dame Cheryl Gillan (United Kingdom, EC/DA) today made the following statement on the situation in Belarus:

"I am concerned by the scenes of violence on the streets of Belarus during the protests that followed last Sunday's Presidential Elections and reports of mass detention and ill-treatment of people, including journalists.

Violence is not a way forward in the democratic political process and it should be stopped on all sides of the political spectrum. I refer in this context to the call by Rik Daems, our PACE President, for utmost restraint and for ensuring unhindered exercise of fundamental human rights and freedoms. I hope that Belarusian authorities will hear the voice of people asking for genuine change and engage in an inclusive dialogue with society.

The Council of Europe, with its rich experience of working towards democratic transformations, may provide valuable assistance to help create part of that dialogue to solve the current crisis and open a path for any reforms. To this end the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy has placed this matter on its agenda for discussion at its next meeting on 17-18 September 2020".

# Secretary General comments on the situation in Belarus

SECRETARY GENERAL STRASBOURG 14 AUGUST 2020

**Council of Europe [Secretary General](#) Marija Pejčinović Burić has made the following **statement** with regard to **Belarus**: “The situation in Belarus is of ongoing concern. Although Belarus is **not a member state** of the Council of Europe, we have **cooperated in several areas** and **Belarus is party to a number of our conventions**.**

“I therefore call on the Belarusian authorities to guarantee freedom of assembly and freedom of expression, and to refrain from detaining peaceful demonstrators as well as from any kind of ill-treatment of protesters.

“Belarus needs to fully engage with civil society and this needs to start without delay.

“The Council of Europe and its expert bodies are ready to engage with Belarus to support the necessary reform process.”

# **International electoral standards must be respected in Belarus**

## **Statement by Venice Commission President Gianni Buquicchio**

VENICE COMMISSION STRASBOURG 14 AUGUST 2020

“Democratic elections are an expression of the sovereignty belonging to the people of a country. It is the free expression of the will of the people that provides the basis for the authority and legitimacy of government. The rights of citizens to vote and to be elected at periodic, democratic elections are internationally recognised human rights.

Democratic elections cannot be achieved without respect for human rights, in particular freedom of expression and of the press, freedom of circulation inside the country, freedom of assembly and freedom of association for political purposes, including the creation of political parties. Any restrictions of these freedoms must have a basis in law, be in the public interest and comply with the principle of proportionality. These rights must be enjoyed without any discrimination.

Achieving democratic elections in conformity with international standards, as enshrined in particular in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ratified by Belarus, therefore has become a matter of concern for international organisations, just as it is the concern of national institutions, political competitors, citizens and their civic organisations. National and international election observation express these interests and are vital to ensure trust in the electoral processes.

The Venice Commission has identified, defended and actively promoted the fundamental standards in the field of elections. I have followed with great concern the recent presidential elections in Belarus. I call on the authorities of Belarus to respect international standards applicable to elections, releasing national observers and demonstrators and allowing the unhindered exercise of the freedoms of assembly, association and expression, in the interest of the Belarus people and of the stability of the country”.

# Belarus: PACE President encourages an all-inclusive national political process and democratic reforms

18/08/2020 President

"Events in Belarus demonstrate the paramount importance of the values the Council of Europe stands for. By actively defending their fundamental freedoms, the people of Belarus have chosen the path of democratic change. Therefore, an all-inclusive national political process is urgently needed to ensure peaceful and democratic transition, opening the door for much-needed reforms. I welcome the efforts of all stakeholders and international partners to support it," said PACE President Rik Daems.

"As a champion of democracy and human rights on the continent, the Council of Europe could provide valuable standards and expertise, in particular in the fields of constitutional and electoral reform, strengthening the independence and the efficiency of the justice system, creating an enabling environment for civil society, and supporting a pluralistic and independent media environment, as well as in many other fields.

The Organisation's strategic objective remains the integration of Belarus into the Council of Europe on the basis of the Organisation's values and principles. Today, we have the opportunity to take an important step along this path and all Council of Europe member States should work together in order to achieve this objective, in the interests of Europe, its citizens and the values we share.

I sincerely hope that the political process and democratic reforms will allow us to welcome Belarus and its citizens into our family of common values where they belong. Therefore I look forward to a comprehensive discussion within the Political Affairs Committee in the coming weeks to identify concrete initiatives that could be put forward by the Assembly in this respect."

*Belarus applied to join the Council of Europe in 1993 but its special guest status with the Parliamentary Assembly has been suspended since 1997.*

# Belarus: joint statement by the Committee of Ministers Presidency, PACE President and Secretary General

COUNCIL OF EUROPE STRASBOURG 26 AUGUST 2020

In a joint statement by the Alternate Foreign Minister of Greece, Miltiadis Varvitsiotis, President of the Committee of Ministers, Rik Daems, President of the Parliamentary Assembly and Marija Pejčinović Burić, Secretary General, the three Council of Europe leaders called on the Belarussian authorities and all relevant stakeholders “to urgently initiate a broad-based and inclusive national dialogue, fully involving civil society, to ensure a peaceful way out of the current crisis and opening the door for necessary reforms benefiting all Belarussian citizens.”

Belarus is not yet a member of the Council of Europe. However, over the years it did sign and ratify 12 Council of Europe treaties and protocols, as well as joined four Partial Agreements: The Venice Commission, GRECO (the Group of States against Corruption), the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sports and the European Pharmacopeia. In addition, the Council of Europe has a number of activities in Belarus, facilitated through its Information Point in Minsk, which was opened in 2009. A new Action Plan (2019-21) between Belarus and the Council of Europe on related project cooperation was adopted last year. “We all wish that one day Belarus will join our European family of common values by becoming a full-fledged member of the Council of Europe. The Council of Europe stands ready to work for the implementation of the Action Plan to help bring Belarussian legislation closer to European democratic standards,” highlighted the three leaders.

“The Council of Europe, with its expertise and experience stands ready to support such a dialogue, in cooperation with other international partners. In particular, we stand ready to support necessary constitutional reforms,” they underlined.

The leaders of the Council of Europe concluded by calling for “the immediate release of all detained protesters, the stop to all ill-treatment and for the urgent and transparent investigation into acts of law enforcement brutality. Legitimacy cannot come from repression. It comes from an electoral process that is free, fair and based on the rule of law”.

# Situation in Belarus: statement by Congress President

CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES STRASBOURG 26 AUGUST 2020

The President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, Anders Knape, has made the following statement on the situation in Belarus:

"The events in Belarus following the Presidential election have brought to the fore the people's desire for democratic change in the country and urgent need for dialogue between citizens and authorities.

Over the past several years, the Congress has pursued its co-operation with Belarus aimed at improving local self-government in the country, as we are convinced that democratic reforms must necessarily involve decentralisation of power to the local and regional level and greater citizens' participation in governance of their communities.

The Congress will continue its support for democratisation in Belarus, stressing the importance of creating an environment based on citizens' trust and engagement of civil society in decision making. We stand ready to bring our expertise in order to improve the country's legislative framework, in the light of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and its Additional Protocol on the right of citizens to participate in the affairs of local authorities. "