

Motion

tabled by the SPD, Alliance 90/The Greens and FDP parliamentary groups

In support of a democratic Belarus in the European family

The German Bundestag is requested to adopt the following motion:

I. The German Bundestag declares:

The German Bundestag stands resolutely at the side of all those standing up for democracy and human rights, freedom, self-determination and fair elections in Belarus. Our solidarity with the Belarusian pro-democracy movement is unwavering. The Members of the Bundestag extend their recognition and support to the many Belarusian campaigners for freedom who are paying a very high personal price for the goal of a democratic Belarus.

The German Bundestag remembers the victims of the Belarusian regime who lost their lives to state violence during the protests that followed the fraudulent presidential election in the summer of 2020, or who died as political prisoners detained in inhumane conditions in Belarus. Our sincere sympathy goes out to their families. The Members of the Bundestag are conscious of the deep pain many Belarusians are suffering because of the regime.

The German Bundestag expresses its solidarity with all political prisoners in Belarus. Their release is of the highest priority. Standing up for freedom, human dignity and democracy is not a crime but a human right. With more than 100 parliamentary sponsorships, the Members of the German Bundestag are playing their part in continuing to draw attention to the devastating plight of political prisoners and ensuring they are not forgotten. In addition, the establishment of a Democratic Belarus Friendship Group has created a forum at the Bundestag for regular discussions with the Belarusian pro-democracy movement about the country's future.

Germany's history and role in Europe mean we have a duty to do all we can to support democracy and freedom movements on our continent. Russia's illegal war of aggression against Ukraine has once again made clear that autocratic regimes pose a direct threat to the peace, security and stability of our rules-based, peaceful European order. Strengthening the democratic forces in our European neighbourhood is therefore also in our own interests.

II. The German Bundestag notes:

The presidential election in Belarus on 9 August 2020 was marred by fraud on a massive scale. It was neither free nor fair, and in no way met the standard for democratic elections. In the run-up to the vote, the dictator Lukashenko deliberately thwarted an international election observation mission by the OSCE. Aleksandr Lukashenko derives no legitimacy whatsoever from this election. The EU Member States rightly did not recognise the election result.

Since the summer of 2020, the Belarusian regime has been engaged in an unprecedented crackdown on the population. The peaceful protests against the fraudulent election were brutally suppressed. Tens of thousands of people were arbitrarily detained, and thousands convicted at show trials. Civil society organisations and independent trade unions have been forced to disband, and independent media outlets and national and international cultural organisations have been shut down. Work to promote human rights and democracy has been criminalised, lawyers have been disbarred, and the potential use of the death penalty has been drastically expanded. Freedom of assembly and the right to freedom of expression do not exist in practice.

Representatives of the Belarusian pro-democracy movement are either in exile or in prison. People are still being imprisoned on political grounds almost every day. Estimates currently put the number of political prisoners at around 1500. The true number is likely to be far higher. The Nobel Peace Prize laureate Ales Bialiatski has been sentenced to ten years' imprisonment; Sergei Tikhanovsky and Viktor Babariko, who were barred from standing as presidential candidates, have been sentenced to 18 and 14 years in prison respectively; and a leading opposition activist, Maria Kalesnikava, has been given an 11-year term.

The conditions in Belarusian prisons and prison camps are inhumane: mistreatment and torture, including sexual violence, and weeks of solitary confinement in tiny cells without a mattress, blanket, books or contact with family and friends are a horrifying daily reality for many. Even children are often not allowed to visit their parents. Medical care falls short of what is necessary. Several political prisoners have already died in these inhumane prison conditions. Suicide attempts are a regular occurrence. It is not uncommon for detainees not to be heard from for months – a daily nightmare for their families and friends. Prisoners' families are often threatened and subjected to pressure.

In February 2023, a report by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights confirmed that widespread and gross human rights violations have been committed in Belarus, some of which may amount to crimes against humanity. Furthermore, a report published in May 2023 by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), of which Belarus is a member, concludes that the Belarusian regime is violating a large number of human rights obligations arising from the OSCE human dimension, and that it has created an arsenal of legal and constitutional changes designed to hinder any form of opposition.

Aleksandr Lukashenko and his regime made a decision in the summer of 2020 for which they bear sole responsibility. They put violently maintaining their own grasp on power above the will of the Belarusian people and the country's future. Rather than beginning to open up the country to democracy, the Lukashenko regime deliberately led Belarus into isolation and thus made it even more politically, economically and financially dependent on the Kremlin.

Belarus is a base and a launching ground for the Russian army in the illegal war of aggression against Ukraine: on 24 February 2022, Russian troops attacked Ukraine from Belarus. Russian missiles have repeatedly been fired on Ukrainian

territory from inside Belarus. The declared stationing of tactical nuclear weapons shows the extent to which the dictator Lukashenko continues to act as Vladimir Putin's henchman. The Belarusian regime is also demonstrably participating in one of Russia's most abhorrent war crimes – the deportation of Ukrainian children.

There is no majority support in the Belarusian population for Russia's war of aggression. Indeed, there is also active resistance to the regime's actions, as is shown, for example, by a number of courageous efforts to sabotage the Russian army's supply lines. In addition, many Belarusian volunteers are fighting in the Ukrainian army. They are convinced that a free Belarus is only possible with a free Ukraine. In exile, the democratic forces from Belarus have expressed solidarity with the Ukrainian people.

This solidarity and the tireless commitment of democratic civil society and the "United Transitional Cabinet", which opposes the dictator Lukashenko, clearly show that an alternative to the dictatorial regime in Belarus is possible and that the strong and diverse Belarusian society should not be equated with the regime. The German Bundestag stands firmly at the side of the entire Belarusian pro-democracy movement, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, and the "United Transitional Cabinet" she leads. The Members of the Bundestag are grateful for her courage, strength, resilience, and her fight for European values.

The European Union has become the biggest haven for the Belarusian democratic movement in exile. Lithuania and Poland, in particular, deserve great credit for their exemplary willingness to provide rapid, unbureaucratic and comprehensive assistance. The European Union and the Belarusian pro-democracy movement are united by the same values: respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy and the rule of law. All Belarusians should know that a future free and democratic Belarus will be welcome in the European family of nations.

III. The German Bundestag condemns in the strongest possible terms:

- Russia's illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, and the Belarusian regime's support for this flagrant breach of international law and the associated severe violations of international humanitarian law;
- the Belarusian regime's brutal crackdown on its own population and the merciless persecution of the Belarusian pro-democracy movement;
- all cases of the murder of dissidents, abduction, politically motivated imprisonment and sentencing, torture and sexual violence;
- the unlawful detention of political prisoners, the targeted efforts to wear down their family and friends, and the inhumane prison conditions.

The Bundestag calls on the Belarusian regime to cease all forms of repression, release all political prisoners, facilitate free and fair elections monitored by OSCE observers, and immediately end its support for the illegal war against Ukraine.

IV. The German Bundestag welcomes:

- the restrictive measures against Belarus that have been imposed to date at European level – both the individual sanctions against the dictator

Lukashenko and parts of the Belarusian apparatus of repression, and the sectoral economic sanctions;

- the Consultative Group for dialogue with the Belarusian pro-democracy movement set up at EU level, and the funding made available to support Belarusian civil society and independent media outlets;
- the investment package announced by the European Union to provide economic support to a democratic Belarus in the event of a democratic transition;
- the further development of Deutsche Welle’s dedicated digital programming for Belarus, which was launched in the autumn of 2020 and has since been successful in reaching and facilitating dialogue with people in Belarus and in exile;
- the Federal Government’s past and ongoing support for the Belarusian pro-democracy movement, including through
 - funding for civil society projects as part of the “Expanding Cooperation with Civil Society in the Eastern Partnership Countries and Russia” programme and funding for free trade unions;
 - the contribution to the European Endowment for Democracy;
 - funding for the International Accountability Platform for Belarus to collect and preserve evidence of gross human rights violations;
 - funding for medical and psychological support for victims of repression;
 - various scholarship programmes which are also open to people from Belarus, such as the Hannah Arendt Initiative for media professionals in exile, the Elisabeth Selbert Initiative for human rights defenders, the Martin Roth Initiative for artists and cultural professionals, the Philipp Schwartz Initiative for researchers and the Hilde Domin Programme for students;
 - funding for the European Fund for Journalism in Exile (JX Fund) and, through this, for Reporters Without Borders, the Schöpflin Foundation and the Rudolf Augstein Foundation to support exile media outlets and journalists who are at risk, including those from Belarus;
 - support for the offices of the German political foundations, which are maintaining contact with Belarus;
 - funding for the Science at Risk Emergency Office of the Academic Network Eastern Europe, to support scientists facing political persecution;
 - the continued admission of people from Belarus facing political persecution, under Section 22, second sentence, of the Residence Act (*Aufenthaltsgesetz*).

- V. The German Bundestag calls on the Federal Government, while complying with budgetary requirements,
- at European level
 - to continue to press for individual sanctions against the Belarusian security and intelligence apparatus, and against all judges responsible for the arbitrary judgments imposed on political prisoners;
 - to press for further sectoral economic sanctions targeting the financing structures of the Belarusian regime, take effective action to close any loopholes in the sanctions regime and, in the case of a debate about easing sanctions, to resolutely oppose doing so, as sanctions can in principle only be lifted if the numerous serious grounds that led to the imposition of sanctions no longer apply;
 - to seek to ensure an intensive dialogue takes place with the democratic forces from Belarus in the framework of the EU Consultative Group – with the aim of developing joint strategies and being able to regularly ask what support they need and make adjustments accordingly;
 - to press for the inclusion of Belarusian civil society and democratic forces in the EU’s Eastern Partnership programme, which is currently being adjusted by the European External Action Service;
 - to prepare for Belarus’s future as a free and democratic country, and signal that a democratic Belarus is welcome in the European community of shared values;
 - to press for the preservation of Belarus’s state sovereignty and its culture and language, and to make it absolutely clear to Russia that the creeping takeover of Belarus being pushed by the Kremlin with the connivance of Aleksandr Lukashenko is absolutely unacceptable and rejected in the strongest possible terms. Our eastern neighbours are and will remain independent and sovereign states which determine their own future and which must never again become the object of imperialist dreams and interests;
 - to work unrelentingly towards the release of all political prisoners, towards fair and free elections monitored by OSCE observers, and towards an immediate end to violence and torture;
 - to continue and further expand its support for the democratic forces;
 - to provide continuous and intensified support for independent media and free journalists, human rights defenders, scientists, cultural professionals, top athletes in exile, students and trade union activists, digital community projects and victims of repression.
The existing funding and scholarship programmes of the various ministries and agencies should be used to achieve this, but full use should also be made of alternative funding options for individual cases or outstanding civil society projects;
 - to continue to admit people from Belarus facing political persecution, under Section 22, second sentence, of the Residence Act.

- to provide intensified and comprehensive support to former political prisoners after their release. If they remain at risk from the Lukashenko regime, their admission to Germany under Section 22, second sentence, of the Residence Act should be enabled, and they should be offered medical and psychosocial help, among other things. More specific ideas should be developed together with Belarusian civil society, including on how greater support can be provided to the families of political prisoners;
- to continue to support the collection of evidence of gross human rights violations and seek to ensure that the perpetrators and those politically responsible are brought to justice. The Belarusian regime's support for the forcible deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia and Belarus must also be examined by the courts, so that those responsible can be held to account;
- to continue in future to fund projects by Belarus's democratic civil society as part of the "Expanding Cooperation with Civil Society in the Eastern Partnership Countries and Russia" programme. Projects by the Belarusian diaspora and civil society in exile should explicitly also continue to receive funding in this context;
- to improve the application and decision-making process of the "Expanding Cooperation with Civil Society in the Eastern Partnership Countries and Russia" programme, including with the aim of ensuring that funding can be disbursed to the civil society partners as early as possible in the year and allowing a more flexible approach to funding applications in the event of major developments;
- to continue to support the outstanding civil society work of organisations such as RAZAM e.V., Libereco – Partnership for Human Rights e.V. or the Science at Risk Emergency Office of the Academic Network Eastern Europe (AKNO), so that there continue to be points of contact in Germany in future for people from Belarus facing political persecution, and so that more can be done to educate and inform about the situation in Belarus;
- to do more to educate the *Land* ministries and senate departments responsible for residence law about the current human rights situation in Belarus and draw attention to the various options which exist under residence law as it stands, especially for dissident cultural and media professionals. The model for this should be the letter from the Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community of 20 June 2022 (M3AG-21000/33#14), which provided information about options under residence law for dissident cultural and media professionals from Russia;
- to continue to raise awareness in German missions in third countries, such as Georgia or Moldova, regarding visa applications under Section 22, second sentence, of the Residence Act from Belarusians facing political persecution;
- to draw attention to the fact that the application of Section 24 of the Residence Act in conjunction with Article 2 (3) of Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/382 of 4 March 2022 establishing the existence of a mass influx of displaced persons from Ukraine within the meaning of Article 5 of Directive 2001/55/EC, and having the effect of introducing temporary protection, should also be examined in the case of Belarusian nationals facing political persecution who were resident in Ukraine on 24 February 2022 and made use of the possibility of visa-free residence

or a temporary settlement permit there, and who are unable to safely return permanently to Belarus;

- to issue “travel documents for foreigners” under the Ordinance Governing Residence (*Aufenthaltsverordnung*) to Belarusian nationals facing political persecution in Belarus. Since the summer of 2020, it has no longer been reasonable to expect them to cooperate with the Belarusian embassy in Germany: firstly, as this would reveal that they have sought protection here, and secondly, as it could put family members in Belarus in danger. With the decree issued by the dictator Lukashenko on 7 September 2023 ordering missions abroad to no longer issue passports, among other things, to Belarusians living in other countries, the situation for Belarusians in exile has worsened significantly, and so a solution to this issue must be found as quickly as possible in Germany and throughout the EU.

Berlin, 7 November 2023

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