



**Doc. 12122**

22 January 2010

## Situation in Belarus

**Reply to Recommendation<sup>1</sup>:** Recommendation 1874 (2009)  
Committee of Ministers

1. The Committee of Ministers has carefully reviewed [Recommendation 1874 \(2009\)](#) on “The situation in Belarus”, also taking into consideration [Resolution 1671 \(2009\)](#).
2. The Committee of Ministers recalls that the then Chairman of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, Slovenian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Samuel Žbogar, and the Deputy Secretary General, Mrs De Boer-Buquicchio, held a number of high-level meetings with the Belarusian authorities, including with the Belarusian Foreign Minister, Sergei Martynov, during their visit to Minsk on 8 and 9 June 2009. Meetings of the Chair of the Rapporteur Group on Democracy of the Ministers’ Deputies (GR-DEM) and the representative of Belarus to the Council of Europe are held after GR-DEM meetings at which issues pertaining to Belarus are discussed. In addition, a representative of Belarus took part in an exchange of views with the GR-DEM in the context of a discussion held by the Group at its meeting of 10 December 2009 on the co-operation between the Council of Europe and Belarus.
3. The Council of Europe Secretariat follows the situation in Belarus constantly, through the ongoing contacts that the various Directorates maintain with partner organisations in Belarus, in a range of fields of activity. The issues referred to by the Assembly as being of importance in monitoring the situation in Belarus closely reflect the concerns of the Committee of Ministers; in this respect, the Committee of Ministers welcomes the joint statement issued on 9 October 2009 by the Chair of the Committee of Ministers, the President of the Assembly and the Secretary General, appealing to the Belarusian President, Alyaksandr Lukashenka, to declare forthwith a moratorium on the use of the death penalty in Belarus, and to commute the sentences of all prisoners sentenced to death to terms of imprisonment. The Committee of Ministers remains vigilant on other areas of importance for the Organisation outlined by the Parliamentary Assembly (*inter alia*, freedom of association, of assembly, of the media, electoral reform and the question of alleged political prisoners).
4. On accession to conventions, in pursuit of the step-by-step approach advocated by the Chairman of the Committee of Ministers and the Deputy Secretary General further to their June 2009 visit to Minsk, a technical-level meeting to examine practical legal and procedural issues related to the possible accession of Belarus to the Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings took place in Strasbourg on 18 November 2009. The participants held an exchange of views concerning the legislation and practice of Belarus as regards action against trafficking in human beings on the one hand and the main measures and requirements of the Council of Europe Convention on the other hand, with a view to examining the possibility of Belarus to accede to this Convention.
5. With regard to the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA), the Committee of Ministers agreed in principle, on 4 November 2009, to grant the request of Belarus to be invited to accede to this Agreement.

---

1. adopted at the 1074th meeting of the Ministers’ Deputies (12-13 January 2010)



6. The possibility of Belarus being invited to accede to other Council of Europe conventions, including both those in which it has expressed an interest (principally in the field of multilateral co-operation on criminal matters), as well as the other conventions (notably the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment) remains under discussion within the Committee of Ministers.

7. The Committee of Ministers welcomes the development of relations between Belarus and the Congress, as evidenced by the granting of observer status to the Council for Co-operation of Local Self-Government Bodies at the Council of the Republic of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus, and to the NGO "Lev Sapieha Foundation", and assures the Assembly of its support to the Congress in promoting the latter's aims and values in Belarus.

8. The Committee of Ministers would recall that the Council of Europe Information Point in Minsk opened in June 2009, as a result to no small extent of the political will of successive chairmanships of the Committee of Ministers (Slovakia, Sweden, Spain and Slovenia) to promote the establishment of this modest but essential structure to raise awareness of the Organisation and to promote its values and standards. The Information Point has now launched two Council of Europe campaigns in Belarus (that against domestic violence against women, and that in favour of the abolition of the death penalty), and will pursue its work with the organisation of open lectures on the Council of Europe and with related awareness-raising activities. It is also nearing completion of its own website, in Russian and Belarusian. Further activities could be developed in co-operation with the European Union delegation and OSCE Office in Minsk.

9. Belarusian civil society representatives and NGOs continue to participate in the meetings of the Conference of INGOs during Assembly sessions, as well as in the work of the Conference's Civil Society and Democracy Committee and its Human Rights Committee. A beginning has also been made to organising other actions in Belarus. A seminar on the European Convention on Human Rights and criminal justice was held in Minsk on 30 and 31 October 2009, in co-operation with two Belarus NGOs, the Legal Initiative Organisation and the Society for Comparative Legal Studies.

10. The Council of Europe can develop common actions with the European Union in Belarus in the context of the Eastern Partnership, in which Belarus is a full participant, in particular in the areas covered by Platform 1 on democracy, good governance and stability and Platform 4 on contacts between people.