



Resolution 1496 (2006)¹

Belarus in the aftermath of the Presidential election of 19 March 2006

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly strongly condemns the undemocratic conduct of the presidential election of 19 March 2006 in Belarus as well as the wave of intimidation, violence and persecution that hit Belarusian democratic forces before, during and after the vote.
2. The Assembly recalls that, in its [Resolution 1482 \(2006\)](#) on the situation in Belarus on the eve of the presidential election, the Assembly affirmed that, in light of the situation in Belarus in the field of democracy, rule of law and human rights, there could not be any change in its policy towards the Belarusian regime and that the lifting of the suspension of special guest status for the Belarusian Parliament was not on the agenda.
3. In that resolution, the Assembly also stated that “should the Belarusian authorities give clear and conclusive signs of their commitment to move closer to Council of Europe standards in the fields of democracy, rule of law and human rights, the Assembly would be prepared to reopen appropriate communication channels. To this end, particular attention will be paid to whether all candidates have equal freedom to campaign, the overall fairness of the electoral campaign and the conduct of election procedures”.
4. The Assembly deeply regrets that, despite its readiness to open communication channels, the March vote was used by the current Belarusian leadership as a further opportunity to show its blatant disregard for the standards and values promoted by the Council of Europe. Candidates did not have equal freedom to campaign and the conduct of the vote was fraudulent and totally lacking in transparency. The refusal of the Belarusian authorities to issue visas for international observers from Council of Europe member states, the limitation of the rights from which observers should benefit in accordance with Council of Europe standards, the lack of opposition representatives in the electoral commissions at all levels, the manipulative influence of the administration and the abuse of the practice of early voting, in particular, give rise to the most serious concerns, which should also be addressed through the revision of the relevant Belarusian legislation.
5. In these circumstances, and having taken note of the preliminary findings of the OSCE/ODIHR International Observation Mission, the Assembly is bound to conclude that the electoral results did not reflect the real will of the Belarusian people. As a consequence, the popular protest which ensued was a legitimate and courageous gesture which deserves the Assembly's solidarity and represents an important sign of political awareness. The Assembly further encourages Belarusian democratic forces to remain united and to continue in their efforts to raise support for democratic values among the Belarusian population at large. It reiterates that the primary objective of its policy should be ending the isolation of the Belarusian people by promoting contacts with democratic political forces, civil society and ordinary citizens of Belarus.
6. In this respect, the Assembly restates the unique role that could be played by a Council of Europe Information Office based in Belarus to support the democratisation process and demands that the establishment of such a structure become a priority for the Council of Europe.
7. Finally, the Assembly welcomes the decision of the European Union to enforce a package of selected restrictive measures towards the current Belarusian leadership, which are fully in line with Assembly [Resolution 1482 \(2006\)](#), as well as to intensify its support for the Belarusian civil society and ordinary citizens,

1. Assembly debate on 13 April 2006 (14th Sitting) (see [Doc.10890](#), report of the Political Affairs Committee, rapporteur: Mr Herkel). Text adopted by the Assembly on 13 April 2006 (14th Sitting).



including by facilitating the enjoyment of their right to travel and study in EU member states. Likewise, the Assembly welcomes the proposal of the European Parliament to set up an international commission to investigate the disappearances of Yuri Zakharenko, Victor Gonchar, Anatoly Krasovsky and Dmitry Zavadsky.

8. In light of the above, the Assembly reiterates the still relevant recommendations laid down in its [Resolution 1482 \(2006\)](#) and [Recommendation 1734 \(2006\)](#) on the situation in Belarus on the eve of the presidential election.

9. In addition, the Assembly calls on the Belarusian authorities:

- 9.1. to release immediately all those detained in connection with the March presidential elections;
- 9.2. to disclose information on all those who were arrested or who received medical treatment after the dispersal of the peaceful demonstrations;
- 9.3. to conduct a transparent investigation into the abusive use of force by police and security forces against peaceful demonstrators;
- 9.4. to refrain from further intimidation, harassment and persecution against peaceful protesters and opposition supporters, including those taking the form of dismissal from employment, non-renewal of employment contracts or expulsion from universities;
- 9.5. to open a genuine dialogue with relevant international institutions, including the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), with a view to amending the Belarusian Electoral Code to make it consistent with Council of Europe standards, and addressing the malpractice of the administration in electoral matters, well in advance of the next elections;
- 9.6. to accede to the opposition's demand for a re-run of the presidential election and ensure the pre-conditions exist for it to be free, fair and respectful of international standards.

10. The Assembly calls on its member states:

- 10.1. to facilitate access to university institutions for Belarusian citizens;
- 10.2. to set up appropriate systems to allocate scholarships and traineeships to Belarusian students, including at the Council of Europe and other international organisations of which these states are members;
- 10.3. to introduce flexible visa regimes in favour of those Belarusians representing civil society and students;
- 10.4. to endorse exchanges between the political parties of the Belarusian opposition and relevant political parties in Council of Europe countries, as well as between groups in civil society.

11. The Assembly also calls on its member states which are not European Union members to align themselves with the package of sanctions recently decided by the EU, in particular as regards the visa ban against a number of Belarusian officials and the freezing of assets.

12. Being convinced that significant progress in the respect of democratic values, the rule of law and human rights in Belarus can not be achieved without the active support of the Russian Federation, the Assembly asks its Political Affairs Committee to establish a framework for dialogue and structured co-operation with the representatives of the Russian Federation to the Assembly involving also the Committee of Ministers, in order to find ways to achieve such support.

13. The Assembly calls on the Secretary General of the Council of Europe:

- 13.1. to enable Belarusian students and young graduates to conduct internships and study periods at the Council of Europe;
- 13.2. to encourage the further involvement of Belarusian civil society and NGOs in the activities of the Council of Europe.

14. The Assembly invites the Venice Commission to make proposals on how to amend the Belarusian Electoral Code and address the malpractice of the administration in electoral matters, with particular reference to the issues of the role of independent observers, the composition of the electoral commissions and the practice of early voting, if necessary by liaising with the appropriate Belarusian authorities.

15. Finally, the Assembly invites the European Youth Centres to encourage the further involvement of young people and youth organisations from Belarus in their activities.