Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Resolution 2587 (2025)[1]

The urgent need for free and fair elections in Belarus

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Free and fair elections constitute the very foundation of democratic government and a cornerstone of representative democracy. By electing representatives from among themselves to form governing bodies, citizens exercise their right to be represented in the political decision-making process. The right to vote and to stand for election is a fundamental human right, indispensable for the effective functioning of democracy and the protection of individual freedoms and liberties.

2. The so-called presidential election organised in Belarus on 26 January 2025 exemplifies the blatant contempt of the regime of Aliaksandr Lukashenka for basic democratic norms and international law that has characterised the three decades of his rule.

3. This disregard for international law is made clear in the Lukashenka regime's participation in the Russian Federation's large-scale aggression against Ukraine, a most serious violation of international law which led the Parliamentary Assembly to suspend all relations with the Belarusian authorities on the basis of its Opinion 300 (2022) "Consequences of the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine", and in its continued weaponisation of migrants as a tool for hybrid war against neighbouring States.

4. Since the fraudulent elections of 2020, the Lukashenka regime has systematically implemented measures that, in their design and implementation, have entirely eroded all vestiges of the key pillars of democratic society in the country.

5. The Assembly refers to the assessment of the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) in its Final Opinion on the Constitutional Reform of 24 October 2022 (Opinion No. 1054 / 2021) that amendments to the Constitution of Belarus adopted by referendum on 27 February 2022 provided no reasonable limitations on the term of office of Mr Lukashenka. It further refers to the Interim Opinion on Constitutional Amendments and the Procedure for their Adoption of the Venice Commission of 23 March 2021 (Opinion No. 992/2020) that assessed that *ad hominem* term-limit waivers for incumbent presidents violate international legal principles.

6. The Assembly reaffirms its consideration that any country that extends presidential term limits beyond the usual two terms of four or five years constitutes a significant departure from democracy and the rule of law.

7. The Assembly recognises the invaluable role played by international election observers in providing credible and reliable election assessments, and reaffirms that in a truly democratic system, international scrutiny, transparency and accountability shall be encouraged. The decision to invite neither election observers from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe to observe the 2024 so-called parliamentary and local elections, nor observers to the so-called presidential election of 2025, is in contradiction to international commitments made by Belarus and is a further indication of the state of the democratic space and of civil and political rights and freedoms in Belarus.

8. The unprecedented number of politically motivated arrests and detentions, and the widespread intimidation of opposition figures, journalists, activists and human rights defenders, have forced over 500 000 Belarusians to flee the country, many of whom face continued repressions via trials *in absentia*, the

1. *Assembly debate* on 30 January 2025 (7th sitting) (see Doc. 16105, report of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy, rapporteur: Mr Ryszard Petru). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 30 January 2025 (7th sitting).

confiscation of property, the inability to renew identification documents, threats to their family and abuse by the Belarusian authorities of alert systems of the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) to harass dissidents. The regime's repression has a disproportionate impact on young people, including politically motivated expulsions and arrests as well as the suppression of their rights to education, expression and participation.

9. The Assembly is alarmed by the continued transnational repression of the Lukashenka regime and calls attention to the politically motivated criminal trials *in absentia* of 31 May 2024 against 20 scholars, political experts, journalists, experts and opposition politicians, and their labelling as individuals involved in extremist activities. Among those arbitrarily detained are partners of the Council of Europe who have been prosecuted for peacefully and bravely exercising their rights, and even for merely exercising their professional activities.

10. The Assembly deplores that over 1 200 political prisoners remain detained in Belarus, including prisoners without any possibility to communicate with those outside for indefinite periods of time, and who experience torture, inhuman or degrading treatment, acts of physical or sexual violence, a lack of basic medical care and privacy, a lack of a fair trial, psychological pressure and discrimination.

11. The overall policy of political repression has led to the adoption of legislation that effectively bans the registration and operation of opposition democratic political parties and the presentation of alternative presidential candidates. All opposition political figures are imprisoned or abroad. Three opposition candidates from the 2020 presidential election remain incarcerated, while the 2022 constitutional amendments of Mr Lukashenka extended age limits and residence qualifications for presidential candidates to effectively prohibit any Belarusians in exile from presenting a candidacy.

12. The widespread and systematic nature of the persecution against the civilian population conducted by the Lukashenka regime may amount to crimes against humanity, and the Assembly acknowledges the referral, in September 2024, of the Republic of Lithuania to the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court to investigate these alleged crimes.

13. In a context where freedoms of speech, assembly and association are curtailed, where opposition political parties are dissolved and their leaders persecuted, where the freedom of the media is not respected, where there is no redress against these violations and where no credible domestic or international election observation is allowed, it is clear that free and fair elections cannot be held.

14. The Assembly reaffirms its unwavering commitment to supporting the rights, freedoms and safety of the Belarusian people while standing in solidarity with all those affected by the crimes of the Lukashenka regime, and its support for the Belarusian democratic forces, led by Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, and its structures – the Office of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, the United Transitional Cabinet of Belarus and the Coordination Council, as an elected representative body of Belarusian democratic society – which are leading efforts for a democratic future for Belarus.

15. It underlines that co-operation with representatives of Belarusian democratic forces and civil society remains a priority for the Council of Europe, as articulated in the Reykjavik Declaration adopted by the Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe in May 2023.

16. In this context, the Assembly welcomes the development of the activities of the Council of Europe Contact Group on co-operation with Belarusian democratic forces and civil society, the establishment of an information point for Belarusian people in Vilnius, decided in November 2024, and the regular dialogue established by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, including on the issue of the death penalty.

17. The Assembly recalls its own pioneering resolve set out in its Resolution 2530 (2024) "A democratic future for Belarus" to further promote the participation of representatives of Belarusian democratic forces in its work. It welcomes, as a clear demonstration of this commitment, the establishment of a representative delegation of Belarusian democratic forces for the 2025 session of the Assembly.

18. The Assembly reiterates its ambition to welcome a future democratic, independent, sovereign, peaceful and prosperous Belarus as a member of the Council of Europe.

19. In light of these considerations, deploring the further deterioration of human rights, the rule of law and democratic standards in Belarus, the Assembly:

19.1. stresses that democratic elections are not possible without respect for human rights, in particular freedom of expression, assembly and association;

19.2. considers that the so-called elections organised in Belarus on 26 January 2025 do not meet the minimum international standards for democratic elections and lack any democratic credibility;

19.3. considers that there are no grounds for recognising the legitimacy of Aliaksandr Lukashenka as president.

20. In line with the recommendations set out in its Resolution 2530 (2024), the Assembly believes that, with a view to honouring its obligations under international law, aligning itself to the Council of Europe's values and preserving its sovereignty and independence, Belarus should:

20.1. cease all repressive measures designed to silence dissent, and ensure the unconditional and immediate release of all political prisoners and provide for their rehabilitation;

20.2. declare an amnesty for all those arrested on political grounds;

20.3. immediately put an end to all acts of torture or inhuman and degrading treatment, whether in public, citizens' homes or any place of detention;

20.4. ensure the organisation of free and fair elections, together with the respect for civil and political rights and freedoms, in line with the recommendations set out in Assembly Resolution 2371 (2021) "Urgent need for electoral reform in Belarus" and recommendations made by the Venice Commission and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe;

20.5. enable a peaceful transfer of power after the organisation of free and fair elections;

20.6. impose an immediate moratorium on the death penalty and take steps towards its permanent abolition.

21. The Assembly calls on Council of Europe member States to:

21.1. reject the legitimacy of the so-called elections in Belarus of 26 January 2025, to make clear their non-recognition of the election of Aliaksandr Lukashenka to the post of President of Belarus, and take decisive steps to broaden and intensify targeted sanctions against the regime and those who support its unlawful activities;

21.2. in line with the Reykjavik Declaration, continue and intensify support for the structures of the Belarusian democratic forces led by Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya;

21.3. maintain and expand efforts to investigate human rights abuses in Belarus and actively support mechanisms that ensure accountability for those responsible;

21.4. explore measures to facilitate entry and stay in safe and dignified conditions for Belarusian citizens who flee the Lukashenka regime, in line with Assembly Resolution 2499 (2023) "Addressing the specific challenges faced by the Belarusians in exile"; take measures to help them preserve their language, culture and identity; and refrain from returning them to Belarus as long as they are at risk of persecution;

21.5. in line with Assembly Resolution 2509 (2023) "Transnational repression as a growing threat to the rule of law and human rights", establish mechanisms to track incidents of transnational repression and ensure that partners of the Council of Europe, human rights defenders, journalists and activists are better protected from the risk of transnational repression;

21.6. promote justice and accountability for crimes against humanity committed against Belarusians by the highest military-political leadership of Belarus;

21.7. support the referral of the Belarus situation by the Government of Lithuania to the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court.