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23 May 2024

Concept note and programme

The role of national parliaments in addressing the challenges faced by the Belarusians in exile

The Luxembourg solutions, 6 – 7 June 2024

Chambre des Députés du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg *23, rue du Marché-aux-Herbes | L-1728 Luxembourg*

1. Introduction

In Resolution 2499 (2023), the Assembly addressed the challenges faced by the Belarusians in exile and proposed a number of solutions to be implemented by Council of Europe member states. The objective of this meeting will be to discuss the role national authorities, including parliaments, can play in supporting the implementation of these recommendations.

2. Objective

This event is a follow-up to the PACE report on “Addressing the specific challenges faced by the Belarusians in exile” adopted in June 2023 and whose rapporteur is Paul Galles (Luxembourg, EPP/CD). It aims to generate a discussion on the role national authorities, including parliaments through the newly established international parliamentary Alliance for Democratic Belarus, can play to support the recommendations made in Resolution 2499 (2023). It builds on the structured and regular dialogue of the Council of Europe, including its Assembly, with Belarusian democratic forces, and enhances links with civil society, human rights defenders, independent journalists and academia with a view to contributing to fostering their visibility and outreach. The overall aim of the event is to support the efforts of the Belarus democratic forces in resolving the challenges faced by Belarusians in exile pending their return to a democratic Belarus.

3. Format

The conference “The Luxembourg solutions”, organised in cooperation with the Chamber of Deputies of Luxembourg, is a high-level event with the participation of Theodoros Rousopoulos, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, Leader of the Belarus democratic forces.

Six sessions will address key challenges facing the Belarusians in exile and the solutions proposed in Resolution 2499 (2023). The starting point of each session will be an overview of the relevant recommendations, followed by a snapshot of the current challenges and possible solutions provided by Belarusian and speakers and representatives of national parliaments members of the international parliamentary Alliance for Democratic Belarus, foreign affairs representatives or representatives from international organisations, including the Council of Europe, with actions on each theme to be elaborated during the discussion for orienting and aiding the co-ordination of subsequent steps.

The panels will focus on legal entry and stay, threats to freedom of movement and the denial of consular services. Access to education, pursuing a professional career in exile and preserving and promoting Belarus cultural identity will also be discussed. They will be moderated by members of the bureau ad hoc Committee on Belarusians in exile or other relevant persons.

The perspective of the artistic world will also be brought by the award-winning writer Sasha Filipenko, and Natalia Kaliada, co-founder and director of the Belarus Free Theatre. The event will include a press conference so as to increase the visibility of the situation of Belarusians in exile and promote the newly established international parliamentary Alliance for Democratic Belarus.

Thursday 6 June 2024

12.00 – 13.00 *Registration of participants and welcome lunch*

13.00 – 13.45 **Opening session**

- Fernand Etgen, Vice-President of the Chamber of Deputies of the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg
- Xavier Bettel, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Luxembourg
- Theodoros Rousopoulos, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
- Paul Galles (Luxembourg, EPP/CD), member of the PACE Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons and rapporteur on “Addressing the specific challenges faced by the Belarusians in exile”
- Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, Leader of the Belarus democratic forces

13.45 – 14.00 **Grand témoin - Sasha Filipenko, writer**

14.00 – 14.15 Family photo

14.15 – 15.15 **Legal entry and stay**

Panel discussion on how legal entry and stay could be facilitated in Council of Europe member States for Belarusians in exile who fled the Lukashenka regime

Moderator: Paul Galles (Luxembourg, EPP/CD), member of the PACE Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons and rapporteur on “Addressing the specific challenges faced by the Belarusians in exile”

Speakers:

Belarusian speaker

Bogdana Sybikowska, DG HOME, International Affairs Unit, Desk Officer for Belarus

David Best, Special Representative of the Secretary General on Migration and Refugees (*tbc*)

15.15 – 16.15 **Threats to freedom of movement and denial of consular services**

Panel discussion on the new passport prepared by the Belarus democratic forces, and how national parliaments can alleviate the denial of consular services for Belarus citizens

Moderator: Marietta Karamanli (France, SOC), member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Speakers:

Belarusian speakers

Ambassador Violaine de Villemeur, Special Envoy for Belarus, Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, France

16.15 – 16.30 *Coffee break*

16.30 – 17.30 **Reprisals at home**

Followed by panel discussion on security threats posed to relatives who stayed in Belarus and what role national parliaments can play to support political prisoners’ relatives in exile

Moderator: Octavie Modert (Luxembourg, EPP/CD), member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Speakers:

Belarusian speakers

Ken McBain, Libereco

17.30 Press conference

19.30 Dinner hosted by the Luxembourg Parliament at Restaurant Mu (40, boulevard d’Avranches, 1160 Luxembourg)

Friday 7 June 2024

9.15 – 10.15 **Access to education**

Panel discussion on the best way to integrate Belarusian children in the host countries' school systems and on promoting Belarus academia in exile in Council of Europe member States

Moderator: Professor Elena Korosteleva, Professor of Politics and Global Sustainable Development, Director of the Institute for Global Sustainable Development, Warwick University

Speakers:

Belarusian speakers

Villano Qiriazhi, Head of Education Department, Directorate General of Democracy and Human Dignity

10.15 – 11.30 **Pursuing a professional career in exile**

Panel discussion on strategies to promote Belarus businesses in exile and better integrate Belarusians in the local labour market

Moderator: Larysa Bilozir (Ukraine, ALDE), member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Speakers:

Belarusian speakers

11.30 – 12.15 *Refreshments*

12.15 – 13.30 **Preserving and promoting Belarusian cultural identity**

Panel discussion on ways national parliaments can play a conducive role in promoting and disseminating the Belarusian cultural identity in the host countries

Moderator: Kimmo Kiljunen (Finland, SOC), member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Speakers:

Belarusian speakers

Yael Ohana, Programme Manager - Education, Training & Cooperation, Youth Department, Council of Europe

13.30 – 13.45 **Final statement by Natalia Kaliada, Co-Founding and Artistic Director of the Belarus Free Theatre**

13.45 – 14.15 **Concluding remarks and next steps**

- Anaïs Marin, UN Special Rapporteur on Belarus
- Anatoli Liabedzka, Advisor for the Constitutional Reform and Parliamentary Cooperation
- Paul Galles

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