

(2000/C 280 E/097)

**WRITTEN QUESTION P-2660/99****by Ari Vatanen (PPE-DE) to the Council***(22 December 1999)**Subject:* Development of democracy in Belarus

Recent events in Belarus have shown that the country is still far removed from democracy. The government headed by President Lukashenko is seeking, in spite of public opposition, to enter into a federal union with Russia.

Most recently, on 17 October 1999, over 20 000 Belarussians marched against the Lukashenko regime in Minsk. This resulted in a bloody clash between riot police and demonstrators, most of whom were arrested. Representatives of Belarus also blamed the demonstration on Western states.

Lukashenko has been criticised for systematically suppressing opposition and (inter alia) the press. Last autumn at least three important Belarussian opposition leaders disappeared. To enable Belarus to redeem its position in Europe as a free state without a dictatorship, the EU should also work towards helping Belarus on the way to developing democracy and human rights.

What has the Council done, and what does it propose to do, to promote the development of democracy and respect for human rights in Belarus?

**Reply***(13 March 2000)*

The Council has always attached particular importance to the development of democracy and respect for human rights in Belarus. In the light of the political and constitutional situation as well as the human rights violations in Belarus, it adopted a series of restrictive measures in September 1997 (ministerial contacts to be established only through the Presidency; halt to EU and Member States' technical assistance programs, except those in support of human rights and the democratisation process; no conclusion of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement).

To keep the door open and give Belarus an incentive to make progress in the fields of human rights and democracy, the Council has identified step-by-step benchmarks for the lifting of the 1997 restrictions. With this approach, positive steps in the fields of human rights, the media and re-registration for political parties and NGOs would be reciprocated by gradual lifting of the restrictions imposed by the Union.

Some positive measures have recently been taken by the Belarussian government such as the liberation of ex-Prime Minister Chigir and people arrested after the 17 October demonstrations, the agreement with the opposition on access to state-controlled media; the signing of the TACIS Civil Society Development Programme and the re-registration of NGOs and political parties.

But at the same time, Belarus has been backtracking on a number of points: ex-Prime Minister Chigir has been freed from provisional custody but the charges against him still stand and his trial is under way. According to unconfirmed information, a prominent political prisoner, Mr Klimov, was recently severely beaten. President Lukashenko consigned to oblivion the media agreement concluded at the preliminary negotiations conducted under OSCE auspices and Mr Sazonov, the chief negotiator of the Government in the OSCE-sponsored dialogue with the opposition, has resigned. Furthermore, the Government bypassed dialogue with the opposition on the draft election code. The lower chamber and the upper chamber of the Belarussian National Assembly adopted at the second reading the draft which is now before the President for signing. The code is badly drafted and contains a number of inconsistencies.

Two front-rank political personalities have disappeared over the last few months: Mr Zakharenko (former Minister for Internal Affairs) disappeared in May 1999 and Mr Gonchar (Vice-Chairman of the 13th Supreme Soviet) in September 1999; we have no information concerning their whereabouts. The case of a third major personality, Mrs Vinnikova (former Chairwoman of the Belarusian Central Bank) has been solved. She joined her son in the United Kingdom at the end of 1999.

In the light of these developments the Council is not in a position to lift the 1997 restrictions. The EU makes its position clear to Belarus at every appropriate occasion and presses for more democratic reforms (senior officials' Troika mission to Minsk on 1 and 2 November, meeting between Under-Secretary of State Blomberg and Foreign Minister Latypov in Istanbul on 18 November and démarches by heads of mission whenever necessary). Moreover, the recently signed TACIS Civil Society Development Programme will contribute to improving the democratic reform process in Belarus.

The EU's overriding aim is the holding of free and fair, internationally observed and recognised elections in 2000. The Council has taken good note of President Lukashenko's commitment to such elections, and will hold him to his word.

To set the electoral process in motion, a dialogue between the Government and the opposition is indispensable. The EU fully supports the efforts of the OSCE as the only organisation able to kick-start this dialogue.

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(2000/C 280 E/098)

**WRITTEN QUESTION E-2665/99**

**by Yasmine Boudjenah (GUE/NGL) to the Commission**

(12 January 2000)

*Subject:* Restructuring of ABB Alstom Power

The management of the ABB Alstom Power group, which was formed in a merger on 30 June 1999, has announced a restructuring programme. In some countries where the undertaking operates job cuts have already been announced.

Have this group and/or its pre-merger constituent groups received any EU aid?

If so, could the Commission give details of the amount and the conditions under which it was granted? Was such aid conditional on job creation? Is the Commission prepared to ask for it to be repaid?

**Answer given by Mr Barnier on behalf of the Commission**

(10 February 2000)

The Commission is making the necessary inquiries in the various Member States. It will make the results of its investigation known as soon as possible.

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(2000/C 280 E/099)

**WRITTEN QUESTION E-2667/99**

**by Olivier Dupuis (TDI) to the Council**

(13 January 2000)

*Subject:* Prospects of Azerbaijan joining the Council of Europe and development of EU/Azerbaijan relations

Can the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy give full details on the state of progress of Azerbaijan's accession to the Council of Europe? More generally, can the High Representative indicate how the EU intends to develop relations with the country?