

Ladies and gentlemen,

The current situation in Belarus is a great challenge to the entire European human rights protection system. HR violations there amount to breaches of *Ius cogens* provisions – however, the current system is not fully adjusted to deal with them.

CoE is not a “roundtable” type organization like the OSCE or UN. It was established as a main European watchdog for democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. CoE has very well developed legal framework and mechanisms for monitoring HR situation and sanctioning for violations, with its crown jewel – ECHR and ECtHR. However, CoE has very limited mandate to deal with the third countries.

Belarus is not a member state of the CoE, hence, not a state party to ECHR. It acceded to some CoE instruments, in particular, is an associate member of the Venice Commission. Nevertheless, mechanisms applicable to virtually all other European states cannot be applied to Belarus.

Therefore, the question is if and how the CoE expertise and experience can be used to remedy gross and systematic HR violations in Belarus and to prevent impunity for perpetrators.

PACE has launched a report which’s title speaks for itself: “Human rights violations in Belarus require an international investigation”. PACE is a second parliament, an additional job for its members, therefore, normally, preparation and adoption of reports takes up to 2 years. In this case, we have assigned the highest priority to this report. Within a couple of months, we appointed a rapporteur, Mme Alexandra Louis from France. The rapporteur has already presented her introductory memorandum. Last week, the AS/Jur under my chairmanship

held a hearing with the participation of Prof Wolfgang Benedek, OSCE Special Rapporteur, leader of Democratic Belarus Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, and two representatives of prominent HR NGOs, Valentin Stefanovich from “Viasna” and Aleg Gulak from Belarussian Helsinki Committee. We will do our best to finalise the report and adopt corresponding resolution and, possibly, recommendation as soon as possible.

At the level of CM the situation is more complicated. The “executive branch” of CoE prefers to work on the basis of consensus, and some MS are supportive of the Lukashenko regime and will oppose strict measures against it.

To conclude, I would like to commend NGO community for its dedicated and constructive efforts to combat HR violations in Belarus. In particular, I very much appreciate Civil society recommendations to the international community adopted on 1 December 2020 and signed by 60 NGOs from many countries. I believe that we, as inter-governmental organizations, must learn from civil society how to develop coordination and synergy. I urge all international organizations to engage in active and practical cooperation with a practical aim: to stop systematic HR violations in the heart of Europe, to prevent impunity and to ensure accountability of the perpetrators.

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