

Press Release

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PACE President: stop intimidation of the Belarus opposition

Strasbourg, 09.03.2006 - René van der Linden, President of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE), today condemned actions aimed at creating a climate of intimidation by the Lukashenko regime against opposition candidates ahead of the presidential election in Belarus, following the arrest and trial of Vincuk Viachorka, Chair of the Belarusian Popular National Front Party and an aide of presidential candidate Alexander Milinkevich.

"Recent weeks have seen continuous episodes of harassment and abuse of justice against the opposition, from the arrest and trial of youth activists to the beating of presidential candidate Alexander Kazulin. The arrest and trial of Vincuk Viachorka is further evidence of the unwillingness of the Lukashenko regime to ensure the basic conditions for free and democratic elections, despite the presence of independent international monitors, and of its lack of respect for human rights and the rule of law."

President van der Linden reiterated PACE's call on President Lukashenko and the Belarusian authorities to refrain from obstructing the free and fair running of the electoral campaign and ensure that the elections are held in full compliance with international standards. "Intimidation against all opposition candidates, members of their electoral teams and supporters should stop immediately," he added. "All those who are held or detained on spurious charges should be immediately released."

On 22-23 February in Prague, President van der Linden and Czech Foreign Minister Cyril Svoboda co-hosted a conference on Belarus, which gathered a number of ministers and government representatives from the region, as well as PACE members, to discuss strategies for promoting democratisation in Belarus and end the isolation of the Belarusian people from the rest of Europe.

During the last session, PACE held an urgent debate on the situation in Belarus on the eve of the presidential election, with the participation of Alexander Milinkevich, the single candidate of the Unified Democratic Forces of Belarus, and Vladimir Konoplev, Chairman of the Chamber of Representatives of Belarus. On that occasion, PACE also deplored the blatant flouting of freedom of expression and called for "positive action to ensure that pluralist information can be provided".

[Resolution 1482 \(2006\)](#)

[Recommendation 1734 \(2006\)](#)

[Statement by the President, 23 February 2006](#)

The Parliamentary Assembly brings together 315 members from the national parliaments of the 46 member states.

President: René van der Linden (Netherlands, EPP/CD); Secretary General of the Assembly: Mateo Sorinas.

Political Groups: SOC (Socialist Group); EPP/CD (Group of the European People's Party); ALDE (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe); EDG (European Democratic Group); UEL (Group of the Unified European Left).