

# Press Release

## Parliamentary Assembly – Communication Unit

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## Belarus: PACE ready to restore Special Guest status if a moratorium on death penalty is decreed

Strasbourg, 23.06.2009 –The Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE), meeting in plenary session in Strasbourg, today voted in favour of restoring the Special Guest status of the Belarusian Parliament, which has been suspended since 1997, with a view to "engaging in political dialogue with the authorities" while supporting "the strengthening of democratic forces and civil society". This status, however, could only be granted "after a moratorium on the execution of the death penalty is decreed".

The Assembly said that the country's authorities had recently undertaken measures that were important steps in the right direction, in particular the release of opposition figures considered as political prisoners, registration of the opposition movement "For Freedom!", inclusion of three independent media outlets in the state distribution network and the appointment of consultative councils involving civil society.

Nevertheless, the parliamentarians said, there is cause for concern, particularly in the areas of the electoral process, respect for political freedom and media pluralism, and they regretted that it is also still possible to carry out death sentences. The rapporteur, Andrea Rigoni (Italy, ALDE), recalled that no executions have been carried out since October 2008, according to official statements.

In the light of these factors, the Assembly considers that the lifting of the suspension should be accompanied by monitoring of the situation to assess whether the country is making "substantive and irreversible" progress towards Council of Europe standards.

In the context of the restoration of the Special Guest status, the parliamentarians said that a delegation of the Belarusian extra-parliamentary opposition should be invited to participate in the work of the Assembly and its committees.

PACE granted the Belarusian Parliament Special Guest status in 1992. In the absence of progress in the areas of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, this status was suspended in 1997 and Belarus' application to join Council of Europe was shelved the following year.

The Parliamentary Assembly brings together 318 members from the national parliaments of the 47 member states.

President: Lluís Maria de Puig (Spain, SOC) – Secretary General of the Assembly: Mateo Sorinas.

Political groups: EPP/CD (Group of the European People's Party); SOC (Socialist Group); EDG (European Democrat Group);

ALDE (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe); UEL (Group of the Unified European Left).