

Deadlock on EURONEST resolved

On 10 February, the European Parliament (EP) decided to convene the first meeting of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Eastern Partnership EURONEST in March. The meeting will take place without the participation of any representatives from Belarus. The Parliament's decision ends an almost two-year stalemate that had prevented the launch of the EURONEST project.

According to the Prague Declaration which founded the Eastern Partnership, the Parliamentary Assembly should include sixty deputies from the EP, and ten members each from the six partner countries. EURONEST should have been inaugurated in 2009, but from the beginning the question of who would represent Belarus was a bone of contention. Some of the MEPs did not agree to the participation of representatives from the Belarusian parliament, which the EP does not recognise. Instead, they suggested that the Belarusian delegation should be made up of representatives of the opposition and the civil society. However, the other partner countries and some of the EP's parties disagreed, as they were in favour of representatives of the Belarusian government participating. In the absence of a compromise, the first meeting of EURONEST was constantly delayed.

On 10 February this year, the EP decided that the meeting would take place without the participation of a Belarusian delegation (neither of parliamentarians nor of representatives of the civil society), a decision which the partner countries did not contest this time. The events surrounding the presidential elections in Belarus (electoral fraud, and massive repression against the opposition after the elections) influenced this decision. Convening EURONEST without the presence of Belarusian government representatives will constitute another political sanction by the EU against the Lukashenka regime. However, the absence of any representatives from the opposition or the civil society will lessen the importance of the session. <sza>