Resolution on Pakistan

2007/2647(RSP) - 25/10/2007 - Text adopted by Parliament, topical subjects

The European Parliament adopted a joint resolution on Pakistan and strongly condemned the suicide bombing attack against civilians and the opposition leader Benazir Bhutto, the Life Chairperson of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), who returned to Pakistan on 18 October 2007. The bomb attack resulted in the deaths of more than 130 people and the injuring of more than 500 people, and Parliament pointed out that the already fragile pre-electoral climate in Pakistan had been further inflamed by this attack. It demanded that the government of Pakistan take immediate action to pursue a thorough and independent investigation into this attack, and extended its deepest sympathy to the people of Pakistan and especially to the families of all those killed and injured.

Members reaffirmed their solidarity with the people of Pakistan and urged Pakistan to uphold all the principles enshrined in Cooperation Agreement of 24 November 2001 between the EC and Pakistan on Partnership and Development, and in particular the democracy and human rights clause.

Parliament recalled that an attempt by Nawaz Sharif, President of the Pakistan Muslim League, to return to Pakistan also failed, as he was forced to leave the country immediately on arrival, and it strongly condemned his forced departure, made despite a ruling by Pakistan's Supreme Court allowing his return to Pakistan.

It asked the government of Pakistan, as a pre-condition for democratic elections, to allow the return of all political leaders to counter the extremist forces in the country and contribute to establishing a legitimate government through free and fair elections, replacing the current military dictatorship. The caretaker government to be put in place must be neutral. Parliament expressed its concern about the fact that the composition of the caretaker government is to be decided by President Musharraf alone. It deplored President Musharraf's failure to relinquish his post of Chief of Army Staff before standing as a candidate and being elected president, which he had previously agreed to do in an undertaking to the EU. Parliament demanded that that he should do so before taking office, noting that his failure to act had had a negative effect on the credibility of the Presidency in Pakistan.

Members deplored certain recent High Court cases in Pakistan which gave rise to serious concerns about the lack of rule of law, and called on the Pakistani government to refrain from political interference and to respect the independence of the judiciary. They condemned the arbitrary arrest of members of the opposition when they criticised President Musharraf and urged the government to accept and implement the Supreme Court's directive to put an end to the disappearances of political opponents.

Parliament asked the government of Pakistan to do the following :

- to return to democratic government by holding free, fair and transparent elections in January 2008. Parliament warned against the imposition of emergency rule to suppress freedom of speech, association, assembly or movement;

- to provide all parties with equal access to the media;

- to take immediate action to restrict the influence of the military in society as a whole;

- to respect a transition to civilian rule and to strengthen democratic institutions as the only possible way to answer the challenges in Pakistani society;

- to take immediate action to cease such religious-based repression and to ensure the integrity and safety of all minorities by granting them genuine and effective legal and political protection;

- to reform its blasphemy laws, which are so widely misused, and provide proper protection for lawyers and human rights defenders facing threats for defending those accused of blasphemy;

- to repeal the Hudood Ordinances, which have led to the imprisonment of hundreds of women.

Parliament was concerned at the possibility of Pakistani women not being able to participate fully in the democratic process due to an academic qualification being required as a precondition for standing for election. This would exclude 70% of Pakistani women. It called for the removal of this restriction.

Parliament recognised the efforts Pakistan was making to resist the rise of terrorist groups, and regretted that the settlement reached to prevent further conflict in Northern Waziristan was not successful. The government was asked to combat renewed insurgency-related violence through proportionate measures and to impose the rule of law and extend civil and political rights to this area.

With regard to the ongoing insurgency in Balochistan, Parliament demanded that the military refrain from supporting Islamist parties in a bid to counter secular Baloch and moderate Pashtun forces. It further demanded the release of all political prisoners, including those in the unlawful custody of intelligence agencies.

It stressed the importance of universal access to state education and effective monitoring of the madrassas to prevent control by extremists, and called on the government of Pakistan to implement its previous undertaking with regard to the attendance of foreign students at the madrassas.

Lastly, Parliament asked the Member States fully to respect the EU Code of Conduct on Arms Exports.