

Resolution on democracy, human rights and the new EU-Vietnam Partnership and Cooperation Agreement

2008/2643(RSP) - 22/10/2008 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

Following the debate that took place during the sitting of 21 October, the European Parliament adopted by 479 votes to 21 with 4 abstentions, a resolution on democracy, human rights and the new EU-Vietnam Partnership and Cooperation Agreement.

The resolution had been tabled for consideration in plenary by the PES, ALDE, and UEN groups.

Parliament notes that the next meeting within the framework of the human rights dialogue between the EU Troika and Vietnam is scheduled for December 2008.

It remarks that freedom of assembly is severely restricted in Vietnam, as is press freedom. In addition, the ethnic minorities of the Northern and Central Highlands are still subjected to discrimination, confiscation of their land and violation of their religious and cultural freedoms. More than 300 Montagnards have been sentenced to imprisonment since 2001 for peaceful political or religious activities. In spite of repeated appeals from the international community, the supreme patriarch of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam, Thích Quảng ô (79 years old), winner of the 2006 Rafto Prize for human rights defenders, has been imprisoned numerous times since 1982 and still remains under effective house arrest. Furthermore, members of the ethnic Khmer minority (Khmer Krom) in southern Vietnam have suffered religious persecution and land confiscation. The Vietnamese authorities have placed Khmer Krom monk Tim Sakhorn under house arrest following his release from prison in June 2008.

In view of these considerations, Parliament stresses that the human rights dialogue between the EU and Vietnam must lead to tangible improvements in Vietnam. It asks the Council and the Commission to **reassess the cooperation policy with Vietnam**, bearing in mind Article 1 of the 1995 Cooperation Agreement, which states that cooperation is based on respect for human rights and democratic principles. The Commission is asked to establish clear benchmarks for the evaluation of the current development projects in Vietnam in order to ensure their compliance with the human rights and democracy clause contained in the Agreement.

Parliament calls on the Council and Commission to negotiate a **new Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the EU and Vietnam**, which will include a clear human rights and democracy clause accompanied by a mechanism for the implementation of that clause. They must raise with the Vietnamese side the need to stop the current systematic violation of democracy and human rights before the finalisation of the Agreement and, in particular, to ask the Vietnamese Government to do the following:

- as a member of the UN Security Council, to cooperate with UN human rights mechanisms, by inviting the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, who last visited Vietnam in 1998, and the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, which last visited Vietnam in 1994, to visit Vietnam. Vietnam must provide UN officials and Special Rapporteurs with unrestricted access to all

regions, including the Central and Northern Highlands, where they should be allowed to conduct confidential interviews with political and religious prisoners and detainees, as well as with Montagnard asylum seekers returned to Vietnam from Cambodia;

- to release all people imprisoned for the peaceful expression of political or religious beliefs, including more than 300 Montagnard Christians, as well as Khmer Krom Buddhist monks, democracy activists, land rights petitioners, cyber-dissidents, trade union leaders, Catholic parishioners, and followers of Hòa Hào Buddhism and the Cao ài religion;
- to provide full freedom from house arrest to Thích Quảng ô and Tim Sakhorn;
- to allow independent religious organisations to conduct religious activities without government interference and allow those religious organisations to register with the government if they choose to do so. Church properties and pagodas confiscated by the Vietnamese Government must be returned and the legal status of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam re-established;
- to repeal provisions in Vietnamese law that criminalise dissent and certain religious activities on the basis of imprecisely defined "national security" crimes, and to ensure that those laws cannot be applied against persons who have exercised their basic rights to freedom of expression, assembly, association and religious belief;
- to end the Vietnamese Government's censorship and control over the domestic media, including the internet and electronic communications, and authorise the publication of independent, privately-run newspapers and magazines.