Resolution on attacks on human rights defenders in Russia and the Anna Politkovskaya murder trial

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Following the debate which took place during the sitting of the same date, the European Parliament adopted by 59 votes a resolution on attacks on human rights defenders in Russia and the Anna Politkovskaya murder trial. The resolution had been tabled for consideration in plenary by the EPP-ED, PES, ALDE, UEN, Greens/EFA, GUE/NGL and IND/DEM groups.

Parliament vehemently condemns the attacks on human rights defenders in Russia, including lawyers who are representing citizens' rights, and calls on the Russian authorities at all levels to protect and guarantee their physical integrity. It recalls that in mid-October 2008 a leading Russian human rights lawyer, Karinna Moskalenko, who has successfully represented 30 Russian citizens in the European Court of Human Rights, was the victim of an attempt to poison her by placing mercury in her car in Strasbourg. It also recalls numerous attempts on the lives of human rights defenders, including the Ingush opposition leader Akhmed Kotiev, the human rights defender Zurab Tsechoev from Ingushetia, the human rights activist Dmitrii Kraiukhin from Orel and the human rights activist Stanislav Dmitrievski from Nizhni Novgorod. Furthermore, the criminal investigation and trial following the murder of the journalist Anna Politkovskaya raise serious concerns with regard to transparency and respect for the rule of law. This brutal killing has not yet been fully investigated and solved in a satisfactory way. Members also note that the Russian authorities remain uncooperative in the investigations into the murder of Alexander Litvinenko in London by poisoning with radioactive polonium.

Against this background, Parliament points out that human rights, the rule of law and democracy must remain core issues for the further development of EU-Russia relations. It stresses the importance of the continuous exchange of views on human rights with Russia as part of the EU-Russia human rights consultations, and calls for the format of such meetings to be improved so as to involve relevant ministries, the judiciary and representatives of Russian civil society. Respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law should be an integral part of the new framework agreement now being negotiated.

Members condemn the search of the offices of the Memorial organisation in St Petersburg on 4 December 2008, during which hard drives and CDs containing the entire database covering thousands of victims were taken away, and ask for their return. They draw attention to the growing trends of violence which, according to the Moscow Bureau for Human Rights, have resulted in more than 100 people being killed in 2008 on the basis of their race, nationality, religion or sexual orientation, and to the absence of effective condemnation of such hate crimes by Russian authorities. Parliament notes with concern recent moves to rehabilitate the Stalinist regime, and stresses that it is only by coming to terms with its tragic past that Russia can establish a true democratic culture.

Parliament states its conviction that the activities of human rights lawyers acting in cases involving alleged human rights abuses, who have to take great personal risks in continuing their work, should be afforded the highest respect, protected by the state and supported by the international community.

With regard to the Politkovskaya case, Parliament notes that it has been two years since the Russian independent journalist Anna Politkovskaya, who has become a symbol for freedom of the press, was murdered. It pays tribute to the courage and work of this symbol of honesty and conscientiousness, whose life work needs continued support and acknowledgement. Members express their dismay at the trial being

open only to a limited number of journalists, and closed to television journalists. They call on the court fully to respect the jury's decision and to open the proceedings to all journalists and media. The court is expected to establish not only who committed and assisted in the murder of Anna Politkovskaya but also who ordered it.

Lastly, Members welcome the establishment in 2006 of the ODIHR's focal point for human rights defenders, which monitors the situation of defenders throughout the territory covered by the OSCE. They strongly encourages the EU institutions to give practical expression to their support for human rights defenders by setting up a focal point for defenders in all three institutions, so as better to coordinate their actions with the other international and European organisations.