Resolution on EU foreign policy in a world of cultural and religious differences

2014/2690(RSP) - 17/04/2014 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 518 to 27 votes, with 30 abstentions, a resolution prepared by the Committee on Foreign Affairs on EU foreign policy in a world of cultural and religious differences.

Principles of EU foreign policy: Members reiterate their conviction that, when defending its own interests in the world, the Union **must always base its policies on the promotion of the fundamental values on which it is founded** (democracy, the rule of law and human rights, social justice and the fight against poverty) and on respect for other countries.

They note in particular that the transition towards democracy in numerous states throughout the world in the past two decades, and more recently the events of the uprisings in the Arab world, have shown that the aspirations for democracy, social justice, human dignity and equal participation are a universal driving force within and across diverse cultural and religious backgrounds and should not be viewed solely as a Western concern. They deplore the fact that **the notion of cultural and religious differences has repeatedly been instrumentalised** to justify blatant violations of human rights by authoritarian regimes and radical non-state actors.

Members recall that **respect for religious freedoms is an important external policy principle**, and that they **repudiate the advocacy and dissemination of fundamentalist religious tenets** aimed at eroding or violating the rights of particular communities.

Challenges of religious influence in the international political arena: Members consider that the European Union should be more assertive in its support for the promotion and protection of human rights and social and political rights by civil society. They deplore in passing the fact that, in many non-European countries, even where diverse religious expressions are tolerated, **secularism and atheistic or agnostic views are nevertheless often subject to legal or social discrimination** and that atheists are facing threats, pressure and danger. They propose therefore that the religious leaders of the three Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) engage in interreligious dialogue, in a spirit of unity and tolerance.

Credibility, coherence and consistency of EU policy: Members call on all Member States to repeal any existing laws which contradict the fundamental freedom of religion and conscience and freedom of expression. They reaffirm their support for the inclusion in all EU agreements with third countries, of **reciprocal conditionality and political clauses on human rights and democracy**, as a common reaffirmation of the mutual commitment to these values with appropriate safeguards to ensure that the suspension mechanism cannot be abused by either side.

Recommendations to the European External Action Service (EEAS) and to the Commission: Parliament also calls on the EEAS and the EU Delegations worldwide to further engage with third countries and regional organisations in the promotion of intercultural and interreligious dialogue. They call on the EU to make culture an even stronger part of political dialogue with partner countries and regions around the world, **promoting cultural exchanges** and systematically integrating culture into development programmes and projects. They stress, in this connection, the need to streamline the Commission’s internal operations within the various DGs which focus on external relations (foreign

policy, enlargement, trade and development), education, culture and the digital agenda. Lastly, Parliament encourages all Heads of EU Delegations to make full use of digital diplomacy tools through their active and consistent presence in the social media.