Resolution on the closing-down of the NGO ‘Memorial’ (winner of the 2009 Sakharov Prize) in Russia

2014/2903(RSP) - 23/10/2014 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 529 votes to 57, with 34 abstentions, a resolution on the closing-down of the NGO ‘Memorial’ (winner of the 2009 Sakharov Prize) in Russia.

The resolution was tabled by the EPP, S&D, ECR, ALDE, Greens/EFA as well as Marie-Christine Vergiat, Helmut Scholz, Merja Kyllönen, Ignazio Corrao and Fabio Massimo Castaldo.

Memorial is a Russian historical and civil rights society that has operated since 1987 to defend civil rights. It was founded on the initiative of a group of Soviet-era dissidents under the auspices of Nobel laureate Andrei Sakharov. It upholds democracy, the rule of law, and fundamental human rights in the practice of politics and public life.

The European Parliament awarded Memorial the Sakharov Prize in 2009.

Memorial, through the voices of its leaders, has strongly opposed and criticised Russia’s aggression towards Ukraine and called on President Putin to put an end to it.

In May 2014, a Moscow court ordered Memorial Human Rights Centre to be registered as a foreign agent on account of its ‘political activity’ in the field of human rights work. The NGO subsequently refused to register under this unfair label and decided to liquidate its structure and continue its work without being registered.

Parliament strongly **condemned the Russian Ministry of Justice’s appeal to the Supreme Court to close the independent rights organisation Memorial**, and the hearing scheduled for 13 November 2014, and urges the Ministry of Justice to withdraw its lawsuit before the scheduled hearing;.

It called on the Russian authorities to put an end to all acts of harassment, including at the judicial level, against the organisation and to ensure that all human rights defenders are able to carry out their legitimate activities in all circumstances without any interference.

Considering that the **law on ‘foreign agents’ is in violation of Russia’s commitments** to the Council of Europe and the OSCE, Members urged Russia to repeal laws that contain provisions inconsistent with Russia’s international and constitutional commitments on human rights.

Overall, Parliament expressed deep concern at the **worsening condition of critical civil society in Russia** , in particular those organisations which work on human rights and democratic freedoms and express criticism of state policies. It strongly called on Russia to reverse the current trend and to respect the principles of the rule of law, freedom of speech and freedom of assembly granted its Constitution and by the European Convention on Human Rights to which Russia is a signatory.

The Presidents of the Council and the Commission, as well as the Vice-President/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (VP/HR) and the European External Action Service (EEAS) are called upon:

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to ensure that the cases of all those persecuted for political reasons are raised in meetings with their Russian counterparts and to continue to follow such cases closely and report back to Parliament on their exchanges with the Russian authorities;

- to ensure that the EU seeks every opportunity to continue to engage with and support Russian civil society organisations, including those working to promote the values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law;
- to increase its financial assistance to Russian civil society and to include the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum in the Partnership Instrument in order to ensure sustainable and credible long-term support.