

Resolution on Swaziland, the case of human rights activists Thulani Maseko and Bheki Makhubu

2015/2712(RSP) - 21/05/2015 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 579 votes to 6, with 58 abstentions a resolution on Swaziland, and the case of human rights activists Thulani Maseko and Bheki Makhubu.

The resolution was tabled by the ECR, EFD, Greens/EFA, ALDE, GUE/NGL, EPP and S&D groups.

It called for the **immediate and unconditional release of Mr Maseko and Mr Makhubu**, respectively, a lawyer working for the Trade Union Congress of Swaziland, and editor-in-chief of The Nation, considered to be the country's sole independent newspaper. Both were arrested for criticising the lack of independence of the judicial system, convicted for contempt of court by the High Court of Swaziland and sentenced to two years' imprisonment. Parliament noted that that their imprisonment related directly to the legitimate exercise of their right to freedom of expression and opinion. It also called for the immediate and unconditional release of all prisoners of conscience and political prisoners and noted further that the Trade Union Congress of Swaziland, the Amalgamated Trade Unions of Swaziland, the Federation of Swaziland Employers and Chamber of Commerce have all been dissolved.

Members considered the imprisonment of political activists and the banning of trade unions to be in **clear contravention of commitments made by Swaziland under the Cotonou Agreement** to respect democracy, the rule of law and human rights, and also under the sustainable development chapter of the **SADC Economic Partnership Agreement**, which would come before the European Parliament in the second half of 2015 for possible approval.

Parliament stated that its support for the latter would depend on respect for the commitments entered into, including the commitment to abide by core ILO standards such as Conventions Nos 87 and 98.

It recalled that the EU grants **GSP trade preferences to Swaziland** in order to provide trade incentives with a view to ensuring respect for core human and labour rights and good governance, and it considered that the banning of trade unions and the imprisonment of political opponents run counter to these aims.

The Commission was therefore asked to honour its obligation to monitor Swaziland's adherence to human rights and to labour and environmental conventions under the GSP, and to **open an investigation to determine whether there has been a serious and systematic violation of the labour rights protected under the GSP**. Parliament noted in this connection that in November 2014 Swaziland lost its preferential trade agreement with the USA under the African Growth and Opportunity Act after the government failed to take reform measures.