Resolution on freedom of expression in Bangladesh

2015/2970(RSP) - 26/11/2015 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 586 votes to 31, with 25 abstentions, a resolution on freedom of expression in Bangladesh.

The text adopted in plenary was tabled by the EPP, S&D, ECR, ALDE, GUE/NGL, Greens/EFA and EFDD groups.

Parliament noted that violations of fundamental freedoms and human rights – including violence, incitement, hate speech, harassment, intimidation and censorship against journalists and bloggers – continue to be widespread in Bangladesh. This country ranks 146th out of 180 on the World Press Freedom Index. In recent months several journalists have been arrested and charged with violating the Information and Communication Technology Act (ICT Act), which criminalises defamatory and 'anti-state' publications.

Members expressed their deepest concern at the **deteriorating climate regarding the right to freedom of expression** which has accompanied the rise of religious fundamentalism, intolerance and extremist violence in Bangladesh. They condemned the increasing attacks of Islamist extremists against secularist writers, bloggers, religious minorities and foreign aid workers.

Parliament reminded the competent Bangladesh authorities of their **national and international legal obligations**, including their responsibility to ensure the security and safety of all citizens, irrespective of their political or religious views, and to **guarantee that the freedoms of expression and the press can be exercised** without arbitrary limitations and censorship in the country.

The Bangladesh authorities are called upon to:

- further condemn the ongoing horrendous acts against freedom of expression and to act to bring an immediate end to all acts of violence, harassment, intimidation and censorship against journalists, bloggers and civil society;
- ensure that independent investigations are carried out and explanations are given with respect to the disappearance of members of opposition parties over the last few years;
- prevent impunity and to do everything possible to identify all attackers and bring them to justice, by launching independent, credible and transparent investigations and ensuring fair trials, without recourse to the death penalty;
- take the necessary measures to prevent more killings by taking effective measures to protect writers, publishers and other people who have received threats;
- restore the full independence of the media and unhindered access to all forms of publications, including electronic ones;
- ensure the independence and impartiality of the court system and to amend the Information and Communication Technology Act and the Cyber-Security Act of 2015;
- allow international NGOs in the country to undertake their missions and to ensure that all human rights and civil society groups are able to work in a climate free of fear and repression.

Recalling that the EU has good, long-standing relations with Bangladesh, including through the Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development, Parliament called for the EU to **raise immediately the above concerns and recommendations with the Bangladeshi authorities**. It called on

the European External Action Service, the EU Delegation to Bangladesh and the Member States' delegations to **monitor closely the human rights and political situation in Bangladesh** and to use all available instruments, including the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights.