

Resolution on the right to peaceful protest and the proportionate use of force

2019/2569(RSP) - 14/02/2019 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 438 votes to 78 with 87 abstentions a resolution on the right to peaceful protest and the proportionate use of force.

The resolution was tabled by the EPP, ECR, and ALDE groups.

Stressing that public debate is vital to the functioning of democratic societies, Parliament condemned the adoption of restrictive laws concerning freedom of assembly in several Member States in recent years, and noted that law enforcement authorities in several Member States have been criticised for undermining the right to protest and using excessive force. Member States were called upon to ensure that the use of force by law enforcement authorities is always lawful, proportionate, necessary and the last resort, as set out in the case law of the European Court of Justice. Members noted that the indiscriminate use of force against crowds contravenes the principle of proportionality. They encouraged the relevant authorities to ensure a transparent, impartial, independent and effective investigation when the use of disproportionate force is suspected or has been alleged, recalling that law enforcement agencies must always be held accountable for the fulfilment of their duties and their compliance with the relevant legal and operational frameworks.

Whilst condemning the use of violent and disproportionate interventions by state authorities during protests and peaceful demonstrations, Parliament acknowledged that the police, among whom there have also been many casualties, are operating in difficult conditions, owing in particular to the hostility of some protesters, but also to an excessive workload. It condemned every kind of violence against individuals or property by violent, militant protesters, who only come for a violent purpose and harm the legitimacy of peaceful protests, and emphasised the importance of guaranteeing the safety of law enforcement officers, police officers and soldiers engaged in security maintenance operations during public protest demonstrations;

The resolution encouraged Member States' law enforcement officials to actively participate in training provided by the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL) on 'Public order – policing of major events', and also encouraged Member States to exchange best practices in this regard.

Lastly, Parliament noted the important role of journalists and photojournalists in reporting cases of disproportionate violence, and condemns all instances in which they have been deliberately targeted.