Resolution on the situation in Sri Lanka, in particular the arrests under the Prevention of Terrorism Act

2021/2748(RSP) - 10/06/2021 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 628 votes to 15, with 40 abstentions, a resolution on the situation in Sri Lanka, in particular the arrests under the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

The text adopted in plenary was tabled as a joint report by the EPP, S&D, Renew, Greens/EFA, ECR and the Left groups.

The resolution stressed that the human rights situation in Sri Lanka has been steadily deteriorating, with the new government rapidly backtracking on the limited progress achieved under previous

Administrations. The controversial Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) has been in place in Sri Lanka since 1979 and grants the police broad powers to search, arrest and detain civilian suspects. The wide-ranging powers provided for in the PTA have led to consistent and well-founded allegations of torture and sexual abuse, forced confessions and systematic denials of due process.

Parliament expressed deep concern over Sri Lanka’s alarming path towards the recurrence of grave human rights violations as described by the most recent UN report on the country, which lists among the early warning signs the accelerating militarisation of civilian governmental functions, the reversal of important constitutional safeguards, political obstruction of accountability, exclusionary rhetoric, intimidation of civil society, and the use of anti-terrorism laws. It reiterated its strong opposition to the continued application of the current PTA.

The Sri Lankan authorities are called on to:

- fulfil their pledge to review and repeal the act and replace it with anti-terrorism legislation which adheres to international best practices;

- immediately suspend the deradicalisation regulations;

- immediately give those detained under the PTA, without due process and access to justice, a fair trial on valid charges and, if there are no charges, to release them unconditionally;

- unequivocally condemn hate speech, incitement to violence and discrimination against religious and ethnic groups in the country, and to hold to account those who advance such divisions, including within the government and military;

- prevent any hindrance of the investigation and possible prosecution of members of the security forces accused of serious human rights abuses; insists that an investigation be carried out into allegations of grave human rights abuses and war crimes committed during the civil war by senior figures from all sides;

- end the practice of appointing current and former military commanders implicated in serious abuses to senior government positions;

- abolish the use of capital punishment in the country.

Concerning the GSP+ scheme, one of Sri Lanka's key commitments was to fully align its counterterrorism legislation with international human rights conventions in order to secure a favourable trading relationship under the GSP+. The Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) are urged to take into due account current events when assessing Sri Lanka's eligibility for GSP+ status and to use the GSP+ as a leverage to push for advancement on Sri Lanka's human rights obligations and demand the repeal or replacement of the PTA, to carefully assess whether there is sufficient reason, as a last resort, to initiate a procedure for the temporary withdrawal of Sri Lanka's GSP+ status and the benefits that come with it, and to report to Parliament on this matter as soon as possible.