Resolution on Hong Kong, notably the case of Apple Daily

2021/2786(RSP) - 08/07/2021 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 578 votes to 29, with 73 abstentions, a resolution on Hong Kong, notably the case of Apple Daily.

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

On 17 June 2021, 500 Hong Kong armed police raided the offices of the largest pro-opposition newspaper, Apple Daily. Five of the paper's senior executives and editors were arrested. According to a Hong Kong police spokesperson, the newspaper executives and editors were arrested for their role in the publication of more than 30 articles calling on foreign countries to impose sanctions in relation to the National Security Law (NSL). Such calls were considered by the Hong Kong authorities as collusion with foreign countries endangering national security. Following the freeze of all its assets (around EUR 2 million) by the Hong Kong authorities on the basis of the NSL, Apple Daily was forced to definitively close on 24 June 2021 after 26 years. More than 800 Apple Daily staff have lost their job and are unlikely to be re-employed in Hong Kong.

The founder of Apple Daily, Jimmy Lai, is serving 20 months in jail for his involvement in the 2019 protest movement and faces additional charges under the NSL that carry a possible life sentence.

Parliament **condemned in the strongest terms** the forced closure of the Apple Daily newspaper, the continued freezing of its assets and the arrests of its journalists as yet another step by the People's Republic of China's (PRC) in dismantling free society in Hong Kong and setting the definitive end of media freedom and freedom of expression there.

The resolution called on the Hong Kong authorities to:

- end all legal harassment and all intimidation directed at journalists;

- immediately and unconditionally release and drop all charges against all journalists, as well as all peaceful protesters, activists and political representatives, who have simply exercised their right to freedom of expression and other human rights and who have been arrested on charges pursuant to the NSL;

- stop politically motivated prosecutions and other legal procedures against peaceful protesters with a view to silencing critical voices and deterring people from participating in the public sphere.

Parliament condemns the emerging restrictions on the independence of the judiciary and the increasing politicisation of courts and stressed the urgent need to prevent, as the next step, the dismantling of Hong Kong's independent judiciary. The EEAS is called on to prepare a detailed public report on the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary in addition to the Hong Kong annual report.

The Chinese authorities are urged to repeal the NSL, which damages Hong Kong's international status and the Hong Kong authorities are urged to fully restore respect for the rule of law, human rights, democratic principles and the high degree of autonomy under the 'one country, two systems' principle, as enshrined in the Hong Kong Basic Law and in line with its domestic and international obligations.

Recalling the importance of the EU continuing to raise the issue of human rights violations in China, the Commission and the Member States are called on to address the NSL as a top priority on the agenda of all EU-China meetings.

Member States are urged to:

- address the impasse and adopt new measures including targeted sanctions under the EU global human rights sanctions regime, including the implementation of travel bans and asset freezes, against individuals and entities in Hong Kong and China for the serious violations of human rights and international law in Hong Kong;

- coordinate the implementation of a ‘lifeboat scheme’ for pro-democracy activists and political leaders in Hong Kong following this escalating deterioration of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and to issue emergency travel documents for journalists in Hong Kong who are at risk of arrest under the NSL.

Steps taken by the UK, Australia and Canada to open schemes to offer Hong Kong citizens the opportunity to live and work in their respective countries were welcomed by the Parliament.

Lastly, the Commission, the Council and the Member States are urged to decline invitations for government representatives and diplomats to attend the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics unless the Chinese Government demonstrates a verifiable improvement in the human rights situation in Hong Kong, the Xinjiang Uyghur Region, Tibet, Inner Mongolia and elsewhere in China.