Resolution on recent attacks in Tunisia against freedom of expression and association, and against trade unions, in particular the case of journalist Noureddine Boutar

2023/2588(RSP) - 16/03/2023 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 496 votes to 28, with 13 abstentions, a resolution on recent attacks in Tunisia against freedom of expression and association, and against trade unions, in particular the case of journalist Noureddine Boutar.

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

As a reminder, President Saied has been ruling alone since 25 July 2021, dismissing the government, dissolving the Assembly, the 2014 Constitution, the Independent High Authority for Elections, the High Judicial Council, all municipal councils and 57 judges.

On 13 February 2023, counter-terrorist units arrested journalist Noureddine Boutar, director of Tunisia's largest independent radio station, on politically motivated grounds and unfounded allegations, alongside a dozen opposition voices. The arrested journalists were branded 'terrorists' and 'traitors'.

Moreover, union representative Anis Kaabi was arrested on 31 January 2023, over 36 trade unionists were prosecuted for striking, ETUC General Secretary Esther Lynch was expelled from Tunisia on 23 February 2023, and unions from six EU countries were denied entry.

The NGO Bill allegedly provides for 'prior government approval of NGOs and Central Bank approval for foreign funding'.

Parliament called on Tunisia to:

- immediately release Noureddine Boutar and all others who have been arbitrarily detained, including journalists, judges, lawyers, political activists and trade unionists such as Anis Kaabi, and to respect freedom of expression and association as well as trade unions' and workers' rights;

- ensure social dialogue, to respect collective agreements and to take action to tackle the cost of living crisis;

- end to the ongoing crackdown on civil society. In this regard, the EU Delegation and Member States are called on to monitor and attend political trials and engage in regular dialogue with civil society;

- immediately reinstate the judges who were arbitrarily dismissed, reverse all measures undermining judicial independence, and end the use of military courts to prosecute civilians;

- comply with international and national laws, notably law 50-2018 against racial discrimination.

Lastly, the resolution stressed that specific EU support programmes to the Ministries of Justice and Interior Affairs should be suspended.