Combating terrorism in the European Union

1996/2134(INI) - 30/01/1997 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted, by 294 votes to 19 with 4 abstentions, the own-initiative report of Mrs Viviane REDING (PPE, L) on combating terrorism, calling in particular on the IGC to include in the Treaty 'concrete and effective principles for ensuring close collaboration on judicial matters' and advocating that this cooperation should constitute an essential pillar in the fight against terrorism and any other form of organised crime. The basic premise is clear: a total rejection of all acts of terrorism or recourse to violence as a means of pursuing political or ideological objectives in the European Union, whether these be motivated by religious fanaticism or based on irrational motives. The democratic constitutional structure of the Member States makes the recourse to such practices even more unjustifiable. Such acts should never be considered as political offences, but should always be regarded as criminal actions to be prosecuted in the criminal courts, under the rule of law, without recourse to exceptional procedures. This approach does not however rule out the call for democratic dialogue in the attempt to find a political solution to ethno-national, social and ecological conflicts and to prevent such conflicts from being used as an excuse for acts of terrorism. From this perspective Parliament advocated a strengthening of police and judicial cooperation between Member States in order to combat terrorism and to this effect proposed a series of concrete measures for the prevention (for example by airport controls, improved systems for detecting dangerous substances, etc.) suppression and investigation of terrorism. Parliament called in particular for Europol to be granted powers for the prevention and control of terrorism, and for this to be done as soon as possible after the ratification of the Convention. The Member States should classify acts of terrorism in their penal codes as serious offences which are liable for extradition and should cooperate actively within the framework of the new European Convention on extradition. Parliament called in particular on Member States to ratify this Convention (signed 27 September 1996) as soon as possible and hoped that Member States would abandon the reserve clause which allowed them not to proceed with the extradition of their own nationals. The resolution also set out to define the concept of terrorism, affirming that within the EU terrorism must be regarded as a 'criminal act which seeks, under the rule of law, to alter the political, economic and social structures by threatening to use violence or by resorting to violence'. Apologia for terrorism should also be considered as a criminal offence. Parliament stressed that financial and police cooperation should be reinforced and that this should be accompanied by a strengthening of democratic controls and legal restrictions. In the longer term, Parliament called on the Council to strive for the harmonisation, at European level, of the criminal law applying to 'serious cross-border crime'. In addition, the IGC should include in the Treaty the principle that the right of asylum only applies to nationals from non-member countries. At the same time, it called on the Council to take the decisions and measures which were needed to ensure that a national from a Member State, who is accused of a terrorist offence or of collaborating with an armed group, as defined in the resolution, cannot be granted political asylum or refugee status in another Member State. Finally, Parliament considered that it was essential for both material and psychological aid to be given to the victims of terrorism and their families.