Resolution on the right to freedom of expression and respect for religious beliefs

2006/2525(RSP) - 16/02/2006 - Text adopted by Parliament, topical subjects

The European Parliament adopted a resolution in the wake of the publication of cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed in some European newspapers. Parliament defended freedom of expression as a fundamental value of the EU. However, freedom of expression must be exercised within the limits of the law and should coexist with personal responsibility and with respect for human rights, religious feelings and beliefs, whether they be connected with the Islamic, Christian, Jewish or any other religion. It acknowledged that balancing these concerns necessitated ongoing debate in a democracy. All those who enjoy freedom of expression must commit themselves to supporting the fundamental values of the EU - democracy, pluralism and tolerance - and not abuse that freedom by incitement to religious hatred or the dissemination of xenophobic or racist attitudes aimed at excluding any persons, whatever their origin or religious beliefs

Parliament considered that freedom of expression and the independence of the press were universal rights which cannot be undermined by any individual or group that feels offended by what is being said or written. It expressed, at the same time, its respect for those who have felt offended by the cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed, but pointed out that redress for any possible offence may be sought through the courts in accordance with existing national and European legislation.

Parliament condemned in the strongest possible terms the burning down of embassies of Member States, as well as the threats against individuals. It deplored the failure of some governments to prevent violence and the toleration by other governments of violent attacks. Countries where these incidents took place must show in practice that such incidents will not be accepted in the future. It pointed out that many of the countries where the violence and demonstrations over the cartoons took place are countries where freedom of expression, freedom of speech and freedom of assembly were regularly violated. However, Parliament welcomed the support of leaders of European Muslim communities and in the Arab world who have expressed their firm condemnation of the violent attacks on embassies and expressed its solidarity with journalists in Jordan, Egypt and Algeria who have courageously reprinted and pointedly commented on the cartoons.

Parliament expressed its full support for and solidarity with Denmark and the countries and people that have been affected under these unprecedented and difficult circumstances. It welcomed the initiative of Turkey to join diplomatic forces and act as a mediator in this conflict. It strongly regretted that there seemed to be organised extremist groups both in Europe and in the Muslim world which see an advantage in escalating the present tensions and using the cartoons as a pretext for incitement to violence and discrimination.

It also regretted the increased anti-Semitic and anti-Israeli propaganda in some Arab countries and in Iran. In these countries degrading and humiliating cartoons of Jews are regularly printed, thus showing that those countries obviously do not apply the same standards to all religious communities.

Parliament called for a return to a climate of peaceful dialogue, and on local political and religious leaders to take active steps to end the violence. The Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly is the appropriate forum for working together with the EU's partners on the southern bank of the Mediterranean for a democratic, pluralist and tolerant society based on the values of human rights.