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Publication of cartoons satirising the Muslim Prophet Muhammad

Greens/EFA motion for a resolution on the right to freedom of speech and respect for religious beliefs

The European Parliament,

 having regard to Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, together with the responsibilities and restrictions that the law may attach to the freedom enshrined therein,

 having regard to Rule 103(2) of its Rules of Procedure,

A. whereas freedom of thought, conscience and religion is enshrined in Article 9 of the same Convention,

B. whereas these freedoms form a fundamental part of the development of European democracies and of the clear separation between state and religion,

C. whereas the crisis which followed the publication of the cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed in the Danish newspaper Jyllandsposten and then in various European newspapers is of great concern as regards dialogue between cultures, respect for religions and beliefs and the freedom of expression,

D. whereas the Council of Europe has often deplored the fact that the current political environment in Denmark and the latest law on aliens are creating hostility towards immigrants, both Muslim and non-Muslim,

1. States that the freedom of expression and the independence of the press as universal rights cannot be undermined by any individual or group that feels offended by what is being said or written; expresses, at the same time, its sympathy for those who have felt offended by the cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed, but points out that legal action may be taken against any offensive behaviour under existing European legislation;

2. Expresses, in this regard, its strong concern at the deterioration of relations between the EU and some Islamic countries, and calls for a strong initiative aimed at overcoming the present crisis;

3. Deplores the manner in which the Danish Government has at the very beginning ignored the concerns raised by some ambassadors of Islamic countries on this issue;

4. Points out, nevertheless, that the wave of attacks against European embassies and the mass demonstrations which took place in those countries were triggered by false and misleading documents and

material that should have been more thoroughly better checked by Islamic leaders;

5. Strongly condemns the violent acts against European embassies and EU Commission delegations in several Muslim countries which set off a wave of hatred against Denmark and some other European countries;

6. Calls on public actors to act with responsibility, refraining from actions that are deliberately aimed at hurting the sensibility of religions and cultures and thereby leading to intolerance; asks the media to contribute to a de-escalation by also enabling moderate voices to be heard more loudly;

7. Welcomes the statements of some leaders of European Muslim communities who have expressed their firm condemnation over the violent attacks on embassies and the burning of flags;

8. Takes the view that many of these acts have been allowed or encouraged for political reasons, in particular as regards the looting of the Danish and Norwegian embassies in Damascus, which were not adequately protected by the Syrian authorities;

9. Regrets the lack of solidarity and coordination among EU Member States, which failed once again to speak with one voice during the crisis;

10. Points out that many of the countries where the violence and demonstrations over the cartoons have taken place, are countries where freedom of expression, freedom of speech and freedom of assembly are regularly violated;

11. Stresses that editors carrying out their duty of information in several European newspapers have printed the cartoons in solidarity with Jyllandsposten and in defence of the freedom of the press, but regrets, at the same time, that others have done so with the aim of provoking and inciting hatred against migrants and Muslims in particular;

12. Expresses its solidarity with the Jordanian journalist Jihad Momani, who courageously printed and pointedly commented on the cartoons; strongly condemns his temporary arrest and urges the Jordanian Government to drop all charges against him and his colleague as a sign that Jordan tolerates dissenting voices;

13. Regrets the renewed and increased anti-Semitic and anti-Israeli propaganda in some Arab countries and Iran; points out that in these countries degrading and humiliating cartoons of Jews are regularly printed, thus showing that they obviously do not apply the same standards to all religious communities;

14. Expresses its concern at the fact that the Danish Government has on several occasions ignored the concerns raised by the Council of Europe regarding the situation of migrants in Denmark;

15. Urges the Council, the Commission and the Member States to encourage all parties in the current situation to take part in open-minded, sensitive and transparent dialogue and to combat any manifestation of intolerance;

16. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference.

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