

Thursday 10 March 2011

Pakistan - murder of Shahbaz Bhatti, Minister for Minorities

P7_TA(2011)0098

European Parliament resolution of 10 March 2011 on Pakistan, in particular the murder of Shahbaz Bhatti

(2012/C 199 E/21)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on human rights and democracy in Pakistan, in particular that of 20 January 2011 ⁽¹⁾ as well as those of 20 May 2010 ⁽²⁾, 12 July 2007 ⁽³⁾, 25 October 2007 ⁽⁴⁾ and 15 November 2007 ⁽⁵⁾,
 - having regard to its resolution of 16 December 2010 on the Annual Report on Human Rights in the World 2009 and the European Union's policy on the matter ⁽⁶⁾,
 - having regard to the Council Conclusions on intolerance, discrimination and violence on the basis of religion or belief, adopted on 21 February 2011,
 - having regard to the statement of 2 March 2011 by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton on the assassination of the Minister for Minorities in the Government of Pakistan, Mr Shahbaz Bhatti,
 - having regard to the statement by the President of the European Parliament, Jerzy Buzek, of 2 March 2011,
 - having regard to Article 18 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR),
 - having regard to the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR),
 - having regard to the 1981 UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination based on Religion and Belief,
 - having regard to Article 19 of the Pakistani Constitution on freedom of speech,
 - having regard to Rule 122(5) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas, on 2 March 2011, the Pakistani Minister for Minorities, Shahbaz Bhatti, was assassinated by armed men who opened fire on his car as he travelled to work in the capital Islamabad; whereas a group calling itself the Tehreek-e-Taliban Punjab (Taliban Movement Punjab) claimed responsibility for the killing and said that the minister had been killed for his stance on the blasphemy laws,
- B. whereas – in spite of repeated threats to the life of Mr Bhatti by Islamist groupings – he had his specific request for the use of a bulletproof official car as well as his own choice of trusted bodyguards refused by the Pakistani authorities,

⁽¹⁾ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2011)0026.

⁽²⁾ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2010)0194.

⁽³⁾ OJ C 175 E, 10.7.2008, p. 583.

⁽⁴⁾ OJ C 263, 16.10.2008, p. 666.

⁽⁵⁾ OJ C 282 E, 6.11.2008, p. 432.

⁽⁶⁾ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2010)0489.

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- C. whereas Shahbaz Bhatti was the only Christian member of the Pakistani Cabinet and one of the country's few leading politicians who had the courage to combat these laws and the injustices they have facilitated,
 - D. whereas this assassination happened only two months after the murder of Salman Taseer, Governor of the Province of Punjab, by one of his own security guards, who disagreed with Taseer's opposition to Pakistan's blasphemy laws,
 - E. whereas on 1 March 2011 a third prominent Pakistani human rights defender, Naeem Sabir Jamalini, the Coordinator of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, was likewise assassinated, who was particularly active in combating the human rights violations in the Baluchistan region,
 - F. whereas a fatwa was reportedly issued against Sherry Rehman, a former Pakistani minister, reformist politician and well-known journalist, calling her the next candidate for murder,
 - G. whereas Minister Bhatti and Governor Taseer solely reiterated the stated position of the ruling Pakistan People's Party; whereas when, on 30 December 2010, the Gilani Government publicly reneged on its manifesto commitment to review the blasphemy laws, it left supporters of reform isolated and vulnerable to continuous threats from radical religious leaders and militant extremist groups who intimidate, threaten and kill those with opposing views,
 - H. whereas politicians, political parties and representatives of the media and civil society such as women's and human rights activists are constantly intimidated, and even murdered, and whereas therefore public debate on the blasphemy laws is increasingly stifled,
 - I. whereas Article 3(5) of the Treaty on European Union states that the promotion of democracy and respect for human rights and civil liberties are fundamental principles and aims of the European Union and constitute common ground for its relations with third countries; whereas EU development assistance is conditional upon respect for human rights and minority rights,
1. Strongly condemns the brutal murder of Shahbaz Bhatti, Minister for Minorities in the Government of Pakistan, on 2 March 2011 and expresses its sincere condolences to the family and friends of the victim and to the people of Pakistan as well as its solidarity with all those who continue to be threatened and still raise their voice;
 2. Applauds Minister Shahbaz Bhatti's courage and proven commitment to justice, interfaith dialogue and freedom of religion and belief in Pakistan, in addition to his concern over Asia Bibi, the Christian woman and mother of five children condemned to death for blasphemy, despite continuous threats and the enormous personal risks involved;
 3. Recognises Minister Shahbaz Bhatti's dedication to combating the blasphemy laws and the injustice they have facilitated; recognises the progress made during his period as Minister, including significant, discreet negotiations on potential amendments to these laws;
 4. Notes that, contrary to the weak public reaction to Governor Salman Taseer's assassination, there has been broad public condemnation of Minister Shahbaz Bhatti's assassination across the relevant political divide, in the media and across the religious and ethnic spectrum of Pakistan's society; hopes that this outrage will contribute to a closing of ranks amongst all those who seek to defend the democratic values enshrined in the Constitution of Pakistan;

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5. Urges the Pakistani authorities to conduct a thorough investigation into all aspects of Shahbaz Bhatti's murder and bring all perpetrators of this crime rapidly to justice in accordance with the strict rule of law, as well as to ensure the swift and fair prosecution of the late Governor Salman Taseer's killer;
6. Calls on the Government of Pakistan to step up measures to ensure the security of cabinet ministers and persons under concrete threat from religious extremists and terrorists, such as former Information Minister Sherry Rehman and lawyers defending cases related to blasphemy accusations;
7. Encourages the Government of Pakistan to appoint without delay a new minister for minorities and affirms its position that this person should be a strong and impartial minority representative;
8. Encourages the Government of Pakistan to support the Ministry for Minorities in continuing the work and vision of Shahbaz Bhatti, in particular the national-level dialogue between religious leaders and the grassroots project on District Interfaith Harmony Committees;
9. Urgently repeats its call on the Government of Pakistan, all political parties, civil society and the media to stand united and fight the extremist onslaught; hopes that the Government of Pakistan will represent in both its composition and actions the multi-ethnic and multi-religious composition of Pakistani society;
10. Calls for an urgent and meaningful policy shift away from appeasement of such extremists to be supported by the military, the judiciary, the media and the political class alike, given that the status quo has produced such dramatic consequences; calls on the Government of Pakistan not to let voices in favour of religious tolerance and respect for universal principles of human rights in the country be silenced by extremists;
11. Is deeply concerned about the climate of intolerance and violence and urges the Government of Pakistan to prosecute those inciting violence in Pakistan, in particular those calling for and, in some cases, offering rewards for the deaths of individuals and groups with whom they disagree, and to take further measure to facilitate debate on the issue;
12. Commends particularly the efforts of former minister Sherry Rehman and the late Minister for Minorities, Shahbaz Bhatti, to amend the blasphemy laws in order to prevent their misuse and calls on the Government to repeal these laws as well as other discriminatory legislation, inter alia Section 295 B and C of the Penal Code, which are relics of the past; urges the Government of Pakistan as well to enforce existing legislation such as Article 137 of the Penal Code, which makes hate speech a crime;
13. Calls on the competent EU institutions to include the issue of religious tolerance in society in its political dialogue with Pakistan, this matter being of central importance to the long-term fight against religious extremism;
14. Suggests that the EU invite the Government of Pakistan to an annual joint round-table meeting on the situation of Pakistan's minorities and to include the European Parliament in the preparation and realisation of such an event;
15. Calls on the competent EU institutions to continue with financial support for human rights organisations and defenders, and to outline practical measures to support the civil society movement in Pakistan against the blasphemy laws and other discriminatory legislation;

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16. Welcomes the recent Council conclusions on intolerance, discrimination and violence on the basis of religion or belief, which refer to enhancing EU action in this field; calls on the competent EU institutions to actively pursue the issue of religious persecution in the world;

17. Calls on the competent EU institutions to investigate the possibility of using the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) in order to finance actions supporting the fight against religious intolerance, extremism and discriminatory laws worldwide; reiterates its call on the High Representative to develop a permanent capacity within the human rights directorate of the European External Action Service to monitor the situation of governmental and societal restrictions on freedom of conscience and related rights;

18. Calls on the competent EU institutions to encourage the Government of Pakistan to re-establish a separate Ministry for Human Rights as well as a meaningful, independent and impartial National Human Rights Commission;

19. Urges the competent EU institutions to insist that the Government of Pakistan uphold the democracy and human rights clause enshrined in the Cooperation Agreement between the European Union and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan; calls on the European External Action Service to present a report on the implementation of the Cooperation Agreement and the democracy and human rights clause;

20. Recalls that Pakistan has certain obligations as a signatory state of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and calls on Pakistan's relevant authorities to engage in a process of reviewing the scope of the blanket reservations made to the ICCPR, some of which limit rights enshrined in the Constitution of Pakistan or are contrary to the notion of supremacy of international law over national law; believes that the way the blasphemy laws are currently implemented is in clear breach of these obligations and asks the EEAS to take this into account during the examination of a possible application of the GSP+ scheme to Pakistan from 2013 onwards, and report back to the EP on the matter;

21. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the European External Action Service, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission, the governments and parliaments of the Member States and the Government and Parliament of Pakistan.

Belarus, in particular the cases of Ales Michalevic and Natalia Radina

P7_TA(2011)0099

European Parliament resolution of 10 March 2011 on Belarus (in particular the cases of Ales Mikhalevic and Natalia Radina)

(2012/C 199 E/22)

The European Parliament,

— having regard to its previous resolutions on Belarus, in particular those of 20 January 2011 ⁽¹⁾, 17 December 2009 ⁽²⁾ and 22 May 2008 ⁽³⁾,

— having regard to the statement made in Brussels on 18 February 2011 by the EU High Representative, Catherine Ashton, on the conviction and sentencing of a Belarusian opposition representative,

⁽¹⁾ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2011)0022.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 286 E, 22.10.2010, p. 16.

⁽³⁾ OJ C 279 E, 19.11.2009, p. 113.