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*Plenary sitting*

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**B8-1260/2015**

24.11.2015

## MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

with request for inclusion in the agenda for a debate on cases of breaches of human rights, democracy and the rule of law

pursuant to Rule 135 of the Rules of Procedure

on the freedom of expression in Bangladesh  
(2015/2970(RSP))

**Mark Demesmaeker, Charles Tannock, Monica Macovei, Beatrix von Storch, Raffaele Fitto, Jana Žitňanská, Ryszard Antoni Legutko, Anna Elżbieta Fotyga, Karol Karski, Tomasz Piotr Poręba, Ryszard Czarnecki, Valdemar Tomaševski**  
on behalf of the ECR Group

**European Parliament resolution on the freedom of expression in Bangladesh  
(2015/2970(RSP))**

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to its previous resolutions on Bangladesh, in particular of 18 September 2014 on human rights violations in Bangladesh and of 16 January 2014 on recent elections in Bangladesh,
  - having regard to the EC-Bangladesh Cooperation Agreement of 2001,
  - having regard to the statement of UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein of 5 November 2015,
  - having regard to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, ratified by Bangladesh in the year 2000,
  - having regard to Art. 135 of its rules of procedure,
- A. Whereas Bangladesh has seen a string of deadly extremist attacks this year on bloggers, activists and publishers, including Rajib Haider, Avijit Roy, Oyasiquir Rahman, Ananta Bijoy Das, Niladri Chattopadhyay and Faisal Arefin Dipon; whereas several others survived attacks severely wounded and many more writers and publishers have received death threats;
- B. Whereas foreign nationals, including Cesare Tavella from Italy and Konio Hoshi from Japan, have also been killed and others wounded in attacks claimed by Islamist extremists;
- C. Whereas religious minorities such as Shia Muslims, Hindus and Christians have also been targeted by sometimes deadly extremist violence, such as the bomb attack on a Shiite procession on 24 October 2015 which claimed the life of a teenage boy;
- D. Whereas the violence takes place against the backdrop of war crime trials against Islamist leaders from Bangladesh's 1971 independence war with Pakistan; whereas many of the attacked and threatened writers and publishers were connected to street protests of early 2013 when hundreds of thousands of young people demanded capital sentences for those leaders;
- E. Whereas the EU has good, long-standing relations with Bangladesh, including through the Cooperation Agreement on partnership and development;
- F. Whereas some foreign intelligence agencies have reported Islamic State (IS) and Al Qaeda (AQ) activities in Bangladesh, but whereas the country also has a domestic

extremist problem;

- G. Whereas following the general elections on 5 January 2014, which were boycotted by the main opposition party Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and which were overshadowed by BNP-instigated strikes and resulting violence, the Awami League government led by Sheikh Hasina has taken several steps limiting civil rights;
  - H. Whereas in July 2014 the Bangladesh government has proposed a law, the Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Act, that could impose severe restrictions on the activities of nongovernmental organizations;
  - I. Whereas since August 2014 the Bangladesh government is applying a new media policy; whereas elements of this policy impose limits on media freedom when, for example, banning speech that is "anti-state", "ridicules the national ideology" and "is inconsistent with Bangladesh's culture" and restricting the reporting of "anarchy, rebellion, or violence"; whereas in recent months several journalists have been arrested and charged with violating the Information and Communication Technology Act (ICT Act), which criminalizes defamatory and "anti-State" publications;
- 1. Condemns in the strongest possible terms the extremist attacks and offers its sincere condolences to the victims and their families;
  - 2. Supports the Government of Bangladesh in its efforts to defend a pluralist, secular state against murderous attempts by Islamist, jihadist groups to undermine these principles; calls on all political parties and their leaders to unequivocally and unreservedly condemn the extremist violence and to support the right to freedom of expression;
  - 3. Urges the Government of Bangladesh to take additional measures to prevent more killings by bringing the perpetrators to justice and by taking effective measures to protect writers, publishers and others who have received threats;
  - 4. Welcomes the Bangladesh Government's enhances security and law enforcements measures such as the establishment of additional police check-points and strengthening the capacity of the police force and other law enforcement agencies;
  - 5. Notes that investigations into the attacks and murder of writers and online activists are progressing; Notes that eight persons have been arrested in connection with the murder of Abhijit Roy, two in connection with the murder of Wasique Babu, and four in connection with the murder of Niladri Chatterjee;
  - 6. Believes that it is the state's duty to ensure that journalists, civil society actors and human rights defenders are able to exercise their right to freedom of expression safely;
  - 7. Commends the Bangladesh government for the progress made towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals, which has resulted in significant and real-life improvements for millions of its citizens; furthermore acknowledges the fact that these improvements were realized under difficult domestic circumstances, which include the

constant threat of violent attacks by radical groups such as the BNP-affiliated Jamaat-e-Islami party;

8. Urges the Parliament of Bangladesh to continue the consultations with independent groups on the content of this draft law and to make sure that, if it is eventually adopted, it complies with international standards and civil rights conventions Bangladesh has committed itself to;
9. Expresses, furthermore, its concern at the implementation of the new media policy, which allows the Bangladesh authorities to restrict the country's media; welcomes efforts made by the Bangladesh government to revise its new media policy, taking into account the international obligations the country has imposed on itself when signing and ratifying the ICCPR and other civil rights conventions;
10. In this context, is concerned about some elements of the proposed Cyber Security Act 2015, which seeks to fortify the ICT Act, further tightening the power of the authorities to restrict alternative views;
11. Welcomes the progress being made in the criminal investigations into the deaths of Italian national, Cesare Tavella, and Japanese national, Konio Hoshi; Notes that arrests have been made in relation to both cases and that the investigations are ongoing;
12. Is very concerned at recurring cases of ethnic and religiously motivated violence; urges the Bangladesh government as well as religious organizations and their leaders to embark on a process of reconciliation; urges the Bangladesh government to work towards bringing to justice the perpetrators of this kind of violence; furthermore urges the Bangladesh government to offer sufficient protection and guarantees to minorities such as Shia Muslims, Ahmadiyya, Hindus, Buddhists and Christians, but also Biharis;
13. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Government and Parliament of Bangladesh, the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy; and the governments and parliaments of the EU Member States.