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B6-0136/2006 }
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B6-0139/2006 }
B6-0141/2006 } RC1

JOINT MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

pursuant to Rule 103(4) of the Rules of Procedure, by

- Hans-Gert Poettering, João de Deus Pinheiro, Elmar Brok, José Ignacio Salafranca Sánchez-Neyra, Gunnar Hökmark and Gitte Seeberg, on behalf of the PPE-DE Group
- Graham Watson, Karin Riis-Jørgensen, Jean-Marie Cavada, Annemie Neyts-Uyttebroeck, Sophia in 't Veld and Sarah Ludford, on behalf of the ALDE Group
- Daniel Marc Cohn-Bendit and Monica Frassoni, on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group
- Cristiana Muscardini and Brian Crowley, on behalf of the UEN Group
- Jens-Peter Bonde

replacing the motions by the following groups:

- PPE-DE (B6-0136/2006)
- Verts/ALE (B6-0138/2006)
- ALDE (B6-0139/2006)
- UEN (B6-0141/2006)

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

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European Parliament resolution on the right to freedom of expression and respect for religious beliefs

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Articles 9 and 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, Articles 10 and 11 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and Articles 6 and 11 of the Treaty on European Union,
 - having regard to Article 22 of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations,
 - having regard to the reactions of the High Representative, Javier Solana, the President of the European Parliament, Josep Borrell, and the Austrian Presidency, and to the joint statement by the Secretaries-General of the UN and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference,
 - having regard to Rule 103(4) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas freedom of expression, thought, conscience and religion is enshrined in Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights,
- B. whereas these freedoms form a fundamental part of the development of European democracies, as does the clear separation between the State and religion,
- C. whereas the violent protests in various parts of the world are directed towards individual Member States of the EU and the so-called Western world as a whole, and whereas the protests were triggered by the private publication of cartoons which were not communications by any State,
- D. whereas this has led to protests and consumer and trade boycotts as well as violent unrest around the world, particularly in Islamic countries, some of it orchestrated,
- E. whereas the overwhelming majority of peoples in the EU, as well as countries affected by these unfortunate events, hope for dialogue and a peaceful relationship based on mutual respect and understanding, and whereas only groups opposed thereto profit from recent developments,
- F. whereas the cartoons that triggered the protests do not further the dialogue that the EU has initiated to build intercultural and interreligious ties, and whereas the European Union remains fully committed to further developing and strengthening ties with the affected countries in a spirit of mutual cooperation and a common vision of strengthened relations,
- G. whereas free and independent media are an essential requirement for the full respect of the right of freedom of expression and reinforce the principle of democracy on which the Union is founded,
1. Defends freedom of expression as a fundamental value of the EU; believes that freedom of expression must be exercised with personal responsibility and on a basis of respect for others' rights and sensibilities; acknowledges that balancing these concerns necessitates an ongoing

debate in a democracy;

2. Calls on all those who enjoy freedom of expression to commit themselves to supporting the fundamental values of the EU - democracy, pluralism and tolerance - and not to 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;
3. Recalls that freedom of expression, thought, conscience and religion is enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights;
4. Believes that freedom of expression should always be exercised with responsibility and with respect for human rights, religious feelings and beliefs, whether they be connected with the Islamic, Christian, Jewish or any other religion;
5. Considers that 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 respect for those who have felt offended by the cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed but points out that redress for any possible offence may be sought through the courts in accordance with existing national and European legislation;
6. Condemns in the strongest possible terms the burning down of embassies of EU Member States, as well as the threats against EU citizens; deplores the failure of some governments to prevent violence and the toleration by other governments of violent attacks; calls on the countries where these incidents happened to show clearly and in practice that such incidents will not in the future be accepted; calls on all States to honour their obligations under the Vienna Convention;
7. 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;
8. Welcomes the statements and efforts of those leaders of European Muslim communities and in the Arab world who have expressed their firm condemnation of the violent attacks on embassies and the burning of flags;
9. Expresses its solidarity with journalists in Jordan, Egypt and Algeria who have courageously reprinted and pointedly commented on the cartoons; strongly condemns their arrest and urges the respective governments to drop all charges against them;
10. Underlines that a boycott against one Member State is in contradiction with the fact that trade agreements are always concluded with the EU as a whole;
11. Expresses its full support for and solidarity with Denmark and the countries and people that have been affected under these unprecedented and difficult circumstances; recalls the solidarity clause in Article 11 of the Treaty on European Union;
12. Supports all democratic forces - politicians, media and civil society - that are confronted with and struggling against authoritarian or oppressive religious regimes;

13. Denounces the assassination of Father Santoro by religious fanatics in Turkey and also the deaths of all other victims of the recent violence;
14. Strongly regrets that there seem to be organised extremist groups which see an advantage in escalating the present tensions and using the cartoons as a pretext for incitement to violence; notes that the population at large in the countries concerned takes a different view and strives for peace, stability and economic and cultural exchange rather than chaos and violence;
15. 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;
16. Calls for a return to a climate of constructive and peaceful dialogue, and calls on local political and religious leaders to take active steps to end the violence;
17. Considers that the promotion of intercultural and interreligious dialogue and the advancement of mutual understanding and respect are an ongoing challenge for the globalised world;
18. Firmly believes that the pursuit of these steps will make full use of the framework of cooperation and dialogue with the Mediterranean and Asian partner countries;
19. Recalls that the EMPA is the appropriate forum for working together with our partners on the southern bank of the Mediterranean for a democratic, pluralist and tolerant society based on the values of human rights; in this context, welcomes the statement by the EMPA Bureau and calls for the March session to deal with this problem as a priority issue;
20. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Council of Europe, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference and the Arab League.