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MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

on Eritrea

tabled by Mr BOWIS, Mr GEMELLI and Mrs MAIJ-WEGGEN

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on behalf of the EPP-ED

The European Parliament,

- A. Whereas, at the Country's independence from Ethiopia in 1991, President Issaias began his Presidency with encouraging moves, both towards democracy and in his own modest official lifestyle, he has since ruled the country with an iron grip, allowing no political opposition, with the PFDJ (ruling People's Front for Democracy and Justice) being the only official party recognised by the government;
- B. Welcoming the recent launch of a new political party, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front - Democratic Party (EPLF-DP), which has vowed to end President Issaias' un-elected, single-party reign by challenging his autocratic regime;
- C. Deploring that ten years since independence, President Issaias has yet to formalise his position through the normal democratic process of an election, and that the country's first-ever parliamentary elections that were scheduled for December 2001 have been shelved indefinitely on the grounds of security concerns;
- D. Whereas President Issaias is becoming increasingly unpopular as a result of his increasingly authoritarian rule and the conclusion of the disastrous and costly border conflict with Ethiopia, which cost the country thousands of lives and millions of dollars;
- E. Whereas the growing public dissent and criticism of his rule resulted in a government crack-down on students in August 2001 - with two of the detained students dying while in detention in the desert - and reached a nadir in September 2001 when the government ordered the arrest of 11 out of the 15 senior government and party figures (G15) for their open criticism of his leadership in a widely-publicised letter, and banned the country's fledging independent press;
- F. Whereas nothing has been heard of the prisoners since their arrest but a report currently discussed in the National Assembly accuses them of treason, in essence because they made their remarks at a time "when the country should be united in the face of the threat from Ethiopia";
- G. Deploring in the strongest possible terms the expulsion of the Italian Ambassador to Eritrea, Mr Antonio Bandini, on 28 September 2001, following an official protest to the Eritrean government lodged by the EU ambassadors over the above-mentioned human rights violations, and in particular the arrest of the 11 former members of Eritrea's ruling party, the indefinite closure of the country's independent press, and the arrest of independent journalists;
- H. Whereas all 15 EU Member States withdrew their Ambassadors from Asmara following the expulsion of the Italian Ambassador, and at an October 2001 meeting the EU expressed its concerns over recent developments in Eritrea in light of what it described as "authoritarian development"; whereas four of the EU Envoys (Germany, Holland, France and Denmark) have meantime returned to Asmara but deploring that this was not coordinated at EU level;

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- I. Whereas the EU is Eritrea's leading development partner and is expected to provide crucial finance to rebuild the country's war-shattered economy;
 1. Condemns the human rights violations in Eritrea, in particular the crack-down on students in August 2001, as well as the arrest of the 11 dissidents and the shutting down of the independent press in September 2001;
 2. Demands that the 11 dissidents are immediately released and that any charges brought against them should be made public and submitted to a civilian court in the presence of international observers and human rights organisations;
 3. Calls for the immediate lifting of the ban on the independent press;
 4. Deplores the postponement sine-die of the first-ever parliamentary elections scheduled for December 2001 and calls for a new date for elections to be set as soon as possible, to be conducted under international scrutiny and observation;
 5. Considers that these human rights abuses constitute a flagrant violation of the essential elements referred to in Art. 9 of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement and warrant the immediate opening of consultations pursuant to Art. 96 of the same Agreement;
 6. Strongly condemns the expulsion of the Italian ambassador on 28 September 2001 and demands his immediate reinstatement as well as an official apology from the Eritrean government;
 7. Calls on the Council and EU Member States to take a coordinated stance with regard to relations with Eritrea, to monitor closely the political situation in the country and to make the continuation of EU development cooperation conditional upon substantial progress to be achieved in the areas of human rights and democratisation, in particular freedom of speech, press and assembly, and the holding of democratic elections;
 8. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the government of Eritrea.

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