

WRITTEN QUESTION P-3493/09  
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to the Commission

Subject: Commission role in investigating respect for human rights and press freedom in Tunisia

On 30 January 2009 Tunisian police officers and an examining magistrate entered the offices of the Kalima radio station in Tunis, confiscated the station's equipment, and sealed the premises. A judicial investigation has also been opened concerning the editor-in-chief, Sihem Bensedrine, because she had allegedly been broadcasting without first obtaining a legal licence within the meaning of the Tunisian Communications Code.

However, the search, the confiscation of the equipment, the sealing of the Kalima offices, and the proceedings against Ms Bensedrine are all open to doubt in terms of their legality.

What this case appears to involve is a failure to observe the Tunisian Code of Criminal Procedure (Articles 10, 53, and 199) and the Telecommunications Code (Articles 5, 6, 46, 57, 74, and 80), combined with trumped-up charges against Ms Bensedrine, given that the Public Prosecutor has no clear-cut evidence of the offences of which she has been accused, nor has he received any papers from the National Telecommunications Authority, which is legally empowered to establish the facts and give interpretations in cases relating to telecommunications.

The serious irregularities and breaches of procedure and the trumped-up accusations against a well-known journalist and human rights defender raise questions about the attitude of the Tunisian authorities regarding press freedom and human rights.

The EU and Tunisia, which entered into an association agreement in 1995, have developed close relations in the sphere of democratic reforms and economic modernisation. Tunisia has committed itself under the agreement to consolidating the independence and effectiveness of the judiciary and respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms.

In the light of the incident in Tunisia on 30 January 2009, what steps will the Commission take with a view to investigating whether Tunisia respects human rights and press freedom in accordance with the undertakings that it has given to the EU? What form of intervention will it bring to bear in order to halt the proceedings against Kalima and Ms Bensedrine?