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Plenary sitting

15.1.2014

B7-0034/2014 }
B7-0036/2014 }
B7-0037/2014 }
B7-0038/2014 }
B7-0040/2014 }
B7-0041/2014 } RC1

JOINT MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

pursuant to Rules 122(5) and 110(4) of the Rules of Procedure

replacing the motions by the following groups:

Verts/ALE (B7-0034/2014)
ECR (B7-0036/2014)
S&D (B7-0037/2014)
ALDE (B7-0038/2014)
GUE/NGL (B7-0040/2014)
PPE (B7-0041/2014)

on recent elections in Bangladesh
(2014/2516(RSP))

José Ignacio Salafranca Sánchez-Neyra, Salvador Sedó i Alabart, Mairead McGuinness, Elmar Brok, Cristian Dan Preda, Bernd Posselt, Filip Kaczmarek, Ivo Belet, Tunne Kelam, Elena Băsescu, Monica Luisa Macovei, Mariya Gabriel, Philippe Boulland, Jean Roatta, Eduard Kukan, Roberta Angelilli, Petri Sarvamaa, Eija-Riitta Korhola, Giovanni La Via, Sergio Paolo Francesco Silvestris, Sari Essayah, Seán Kelly, Krzysztof Lisek, Joachim Zeller, Davor Ivo Stier, Laima Liucija Andrikienė, Tadeusz Zwiefka, Bogusław Sonik

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on behalf of the PPE Group

Véronique De Keyser, Ana Gomes, Liisa Jaakonsaari, Joanna Senyszyn, Lidia Joanna Geringer de Oedenberg, Pino Arlacchi, Mitro Repo, Marc Tarabella, Richard Howitt, John Attard-Montalto

on behalf of the S&D Group

Phil Bennion, Marietje Schaake, Alexander Graf Lambsdorff, Sarah Ludford, Louis Michel, Kristiina Ojula, Johannes Cornelis van Baalen, Hannu Takkula, Ramon Tremosa i Balcells, Angelika Werthmann, Izaskun Bilbao Barandica, Marielle de Sarnez, Robert Rochefort

on behalf of the ALDE Group

Jean Lambert, Barbara Lochbihler, Nicole Kiil-Nielsen, Raül Romeva i Rueda, Tarja Cronberg, Iñaki Irazabalbeitia Fernández, Rui Tavares

on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group

Charles Tannock, Paweł Robert Kowal

on behalf of the ECR Group

Marie-Christine Vergiat, Nikola Vuljanić

on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group

Jaroslav Paška

European Parliament resolution on recent elections in Bangladesh (2014/2516(RSP))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its resolutions on Bangladesh, in particular those of 21 November 2013 on Bangladesh: human rights and forthcoming elections¹, of 23 May 2013 on labour conditions and health and safety standards following the recent factory fires and building collapse in Bangladesh², of 14 March 2013 on the situation in Bangladesh³, and of 17 January 2013 on recent casualties in textile factory fires, notably in Bangladesh⁴,
 - having regard to the Declaration by High Representative Catherine Ashton on behalf of the European Union on the Legislative Elections in Bangladesh of 9 January 2014 and the Statement by High Representative Catherine Ashton on the preparation for general elections in Bangladesh of 30 November 2013,
 - having regard to the Statement by the Spokesperson of High Representative Catherine Ashton on EU Election Observation Mission in Bangladesh of 20 December 2013,
 - having regard to the press release of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, entitled ‘Political brinkmanship driving Bangladesh to the edge’ of 1 December 2013,
 - having regard to Rules 122(5) and 110(4) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas on 5 January 2014 Bangladesh held general elections under the auspices of an interim government headed by the former and present Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who had done away with the traditional Bangladeshi system of a neutral caretaker government by means of the 15th amendment to the Constitution in 2011;
- B. whereas 2013 has reportedly been the most violent year in post-independence Bangladesh’s history, and the pre-election and election phases in particular have been marked by widespread violence, with blockades, strikes and voter intimidation orchestrated mainly by the opposition and with over 300 people killed since the beginning of 2013, including at least 18 on election day, with Bangladesh’s fragile economy being paralysed as a result;
- C. whereas the elections were boycotted by the opposition alliance led by the BNP (Bangladesh Nationalist Party), which had insisted on a ‘non-party’ caretaker government, and resulted in a largely unopposed victory for the ruling Awami League, with over half of the constituencies uncontested and low voter participation; whereas the Election Commission reportedly had to suspend voting at over 300 polling stations due to violence;

¹ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2013)0516.

² Texts adopted, P7_TA(2013)0230.

³ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2013)0100.

⁴ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2013)0027.

- D. whereas Bangladesh's two main parties have a long-standing tradition of uncompromising confrontation and mistrust which risks jeopardising the impressive social and economic progress made by Bangladesh in the last decade;
- E. whereas a UN mission led by Óscar Fernández-Taranco, which had been intended to broker a compromise, concluded its five-day visit on 5 October 2013 without having achieving a breakthrough;
- F. whereas UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said that he regretted the fact that the parties had not reached an agreement before the elections, and called on all sides to ensure a peaceful environment 'where people can maintain their right to assembly and expression';
- G. whereas the EU has good, long-standing relations with Bangladesh, including through the Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development; whereas, however, it did not send an election observation mission to the country, because the conditions for representative elections had not been met on account of the absence of opposition candidates;
- H. whereas Bangladesh's electoral commission has declared the elections to have been free, fair and credible, and whereas the new government led by the re-elected Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has been sworn in; whereas voter turnout in these elections was very low, at 40 % according to government figures, 20 % according to Dhaka-based diplomats, and even lower according to representatives of the opposition;
- I. whereas the leader of the opposition, Khaleda Zia, has been restricted in her movements, other prominent BNP members have recently been arrested and numerous BNP supporters have reportedly been going into hiding for fear of reprisals;
- J. whereas the BNP opposition is continuing to cooperate with Jamaat-e-Islami and the splinter group Hafezat-e-Islam, which are regarded as the main instigators of the violence;
- K. whereas on 12 December 2013 Abdul Quader Molla, a prominent leader of Jamaat-e-Islami, became the first person to be executed for war crimes perpetrated during Bangladesh's war of independence, and whereas the proceedings of the country's International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) have been a highly contested electoral issue, with six out of the seven people found guilty of war crimes sentenced to death;
- L. whereas during and after the elections thousands of citizens belonging to vulnerable minority groups, particularly Hindus, have been violently attacked and chased from their homes, reportedly mainly by Jammata e-Islami militants, for reasons partly linked to the ICT trials, as many of the prosecution witnesses are Hindus;
- M. whereas at least one ICT witness, Mustafa Howlader, was killed in his home on 10 December 2013;
- 1. Strongly condemns the killings and widespread violence which erupted throughout the country in the run-up to and during the January 2014 elections, especially attacks on

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religious and cultural minorities and other vulnerable groups; expresses serious concern at the paralysis of everyday life in Bangladesh on account of strikes and blockades and the confrontation between the two political camps;

2. Calls on the Government of Bangladesh to immediately halt all repressive methods used by the security forces, including indiscriminate firing with live ammunition and torture in custody, and to release the opposition politicians who have been subjected to arbitrary arrest; urges that prompt, independent and transparent investigations be carried out into the recent cases of violent deaths before and after the elections, and that the perpetrators, including those in the security services, be brought to justice;
3. Underlines Bangladesh's reputation as a tolerant society within a secular state, and calls on the Bangladeshi authorities to provide increased protection for ethnic and religious minorities at risk and to ensure effective prosecution of all instigators of intercommunal violence;
4. Sincerely regrets the fact that the Bangladeshi Parliament and the political parties did not manage to agree on an inclusive mechanism for the elections, and calls on the government and the opposition to put the best interests of Bangladesh first as a matter of urgency and to find a compromise which would give the Bangladeshi people a chance to express their democratic choice in a representative way; believes that all options should be considered, including an early election if all legitimate political parties are willing to stand and offer voters a choice;
5. Calls on the EU to use all the means at its disposal to assist such a process if requested and to make full use of its resources, in particular the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights and the Instrument for Stability; calls also on its Directorate for Democracy Support to make Bangladesh a focal point for activities of the Office for Promotion of Parliamentary Democracy (OPPD);
6. Believes that, in the interest of Bangladesh's future, parties having a democratic reputation need to develop a culture of mutual respect; urges the BNP to unequivocally distance itself from Jamaat-e-Islami and Hafezat-e-Islam;
7. Stresses that parties which turn to terrorist acts should be banned;
8. Acknowledges that the International Crimes Tribunal has played an important role in providing redress and closure for victims of and those affected by the Bangladeshi war of independence;
9. Expresses concern, however, at the increasing number of people on death row in Bangladesh, besides the six individuals sentenced by the ICT, and in particular at the sentencing to death of 152 soldiers over a bloody mutiny in 2009 and the recent execution of Abdul Quader Molla; calls on the government and the parliament to abolish the death penalty and to commute all death sentences; calls also on the authorities to urgently set up an effective mechanism to protect witnesses in cases before the ICT;

10. Calls also on the government to revise the Information and Communication Technology Act and the Anti-Terrorism Act , which were made more stringent under the last government and can lead to the arbitrary criminalisation of citizens;
11. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the European External Action Service, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy / Vice-President of the European Commission, the EU Special Representative for Human Rights, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the UN Secretary-General, the UN Human Rights Council and the Government and Parliament of Bangladesh.