

P6_TA(2005)0242

Freedom of the press in Algeria

European Parliament resolution on freedom of the press in Algeria

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreement of 21 April 2002 between the European Union and Algeria,
 - having regard to the UNDP reports for 2002, 2003 and 2004 on human development in the Arab world,
 - having regard to the Commission communication of 21 May 2003, entitled 'Reinvigorating EU actions on Human Rights and democratisation with Mediterranean partners' (COM(2003)0294),
 - having regard to the Commission communication of 11 March 2003, entitled 'Wider Europe - Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours' (COM(2003)0104),
 - having regard to the Commission communication of 12 April 2005, entitled 'The Tenth Anniversary of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership: A work programme to meet the challenges of the next five years' (COM(2005)0139),
 - having regard to its resolution of 28 April 2005 on the annual report on human rights in the world 2004 and the EU's policy on the matter¹,
 - having regard to the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly resolution on economic and financial issues, social affairs and education, adopted in Cairo on 15 March 2005,
 - having regard to its previous resolutions on Algeria, in particular its resolution of 10 October 2002 on the conclusion of an association agreement with Algeria²,
 - having regard to Rule 115(5) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas the Euro-Mediterranean partnership seeks particularly to create an area of peace and stability based on respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and democracy,
- B. whereas the European Union seeks to promote democracy, good governance, the rule of law and the defence of all human rights,

¹ *Texts Adopted* of that date, P6_TA(2005)0150.

² OJ C 279 E, 20.11.2003, p. 115.

- C. recalling the undertakings given by the Algerian Government under the Barcelona Declaration adopted at the Euro-Mediterranean Conference on 27 to 28 November 1995,
- D. having regard to Article 2 of the above-mentioned Association Agreement which stipulates that respect for democratic principles and fundamental human rights is to inspire the domestic and international policies of the parties to it and shall constitute an essential element of that Agreement,
- E. whereas television, radio and print activities are State monopolies in Algeria,
- F. concerned at the situation regarding press freedom following the reform of the Algerian Penal Code in May 2001 and in particular certain of its provisions, which impose heavy fines and prison sentences for libel,
- G. whereas numerous legal proceedings for violation of press laws have been initiated against journalists working for privately owned French language newspapers such as 'Le Matin', 'Liberté', 'Le soir d'Algérie' and 'El Watan'; particularly concerned at the prison sentences received by Farid Alilat, Fouad Boughanem, Hakim Laâlam, Abla Chérif, Hassane Zerrouky, Youssef Rezzoug, Yasmine Ferroukhi and Hafnaoui Ghoul,
- H. recalling that Mohamed Benchicou, Editor of 'Le Matin', was sentenced to a minimum of two years' imprisonment on 14 June 2004 for infringement of the law concerning exchange control and capital movements, while his newspaper went into compulsory liquidation in June 2004, and that his application for release on grounds of ill health was rejected by the Algerian authorities on 20 April 2005 despite the alarming deterioration in his condition; recalling also the sentencing and imprisonment since 28 June 2004 of Ahmed Benaoum, head of the Er-raï Elam press group,
- I. whereas the state of emergency decreed on 9 February 1992 and all resulting decrees and legal texts are still in force,
- J. whereas projects seeking to develop of pluralist information channels and strengthen the independent media in Algeria are currently receiving funding pursuant to the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR),
 1. Welcomes the ratification by the Algerian Parliament of the above-mentioned Association Agreement and hopes that, as soon as it enters into force, it will be possible to reinitiate political dialogue with Algeria through the Association Council;
 2. Stresses the importance of Euro-Mediterranean neighbourhood policy and its action plans seeking to strengthen democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights and, especially, freedom of the press, of which particular account must be taken when such action plans are being drawn up;
 3. Considers in particular that the provisions of the Algerian penal code of May 2001 imposing prison sentences for defamation of the President, Parliament or 'any other public or constituent body' are obstructing the work of journalists in Algeria;
 4. Urges the Algerian authorities to adopt and implement without delay the necessary legislative measures to ensure the greatest respect for fundamental rights and, in

particular, full respect for the freedom of the press, in accordance with the international agreements which Algeria is a party; calls in this connection for the effective decriminalisation of infringements of the press laws;

5. Calls on the Algerian authorities to release without delay the journalists sentenced to imprisonment for libel, to end this judicial persecution of the Algerian private media for their opinions and to halt the legal proceedings initiated against the Algerian private media;
6. Considers that the lifting of the state of emergency would help to promote the rule of law and compliance with the provisions of Article 2 of the Association Agreement;
7. Calls on the Council and the Commission to establish clear mechanisms for the regular monitoring of compliance with Article 2 by all parties to the Association Agreement, and the European Parliament, the National Popular Assembly and Algerian civil society;
8. Calls on the United Kingdom Presidency to convene the EU-Algeria Association Council so as to reinitiate political dialogue with Algeria and to include on the agenda of the meeting the question of the freedom of the press;
9. Calls on the Commission to continue to promote programmes, by way of the EIDHR, that seek to strengthen the independent media in Algeria and the development of pluralist information channels;
10. Asks that the question of freedom of the press be raised at the next meeting of the Interparliamentary Delegation for relations with the Maghreb countries;
11. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Personal Representative on Human Rights of Mr Javier Solana, the Secretary-General/High Representative for the CFSP, the Commission and the Government and Popular National Assembly of Algeria.