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Joint motion for a resolution on the rise in neo-fascist violence in Europe (2018/2869(RSP))

On 25 October, the European Parliament adopted a strong and comprehensive resolution on the rise of neo-fascist violence in Europe and more broadly racism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance. The first time such a resolution has been adopted since 1999 and it is an important position of the parliament ahead of the EU election.

The European Parliament,

– having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,

- having regard to the report of 9 May 2017 by the UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance,
- having regard to UN General Assembly Resolution 71/179 of 19 December 2016 on 'Combating glorification of Nazism, neo-Nazism and other practices that contribute to fuelling contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance',
- having regard to the European Convention on Human Rights, in particular Article 14 thereof and Protocol No 12 thereto,
- having regard to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination,
- having regard to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union,
- having regard to Articles 2, 3, 6 and 7 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU),
- having regard to Council Directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000(1) prohibiting discrimination on grounds of race and ethnic origin (the Race Equality Directive),
- having regard to Council Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA of 28 November 2008 on combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law(2),
- having regard to Directive 2012/29/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime(3),
- having regard to Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 1141/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 October 2014 on the statute and funding of European political parties and European political foundations(4),
- having regard to the establishment in June 2016 of the EU High Level Group on combating racism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance,
- having regard to the Council of Europe resolution of 30 September 2014 on counteraction to manifestations of neoNazism and right-wing extremism,
- having regard to the EU Code of Practice on Disinformation,
- having regard to the Code of Conduct on Countering Illegal Hate Speech Online,
- having regard to Rule 123(2) and (4) of its Rules of Procedure,

A. whereas as enshrined in Article 2 of the TEU, the Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities; whereas these values are common to all Member States;

B. whereas the lack of serious action against neo-fascist and neo-Nazi groups has enabled the occurrence of the current xenophobic surge in Europe;

C. whereas openly neo-fascist, neo-Nazi, racist and xenophobic groups and political parties have been inciting hatred and violence in society, reminding us of what they were capable of doing in the past;

D. whereas the dissemination of hate speech online often leads to a rise in violence, including by neo-fascist groups;

E. whereas neo-fascist groups have taken the lives of thousands of people of all kinds, such as refugees and immigrants, ethnic and religious minorities, LGBTQI people, human rights defenders, activists, politicians and members of the police force;

F. whereas neo-fascist groups use and abuse our democratic tools to spread hate and violence;

G. whereas, as reported by Europol, the EU Security Commissioner Sir Julian King, speaking at an event on 22 March 2017 to commemorate the 2016 Brussels attacks, highlighted the growing menace of right-wing violent extremism, stating that he was not aware of a single EU Member State that is not affected by the phenomenon in some way, specifically citing the 2011 Norway attacks, the assassination of British MP Jo Cox, and attacks on asylum centres and mosques across Europe to highlight what he warned was a 'less reported' threat to security; whereas neo-fascist and neo-Nazi groups manifest themselves in a variety of forms; whereas most of these groups exclude certain individuals or groups from society; whereas these organisations often use aggressive language towards minority groups and seek to justify their doing so by invoking the principle of freedom of speech; whereas the right to freedom of speech is not absolute;

H. whereas Article 30 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights clearly states that nothing in the declaration 'may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms' set forth therein;

I. whereas the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination affirms that its States Parties condemn all propaganda and all organisations which are based on ideas or theories of superiority of one race or group of persons of one colour or ethnic origin;

J. whereas the promotion of fascism is banned in several Member States pursuant to their national laws;

K. whereas the TESAT 2018 Europol report recorded a near doubling in the number of individuals arrested for right-wing extremist offences in 2017;

L. whereas on 22 July 2011, 77 people were killed and 151 injured in the Norway attacks;

M. whereas on 16 June 2016 Jo Cox, Member of the UK Parliament, was brutally murdered in Birstall, UK;

N. whereas according to the TESAT 2018 Europol report, five foiled, failed or completed terrorist attacks attributed to far-right individuals were reported in 2017(5) in the United Kingdom;

O. whereas on 21 September 2018 Eleonora Forenza, MEP, and her assistant Antonio Perillo were assaulted after an antifascist demonstration in Bari, Italy;

P. whereas the French intelligence service has expressed concern at the increasing number of members of military and law enforcement forces joining far-right violent groups(6);

Q. whereas the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), established by the Council of Europe, expressed alarm over the rise of right-wing extremism and neo-fascism in Croatia in a report published on 15 May 2018(7);

R. whereas in Poland, during November 2017 manifestation, pictures of six Members of the European Parliament, who stood up for tolerance, rule of law and other European values, were strung from a makeshift gallows in a public square in the southern city of Katowice by the members of the far-right Polish movement - ONR (National Radical Camp); the investigation is still ongoing, but no charges were brought so far against any of suspects, even though the event was reported in numerous media, including video footage;

R a. whereas in November 2017 to mark Poland's independence day, far-right organizations organized a large manifestation in Warsaw, gathering more than 60,000 people; the demonstrators were holding xenophobic banners with slogans such as "white Europe of brotherly nations", including the ones depicting "falanga" a fascist symbol from the 1930s;

R b. whereas the trial of the neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn, on charges of being a criminal organisation and of the assassination of Pavlos Fyssas, among other crimes, including attempted murder, is still ongoing in Greece; whereas on 21 September 2018 LGBTIQI activist Zak Kostopoulos was brutally assassinated in the centre of Athens; whereas one of the accused is allegedly related to extreme-right forces; whereas a full investigation is needed so that those responsible for his death and ill treatment be brought to justice,

R c . whereas an Italian man has been sentenced to 12 years in prison for shooting and wounding six African migrants in a racially motivated attack in the central Italian city of Macerata;

R d. whereas seven members of a far-right 'vigilante' group arrested in Chemnitz in mid-September 2018 for breaching the peace were recently arraigned on suspicion of forming a terrorist organisation calling itself Revolution Chemnitz; whereas according to federal state prosecutors, investigators had upgraded the charges from criminal to terrorist after reviewing the group's internal communications;

R e. whereas in France on 7 December 2017 five members of the movement Generation Identitaire were convicted of incitement to racial and religious hatred ; whereas

individuals linked to far-right groups, including Action Française, were planning a terrorist attack against a number of French politicians and mosques during the 2017 presidential elections; whereas on 24 June 2018, 10 members of the far-right group Action des Forces Opérationnelles (AFO) were arrested for planning a series of attacks targeting members of the Muslim community ; whereas on 14 September 2018, two ex skin-heads were found guilty of the murder of Clément Méric, a young student and antifascist activist killed in June 2013;

R f. whereas in Spain 12 members of the neo-Nazi organisation Hogar Social Madrid are currently being investigated for incitement to hatred; whereas members of the Spanish fascist groups Falange, Alianza Nacional and Democracia Nacional were arrested and convicted by the Supreme Court in Spain after attacking the Blanquerna Cultural Centre in Madrid during the celebrations of Catalonia's National Day in 2013; whereas in 2016 the anti-racist NGO SOS Racismo documented 309 cases of xenophobic violence ; whereas the president of this organisation received death threats after reporting these cases and has condemned the lack of effective mechanisms to denounce these crimes;

R g. whereas 19 people have been accused by the Francisco Franco Foundation, an entity that glorifies a dictatorship and its crimes, and the Franco family of several offences that could amount to 13 years of prison after carrying out a peaceful and symbolic action which involved unfurling two large banners from the Pazo de Meirás manor house calling on the public authorities to intervene to reclaim this property for the Galician people;

R h. whereas the Spanish Congress adopted a motion to move Francisco Franco from his tomb at the war memorial known as the Valley of the Fallen, a place of pilgrimage for the far right; whereas all remaining symbols or monuments exalting the military uprising, the civil war and Franco's dictatorship should effectively be removed and that those that cannot be removed be subject to the necessary contextualisation and reinterpretation, in order that they may contribute to public awareness and remembrance of the past;

R h. whereas neo-Nazi Nordic Resistance Movement (NMR) regularly stages rallies throughout Scandinavia, chanting slogans and waving the organisation's green-and-white flags; whereas several members of NMR have been convicted for violent attacks on civilians and the police; whereas the numerous arson attacks against refugees reception centres led the Swedish Government in 2015 to hide the location of buildings earmarked for housing refugees;

R i. whereas every year on 16 March thousands of people gather in Riga for Latvian Legion Day to honour Latvians who served in the Waffen-SS;

R j. whereas since the beginning of 2018 C14 and other far-right groups in Ukraine such as the Azov-affiliated National Militia, Right Sector, Karpatska Sich and others have attacked Roma groups several times, as well as anti-fascist demonstrations, city council meetings, an event hosted by Amnesty International, art exhibitions, LGBTQI events, women's rights and environmental activists;

1. Strongly condemns and deplors the terrorist attacks, murders, psychological violence, violent physical attacks and marches by neo-fascist and neo-Nazi organisations that have taken place in various EU Member States;

2. Is deeply concerned at the increasing normalisation of fascism, racism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance in the European Union, and is troubled by reports in some Member States of collusion between political leaders, political parties and law enforcement with neo-fascists and neo-Nazis;
3. Is especially worried about the neo-fascist violence affecting society as a whole and targeting particular minorities such as black Europeans/people of African descent, Jews, Muslims, Roma, third-country nationals, LGBTI people and persons with disabilities;
4. Strongly condemns all violent attacks by neo-fascist groups against politicians and members of political parties as reported in some Member States, and in particular the recent attack by CasaPound fascist squads against Eleonora Forenza, MEP, her assistant Antonio Perillo and others who took part in an anti-fascist demonstration on 21 September 2018 in Bari, Italy;
5. Is deeply concerned by the impunity with which neo-fascist and neo-Nazi groups operate in some Member States and stresses that this sense of impunity is among the reasons that explain the alarming rise in violent actions by certain far-right organisations;
6. Acknowledges the worrying trend of neo-fascist and neo-Nazi groups using social media and the internet to organise and strategise across the European Union;
7. Deplores the fact that in some Member States public broadcasting has become an example of single political party propaganda, which often excludes opposition and minority groups from society and even incites violence;
8. Recalls that the fascist ideology and intolerance are always associated with an attack on democracy itself;
9. Calls on the Member States to strongly condemn and sanction hate crime, hate speech and scapegoating by politicians and public officials at all levels and on all types of media, as they directly normalise and reinforce hatred and violence in society;
10. Calls on the Member States to take further measures to prevent, condemn and counter hate speech and hate crime;
11. Calls on the Commission, the Member States and social media companies to counteract the spread of racism, fascism and xenophobia on the internet, in cooperation with the relevant civil society organisations at a national and international level;
12. Calls on the Member States to investigate and prosecute hate crimes and to share best practices for identifying and investigating hate crimes, including those motivated specifically by the various forms of xenophobia;
13. Calls on the Member States to envisage and provide for adequate support for the victims of racist or xenophobic crimes and hate crimes, and the protection of all witnesses against the perpetrators;

14. Calls on the Member States to set up anti-hate crime units in police forces; calls on police forces to ensure that their personnel do not engage in any form of racist, xenophobic or discriminatory act, and that any such act committed is investigated and those responsible brought to justice;

15. Calls on the Commission to launch a call for civil society organisations to monitor and report hate speech and hate crime in the Member States;

16. Supports, commends and calls for the protection of community groups and civil society organisations that fight against fascism, racism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance;

17. Calls for consolidated EU anti-discrimination legislation, including the transposition/implementation of existing legislation and the passing of new legislation, including the Equal Treatment Directive;

18. Recalls that Council Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA on combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law, the implementation deadline for which was November 2010, provides for a legal base for imposing penalties on legal persons publicly inciting violence or hatred against a minority group, such as exclusion from public benefits, disqualification from commercial activities, placement under judicial supervision or the issuance of a winding-up order;

19. Urges the Commission to update its 2014 report on the implementation of the aforementioned Council Framework Decision, and to initiate infringement proceedings against those Member States that have not complied with the provisions of the Decision;

20. Urges the Member States to safeguard their compliance with the provisions of the Council Framework Decision, to counter organisations spreading hate speech and violence in public spaces and online and to effectively ban neofascist and neo-Nazi groups and any other foundation or association that exalts and glorifies Nazism and fascism, while respecting domestic legal order and jurisdiction;

21. Calls for full and timely cooperation between law enforcement, intelligence agencies, the judiciary and civil society organisations in the fight against fascism, racism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance;

22. Calls on the Member States to follow the Council of Europe's recommendations on counteracting manifestations of neoNazism and right-wing extremism;

23. Calls on the Member States to provide mandatory, human rights-based and service-oriented in-service training to law enforcement officers and officials in the judicial system at all levels;

24. Calls on the Member States to focus on prevention through education, awareness-raising and the exchange of best practices;

25. Calls on the Member States and national sports federations, in particular football clubs, to counteract the scourge of racism, fascism and xenophobia in stadiums and in

the sports culture by condemning and punishing those responsible and by promoting positive educational activities targeting young fans, in cooperation with schools and the relevant civil society organisations;

26. Encourages the Member States to provide training to those working in public broadcasting and the media to raise their awareness about the challenges and discrimination faced by the victims of neo-fascist and neo-Nazi groups;

27. Calls on the Member States to put in place national 'exit programmes' to help individuals to leave violent neo-fascist and neo-Nazi groups; underlines that such programmes should go far beyond one-to-one interventions and should involve long-term support for those struggling to find jobs, relocate and develop new and safe social networks;

28. Emphasises that an awareness of history is one of the preconditions for preventing such crimes from occurring in the future and plays an important role in educating the younger generations;

29. Calls on the Member States to condemn and counteract all forms of Holocaust denial, including the trivialisation and minimalisation of the crimes of the Nazis and their collaborators; points out that the truth about the Holocaust must not be trivialised by political and media discourses;

30. Calls for a common culture of remembrance that rejects the fascist crimes of the past; is deeply worried that the younger generations in Europe and elsewhere feel less and less concerned about the history of fascism, and hence risk becoming indifferent to new threats;

31. Encourages the Member States to promote education through mainstream culture on the diversity of our society and on our common history, including the atrocities of World War II, such as the Holocaust, and the systematic dehumanisation of its victims over a number of years;

32. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the Council of Europe, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the United Nations.

(1)OJ L 180, 19.7.2000, p. 22.

(2)OJ L 328, 6.12.2008, p. 55.

(3)OJ L 315, 14.11.2012, p. 57.

(4)OJ L 317, 4.11.2014, p. 1.

(5)<https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-2018-tesat-2018>

(6)<https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/france/090418/forces-de-l-ordre-liees-l-ultra-droite-violente-la-dgsi-s-inquiete?onglet=full>

(7) <https://rm.coe.int/fifth-report-on-croatia/16808b57be>

European Parliament discusses the impact of religion on Women's Rights

Lea Perekrests for HRWF (03.03.2016) - On 17 February 2016, co-chairs of the European Parliament Platform for Secularism in Politics, MEPs Ms. Virginie Roziere and Ms. Sophie in't Veld, of the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), hosted a meeting titled "Feminism and Faith: Impact of religion on women's rights". Ms. Virginie Roziere, emphasized the importance of this meeting in the Parliament, stating that "After decades of progress, women's rights face a rising threat." The meeting provided a rich and diverse panel, comprised of:

- Ms. Daniela Bankier, head of Gender Equality, European Commission
- Dr. Niels Spierings, assistant professor in Sociology, Radboud University.
- Ms. Kristina Lunz, activist and founder of StopBildSexism, author #ausnahmslos
- Ms. Lorena Sosa, assistant professor, Netherlands Institute of Human Rights

Ms. Sophie in't Veld initiated the discussion by posing the provocative question, "Is religion always detrimental to women's rights?" The meeting touched on an array of ways in which religion and women's rights intersect within and outside of Europe. Some of the main topics discussed by the participants addressed the compatibility of feminism and Islam, feminism and the European court rooms and the objectivisation of women in European media.

This discussion comes at an important time, with the theme of women's rights and religion being covered extensively by the media after the Cologne, Germany, attacks on New Year's Eve, when more than one-hundred women were sexually abused, assaulted and raped. Responding to these attacks, many media platforms and individuals concluded that the attacks were conducted and inspired by Muslim immigrants. This argument has contributed to a theory that claims Islam is dangerous to women.

Dr. Spierings of Radboud University discussed the obstacles that challenge feminism and Islam in the Middle East and Europe, emphasizing that debates on this topic have been damaged by the assumption that only two mind-sets are present in regards to feminism and Islam: those who are secular and feminist and those who are Muslim and anti-feminist. While Spierings explained that the Middle East tends to resist equality of the sexes, he nonetheless remained hopeful that these ideals will only expand in future.

Kristina Lunz was a part of a group of feminists who, in reaction to the Cologne attacks and the anti-Muslim backlash after the event, created a campaign to show how sexual assault/harassment has always been a problem in Germany regardless of changing religious demographics in the country. Ms. Lunz's narrative contributed to the discussion that the protection of women's rights and safety is not a religious-based issue that arises only within Islam but is a societal problem that is, and has been, prevalent and thriving within the EU. Lunz attributes this marginalization of and violence towards women in Europe to their representation in media platforms.

Ms. Lorena Sosa carried this argument, raising awareness about how European courts hinder women's rights in regards to their religious freedom. Ms. Sosa presented three case studies in which women were deprived of their freedom of religious expression ultimately leading to them being denied the right to education and labour. Ms. Lorena Sosa stressed the importance to reflect on the EU practices in addition to religious

practices, "Religion might not be good for women... [but] law is also not very good for women [either]."

In conclusion, the meeting fostered a diversity of voices and experiences, all of which unanimously called for the deconstruction of stigma around the idea that religion and feminism are mutually exclusive. The meeting stressed that this is not just a phenomenon or issue in the Middle East, but also in the European public eye and institutions.

European Parliament awards Sakharov Prize to Raif Badawi



Raif Badawi: a prisoner of conscience

Raif Badawi is the laureate of this year's Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought, following an October 29 decision by EP President Martin Schulz and the political group leaders. Badawi is a blogger from Saudi Arabia currently serving a 10-year prison sentence for insulting Islam on his website promoting social, political and religious debate.

European Parliament (29.10.2015) - <http://bit.ly/1P7rT32> - Badawi is a Saudi Arabian blogger, human rights activist and author of the website Free Saudi Liberals. He was arrested in 2012 and later sentenced to 10 years in prison, 1,000 lashes and a hefty fine for insulting Islamic values on his website.

He was administered the first set of 50 lashes in public in January 2015. The remainder were postponed following international protests. Earlier this week the wife of Raif Badawi, Ensaf Haidar, who is currently living in Canada with their three children, announced that the Saudi authorities have given the green light for the flogging to resume.

In February this year MEPs adopted a resolution strongly condemning the flogging of Badawi as "a cruel and shocking act" and calling on the Saudi Arabian authorities "to release him immediately and unconditionally as he is considered a prisoner of conscience, detained and sentenced solely for exercising his right to freedom of expression".

The finalists

Raif Badawi was one of this year's three finalists. Find out more about the democratic opposition in Venezuela embodied by the Mesa de la Unidad Democrática and political prisoners and the Russian opposition leader Boris Nemtsov here.

The Sakharov Prize

The Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought is awarded each year by the Parliament. It was set up in 1988 to honour individuals and organisations defending human rights and fundamental freedoms. Last year the prize was awarded to Denis Mukwege.

Nominations for the Sakharov Prize can be made by political groups or by at least 40 MEPs. Based on the nominations, the foreign affairs and development committees vote on a shortlist of three finalists. After that the Conference of Presidents, made up of the EP President and the leaders of the political groups, select the winner.

Denis Mukwege: winner of Sakharov Prize 2014

European Parliament (22.10.2014)

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/content/20141016STO74202/html/Denis-Mukwege-winner-of-Sakharov-Prize-2014> - Denis Mukwege is the laureate of the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought 2014, following today's decision by EP President Martin Schulz and the political group leaders. Mukwege will be invited to Strasbourg on 26 November to receive the award during the plenary session.

Announcing Mukwege as the 2014 laureate, President Schulz said: "The Conference of Presidents decided unanimously to award Dr Denis Mukwege from Democratic Republic of Congo the Sakharov Prize for his fight for protection especially of women. However, the political groups recognise the important role played by EuroMaidan in Ukraine and thus want to invite its representatives to join the award ceremony in November," adding that it was also decided to send a delegation with representatives from all political groups to Azerbaijan to meet and support Leyla Yunus in her fight for democracy and freedom in her country.

The gynaecologist standing up for women's rights

In many armed conflicts around the world, rape is used as a weapon of war, but Mukwege decided to help victims in his country. The 59-year-old gynaecologist founded the Panzi Hospital in Bukavu in 1998, when a war took place in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where today he still treats victims of sexual violence who have sustained serious injuries.

The war in DRC might be officially over, but the armed conflict still continues in the eastern part of the country and so do attacks against civilians, including gang rapes. Despite travelling regularly abroad to advocate women's rights and managing Panzi Hospital, Mukwege continues to see patients and perform surgery two days a week. He was nominated by the S&D and ALDE groups and MEP Barbara Lochbihler.

Sakharov Prize

The Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought is awarded each year by the European Parliament. It was set up in 1988 to honour individuals and organisations defending human rights and fundamental freedoms. Last year the prize was awarded to Malala Yousafzai, the Pakistani campaigner for girls' education.

Sakharov Prize: meet the finalists

European Parliament (17.10.2014)

http://www.europarl.ie/en/news_events/news/press_releases_2014/october/sakharov_prize_meet_the-finalists.html - The Ukrainian EuroMaidan movement, Denis Mukwege, a gynaecologist in the war-torn Democratic Republic of Congo and Leyla Yunus, a human rights activist from Azerbaijan have been named as the finalists for the 2014 [Sakharov Prize](#). They were selected by the foreign affairs and development committees on 7 October. Read on to find out more about the finalists.

The pro-European EuroMaidan movement started at the end of November 2013 as a protest against the decision of the Ukrainian government to postpone the signature of the association agreement with the EU. It is represented by the journalist Mr Mustafa Nayem, Eurovision Song Contest winner Ms Ruslana Lyzhychko, activist and student representative Ms Yelyzaveta Schepetylnykova and journalist Ms Tetiana Chornovol.

In many armed conflicts around the world, rape is used as a weapon of war. Denis Mukwege is a 59-year-old gynaecologist from Democratic Republic of Congo. He founded the Panzi Hospital in Bukavu, where he treats rape victims who have sustained serious injuries.

Leyla Yunus, an imprisoned Azerbaijani human rights activist and director of the Institute of Peace and Democracy, has been at the forefront of the struggle for human rights in Azerbaijan. In a resolution adopted on 18 September, the Parliament condemned the detention of several human rights activists in Azerbaijan, including Ms Yunus.

The winner will be decided by Parliament's President and political group leaders on 16 October and the award ceremony will be held in Strasbourg on 26 November

Sakharov Prize

The [Sakharov Prize](#) for Freedom of Thought, named after Soviet scientist and dissident Andrei Sakharov, was established in December 1988 by the European Parliament to honour individuals or organizations who dedicate their lives to the defence of human rights and freedoms, particularly the right to free expression.

The European Parliament, human rights champion

By Edward McMillan-Scott, MEP

EP Today (09.05.2014) / <http://eptoday.com/european-parliament-human-rights-champion/> - Despite the profound changes the world has undergone since the fall of the Berlin wall, torture, unlawful imprisonment and genocide still haunt us.

That is why the end of the European Parliament's mandate is an opportunity to review the vital work done by the EU ensure the promotion and protection of human rights and democracy worldwide.

I have long advocated human rights and democratic reforms, particularly across the ex-Soviet bloc, the Arab world and China.

In 1990, I founded the EU's €160 million Democracy and Human Rights Instrument (EIDHR), after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the world's largest programme to promote and encourage democracy and human rights worldwide in transition countries. It is the only EU programme which can operate without host country consent.

As the first politician to get to Cairo during the revolution in 2011, and a frequent visitor to North Africa before and since, I am more than most conscious of the elation there giving way to frustration over the slow pace of change and worse: in Egypt a counter-revolution.

It is vital that the EU continues to give a voice to the voiceless and hope to those without hope.

With others, and especially the Human Rights and Democracy Network of more than 40 Brussels-based NGOs, I long argued for the recently-established European Endowment for Democracy to act as an expert, flexible and deniable complement to the EIDHR. We also pressed successfully for the new EU Special Representative on Human Rights & Democracy.

A poll by Eurobarometer showed that Europeans continue to put human rights worldwide as their first aspiration for action by the European Parliament.

A key element in our year is the Sakharov Prize, which deservedly went in 2013 to Malala Yousafzai, the courageous schoolgirl who pleads for female education, and was shot by the Taliban on her way to school.

Human rights and democracy is a primary part of EU foreign policy, and the EU must continue to push the agenda, including in trade agreements.

Last year, I launched the Defending Freedoms Project in Brussels and Washington together with blind Chinese activist Chen Guancheng. The transatlantic project between the EU and US highlights human rights abuses around the world and calls on MEPs and US congressmen and women to advocate on behalf of individual prisoners of conscience worldwide. My own case is that of imprisoned Chinese human rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng.

For too long, authoritarian regimes have taken away basic freedoms and western governments have simply stood by. For example, oppression of certain religious and political groups in China continues, and amounts to genocide. Today, even China may be feeling the pressure of the EU and US as purported reforms are underway.

If the EU and US continue to work together taking a coordinated approach to human rights, the world's rising authoritarian powers would no longer be able to act with impunity. Of particular concern is the brutal power now being wielded once again by a Putin-led Russia. Europe needs a Magnitsky Act, systematically barring offenders from visiting the EU, and we should also set up an Impunity Register to log individual cases of

torture or inhumane treatment, pending the opportunity of trials in the International Criminal Court, itself part-funded by the EIDHR.

It is a full agenda, but a wholly worthwhile endeavour. I am proud of the European Parliament's efforts.

Inter-parliamentary gathering addresses need for internal-external coherence on human rights policies

By Aaron Sessions and Serena Romeo, *Human Rights Without Frontiers*

HRWF (07.10.2013) - On the 25th September 2013, the European Parliament's Subcommittee on Human Rights and Committee on Foreign Affairs co-hosted an inter-parliamentary meeting along with national EU parliaments on EU actions regarding human rights and the internal-external coherence of these policies. MEPs and MPs from EU Member States discussed ways to ensure greater consistency within Europe and in their engagement with third countries. The event also addressed the issue of strengthening the role of civil society at large.

The EU Special Representative for Human Rights since September 2012, Stavros Lambrinidis, challenged both the EU and its Member States to work toward consistency at three levels – internal-external, internal-internal, and external-external. In relation to internal-external consistency, Lambrinidis queried how a third country might try to deflect EU criticism of its own human rights record by enquiring into the rights violations of Roma communities in certain EU Member States or whether xenophobia and racism in Europe are being adequately addressed. No country is perfect, he acknowledged; nonetheless, EU institutions and states must not shy away from upholding the human rights values that they share while continuing to work on improving their own performance in this regard.

"Every Member State is an ambassador for the European family," said Lambrinidis, and together the EU must strive for a consistent application of human rights policy and thereby ensure greater credibility.

Regarding internal-internal consistency, he appealed for deeper cooperation between Member States on particular situations, while still acknowledging the different approaches and varying national interests that can come into play. "We don't always sing the same song, but we should all be singing from the same songbook," he said.

The EU Special Representative also spoke to what he called "the attack on civil society" that is currently underway in some European countries. Member States must ensure that their respective legal systems and national policies protect the public space for civil society entities to operate freely and without obstruction. We must underscore the universality of human rights, he argued, and leave no room for those who claim that they are simply a modern Western construct in opposition to "traditional values." Human rights instruments are equally binding on all EU Member States. They articulate the voice of the powerless in the face of the powerful that would deprive them of their human dignity.

In the afternoon session, the joint bodies addressed more directly issues of internal-external coherence in respect to Freedom, Security and Justice. Morten Kjaerum, the director of the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), appealed for greater transparency on the challenges that EU Member States face in harmonizing their structures and legislation in regard to national human rights policies. He also noted some shortfalls at a European level, such as the lack of more comprehensive protections for LGBT persons, a more effective strategy to address human trafficking and consistent

migration policies. Kjaerum also echoed Lambrinidis' concern for the weakening of civil society in some countries.

Non-governmental organizations contributed to the exchange by accenting the need for coherence between EU institutions while at the same time dealing with human rights breaches in third countries. Human Rights Watch warned of a "democracy deficit" when EU institutions develop policies without sufficient consultation with civil society actors. National MPs likewise called for greater coherence among the EU institutions. Issues such as immigration reform, LGBT rights, Roma policy, equal opportunity, minority rights and hate crimes were among the concerns raised by MPs.

Conclusions were drawn in the final session on the respective roles of national parliaments and the European Parliament regarding the monitoring of EU policies on human rights. The challenges ahead include not only better transparency and communication at every level but also the political will and resources to put these policies into practice. Whether the European Union can stay a credible model for the respect of human rights remains an on-going project.

Women's rights and the role of religion in secular societies debated in the European Parliament

By Dr Mark Barwick, *Human Rights Without Frontiers*

HRWF (21.02.2013) - On Tuesday, the *European Parliament Platform for Secularism in Politics* sponsored a lunchtime discussion on the topic, "Women's Rights in Changing Societies." The debate, which was moderated by MEP Sophie In't Veldt, examined the role of religions in secular states in respect to the rights of women in daily life. Special attention was given to reproductive rights and access to health care.

Ms Vicky Claeys of the *International Planned Parenthood Federation* expressed alarm over cases where women had been denied access to abortion services in publicly-funded health facilities on the grounds of religion. In one such case, a woman died after being refused an abortion for a life-threatening pregnancy in a Catholic hospital. In countries where the health care system is subsidised by government funds, she said, such situations reveal a serious conflict in public policy.

Ms Anka Gryqacz, a representative of *Catholics for Choice Europe*, agreed. She said religious groups have an important role to play in public life; however, when religious hierarchies try to influence policies for general society, those policies risk becoming discriminatory, even running counter to the expressed will of those people that they claim to lead. For instance, Catholic women have abortions in Europe at the same rate as non-Catholic women. "Religious people are not sheep," she said, following blindly their religious leaders. In the end, it is women - and especially poor women - who are the most vulnerable.

Ms Annegret Laakmann, chair and co-founder of *Frauenwuerde*, a German association that provides counselling to women in crisis. It was formed in response to failures in the country's health care system to provide services that are free of confessional biases. Recently, two Catholic hospitals in Cologne refused to examine a 25-year-old woman who said she had been raped. Hospital personnel denied treatment to avoid having to offer her advice on abortion or the morning-after pill. The Cardinal of Cologne has since apologised.

Country situations become problematic whenever religious or conscientious objections conflict with the law. For instance, in Germany the Church is the country's second largest employer, after the federal government, supplying a large part of the country's health

and social services. Harmonising religious teachings with national laws remains a challenge for all secular states, not only respecting the rights of women but equally for everyone who values democracy and the rule of law.

Women's networks call organise to end prostitution in Europe

By Elisa Van Ruiten for *Human Rights Without Frontiers*

HRWF (11.12.2012) - On the 4th of December the European Women's Lobby organised a conference on prostitution at the European Parliament to assess ten years of policies on prostitution in Sweden and the Netherlands. Representatives from both countries presented the results of studies made of the policies, legislation and impact of prostitution policy in their respective countries.

Under the Swedish model, a 1999 law focuses on demand and prohibits the purchase of sex services in Sweden as well as by Swedish peace keepers and military personal abroad. As a result of this legislation, prostitution has reportedly decreased by 50%. Also, researchers have noted a decrease in the purchasing of services since the law was enacted.

England, Wales, Ireland, Norway and Iceland have also implemented similar laws and have reported similarly positive results.

Research has shown that buyers are all ages, with the majority being between 30 and 50, from all income levels and ethnicities. They are usually married or co-habituating, living with children and having had numerous sexual partners, controverting the commonly held belief that buyers of sexual services are typically lonely unattractive men.

Advocacy for this model views prostitution as a form of violence against women which should be eradicated. Advocates point to statistics that show that 9 out of 10 prostitutes wish to leave the "profession" but cannot. Sixty-two per cent report they have been raped and a greater proportion report having suffered some form of sexual violence. Prostitution is also closely linked with organised crime and trafficking in human beings.

The conference also highlighted the Netherlands model, where focus is placed on the prevention of human trafficking. Here the view is that entering into prostitution is an individual's right of free choice. However, not all prostitution in the Netherlands is legal; for instance, prostitution among minors and non-licensed prostitution are forbidden. Each municipality is responsible for policies and legislation that manage prostitution locally.

The goal in the Netherlands model is to ensure government control in order to improve conditions for prostitutes and distinguish between forced and voluntary prostitution. However, some studies have shown that as many as 50 to 90% work involuntarily. Thousands of women have been forced into prostitution and 83% of prostitution in the Netherlands takes place outside of licensed brothels.

About 200 non-governmental organisations used the occasion to introduce the Brussels Call "Together for a Europe free from prostitution," including six key recommendations to EU Member States:

- an end to repressive measures against prostituted persons;
- the criminalisation of all forms of procuring;
- real alternatives and exit programmes for those in prostitution;
- the prohibition of the purchase of a sexual act;
- the implementation of policies of prevention and education and the promotion of equality and of positive sexuality; and

- the development of prevention policies in the countries of origin of prostituted persons.

"Anyone who knows anything about the reality of prostitution for the hundreds of thousands of women in Europe whom it has trapped cannot fail to endorse this call for urgent action from the EU and its member states", says Viviane Teitelbaum, President of the European Women's Lobby.

European Parliament Subcommittee reviews Human Rights situation in Iran and Pakistan

Mark Barwick, Human Rights Without Frontiers

HRWF (03.12.2012) - On 28th November the European Parliament (EP) Subcommittee on Human Rights considered testimony on human rights violations in the countries of Iran and Pakistan. The hearing on **Iran** was organised in association with the EP Delegation for relations with Iran and raised the question of whether it is better to isolate or to engage the country in order to achieve the desired affects. In response to this question, Dr Shirin Ebadi, Iranian lawyer and recipient of the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize, contended that military action is out of the question and that the only option left for dealing with the current regime is negotiation. She expressed regret for Europe's policy focus on nuclear weapons, as if Europe's security was all that is at risk in the present standoff. What about human rights for the people of Iran? she asked. What about security for Iranians?

The UN Special Rapporteur on Iran, Dr Ahmed Shaheed, agreed that engaging rather than isolating the country is the better strategy. "Statements have the effect of just talking *at* rather than talking *with*," he said, leading us nowhere.

Faraz Sanei of Human Rights Watch expressed concern for the impact of US sanctions having a negative effect on the EU response to the crisis in Iran. He detailed a number of human rights concerns, including detention and restrictions on political opposition leaders, diminished academic freedom in universities, threats to the freedom of expression and weakened protections for the freedom of religion and belief. Sanei recommended targeted "smart sanctions" against Iran, more cooperation with Iran's neighbouring countries and stepped up efforts to preserve information flow into the country.

An exchange of views on the human rights situation in **Pakistan** was also held in the context of the country's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) at the last session of the UN Human Rights Council. Peter Jacob of the Pakistan Catholic Bishops' Conference noted "institutionalised discrimination against minority religions" in the country. The Pakistani government countered charges made at the UPR hearing, he said, by citing recent laws passed and the establishment of a National Commission on Minorities. "The regime is using rhetoric to mask realities," said Jacob. He recommended a complete review of all EU-funded assistance to the country and stepped up technical assistance to monitor Pakistan's elections in 2013.

Joseph Francis, director of a Pakistani religious rights NGO, outlined the history of blasphemy laws in Pakistan and detailed discriminatory practices toward non-Sunni Muslims in the country. He also said that violence against women is widespread. Women who are members of religious minorities are particularly vulnerable to human rights violations.

Several speakers noted the wide gap that exists between official laws and daily realities in Pakistan. Pakistan shows no commitment, for example, to implement laws and

conventions on child labour, violence against children and religious freedoms. Although some progress was noted in democracy and human rights, the achievements have been minimal. The Pakistani Ambassador, who was present at the session, objected, saying that his country is a democracy and that the charges that had been made were "baseless".

Film on gendercide at the European Parliament calls for end to the killing of girls in India and China

By Elisa Van Ruiten for *Human Rights Without Frontiers*

HRWF (09.11.2012) - The United Nations estimates that as many as 200 million girls worldwide have gone missing and frequently aborted, killed or abandoned just because they were born girls. Organisers of a global campaign to end what they have termed "gendercide" say that the three deadliest words that are pronounced in the world today are these: "It's a girl."

"It's a girl" is also the title of a documentary film that is presently being screened in many countries. On 6th November, Irish MEP Gay Mitchell hosted a viewing of the film at the European Parliament, followed by a discussion with the film's director, Evan Grae Davis, and Reggie Littlejohn, President of Women's Rights Without Frontiers, a member association of Human Right Without Frontiers Int'l..

The documentary gives particular attention to female feticide and infanticide in India and China, where sons are typically considered to have higher value than daughters.

In India, families customarily give their daughter in marriage in exchange for a dowry, given to the husband's family. The birth of a son is therefore more valued than a daughter, as this can bring the bride's family more wealth. In other words, girls are born an economic burden to the family. Although the Indian government has outlawed the dowry system, it is still widely practiced with impunity. Dowries can require large sums of money of poor families, making sons much more desirable than girls. If a foetus is determined through an ultrasound test to be female, there is a high likelihood of an abortion. Others will kill their baby girls at birth through strangulation, poisoning or other methods.

China's One Child Policy is tracked through State Family Planning agencies and enforced by special government police units. Couples who live in urban centres are allowed only one child, whereas rural families may have two – if the first one was a girl, offering the family another chance to birth a son. When this rule is violated, forced abortion and sterilization frequently result. Children that escape this fate have no legal status in Chinese society, barring them from citizenship and the benefits thereof. These policies have resulted in a grossly disproportionate ratio of men to women, contributing to the trafficking of female children.

Producers of the film hope to draw greater attention to the tragedy of gendercide in our world today and to advocate for an end to these egregious practices. See www.ItsAGirlMovie.com for ways to become involved.

WRWF's Reggie Littlejohn challenges UNFPA and IPPF at European Parliament

WRWF (06.11.2012) - Women's Rights Without Frontiers President Reggie Littlejohn co-presented the feature-length documentary, "It's a Girl," at the European Parliament, together with the film's director, Evan Grae-Davis. Littlejohn is featured as an expert on China's One Child Policy in this powerful new documentary exposing gendercide and forced abortion. The event, hosted by MEP Gay Mitchell packed the auditorium.

According to one UN expert, up to 200 million women are missing in the world today due to the sex-selective abortion of baby girls. In China, moreover, the government forcibly aborts women who become pregnant in violation of the One Child Policy, up to the ninth month of pregnancy.

In response to a question about what the European Parliament can do to address this violence against women, Littlejohn raised the issue of the funding of UNFPA and International Planned Parenthood (IPPF).

Littlejohn praised the European Parliament for recently passing a resolution that "strongly condemns . . . the practice of forced abortions and sterilizations globally, especially in the context of the one-child policy." The resolution further states that "the EU has provided, and still provides, funds for organizations involved in family planning policies in China," and "urges the Commission to ensure that its funding of projects does not breach" the European Parliament's commitment against coercive population control.

Littlejohn stated, "It is significant that the European Parliament has urged the Commission to ensure that this funding is not associated with coercion. For decades, the UNFPA and International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) have worked hand in hand with the Chinese population control machine, which is coercive. They are funded by many nations, not only in Europe but the world over, including the United States. I have no doubt that any unbiased investigation by the European Parliament or any other governmental body will reveal that these organizations are complicit with coercive family planning in China."

In addition, Women's Rights Without Frontiers just launched a campaign to end gendercide and forced abortion in China. Littlejohn said, "We are saving lives in China, one baby girl at a time." WRWF's "Save a Girl" campaign has been adopted by the "It's a Girl" film as its official Action Plan for China.

Causes.com End Gendercide and Forced Abortion in China

<http://www.causes.com/causes/792226-women-s-rights-without-frontiers>

Check out how you can see the "It's a Girl" film here.

<http://www.itsagirlmovie.com/>

Reggie Littlejohn, President

Women's Rights Without Frontiers

www.womensrightswithoutfrontiers.org

Stop Forced Abortion – China's War on Women! Video (4 mins)

www.youtube.com/watch?v=JjtuBcJUjY

Iranian lawyer and filmmaker win EU's Sakharov Prize

Reuters (26.10.2012) - The European Union's prize for human rights and freedom of thought was awarded to two Iranians on Friday, a lawyer and a filmmaker who have both been cut off from the outside world for defying the country's leadership.

Imprisoned human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh, 49, and filmmaker Jafar Panahi, 52, were awarded the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize for their courage in defending their own and others' basic freedoms, the parliament said.

Named in honor of Soviet scientist and dissident Andrei Sakharov, the prize has been awarded by the European Parliament annually since 1988. The first recipients were Nelson Mandela and Russian author and dissident Anatoly Marchenko. Russian punk group Pussy Riot was also nominated this year.

"The award... is a message of solidarity and recognition to a woman and a man who have not been bowed by fear and intimidation and who have decided to put the fate of their country before their own," said European Parliament President Martin Schulz as he announced the winners.

Marietje Schaake, a Dutch liberal member of the parliament who nominated Sotoudeh for the prize, said the recipients should draw attention to the repressive action carried out by the Iranian authorities towards human rights' activists.

"These winners are true symbols of the long struggle the Iranian people face every day. The systematic repression, use of violence and censorship are felt by the entire population," she said.

"This prize gives support to all those Iranians that pay a high price for their struggle for freedom, justice and dignity."

Sotoudeh was arrested in September 2010 on suspicion of spreading propaganda and conspiring to harm state security. She is now serving a six-year jail sentence in solitary confinement.

She has defended journalists and rights activists, including Nobel laureate Shirin Ebadi and Dutch national Zahra Bahrami, who was hanged in January 2011 on drug trafficking charges.

"Law and Justice"

"I know that you require water, food, housing, a family, parents, love, and visits with your mother," Sotoudeh began in a letter written from prison to her children, who were prevented from seeing her after she refused to wear a chador, a full length traditional garment.

"However, just as much, you need freedom, social security, the rule of law, and justice."

Sotoudeh began a hunger strike on October 17, according to the International Campaign for Human Rights in [Iran](#). She is protesting against a travel ban placed on her daughter and authorities' limits on visits with her family, ICHRI said.

Sotoudeh's husband, Reza Khandan, told ICHRI that she appeared "very thin and weak" during his visit on October 21, but that she refused to break the hunger strike, in which she is refusing food but not water.

The U.N. special rapporteur on human rights in Iran, Ahmed Shaheed, has urged the Iranian authorities to consider releasing Sotoudeh.

Panahi began his career working as a cinematographer for the Iranian army and became a prize-winning director, winning at the Venice Film festival for "The Circle" in 2000.

Panahi ignored state censors to make films about ordinary people coming to terms with the country's religious and cultural codes, the citation said.

In 2006 he made "Offside", which depicted a group of young women dressing up as men to attend a World Cup qualifying match.

The state's censors were also under the impression that the women were men but nevertheless withheld a film license unless Panahi was prepared to re-edit his four previous films.

In December 2010, Panahi was convicted by Iran's Islamic republic of making anti-government propaganda and was placed under house arrest.

An additional 20-year ban on filmmaking did not deter him and in 2011 he made "This Is Not a Film" about a day in his life. The film was transported out of Iran on a USB stick hidden inside a cake and has since been shown to the world.

Film critic Roger Ebert called the work "an extraordinary act of courage," and American director Steven Spielberg and French actress Juliette Binoche have been among other film luminaries who have spoken up for Panahi.

Among other candidates for the prize this year was Belarussian opposition activist Ales Bialiatski.

Trans and intersex discrimination examined in new report

By Mark Barwick

HRWF (26.09.2012) - "People who do not easily fit into the norms of European societies, such as trans and intersex people, encounter numerous difficulties, both at the practical level of everyday life and at the legal level," stated Silvan Agius, co-author of a groundbreaking new report of trans and intersex people under EU law . The report was commissioned in 2010 by the European Commission and was researched by the European Network of Legal Experts in the field of non-discrimination.

At a 26th September seminar hosted by the LGBT Intergroup of the European Parliament, elements of the report were highlighted and debated by contributors, MEPs and representatives of civil society organisations. The release of the study, entitled "Discrimination against trans and intersex people on the grounds of sex, gender identity and gender expression," marks the first time that matters of gender identity and gender expression have been studied in depth by the European Commission.

The report challenges the traditional "binary model" of defining sex and gender and calls for "depathologising" trans identities and intersex bodies as suffering behavioural or physical disorders. The non-acceptance of other models for defining sex and gender, says the publication, has led to discrimination, harassment and bias-based violence.

International human rights law and national legislation were referenced to appeal for greater equality for and protection of trans and intersex people. Best practices as well recommendations for future EU law were also noted. The LGBT Intergroup will discuss follow-up for future parliamentary actions. The report can be accessed at:

<http://www.non-discrimination.net/content/media/Trans%20and%20intersex%20people.pdf>

European Parliament calls on United Nations to officially ban female genital mutilation

ALDE (14.06.2012) - The practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) has severe health consequences for girls and women and is not only performed in far-away countries: at least 500.000 women and girls in Europe are living with FGM and an estimated 180.000 girls are at risk. Although FGM has been shown to have many harmful effects, both physical and emotional, the practice is sustained by tradition and carried out for non-medical reasons, constituting an extreme example of discrimination based on sex.

The European Parliament today urged the United Nations to call for a ban on FGM at its next General Assembly session. *"Ending FGM strengthens the decisive battle for human rights worldwide"*, says Renate Weber (PNL, Romania), ALDE coordinator of the Civil Liberties Committee and one of the initiators of the European Parliament resolution. *"A United Nations General Assembly resolution to ban FGM worldwide would step up the international community's universal condemnation of this violation of fundamental rights. It will strengthen comprehensive legislation and should provide for effective sanctions against perpetrators performing the practice."*

Izaskun Bilbao Barandica (Partido Nacionalista Vasco, Spain), ALDE member of the Committee on Women's rights and Gender Equality stresses the importance of education: *"An important means to prevent female genital mutilation is to empower girls and women by awareness-raising programmes. People who defend the practice of FGM base their belief on superstition and tradition, instead of facts. The myths they spread should be fought with knowledge and evidence-based information. This is an absolute priority and should be focussed especially on the victims. Not a single woman in the world should believe that genital mutilation is acceptable."*

ALDE specifically emphasises the need to support civil society, and in particular women's organisations, working within their communities to end violence against women, including female genital mutilation.

The European Parliament urges the UN General Assembly to adopt a resolution at its Sixty-seventh session starting in September 2012 to end female genital mutilation worldwide, as requested by the African Union Summit on 2 July 2011, and to criminalize the practice. Actions of Member States are to be harmonized by providing recommendations and guidelines for the development and strengthening of regional and international legal instruments and national legislations.

Crimes of Communism against humanity: Europe needs to do more. Jerzy Buzek MEP, Sandra Kalniete MEP, György Schöpflin MEP and Tunne Kelam MEP

European Parliament/EPP (05.06.2012) - In order to seek a new model of international justice which could finally settle the ethical, moral and legal debt which the European Union has towards its citizens who suffered severe violations of human rights under totalitarian Communist rule, and towards the perpetrators, an international conference entitled 'Legal Settlement of Communist Crimes' was organised today in the European Parliament.

It was a new contribution towards strengthening the process of reconciliation and integration of Europe initiated by the Platform of European Memory and Consciousness and the Reconciliation of European Histories Group (R.E.H. Group) in the European Parliament.

"It is in our history, in the community of the past, that we find answers to the questions of how to act, what to do, how not to act, and what not to do. If the Communist crimes are to remain relevant as a warning for us and future generations, we must speak of them with clarity. We need the courage to distinguish right from wrong, giving proper meaning to the complex reality of Communist rule. A legal settlement of Communist crimes - precisely because of its legal aspect, its reference to rule of law and justice - can best help restore clarity in our understanding of those dark times", said former President of the European Parliament, Jerzy Buzek MEP, in his opening speech.

"It is important that we do not only discuss and condemn the horrific crimes committed by Communist regimes, but also address the concrete steps which need to be taken in order to attain justice for victims and reconciliation for Europe. Many of the people who committed these crimes against humanity are walking the streets and justice has not been served; some even benefit from privileges earned by serving the Communist regimes. To attain some appeasement for the victims of these crimes and to set a precedent for the future, Europe should do everything in its power not only to condemn these crimes but also to pursue justice for the victims of Communist crimes just as was done for the victims of Nazism", emphasised Latvian MEP and Chairwoman of the R.E.H. Group, Sandra Kalniete.

Hungarian MEP György Schöpflin, who chaired the second panel on cases with European-wide relevance, underlined: "This conference is exciting and significant. It is exciting because it questions the hegemonic version of the past, that the Communist crimes are somehow less reprehensible than those of Nazism. It is always exciting when a hegemonic belief - that of the Western Left in this case - is challenged."

"The event is also significant because the victims of the crimes of Communism and their families continue to live with a sense of injustice, that the injustice that they have suffered has not been adequately redressed. The conference can bring the necessary closure one step closer. Finally, the conference is also important because it extends the concept of human rights to the Communist dictatorships and thereby establishes a sense of consistency regarding the recent history of Europe."

"This conference is about equality of all victims of totalitarian regimes before international justice. Today, 23 years after the demolition of the Berlin Wall and 8 years after the EU enlargement to encompass recent Central and Eastern European victims of

the Soviet totalitarianism, it is high time to end the still dominant paradigm of post-war history, formulated with the participation of Stalin which has left millions of victims of the Soviet terrorist regime in the shadows. The experience of the past eight years has demonstrated that one of the preconditions to deepening European integration will be a balanced approach to the victims of different totalitarian regimes of the 20th Century with a legally-binding assessment of all crimes committed against humanity", highlighted Estonian MEP Tunne Kelam.

"We have to do everything possible so that young people do not fall into the traps of ever-changing appearances of inciting hatred and radicalism. The key is learning from past lessons and adopting legal measures throughout Europe such as an EU legal instrument against public condoning of crimes committed by the totalitarian regimes", stressed Lithuanian MEP Radvilė Morkunaitė.

The conference brought together MEPs, legal experts, representatives of institutions and organisations dealing with the totalitarian past, victim associations, as well as important European institutions from at least 16 European countries.
