

Beat: Politics

European Parliament debate murder of Italian researcher Giulio Regeni

Human rights in Egypt in the Plenary

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USPA NEWS - Italian PhD student Giulio Regeni was investigating trade unions in Egypt when he went missing on January 25, 2016. His body, bearing signs of torture, was discovered nine days later in Cairo. Media and human rights activists suspect Egyptian security forces may have been involved.

But Egyptian authorities deny. Thursday, MEPs debate the case and vote on a resolution as part of their regular efforts to call attention to flagrant human rights violations around the world. Egypt is considered an important strategic partner for the European Union but MEPs have repeatedly expressed their concerns over restrictions on fundamental rights, pluralism and the rule of law in the country.

Spanish S&D member Elena Valenciano, chair of the human rights subcommittee, explained: "Parliament has focused on the country several times in the last months through different urgent resolutions. It shows the serious concern of the Parliament which should be reflected as well at the highest level in the relations between the EU and Egypt. The respect of human rights and international commitments is a core principle of the agreements between the EU and Egypt. We must live up to that commitment."

On Thursday March 10, MEPs are expected to call for Egyptian authorities to carry out an impartial and effective investigation into Regeni's case as well as identify and prosecute those responsible. Several civil society organisations have raised awareness of the increasing reports of torture allegations while in police custody as well as of abductions with direct or indirect support from the government in Egypt.

MEPs often use specific cases to call attention to the general situation. Valenciano said: "The case of Giulio Regeni is just another cruel and gruesome example of the current worrisome situation of human rights in Egypt." Romanian EPP member Cristian Dan Preda, vice-chair of the human rights subcommittee, added: "It serves as a reminder of the fact that respect for human rights should be the basis of our relations with Egypt. Our urgency resolutions are often focused on individual cases, where we hope to make a difference. But they are also means for us to signal to the countries concerned that they should prioritise the protection and promotion of human rights and ensure accountability for violations of human rights."

Human rights, a priority for Parliament

The European Parliament has a long tradition of calling attention to violations of human rights across the world. During every plenary session in Strasbourg MEPs debate on Thursday cases of human rights breaches and adopt "urgency" resolutions. Valenciano said: "Urgency resolutions do have an impact on the ground, sometimes even bigger than we believe, and serve as very useful tool for human rights defenders and civil society at large." A debate can be requested by a committee, an inter parliamentary delegation, a political group or by at least 40 MEPs. The Conference of Presidents, consisting of the EP President and the political group leaders, draws up a list with a maximum of three topics per plenary.

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