Thursday 24 October 2019

P9_TA(2019)0043

Egypt

European Parliament resolution of 24 October 2019 on Egypt (2019/2880(RSP))

(2021/C 202/11)

The European Parliament,

— having regard to its previous resolutions on Egypt, in particular those of 17 July 2014 on freedom of expression and assembly in Egypt ([1]), of 15 January 2015 on the situation in Egypt ([2]), of 10 March 2016 on Egypt, notably the case of Giulio Regeni ([3]), of 8 February 2018 on executions in Egypt ([4]), and of 13 December 2018 on Egypt, notably the situation of human rights defenders ([5]),

— having regard to the EU Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) conclusions on Egypt of August 2013 and February 2014,

— having regard to the EU-Egypt Association Agreement of 2001, which entered into force in 2004 and was consolidated by the Action Plan of 2007; having regard to the EU-Egypt Partnership Priorities 2017-2020, formally adopted on 25 July 2017, to the joint statement issued following the 2017 EU-Egypt Association Council, and to the joint statement on the sixth meeting of the EU-Egypt Subcommittee on Political Matters, Human Rights and Democracy in June 2019,

— having regard to the EU Item 4 Statement at the UN Human Rights Council of 19 September 2019 which mentions Egypt,

— having regard to the new EU Strategic Framework and Action Plan on Human Rights, which aims to place the protection and surveillance of human rights at the heart of all EU policies,

— having regard to the EU Guidelines on the Death Penalty, on Torture, on Freedom of Expression and on Human Rights Defenders,

— having regard to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, all of which have been ratified by Egypt,

— having regard to the statement of 27 September 2019 by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet on the protests in Egypt,

— having regard to the Constitution of Egypt, notably its Articles 52 (on the prohibition of torture in all forms and types.), 73 (on freedom of assembly) and 93 (on the binding character of international human rights law),

— having regard to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights of 1981, ratified by Egypt on 20 March 1984,

— having regard to the Arab Charter on Human Rights, to which Egypt is a party,

— having regard to UN Security Council resolution 2473 (2019) adopted in June 2019 which renewed measures designed to implement the arms embargo against Libya,

— having regard to Rules 144(5) and 132(4) of its Rules of Procedure,

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([1]) OJ C 224, 21.6.2016, p. 5.
([2]) OJ C 300, 18.8.2016, p. 34.
([3]) OJ C 50, 9.2.2018, p. 42.
([4]) OJ C 463, 21.12.2018, p. 35.
([5]) Texts adopted, P8_TA(2018)0526.

A. whereas it is reported that in the past weeks the Egyptian authorities have arbitrarily arrested over 4 300 people (almost 3 000 of whom are still in pre-trial detention), including at least 114 women — and at least 111 minors according to Amnesty International and the Belady Foundation — in response to peaceful demonstrations that began on 20 September 2019; whereas excessive force was reportedly used by police and security services to disperse demonstrators;

B. whereas the anti-government demonstrations were protesting against austerity measures, endemic government corruption and systematic repression, and were demanding the resignation of Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi;

C. whereas the recent actions by the Egyptian authorities undermine the fundamental freedoms of expression, association and assembly, which are all enshrined in the Egyptian Constitution, as well as international human rights law; whereas this forms part of a broader crackdown on civil society and fundamental rights in Egypt, notably the freedom of expression both online and offline, the freedom of association and assembly, political pluralism and the rule of law;

D. whereas the Egyptian authorities have continued to crack down on peaceful democratic opposition parties in Egypt, in violation of the rights to participation in public affairs and to freedom of expression, including the arbitrary detention of dozens of citizens in the 'Hope Case' and the arrest of dozens of other members of peaceful political parties since September 2019;

E. whereas human rights lawyers, journalists, activists and members of the opposition have been jailed on serious charges, including for terrorism-related offences; whereas peaceful dissenters, pro-democracy activists and human rights defenders are put in jeopardy by being labelled as terrorists; whereas these arrests are solely related to their peaceful and legitimate work in defence of human rights;

F. whereas the enforced disappearance of human rights defenders is becoming a systematic practice of the Egyptian authorities, before most re-appear in the hands of the State Prosecution, this being the case of Alaa Abdel Fattah, Asmaa Daabes, Esraa Abdel Fattah, Eman Al-Helw, Mohamed Ibrahim, Abdelrahman Tarek, Ezzat Ghoneim, Haytham Mohamadeen and Ibrahim Metwally Hegazy; whereas others, including Ibrahim Ezz El-Din, have still not re-appeared;

G. whereas excessive use is being made of pre-trial preventive detention and precautionary measures in order to prevent human rights defenders and their lawyers such as Mahienour El-Masry, Mohamed El-Baqer, Esraa Abdel Fattah and Mohamed Ramadan from carrying out their legitimate human rights work in Egypt;

H. whereas the Egyptian authorities have hindered progress in investigating and revealing the truth around the kidnapping, torture and killing of the Italian research assistant Giulio Regeni; whereas the Italian Parliament has suspended its diplomatic relations with the Egyptian Parliament and has called on the Member State parliaments to follow suit in solidarity;

I. whereas Reporters Without Borders has documented cases of at least 31 media workers currently being held in detention in Egypt for their work, on the basis of politically-based prosecution and multiple due process violations; whereas six of these journalists have been arrested in relation to the recent protests; whereas foreign media workers are also targeted, with several international media correspondents having been deported or denied entry into Egypt; whereas international organisations have documented the blocking of news media websites and the blocking or restriction of access to online messaging applications, in particular during the last weeks;

J. whereas, while Egypt's NGO Law of 2019 scraps jail sentences and does away with the security-heavy agency previously designated to approve and monitor foreign funding, it nonetheless threatens to restrict civil society significantly, places furthers problematic restrictions on the right to freedom of association and significantly constrains the activities of both domestic and foreign NGOs;

K. whereas women human rights defenders in Egypt continue to face various forms of state-led harassment, notably in the form of defamatory campaigns and judicial prosecution; whereas activists defending the rights of LGBTQI people and women face continuous repression, including under the guise of the preservation of 'public morals';

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L. whereas grave violations of the right to life continue in Egypt through the judiciary, which has issued and implemented an unprecedentedly high number of death sentences against numerous individuals — even sentencing children — including in the aftermath of military and mass trials that lacked minimum guarantees of a fair trial; whereas criminal and military courts have issued over 3 000 death sentences since 2014 and 50 persons are at imminent risk of execution;

M. whereas the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN OHCHR) has declared that several cases are pending in the courts concerning individuals convicted on the basis of evidence allegedly obtained under torture who are facing the death penalty; whereas these convictions appear to be in direct disregard of both Egyptian and international law and procedure;

N. whereas accountability for serious human rights violations by the Egyptian security forces remains almost entirely non-existent, and there is no proper investigation of corruption allegations against the military;

O. whereas at least 900 people were killed by the Egyptian security forces during the Rabaa Square protests in 2013; whereas, while numerous irregularities were condemned during the subsequent trial, and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights described it as a serious miscarriage of justice, none of those responsible for the massacre has yet been tried;

P. whereas Egypt's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process before the UN Human Rights Council, which begins in November 2019, offers a unique opportunity for the international community to scrutinise Egypt's human rights record and put forward recommendations for improvement;

Q. whereas many human rights activists are subjected to repressive measures, some in reprisal for participating in Egypt's 2014 UPR; whereas ten human rights defenders and seven NGOs named in Case 173/2011 (the 'Foreign Funding Case') have suffered crippling asset freezes; whereas travel bans remain on at least 31 defenders and staff of independent Egyptian human rights NGOs involved in Case 173/2011, although 43 staff of foreign civil society organisations convicted in 2013 in the same case have since been acquitted;

R. whereas Egypt has experienced several difficult developments since the 2011 revolution and the international community is supporting the country in addressing its multiple challenges; whereas the security situation in Egypt is fragile, with a high risk of terrorist attacks in the Sinai peninsula and major cities across the country by various Islamist organisations, despite the government's use of aggressive and at times abusive tactics to combat them; whereas terrorist attacks have taken the lives of a large number of innocent civilians, including Copts; whereas military operations have continued to escalate in North Sinai since late 2013, and the government has conducted mass demolitions and the forced eviction of tens of thousands of residents, while preventing independent reporting by imposing a near-absolute media blackout and restrictions on movements in and out of Sinai;

S. whereas no official, strong and united public response has been forthcoming from the EU and its Member States to the September-October 2019 crackdown in Egypt; whereas the 2017-2020 EU-Egypt Partnership Priorities adopted in June 2017 are guided by a shared commitment to the universal values of democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights, and constitute a renewed framework for political engagement and enhanced cooperation, including on security, judicial reform and counter-terrorism, on the basis of due respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; whereas European efforts to engage Egypt to address the severest aspects of human rights violations have not yielded appreciable results;

T. whereas Egypt is an important partner for the European Union and its Member States in a wide range of areas, including trade, security and people-to-people contacts; whereas on 21 August 2013 the Foreign Affairs Council tasked the High Representative with reviewing EU assistance to Egypt; whereas the Council decided that the EU's cooperation with Egypt would be readjusted in accordance with developments on the ground; whereas the EU and Egypt adopted Partnership Priorities in June 2017 that aim to enhance cooperation in a wide range of areas, including the fight against terrorism, with all due respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms;

U. whereas the EU FAC conclusions of 21 August 2013 stated that 'Member States also agreed to suspend export licenses to Egypt of any equipment which might be used for internal repression and to reassess export licenses of equipment covered by Common Position 2008/944/CFSP and review their security assistance with Egypt'; whereas companies based in several EU Member States have continued to export surveillance technology and other security equipment to Egypt, thus facilitating hacking and malware as well as other forms of attacks on human rights defenders and civil society activists both physically and online; whereas this activity has led to the repression of freedom of expression online;

1. Strongly condemns the latest crackdown and the ongoing restrictions on fundamental rights in Egypt, notably freedom of expression both online and offline, freedom of association and assembly, political pluralism and the rule of law; condemns the excessive use of violence against protesters and reminds Egypt that any response by the security forces should be in line with international norms and standards and its own Constitution;

2. Calls for an end to all acts of violence, incitement, hate speech, harassment, intimidation, enforced disappearances and censorship directed at human rights defenders, lawyers, protesters, journalists, bloggers, trade unionists, students, children, women's rights activists, LGBTI people, civil society organisations, political opponents and minorities by state authorities, security forces and services and other groups in Egypt; calls for an independent and transparent investigation into all human rights violations and for those responsible to be held to account; underlines that respect for human rights is the only way to ensure Egypt's long-term stability and security;

3. Calls on the Egyptian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release all human rights defenders detained or sentenced merely for carrying out their legitimate and peaceful human rights work, including Eman Al-Helw, Mohamed Ibrahim, Mohamed Ramadan, Abdelrahman Tarek, Ezzat Ghoneim, Haytham Mohamadeen, Alaa Abdel Fattah, Ibrahim Metwally Hegazy, Mahienour El-Masry, Mohamed El-Baqer and Esraa Abdel Fattah, and to immediately ascertain the whereabouts of Ibrahim Ezz El-Din; further calls for the release of human rights defenders, academics and others in pre-trial detention under the 'Coalition Hope' case, including Zyad el-Elaimy, Hassan Barbary and Ramy Shaath, as well as members of the Bread and Freedom Party, the Al-Dostour party and the Egyptian Social Democratic Party recently detained without credible grounds for criminal charges; pending their release, calls on Egypt to disclose their location, to allow them full access to their families, lawyers of their choice and adequate medical care, and to conduct credible investigations into any allegations of ill-treatment or torture;

4. Stresses the importance of guaranteeing the equality of all Egyptians, regardless of their faith or belief; calls on Egypt to review its blasphemy laws in order to ensure the protection of religious minorities; welcomes the statements calling for a renewal of Islamic discourse to challenge extremism and radicalisation; calls on the Egyptian authorities, including the military and security forces, to respect the rights of Christians, protect them against violence and discrimination and ensure that those responsible for such acts are prosecuted;

5. Supports the aspirations of the majority of Egyptian people who want to establish a free, stable, prosperous, inclusive and democratic country which respects its national and international commitments on human rights and fundamental freedoms; reiterates that the right to peaceful expression of opinion and of criticism must be guaranteed;

6. Urges the Egyptian authorities to stop blocking the websites of local and international news organisations and human rights organisations and to release all media workers detained for doing their journalistic work;

7. Expresses grave concern at the reprisals against persons who cooperate or seek to cooperate with international human rights organisations or the United Nations human rights bodies; calls on the Egyptian authorities to close Case 173/2011 (the 'Foreign Funding Case'), to lift all travel bans imposed on at least 31 human rights defenders and staff of human rights NGOs under the case — as well as all other arbitrarily imposed travel bans — and to allow Egyptian human rights defenders based in Egypt to travel so that they can participate in person in Egypt's Universal Periodic Review that begins on 13 November 2019;

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8. Calls for the repeal of the newly adopted NGO law and for its replacement by a new legislative framework, drafted in genuine consultation with civil society organisations, that conforms with the Egyptian Constitution and international standards;

9. Regrets the lack of a credible investigation into, and accountability for, the kidnapping, torture and murder in 2016 of Italian research assistant Giulio Regeni; reiterates its call on the Egyptian authorities to shed light on the circumstances surrounding the deaths of Giulio Regeni and Eric Lang and to hold those responsible to account, in full cooperation with the authorities of the Member States concerned by these cases;

10. Demands that the authorities amend, adopt and effectively implement legislation to eliminate all forms of discrimination and criminalise all forms of violence against women and girls, including by amending the Personal Status Law and by introducing legal provisions prohibiting gender-based violence, as well as sexual harassment, assaults and rape; further calls on the authorities to effectively carry out the National Strategy to Combat Violence Against Women in partnership with independent civil society organisations with recognised expertise in the field;

11. Expresses concern that the use of the death penalty in Egypt has risen sharply since President Sisi came to power; urges the Egyptian authorities to decree a moratorium on executions with a view to abolishing the use of the death penalty in Egypt, and reiterates its call on Egypt to sign and ratify the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights aimed at the abolition of the death penalty;

12. Sends its most sincere condolences to the families of victims of terrorism; stands in solidarity with the Egyptian people and reaffirms its commitment to fighting the spread of radical ideologies and terrorist groups; calls on the Egyptian authorities to ensure that their ongoing military operations in Sinai are conducted in line with international human rights standards, to thoroughly investigate all abuses and to immediately open North Sinai to independent relief organisations and to independent observers and journalists;

13. Regrets the lack of an official response from the High Representative or the Member States to the latest wave of arrests; calls on the VP/HR and the Member States to respond in a unified and resolute manner to the current crackdown and human rights violations; expects the EEAS to prioritise the situation of human rights defenders in Egypt and to report back to Parliament on its engagement thereon with Cairo, including on the individual cases raised in this resolution; calls on the VP/HR and Member States to use all tools at their disposal, including bilateral and multilateral tools, trade negotiations, the European Neighbourhood Policy, aid and, where necessary, targeted restrictive measures, to halt the country's crackdown and secure concrete progress in Egypt's human rights record;

14. Calls for a profound and comprehensive review of its relations with Egypt; considers that the human rights situation in Egypt requires a serious revision of the Commission's budget support operations, which should be restricted to primarily supporting civil society;

15. Strongly urges that the commitments made in the 2017-2020 EU-Egypt Partnership Priorities be respected and calls for their full and proper implementation; calls for the EU, with a view to negotiating new partnership priorities, to establish clear benchmarks that make further cooperation with Egypt conditional on progress in the reform of democratic institutions, the rule of law and human rights, and to mainstream human rights concerns in all talks with Egyptian authorities; reiterates that human rights should not be undermined by migration management or counter-terrorism actions;

16. Reiterates its calls on the EU Member States to follow up on their 21 August 2013 conclusions announcing the suspension of export licences for any equipment which might be used for internal repression in line with Common Position 2008/944/CFSP, and condemns the persistent non-compliance of EU Member States with these commitments; calls on them therefore to halt exports to Egypt of surveillance technology and other security equipment that can facilitate attacks on human rights defenders and civil society activists, including on social media, as well as any other kind of internal repression; calls on the VP/HR to report on the current state of military and security cooperation by Member States with Egypt; calls for the EU to implement in full its export controls vis-à-vis Egypt with regard to goods that could be used for repression, torture or capital punishment;

17. Stresses the importance of ensuring that any arrangement between the EU and Egypt on migration must strictly comply with international human rights standards, respect the fundamental rights of migrants and refugees, and ensure adequate levels of transparency and accountability;

18. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the parliaments and governments of the Member States, the Egyptian government and parliament, and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights.