



Parliamentary questions

16 October 2017

E-004697/2017

Answer given by Vice-President Mogherini on behalf of the Commission

The European Union (EU) is committed to the promotion of freedom of religion or belief as a right to be exercised by everyone everywhere, based on the principles of equality, non-discrimination and universality.

In the specific case of Russia, the High Representative/Vice-President (HR/VP) is closely following the situation of the Jehovah's Witnesses (JW). The EU Delegation to Russia met with representatives of JW in Moscow on 4 April and 13 July 2017 and remains in close contact with them. European External Action Service officials have also met with representatives of the JW in Brussels. EU and Member States' diplomats attended several sessions of the Supreme Court hearing including the hearing of the appeal on 17 July 2017.

The spokesperson issued statements on 21 April 2017⁽¹⁾ and 18 July 2017⁽²⁾ respectively, after the Russian Supreme Court declared the JW administrative centre as 'extremist', and decided to liquidate it and confiscate all its property, and again once the Court decided to uphold its earlier decision following an appeal by the JW. On 24 April 2017 the HR/VP raised this issue, as well as other human rights concerns, when she met with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov in Moscow.

The EU issued statements condemning the harassment and persecution against Jehovah's Witnesses at the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Permanent Council meetings of 30 March⁽³⁾, 27 April⁽⁴⁾ and 20 July 2017⁽⁵⁾ as well as in the Council of Europe's Council of Ministers on 5 April 2017⁽⁶⁾.

The EU will continue urging the Russian authorities to ensure that JW, like all other religious groups, are able to peacefully enjoy freedom of assembly without interference, as guaranteed by the Constitution of the Russian Federation, Russia's international commitments and international human rights standards.

⁽¹⁾https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/24870/statement-ban-activities-jehovahs-witnesses-russia_en

⁽²⁾https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/30022/Statement%20by%20the%20Spokesperson%20on%20the%20upheld%20ban%20of%20activities%20of%20Jehovah%27s%20Witnesses%20in%20Russia

⁽³⁾<http://www.osce.org/permanent-council/310346?download=true>

⁽⁴⁾https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/pc_1143_eu_on_jehovah_witnesses_in_russia.pdf

⁽⁵⁾https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/pc_1155_eu_jehovahs_witnesses_in_russia.pdf

⁽⁶⁾https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/council-europe/24397/eu-local-statement-persecution-jehovahs-witnesses-russia_en

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