R5 Speak Up, Speak Out: Protecting the Right to Protest

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Agenda item: 1. Resolutions

Motion text

Speak Up, Speak Out: Protecting the Right to Protest

More and more people are joining in climate activism, voicing their concerns on the streets of Europe and beyond. While these protests are peaceful, police forces are used as if the protesters were violent (eg. the violent repercussions against students in Turin's Piazza Arbarello student protest in 2022, or the recent blockades of the A12 motorway in The Hague - reference here). Increasing militarisation is happening in many ways, including the deployment of armed military forces to suppress protests and supplying police with equipment like armoured vehicles, military-grade aircraft, surveillance drones, guns and assault weapons, stun grenades and sound cannons. Military forces are organised, trained and equipped for war and defence and have no place at a protest, where police should be trained in de-escalation, mediation and keeping people safe. Governments try to justify this disproportionate escalation in the use of force by painting protesters as a threat to public safety, but in truth, these tactics are ultimately a way to intimidate people into silence. Police and other state authorities often use facial recognition software and CCTV and IMSI tracking technologies to track phones. The use of mass surveillance tactics like this not only invades protesters' right to privacy but also intimidates people so that they are less likely to want to attend protests in the first place.

We argue that "everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and to freedom of association with others, including the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests [,]" as stated by the European Convention on Human Rights (Article 11 – Freedom of assembly and association - reference here). "No restrictions shall be placed on the exercise of these rights other than such as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others" (reference here).

Having considered the facts laid out in this resolution, we, the Federation of Young European Greens calls upon the European Union and its Member States to:

- Implement stricter regulation of the escalation of the use of violence when intervening, and list robust repercussions when the escalation exceeds legislative standards.

- Create a public system of proportionate policing which utilises the classification of the types of protests and a democratic decision on what is needed to keep protests within legal and civil bounds, to ensure safety.

- Improve the training of police forces to limit the number of unnecessarily violent interventions of protest and ensure the authorities are trained to use the least intrusive means and respond in proportion to the offence (reference here).

- Campaign for a ban on the production and distribution of abusive tools of torture, such as contact electric shock devices and spiked batons. These tools serve only the purpose of inflicting pain. Usage of these tools, especially in the setting of peaceful protests, is harmful and even unlawful under the UN Convention against Torture (reference here).

- Alter national considerations of public demonstrations as a threat to public order or national security. Shift focus of police presence from intimidating and controlling protesters to prioritising the protection of protesters.

- Campaign for stricter regulations on the distribution and use of weaponry by authorities, following the limits already imposed by the European Convention on Human Rights, and ensure the articles of the latter are strictly maintained during demonstrations (reference here). In the instances in which police officers may be required to use force, eg. during the arrest of a violent person or to protect themselves or others, it is crucial that any use of force is limited to the minimum. It should also be applied lawfully and be accounted for by, for example, monitoring safe policing through agents' bodycams (Ibid.).

- Ban arbitral detention and sentencing of demonstrators, such as, but not limited to, in instances where elements of disruption (eg. blocking traffic or noise) are criminalised and stigmatised as serious offences, or even used as accusations of "terrorism" (in 2017, the UK government imposed charges based on counterterrorism legislation against protestors that had blocked Stansted Airport during a non-violent act of disobedience) (reference here).