

EU support for Middle East needed to prevent 'new wave of immigration'

Written by György Hölvényi on 23 March 2015 in Opinion
Opinion

The EU needs to reach a consensus on the 'human catastrophe' being perpetuated by ISIS, writes György Hölvényi.



All of the European parliament's major political families back international support of persecuted minorities, including Christians, in a recent resolution that was strongly endorsed by the EPP group on the attacks and abductions throughout the Middle East by the group calling itself Islamic state (ISIS). This joint resolution may be considered as a historical achievement from a political point of view.

Following several months of ISIS aggression, European decision-makers condemned the deeds of ISIS and the suffering of the displaced religious and ethnic groups in the region. The majority of MEPs recognise the misery of different religious groups whose very existence is endangered by the jihadist attacks. Members of various political affiliations had urged for a special European commitment. Only minor radical powers could not disavow their dogmatic anti-Christian attitudes.

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The EU has already invested in a considerable humanitarian effort to assist the internally displaced people (IDPs) suffering in the Middle East. Before ISIS occupied the region, approximately 1.8 million Christians called it home, but according to some of the more optimistic estimates, only 400,000 Christians remain in Iraq today, the vast majority having fled persecution.

With its considerable financial support, Europe has become the leading donor of aid in the region. However, there remains enough scope for increasing and streamlining this assistance. The resolution of the parliament encourages the EU to create further forms of partnerships to make better use of the capacities of local churches and international relief organisations, in order to ensure that all minority groups can benefit from the protection and support of European aid.

Regional churches have undertaken major responsibilities for IDPs in the region. During my recent visit to northern Iraq I was impressed to see that the Chaldean Catholic patriarchate of Erbil provides food, water and basic shelter to some 200,000 people in refugee camps. However, the financial basis for this is only secured until April.

It has taken months for a political consensus to be achieved on the perception of the human suffering in the region. Finally, the atrocities committed by ISIS have resulted in two main interpretations by the parliament.

On one hand humanitarian and cultural questions must be kept in mind because of the human rights abuses and brutal cultural cleansing being carried out by ISIS. The EPP group believes there must be a clear distinction for the religious aspect. The EPP is strongly of the view that it is Europe's responsibility to help ancient religious communities, especially the Christians struggling for survival.

While highlighting different aspects of this human catastrophe, the most important achievement is that Europe became united on the issue which is a good basis for further action. Europe will now be challenged to show true efficiency in the aid it provides.

The outcomes of the military intervention will be decisive in combating ISIS. Simultaneously, Europe's humanitarian response should try to ensure an exodus of the persecuted communities can be prevented or our continent will have to face a new wave of immigration.

This is a scenario which is neither favourable for the persecuted people, nor for Europe. We therefore need to encourage our governments, churches and especially the European institutions to increase relief activities for providing assistance in the region.

About the author

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