

EU cannot ignore dire human rights situation in Balochistan

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Opinion

Marc Tarabella says the EU cannot stay silent over the plight of the Baloch people in its dealings with the Pakistani government.



During the last few months we have been receiving reports from Pakistan which depict an alarming situation regarding the protection of human rights. Balochistan has been one of the areas which has been most affected by violence in Pakistan.

The main victims of this violence are the people of Balochistan who are being systematically targeted by paramilitary groups, allegedly sponsored by the Pakistani authorities. Extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances are the most common practices.

In an 8 December 2005 statement, the then Pakistani interior minister Aftab Sherpao said that 4000 Baloch were in the custody of the authorities. The figures of those killed after abduction collated from newspaper reports exceed 2000, with the Baloch themselves saying the number of people missing is more than 20,000.

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Mass graves were discovered in Tutak in January 2014 and, despite the fact that an investigative committee was formed, no one has yet been prosecuted for these crimes. At the same time many atrocities are currently being committed in Balochistan by security forces.

The recent visit of Chinese president Xi Jinping to Pakistan and his promise to pump €40bn into projects in the Gwadar-Kashgar energy corridor could, according to the local population, endanger the lives of the people of Balochistan and the protection of their fundamental freedoms. To ensure absolute control over natural resources, the authorities have been cracking down on all dissent in this region.

Sabeen Mahmud, a human and social rights activist, took the initiative of organising a seminar on the situation in Balochistan. Just minutes after the event ended Sabeen was killed by gunmen at a traffic signal while her mother was injured.

This served as a clear message to all those that dare to speak out about the situation in Balochistan. Furthermore, representatives from Baloch civil society are being prevented from leaving Pakistan, having been placed on the exit control list. NGOs are also being targeted, with Save The Children the latest victim of the authorities, who shut down the organisation and demanded that all foreign personnel and volunteers leave the country.

It is the people of Balochistan and Pakistanis that suffer the most from these abuses. It is they who are being deprived of their freedoms and the opportunity for development and prosperity in their country. To the locals there is fundamental difference in the way that the authorities and the Baloch people view the future of Balochistan.

The Pakistani government sees it as land ripe for financial exploitation and brimming with opportunities for its elite. The Baloch see Balochistan as their motherland which has given them their identity, culture, history and way of life; they know that without their land they will lose all meaning as a people.

The European Union on its part cannot remain silent to what is happening in Balochistan. The Pakistani government has signed numerous treaties, commitments to the implementation of the protection of human rights in Pakistan. Yet no real progress is being made and it appears that there is deterioration rather than improvement. We need to show commitment to our principles and use them as guidance in every aspect of our relations with the Pakistani government.

About the author

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