EU High Representative responds to parliamentarian’s questions on Tibet and Nepal

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The EU’s foreign policy chief responded on July 24 to questions from a parliamentarian about human rights and autonomy in Tibet, as well as a proposed extradition treaty that would endanger Tibetan refugees.

Member of the European Parliament Isabel Santos began her written questions by citing a report from the International Campaign for Tibet about new “ethnic unity” legislation that went into effect at the beginning of this year in the Tibet Autonomous Region.

The region spans about half of Tibet, a historically independent country that China annexed in 1959 and continues to rule with an iron fist.

“The International Campaign for Tibet revealed how the ‘ethnic unity’ legislation recently adopted in Tibet will further erode the fundamental liberties of Tibetans and infringe their human rights,” Santos, of Portugal, wrote. “The new legislation adopted on 11 January 2020 aims to establish ‘model areas for national unity and progress’ in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and to give the Chinese government powers to impose a Chinese-centric way of life and cultivate Chinese Communist Party informers.”

Santos added: “Certain provisions of the new regulations stand out, as they aim at indoctrinating Tibetan preschool children with ideological propaganda and interfere with the spheres of family and its privacy.”

Questions for the high representative

Santos concluded by asking two questions.

First, she asked what actions the European External Action Service is taking in bilateral dialogue with China in regard to Tibet’s autonomy and the protection of Tibetans’ rights.

In response to that question, Josep Borrell, high representative of the union for foreign affairs, wrote that the EU has repeatedly raised “strong concerns” about restrictions of religious freedom and the rights of minorities in Tibet, both in bilateral dialogue with China and publicly.

Borrell, who is also vice president of the European Commission, said the EU has also focused on the condition of prisoners in Tibet and the lack of reciprocal access to Tibet.

“It has done so, both in the framework of the EU-China Human Rights Dialogue, as well as, most recently, during the Strategic Dialogue between” Borrell “and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, held on 9 June 2020, as well as during the EU-China summit on 22 June 2020,” Borrell wrote.

He added that the European External Action Service, which he leads, “remains committed to following developments related to Tibet and to continuing to express its expectation that the rights of the Tibetans should be respected.”
Proposed extradition treaty

Santos also asked about a proposed extradition treaty between China and Nepal.

Prior to 2008, thousands of Tibetans would flee to Nepal every year to escape China’s brutal occupation of their land.

Under a “gentleman’s agreement” between Nepal, the UN and other stakeholders, those Tibetans could travel safely to India, where the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan exile leadership reside.

However, the proposed treaty between Nepal and China could mean that Nepali authorities would deport any Tibetans who cross the border, sending them back to Tibet from where they just escaped.

Borrell noted that China and Nepal did not sign the proposed treaty during Chinese President Xi Jinping’s visit to Kathmandu in October 2019. However, the two sides said they would enhance information sharing and cooperation between their law enforcement agencies.

“The European External Action Service is following closely developments in this area,” Borrell wrote, “as well as the application of the agreements concluded between China and Nepal, also considering the possible implications for the Tibetan community resident in Nepal.”

Continuing European support

Borrell’s answers to Santos build on his recent support for Tibetans’ freedoms:

- Earlier this month, Borrell said the EU opposes China’s plans to interfere in the succession of the Dalai Lama, the Tibetan Buddhist spiritual leader who turned 85 on July 6.
- In March, Borrell said the European Commission “will continue to call on the Chinese authorities to allow reciprocal access to Tibet.”
- Borrell also wrote an opinion piece in May stating that the watchwords for the EU-China relationship “should be trust, transparency and reciprocity.”

Below is the full text of Santos’ questions to Borrell and his answers.

Question for written answer E-003247/2020 to the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Rule 138 Isabel Santos (S&D)

Subject: 'Ethnic Unity' legislation — human rights of Tibetans in jeopardy

The International Campaign for Tibet revealed how the ‘ethnic unity’ legislation recently adopted in Tibet will further erode the fundamental liberties of Tibetans and infringe their human rights. The new legislation adopted on 11 January 2020 aims to establish ‘model areas for national unity and progress’ in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and to give the Chinese government powers to impose a Chinese-centric way of life and cultivate Chinese Communist Party informers. Certain provisions of the new regulations stand out, as they aim at indoctrinating Tibetan preschool children with ideological propaganda and interfere with the spheres of family and its privacy.

In light of the concerns regarding Tibet raised at the 43rd session of the UN Human Rights Council, I should like to ask the following:
1. What actions are being pursued by the EEAS in connection with the bilateral dialogue with China regarding the autonomy of Tibet and the protection of human rights of Tibetans?

2. Can the Vice-President/High Representative clarify his understanding of the proposed Extradition Treaty between China and Nepal and its implications for Tibetan residents in Nepal?

**Answer given by High Representative/Vice-President Borrell on behalf of the European Commission**

The EU has repeatedly raised its strong concerns about restrictions on freedom of religion or belief and on the rights of minorities in Tibet, both in EU-China bilateral meetings and publicly, including in multilateral fora. The EU has focused, in particular, on the conditions of prisoners, the rights of people belonging to minorities, freedom of religion or belief and the lack of reciprocal access to the region. It has done so, both in the framework of the EU-China Human Rights Dialogue, as well as, most recently, during the Strategic Dialogue between High Representative/Vice President Borrell and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, held on 9 June 2020, as well as during the EU-China summit on 22 June 2020. The European External Action Service remains committed to following developments related to Tibet and to continuing to express its expectation that the rights of the Tibetans should be respected.

Nepal and China signed a Treaty on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters as well as an Agreement on Boundary Management System during the visit of the Chinese President to Kathmandu in October 2019. No agreement on an extradition treaty was signed during this visit, but both countries agreed to strengthen cooperation and information exchange among law enforcement agencies. The European External Action Service is following closely developments in this area, as well as the application of the agreements concluded between China and Nepal, also considering the possible implications for the Tibetan community resident in Nepal.