

WRITTEN QUESTION E-2981/09

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to the Commission

Subject: Ban on the display of anti-NATO flags in Strasbourg

On the eve of the NATO summit in Strasbourg, French police stepped up checks on citizens in streets, shops and apartments, as well as seizing 'peace' flags displayed by citizens in their windows. According to law professor at the University of Strasbourg and specialist in civil liberties Patrick Wachsmann, this is 'completely illegal', while local authorities, including the mayor of the city, have distanced themselves from police initiatives and actions and denied in a statement issuing orders to the police to take down banners displayed from householders' windows. Communist party activists displaying flags are targeted, while Francois Bayrou MP has condemned the police measures as an unjustified attack on freedom of expression and stated 'it is wrong not to respect peaceful freedom of expression'. The setting up of 'red and orange zones' during the summit that restricted freedom of movement in parts of the city is not covered by any existing law, according to Wachsmann. The city's mayor, Roland Ries, stated that security measures put in place for the NATO summit had gone far beyond what he had imagined and declared that 'it is not acceptable' to oblige persons to remove 'peace' flags.

Does the Commission not think that the ban on and seizure of flags and other security measures are incompatible with the freedom of expression and of demonstration that is protected by Article 6 TEU, by the ECHR and by the common constitutional principles of EU Member States, and that security measures should not be counterproductive, in order to ensure a peaceful running of the NATO summit in Strasbourg?