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EU-Syria Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreement

European Parliament resolution containing the European Parliament's recommendation to the Council on the conclusion of a Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreement between the European Community and its Member States, of the one part, and the Syrian Arab Republic, of the other part (2006/2150(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the proposal for a recommendation to the Council by Véronique De Keyser on behalf of the PSE Group on the negotiations with a view to the conclusion of a Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreement between the European Community and its Member States, of the one part, and the Syrian Arab Republic, of the other part (B6-0373/2006),
 - having regard to the proposal for a Council decision on the conclusion of a Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreement between the European Community and its Member States, of the one part, and the Syrian Arab Republic, of the other part (COM (2004)0808),
 - having regard to its previous resolutions on Syria, and particularly those of 8 September 2005 on the situation of political prisoners in Syria¹ and of 15 June 2006 on Syria²,
 - having regard to the Seventh European Parliament–Syria Interparliamentary Meeting, held in Syria from 11 to 18 June 2005,
 - having regard to the Barcelona Declaration of 28 November 1995 and Parliament's resolution of 27 October 2005 on the Barcelona Process revisited³,
 - having regard to the UN resolutions on relations between Syria and Lebanon, particularly UN Security Council Resolutions 1559(2004) of 2 September 2004 and 1701(2006) of 11 August 2006, and the recent report of 25 September 2006 by Mr Serge Brammertz, Commissioner of the UN International Independent Investigation Commission, investigating, in accordance with the Security Council's resolutions, the fatal attack on the former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri,
 - having regard to Rules 83(5) and 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (A6-0334/2006),
- A. whereas Syria is of geostrategic importance in this region of the Near and Middle East, mainly in view of its potential role as a link between the parties in the peace process and a facilitator of a resolution of the regional conflict; whereas this role could be enhanced by stepping up the dialogue with that country,

¹ OJ C 193 E, 17.8.2006, p. 349.

² *Texts Adopted*, P6_TA(2006)0279.

³ *Texts Adopted*, P6_TA(2005)0412.

- B. whereas at present the elements necessary for the signing of an association agreement between the European Community and Syria are not yet fulfilled, but whereas Parliament is convinced that Syria has the potential to meet the necessary conditions,
- C. whereas the Iraq war, Syria's strategic relations with Iran and its involvement in the affairs of Lebanon have all impacted on Syria's relations with its neighbours and the wider international community,
- D. whereas the aim of the agreement between the European Community and Syria is to encourage and support the transition to a democratic political system respecting human rights and civil liberties and an open and market-based economy, while remaining within the framework of an effective dialogue and real partnership,
- E. whereas Syria has already adopted a number of economic measures advocated by the forthcoming association agreement,
- F. whereas the protection of fundamental freedoms is the foundation for any development towards a strong and independent civil society and whereas the government's position has in recent years been ambiguous but has nevertheless encouraged some hope for a greater opening-up of the Syrian political system,
- G. whereas in spite of its active and constructive participation in the Barcelona Process, Syria is the only country with which the European Community has not yet signed an association agreement, thus preventing the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership from fully developing,
- H. whereas the decree of March 1963 on the state of emergency and all the legislative acts relating to it are still in force today, although the recommendations following the tenth regional congress of the Baath Party (held from 6 to 9 June 2005) provided for their review,
- I. whereas the conclusions of the UN International Independent Investigation Commission, mentioned above, are a fundamental element for the signing of a future association agreement,
- J. whereas the human rights situation in the country has worsened since Parliament's last resolution on Syria of 15 June 2006, mentioned above, and whereas the activists detained in May 2006 for signing a petition calling for improved Syrian-Lebanese relations have not all been released,
 - 1. Is convinced that the association agreement could give a decisive impetus to the political, economic and social reforms needed to improve the country's situation;
 - 2. Reiterates, however, that respect for democratic values, human rights and civil liberties are prerequisites, and that, to this end, an effective control mechanism should be included in the agreement's human rights clause; calls, in particular, for greater respect for ethnic minorities and reiterates the need to maintain freedom of religion;
 - 3. Believes that anchoring Syria firmly within the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership will reinforce Syria's relations with the Member States of the European Union and its partners in the Southern Mediterranean, and facilitate the Middle East peace process;

4. Questions the Council and Commission on the next steps towards signing the Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreement, initialled as long ago as 19 October 2004;
5. Asks the Council to strengthen its initiatives with a view to deepening the cooperation between the EU and Syria and ultimately signing that agreement, while taking account of the following recommendations:
 - encourage and support actions by the Syrian Government towards the establishment of a democratic system;
 - call on Syria to respect Lebanon's sovereignty and abstain from interfering in its internal affairs, in particular by stopping arms supplies and preventing Hezbollah militias from rearming in full cooperation with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), and make renewed efforts to restart a credible peace process in the region leading to a comprehensive settlement and the restitution to Damascus of the Golan Heights;
 - take account of the political signals emanating from the tenth regional congress of the Baath Party, of which the most conspicuous is the change in the leadership team to include younger figures close to President Al-Assad, as is shown by the appointment of Abdullah Dardari as deputy prime minister;
 - give particular attention to the application of the clauses in the association agreement seeking to make public contracts more transparent; call on the Commission to ensure that other bilateral or multilateral agreements follow that approach;
 - call on the Syrian Government to adopt measures in the fields of democracy and human rights so as to comply with international human rights law as regards respect for freedom of expression, the protection of human rights defenders, the prevention of and the fight against torture and the abolition of the death penalty; in particular, draw attention to the necessary reform of the Syrian associations law so as to end all major restrictions as regards the activities of human rights organisations;
 - nevertheless, put to the Syrian Government its serious concerns about the absence of progress in such areas as opening up to multi-party politics and respect for human rights and civil liberties; point out that respect for human rights constitutes a vital component of the association agreement and call on Syria to respect its commitments within the framework of the Barcelona Process and along the lines of the European Neighbourhood Policy; to that end and in that context, call on Syria to do what is needed to immediately lift the state of emergency;
 - call on the Syrian Government to reconsider the cases of political prisoners and release all prisoners of conscience and peace activists, and to allow the existence of groups such as the signatories of the Damascus Declaration, signed on 16 October 2005 by five proscribed parties and by independent personalities, and the signatories of the Beirut-Damascus/Damascus-Beirut Declaration of 12 May 2006; call on Syria to ensure that detained or imprisoned persons are well treated, not subjected to torture and given prompt, regular and unrestricted access to their lawyers, doctors and families; encourage the Syrian Government to cooperate fully with the Lebanese Government, in accordance with the agreement of 5 May 2005

between the Prime Ministers of Syria and Lebanon, to obtain concrete results in the cases of disappearances of Syrian and Lebanese nationals, within the purview of the joint investigative commission created to that end;

- denounce before the Syrian Government – as the European Parliament has done in its above-mentioned resolution of 15 June 2006 – the wave of arrests in response to the Beirut-Damascus/Damascus-Beirut Declaration, that declaration being the first joint initiative by Syrian and Lebanese intellectuals and human rights defenders, and call for their immediate release;
- address the concerns of the European Union with regard to respecting the rights of religious and other minorities, and of the Kurds in particular; call on the Syrian Government to report on the state of progress with these issues;
- re-open a genuine dialogue with Syria with a view to involving it in peace efforts towards an overall settlement of the Middle East conflict;
- urge Syria to play a constructive role in the implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions 1559(2004) and 1701(2006), and call on it specifically to step up controls on its side of the Syria-Lebanon border so as to prevent the supply of arms to non-state entities;
- point out that cooperation by the Syrian authorities with the UN International Independent Investigation Commission has improved, but insist that it be further stepped up and that practical action be taken to follow up the investigation and comply with its findings;
- insist that Syria comply fully with UN Security Council Resolutions 1559(2004), 1562(2004), 1680(2006) and 1701(2006) and with the European Council's declaration on Lebanon adopted at its meeting of 16 and 17 June 2006, which call on Syria and Lebanon to delineate their common frontier so as to reinforce regional stability; call on Syria to make a positive contribution to the clarification of the final status of the Shebaa Farms area in accordance with the UN Secretary-General's recommendations of 12 September 2006 and in compliance with international law;
- note positively in this connection the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanese territory, yet call firmly on the Syrian Government to establish formal diplomatic relations with Lebanon, which has so far been refused, and to stop supporting Hezbollah;
- call on the Syrian Government to give an account of its practical actions to combat the proliferation of weapons, terrorism and al-Qa'ida and on the control of its frontiers with a view to prohibiting the smuggling of weapons and the crossing of terrorists into neighbouring countries;
- deplore in this connection the signing of a military agreement concluded with Iran on 15 June 2006 on strengthening mutual cooperation in the face of American and Israeli 'threats';
- draw the attention of Syria to the importance of its potential role in the Near and Middle East for the peaceful resolution of conflicts in the region; address the

concerns over provision by Syria of support to Damascus-based Palestinian militant groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad at the expense of moderate Palestinian forces seeking coexistence and peace with Israel;

- call on the Syrian Government to improve the living and environmental conditions of Palestinian refugee camps in Syria in accordance with international human rights standards;
 - call on the Syrian Government to release Yacoub Hanna Shamoun, an Assyrian Christian who has been incarcerated for over twenty years without due process or a release date in the near future;
 - exercise caution in the repatriation to Syria of immigrants and refugees belonging to religious minorities as long as repression continues; and, in any event, improve coordination of the different Member States' national approaches to this issue;
 - call for support for a dialogue between Syria and the European Parliament on these various points, so as to go forward with the cooperation between the EU and Syria with the expectation of signing the association agreement;
6. Requests the Council to consider additional incentives and benefits for Syria, going beyond those granted through the association agreement, in order to encourage Syria to review its current foreign policy and regional alignment in ways that will help promote regional peace, stability and prosperity and, in particular, recognition of the State of Israel's right to exist and support by Syria for progress in the Middle East peace process;
 7. Instructs its President to forward this resolution containing the European Parliament's recommendation to the Council, the Commission and the Government and Majlis al-Sha'ab of the Syrian Arab Republic.