P5_TA-PROV(2003)0019

EC-Lebanon Agreement

European Parliament resolution on the conclusion of an Association Agreement with the Republic of Lebanon

The European Parliament,

– 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 Republic of Lebanon, of the other part (COM(2002) 170),

– having regard to the draft Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreement between the European Community and its Member States of the one part, and the Republic of Lebanon, of the other part,

– having regard to its position of 16 January 2003 on 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 Republic of Lebanon, of the other part[1],

– having regard to its resolution of 12 March 1998 on Lebanese prisoners held in Syria[2],

A. having in mind the close relationship which has existed for decades between the European Union and Lebanon and the importance of the current political, economic and cultural relations,

B. mindful of the importance that Lebanon has always had and the role it could play in the search for an acceptable and lasting solution to the conflict in the Middle East,

C. whereas the consolidation of democracy made it possible to achieve the reconciliation of the people in the country - the most important goal after 16 years of destructive war; hoping that the existing diversity and pluralism in Lebanese society will be taken as a positive foundation to support civil peace,

D. whereas the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the southern part of the country in May 2000, implementing UN Security Council Resolution 425, marked a step forward in the process of normalisation of the country, although the situation of the Shebaa farms and the establishment of definite borders with Israel are still pending issues,

E. welcoming the withdrawal of a part of the Syrian troops and hoping that those still stationed in the country will, in the future, also leave by virtue of an agreement with the Lebanese government,

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[1] P5_TA(2003)0018.
[2] OJ C 104, 6.4.1998, p. 238.

F. having regard to Article 2 of the Association Agreement, which stipulates that respect for democratic principles and fundamental human rights, as set out in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, guides their internal and international policy and constitutes an essential element of this agreement,

G. whereas 17 000 Lebanese citizens are still recorded as missing, and their families are distraught in the absence of a response from the authorities on the fate of their relations, and calling the countries of the region concerned to find a solution in relation to citizens of neighbouring countries who are illegally detained,

H. deeply concerned by the precarious situation of more than 300 000 Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon,

I. having regard to the exchange of letters between the two sides on cooperation in the fight against terrorism which had accompanied the signing of the agreement and by which the two sides undertake to co-operate in preventing and punishing acts of terrorism, in particular by means of the full implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1373, to exchange information on terrorist groups and their support networks and on the resources and methods used against terrorism, as well as sharing their experiences in the prevention of terrorism,

J. having regard to the current enormous national debt and the interest on the debt repayments, which accounts for a large proportion of public revenue,

K. welcoming the results of the Conference of Donors held in Paris on 23 November 2002,

L. whereas an excessively general reference to parliamentary control of the agreement has been included in the new agreement, and whereas the establishment of a Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly would increase parliamentary input in the follow-up to the Euro-Mediterranean association agreements,

1. Notes the Council proposal to conclude a Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreement with Lebanon;

2. Calls on the Lebanese government to submit to the consideration of the Lebanese Parliament the issue of the presence of Syrian troops stationed in the country by virtue of an agreement with the Lebanese Government, with regard to the relevant UN resolutions, notably Security Council Resolution 520/1982, in order to reach agreement on the withdrawal of all non-Lebanese troops, with full respect for Lebanon's sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and political independence;

3. Reaffirms that respect for human rights constitutes an essential element of the new Association Agreement, which must be implemented and closely monitored in order to effectively enhance respect for human rights in Lebanon;

4. Encourages the Lebanese authorities to give positive signs in this direction by abolishing the death penalty, by ratifying the UN Convention Against Torture, by signing the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, by launching reform of the legal system, by setting clear and defined limits to the competences of the military jurisdiction, by settling

the question of missing persons and by cooperating with all the UN human rights agencies;

5. Believes that freedom of expression and association are a cornerstone of a democratic society, recalls that this implies, in particular, freedom of the press, whatever the instrument used to disseminate the information (paper, radio, TV, etc.), and stresses the need to extend the scope of its effectiveness and to avoid any discrimination on political grounds; expresses concern at the forced shut-down of the MTV television channel on 4 September 2002 and at the harassment of journalists who are critical of Lebanese authorities;

6. Undertakes to cooperate with the Lebanese Parliament in order to establish procedures for a regular political dialogue also within the framework of Article 2 of the Association Agreement, and calls on the Council and Commission to establish combined procedures for the regular assessment and the implementation of the principles laid down in Article 2; these common procedures shall take into account the views of Lebanese civil society;

7. Calls on the Commission to reconsider its priorities in relation to Lebanon by including human rights issues in the National Indicative Programme 2002-2004, and to immediately engage in cooperation in this area by supporting civil society and independent NGOs through the MEDA programme;

8. Expresses its support for the programme of economic reforms undertaken by Prime Minister Hariri and hopes that these reforms will improve Lebanon's position in the regional and international economy; calls on the Member States to take into consideration the problem faced by the Lebanese authorities of the country's enormous public debt;

9. Encourages both the Lebanese authorities, the Council and the Commission to take advantage of the political dialogue created by the new agreement, including it in the framework of increased regional cooperation with all the Euro-Mediterranean partners, in order to jointly play a proactive role in the Middle-East region, so as to reach a fair, global and lasting settlement to the conflict in the region, in accordance with the relevant UN resolutions; social and economic development in Lebanon would thus be favoured;

10. Welcomes the reference to the interparliamentary relations, explicitly made in Article 5(2) of the new agreement, and reiterates that this dialogue should especially take place within the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly, the creation of which was decided in April 2002 at the Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial meeting in Valencia and whose main task should be the follow-up and parliamentary control of the Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreements; calls, therefore, on the Council to set up this Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly in close contact with the parliaments involved as soon as possible;

11. Considers, in the meantime, that the participation of the representatives of the Lebanese parliament in the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Forum is of the utmost importance; invites, in this regard, the Lebanese parliament to take an active part in the Vth Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Forum which will take place in Crete in March 2003;

12. Expresses its concern about the periodic episodes of tension at the border between Lebanon and Israel and calls on the players involved to abstain from any action that could hamper regional stability;

13. Welcomes Lebanon's strong commitment to the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1373, including the freezing of assets of terrorist groups, and calls on the Council and Commission to include a similar anti-terrorist clause in all future agreements of this kind, as decided at the Seville European Council; calls on the Lebanese Government to remain vigilant against possible attacks by armed groups operating along the border line with Israel;

14. Welcomes the declared objective of establishing a free trade area over a transitional period not exceeding 12 years from the entry into force of the agreement;

15. Supports the European Union's determination to assist Lebanon in its economic restructuring, including modernising the customs authority, competition legislation, trade enhancement, strengthening the trade administration needed to implement the agreement and to prepare for Lebanon's WTO accession, improvement of intellectual property agencies and some other related fields, such as administrative reforms and anti-corruption policies;

16. Welcomes the agreement's provisions on dialogue and co-operation on social and cultural matters;

17. Urges the parties to conclude a bilateral readmission agreement, such as the one referred to in Article 69 of the Association Agreement, that should also cover arrangements for the readmission of third-country nationals;

18. Calls on both parties to the Association Agreement to commit themselves to cooperate and use all the instruments at their disposal to tackle the problems caused by illegal immigration;

19. Is convinced that the Lebanese authorities will carefully respect their commitments on judicial cooperation and respect for the rule of law included in the Association Agreement, as well as the international rules on money laundering, on combating organised crime and illicit drugs and on migration and readmission issues for Lebanese and third country nationals;

20. Notes that there are large areas of land intended for the cultivation of crops for the production of illicit drugs, and calls on the Lebanese authorities to eradicate crops of this kind with extreme firmness;

21. Welcomes Lebanon's effort of solidarity regarding the temporary hosting of Palestinian refugees; calls on the international community to increase its efforts in the region in relation to the problem of the Palestinian refugees; encourages the European Union and the Lebanese authorities to implement this new Association Agreement in a way that could also benefit the hundreds of thousands of Palestinian people living in difficult conditions in the country; calls on the Lebanese authorities to ratify the Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees, to put an end to possible discrimination against

refugee and asylum seekers, ensuring the protection of those subject to expulsion, and to facilitate the integration of those who wish to do so;

22. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the government and parliament of the Lebanon.