

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

2004



2009

DELEGATION FOR RELATIONS WITH THE GULF STATES, INCLUDING YEMEN

PE/DGUL-13/PV/05-07

MINUTES

of the meeting of 11 October 2005, from 15.00 to 17.00
Room ASP 1E2

BRUSSELS

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Annex: Record of attendance

11 October 2005
PK/lo

The meeting opened at 15:20, with Ms Gruber (Chairperson) in the Chair.

1. Adoption of draft agenda

PE 362.445

The draft agenda was adopted.

2. Approval of minutes of the meeting of 29 September 2005 (PE 362.444):

This point was postponed for the next meeting.

3. Chairperson's announcements

The Chair informed the Members about the following:

➤ **Saudi Arabia:**

The Commission has confirmed that Riyadh wants to participate in the EU's Galileo programme and rival the American GPS system. While details are still to be negotiated, the EP has earmarked 1 billion euros for the programme, expected to cost at least 3,5 times this amount.

For the first time, a high-level Saudi delegation held talks at NATO HQ. This suggests the country will soon join the so called "Istanbul Cooperation Initiative", a programme which already includes Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.

Iraq's interior minister has delivered a scathing attack on Saudi Arabia, saying he would not be lectured by "a bedouin on a camel" about human rights and democracy. The Shiite minister said Sunni Saudi Arabia had several problems of its own to take care of and added that "4.000.000 Shiites live like 2nd-class citizens in the Saudi kingdom."

The daughter of Saudi King Abdallah believes it is "only a matter of time" before women join the Shura (consultative) Council and are allowed to drive. Likewise, the Governor of the Saudi Arabian General Investment Authority denied that the motivation behind reforms enacted to prepare the kingdom for accession to the WTO in December is merely economic and reminded that Saudi women have recently been allowed to stand in elections to the board of the Chamber of Commerce in Jeddah.

US envoy Karen Hughes, assigned the difficult task of repairing the US image abroad, has returned home from the Middle East confirming her job would be a "challenge." Hughes, who has no experience in foreign diplomacy, said she found the trip "enlightening".

➤ **Kuwait:**

Sheikh Salem al-Ali al-Sabah has called for a 3 member committee of senior Royal family members to "assist the leadership" of Emir Sheikh Jaber al-Ahmad al-Sabah and Crown Prince Sheikh Saad Abdullah al-Sabah, both of whom are undergoing medical treatment. This has so far been the strongest call for change within the ruling family.

Shiite MPs have called on the interior ministry to protect their mosques after an attack by a mob of teenagers ; the assailants accused the Shiites of helping US forces in Iraq. Shiites form about 1/3rd of Kuwait's population of 956,000, and had rarely been a target of attack by Kuwaiti Sunnis before the overthrow of Saddam Hussein and the rise of Shiites in Irak.

The head of the local Muslim Brotherhood warned all Arab leaders that normalizing ties with "the Zionist entity" would be a crime against Islam. While the US has been exerting pressure on Arab states to end their boycott of Israeli products, Kuwait's Foreign Minister has been quoted as saying that Kuwait would be the last Arab country to establish ties with Israel.

➤ **United Arab Emirates:**

A think-tank has warned that the UAE may be the next target of al-Qaida, described as "busy recruiting in the region". Many believe Dubai is an ideal logistical hub for al-Qaida because of its freewheeling business rules.

➤ **Bahrein:**

The Director of the Geneva-based World Organization Against Torture has declared that Bahrain is free of "systematic torture" since it embarked on democratic reforms in 1999. The NGO called the country, however, to deal with the legacy of torture from previous years, implicitly criticising the Amnesty which covers police officers suspected of participating in Human Rights abuses in the nineties.

➤ **Qatar:**

After a vote held yesterday by the U.N. General Assembly, the country has become a member of the Security Council for a 2 year term.

➤ **Yemen:**

Approximately 500 children have already been struck down by polio, 4 years after the country thought it had beaten the disease. But 2 years go, Islamic clerics urged parents to boycott vaccines for fear of an American anti-Muslim plot, leading in a resurgence of polio first in Nigeria and then Chad, Sudan -- and now Yemen. The WHO praises, however, local governments for really tackling the problem, with international help. There are, however, fears that the epidemic could now spread to Saudi Arabia.

Yemen rebuked the US ambassador for saying that the country had halted its progress toward democracy. The US Ambassador had also cited "harassment and arrest of journalists" and the closure of newspapers, denying that the United States turns a blind eye to the human rights record of countries that take part in the war on terror.

4. Preparation of a visit of the Delegation to Kuwait, in presence of H.E. the Ambassador Abdulazeez Al Sharik

The Chair reminded the Members that a Kuwaiti delegation, led by Dr Nasser Jassem AL-SAANE, president of the "Parliamentary Friendship Group" visited the EP from the 21st to the 23 June, greeted by the 1st Vice Chair, M. Pfluger ; an open Invitation to visit Kuwait was already addressed to the Delegation by the Speaker of the Kuwait National Assembly, M. Jassim Mohammad AL-KHARAFI, back in February 2005.

In order to honour this invitation during 2005, the only dates left that are compatible with Parliamentary Activity are from the 26th to the 28th of November; as the Kuwaiti National Assembly has not confirmed yet whether these dates can be considered suitable for all sides, the Chair gives the floor to the Ambassador of Kuwait, H.E. Abdulazeez AL SHARIK for any comments.

The Ambassador, thanking the European Parliament for warmly welcoming the visit of the Kuwaiti Delegation in June, informs the Members that he has spoken with the Dr Jassem AL-SAANE and that the arrival of an EP delegation is eagerly expected in Kuwait, on the dates indicated. The Delegation will be able to see with its own eyes that in Kuwait freedom of expression is absolutely respected and will be able to "ask for whatever meeting it desires" ; the only request H.E. Abdulazeez AL SHARIK formulates is that of ensuring that the Delegation is as equilibrated as possible and represents the EP's political spectrum.

H.E. AL SHARIK mentions some key elements of the visit, which could include a meeting with the first female minister and Member of Parliament, Ms. Al Mubarak, as well as with Ms Dashti, a leading female political activist and head of the powerful Association of Kuwaiti Economists.

Meetings could also be organised with the Head of State if possible, as well as with the Speaker of the Kuwaiti National Assembly, individual MPs, the Minister of Oil resources, associations of journalists, and -following a request of M. PFLUGER, 1st Vice Chair- the

Kuwaiti Investment Agency. Meetings could also be organised with professionals of the health sector.

On the aspect of Sunni / Shiite relations, the Ambassador deplores an "isolated incident", indicating there never has been any real matter for concern; Sunnis and Shiites are all "brothers and sisters", equal before the Kuwaiti Constitution, and the Delegation will be able to confirm this once it raises the point when in Kuwait.

Follows a debate with the participation of MM. GRUBER, LOUIS, DOYLE, PFLUGER; addressing the issues raised, H.E. AL SHARIK:

- Indicates that the sad pages of Kuwait / Iraq relations are now turned, and that Kuwaiti supports a political process that is as inclusive as possible in Iraq.
- Repeats the opposition of Kuwait to the development of Weapons of Mass Destruction in the region and stands against any confrontation with Iran, promoting a negotiated settlement, as "the last thing we need is another conflict".
- Confirms that Kuwait supports closer links of cooperation among Arab nations, as demonstrated by its active involvement in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) proceedings.

5. Joint Costa Rica/Qatar initiative on the promotion of Democracy and Democratic Values: Presentation by *Chargé d'Affaires* Sheikh Meshal bin Hamad Al Thani

Excusing the *Chargé d'Affaires* Sheikh Meshal bin Hamad Al Thani, not able to attend, the Chair presented on his behalf the broad lines of the joint Costa Rica / Qatar initiative, to be held in the premises of the European Parliament on November 23rd and inviting any interested Members to attend.

Answering to a query of Ms DOYLE, M. ATTARD-MONTALTO explained that this initiative should be seen as part of a wider strategy designed to bring closer the Arab World to Southern American Countries, by establishing country-to-country partnerships.

6. Exchange of views on the last developments in the Gulf countries, in presence of Ms. Patricia L Lombart-Cussac, Deputy Head of Unit, European Commission

The Chair presented to Members Ms Patricia LLOMBART-CUSSAC, Deputy Head of Unit at the External Relations DG.

In her detailed presentation, which focused mainly on the state of play of EU / GCC negotiations, Ms LLOMBART-CUSSAC :

- recalled the Ministerial meetings which took already place in Manama, Bahrain, and which aims at establishing a Free Trade Agreement with the GCC countries ;

- indicated that this dialogue is not merely commercial, but also has other equally important elements, which include the fight against terrorism, WMD, human-rights related aspects, and immigration. While, on political issues, the Commission's strategy is to encourage the Gulf countries initiatives towards further democratisation "at the pace the countries decide themselves", the Commission brought up the issue of the 3 leading Saudi reformers who were jailed earlier this year and welcomed their release by new King Abdullah.
- underlined that, following a recent bilateral US / Saudi Arabia trade agreement, the negotiations on the accession of Saudi Arabia to the WTO may proceed at a new pace; should Saudi Arabia join the WTO before the end of the year, then all GCC countries will be part of it, which is expected to facilitate the EU and the GCC into reaching a Free Trade agreement.

7. Any other business

No other business.

8 Date and place of next meeting

The next meeting of the delegation is scheduled for Wednesday, October 26th, in Strasbourg. The Chair reminded the Members that, on the same day, they are welcome to attend a Hearing organised by the Delegation for Relations with the Mashreq countries on the subject of the Freedom of Press in the Arab World.

The meeting closed at 16.35

**DELTAGERLISTE/ANWESENHEITSLISTE/KATAΣΤΑΣΗ ΠΑΡΟΝΤΩΝ/LIITE RECORD
OF ATTENDANCE/LISTA DE ASISTENCIA/LISTE DE PRESENCE/ELENCO DEI
PRESENTI/PRESENTIELIJST/LISTA DE PRESENÇAS/LÄSNÄOLOLISTA/DELTAGARLISTA**

Til stede	Formandskabet/Vorstand/Προεδρείο/Bureau/Ufficio di Presidenza/Mesa/Puhemiehistö/J.L. Presidium: (*)
Anwesend	GRUBER (P), PFLÜGER (1VP) DOYLE (2VP)
Παρόντες	Medlemmer/Mitglieder/Μέλη/Members/Diputados/Députés/Deputati/Leden/Deputados/Jäsenet/Ledamöter: ATTARD-MONTALTO, GAIA, LOUIS
Present	Stedfortrædere/Stellvertreter/Αναπληρωτές/Substitutes/Suplentes/Suppléants/ Membri supplenti/Plaatsvervangers/Membros suplentes/Varajäsenet/Suppleanter: HANDZLIK
Presentes	
Présents	
Presenti	
Aanwezig	
Lasna	
Närvarande	
Art. 178,2	
Art. 183,3	
Endv. Deltog/Weitere Teiln./ Συμμετείχαν επίσης/Also present Participaron igualmente/ Participaient également/ Hanno partecipato altresì/ Andere deelnemers/ Outros participantes/ Muut osallistujat/ Dessutom deltog	
(Dagsorden/Tagesordnung Pkt/Ημερήσια Διάταξη Σημεί/Point OJ/Punto OG/Agenda Punt/Ordem do dia Punto/punto orden del dia/Esityslist Kohta/ Föredragningslista punkt):	

- * (P) = Formand/Vorsitzender/Πρόεδρος/Chairman/Président/Presidente/Voorzitter/Presidente/Puhemies/Ordförande
(VP) = Næstform./Stellv. Vorsitz./Αντιπρόεδρος/Vice-Chairman/Vice-Président/Vicepresidente/Varapuhemies/Ondervoorz./
Vice-Pres./Vicepres/Vice ordförande.

Til stede den/Anwesend am/Παρόν στις/Present on/Présent le/Presente il/Aanwezig op/Presente em/Presenteel/Läsna/Närvarande den.

Efter indbydelse fra formanden/Auf Einladung d. Vorsitzenden/Με πρόσκληση του Προέδρου/At the invitation of the Chairman/Por invitación del presidente/Sur l'invitation du président/Su invito del presidente/Op uitnodiging van de voorzitter/A convite do presidente/Puhemiehen kutsusta/På ordförandens inbjudan:

Rådet/Rat/Συμβούλιο/Council/Consejo/Conseil/Consiglio/Raad/Conselho/Neuvosto/Rådet: (*)

Kommissionen/Kommission/Επιτροπή/Commission/Comisión/Commissione/Commissie/Comissão/Komissio/Kommissionen: (*)
LLOMBART CUSSAC, GORENFLO

Cour des comptes:
C.E.S.:

Andre deltagere/Andere Teilnehmer Επίσης Παρόντες/Also present Otros participantes/Autres participants/Altri partecipanti Andere aanwezigen/Outros participantes Muut osallistajat/Övriga deltagare		Amb. Abdulazeez AL SHARIK (Emb. of Kuwait) Abdulaziz AL BISHAR (Emb. of Kuwait)
Gruppernes sekretariat Sekretariat der Fraktionen Γραμματεία των Πολ. Ομάδων Secretariat political groups Secr. De los grupos políticos Secr. Groupes politiques Segr. Dei gruppi politici Secr. Van de fracties Secr. Dos grupos politicos Puolueyhymien sihteeristö Gruppernas sekretariat	PPE-DE PSE ALDE Verts/ALE GUE/NGL IND/DEM UEN NI	RIPOLL VILELLA
Cab. Du Président		
Cab. Du Secrétaire Général		
Generaldirektorat Generaldirektion Γενική Διεύθυνση Directorate-General Dirección general Direction générale Direzione generale Directoraat-generaal Direcção general Contrôle financier Service juridique Pääosasto Generaldirektorat	I II III IV V VI VII VIII	KRAUSS, STUTZMANN
Udvalgssekretariatet Ausschubsekretariat Γραμματεία επιτροπής Committee secretariat Secretaria de la comisión Secrétariat de la commission Segretariato della commissione Commissiesecretariaat Secretaria de comissão Valiokunnan sihteeristö Utskottssekretariatet Assist./Βοηθός		KAMARIS, H-H KRAUS

- * (P) = Formand/Pres./Πρόεδρος/Chairman/Président/Voorzitter/Puhemies/Ordförande
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 (M) = Medlem./Mitglied/Μέλος/Member/Miembro/Membre/Membro/Lid/Membro/Jäsen/Ledamot
 (F) = Tjenestemand/Beamter/Υπάλληλος/Official/Funcionario/Fonctionnaire/Funzionario/Ambtenaar/Functionário/Virkamies/Tjänsteman