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P8_TA(2014)0027

Situation in Iraq and Syria and the IS offensive including the persecution of minorities

European Parliament resolution of 18 September 2014 on the situation in Iraq and Syria, and the IS offensive, including the persecution of minorities (2014/2843(RSP))

(2016/C 234/06)

The European Parliament,

— having regard to its previous resolutions on Iraq and Syria,

— having regard to the Foreign Affairs Council conclusions on Iraq and Syria,

— having regard to the European Council conclusions on Iraq and Syria of 30 August 2014,

— having regard to the statements by the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on Iraq and Syria,

— having regard to UN Security Council resolution 2170 (2014) and UN Human Rights Council resolution S-22/L.1 (2014),

— having regard to the statements by the UN Secretary-General on Iraq and Syria,

— having regard to the NATO Summit Declaration of 5 September 2014,

— having regard to the EU guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief adopted on 24 June 2013,

— having regard to the conclusions of the Paris conference on security in Iraq and the fight against Islamic State of 15 September 2014,

— having regard to the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) between the European Union and its Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Iraq, of the other, and to its resolution of 17 January 2013 on the EU-Iraq Partnership and Cooperation Agreement ([1]),

— having regard to Rule 123(2) and (4) of its Rules of Procedure,

A. whereas the security and humanitarian situation in Iraq and Syria, which was already critical, has further deteriorated as a result of the occupation of parts of their territory by the terrorist jihadist al-Qaeda splinter group Islamic State (IS); whereas the transnational character of IS and associated terrorist groups poses a threat to the wider region; whereas there are growing concerns for the welfare of those still trapped in areas controlled by IS forces;

B. whereas the disintegration of the Iraqi-Syrian border has provided IS with opportunities to enhance its presence in both countries; whereas IS has, over the past months, extended its territorial conquest from eastern Syria into north-western Iraq, including Iraq's second-largest city, Mosul; whereas on 29 June 2014 it was reported that IS had proclaimed a 'caliphate', or 'Islamic state', in the territories it controlled in Iraq and Syria, and whereas its leader, Abdu Bakr al-Baghdadi, has declared himself as the caliph; whereas IS does not recognise the internationally accepted borders and has declared its intention to spread the 'Islamic caliphate' to other Muslim-majority countries;

([1]) Texts adopted, P7_TA(2013)0023.

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C. whereas the conquest of the territories in Iraq and Syria was followed by the imposition of the harsh interpretation of Sharia law; whereas serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law have been committed in the areas under the control of IS and associated groups, including targeted killings, forced conversions, abductions, selling of women, slavery of women and children, recruitment of children for suicide bombings, sexual and physical abuse and torture; whereas IS has murdered the journalists James Foley and Steven Sotloff and the aid worker David Haines; whereas Christian, Yazidi, Turkmen, Shabak, Kaka'e, Sabian and Shia communities have been targeted by IS, as well as many Arabs and Sunni Muslims; whereas mosques, monuments, shrines, churches and other places of worship, tombs and cemeteries, as well as archaeological and cultural heritage sites, have been deliberately destroyed;

D. whereas Iraqi Christians have recently been persecuted, deprived of their fundamental rights and forced to leave their homes and become refugees because of their religion and convictions; whereas according to Open Doors International the number of Christians in Iraq has significantly fallen, from 1,2 million at the beginning of the 1990s to between 330 000 and 350 000 now; whereas before the conflict in Syria started, around 1,8 million Christians lived in the country; whereas since the conflict started at least 500 000 Christians have been displaced;

E. whereas according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) an estimated 1,4 million persons were internally displaced this year in Iraq and an estimated 1,5 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance; whereas the upsurge of IS has produced a humanitarian crisis, notably a massive displacement of civilians; whereas on 12 August 2014 the EU decided to increase its humanitarian assistance to Iraq by EUR 5 million to provide basic assistance to displaced people, thus bringing humanitarian funding for Iraq to EUR 17 million so far in 2014; whereas the EU has been further extending its humanitarian aid and has established an air bridge between Brussels and Erbil;

F. whereas according to the UN over 191 000 people have died in Syria in the conflict; whereas according to OCHA an estimated 6,4 million persons are internally displaced in Syria and there are more than 3 million Syrian refugees, mainly in Lebanon (1,17 million refugees), Turkey (832 000), Jordan (613 000), Iraq (215 000) and Egypt and North Africa (162 000); whereas, according to the Office for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (ECHO) an estimated 10,8 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance; whereas so far in 2014 the EU has contributed EUR 150 million in humanitarian aid for the victims of the Syrian crisis;

G. whereas hundreds of foreign fighters, including many from EU Member States, have joined the IS insurgency; whereas these EU citizens are identified as a security risk by the governments of the Member States;

H. whereas the EU has acknowledged the burden placed on the Kurdistan region and the Kurdistan Regional Government, which are hosting a large number of internally displaced persons;

I. whereas the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has stated that it remains very difficult to operate within the area to give civilians and refugees the proper aid they need; whereas it is important to shelter the hundreds of thousands of Syrian and Iraqi refugees before winter arrives;

J. whereas the EU has reiterated its firm commitment to Iraq's unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity;

K. whereas the Heads of State and Government participating in the NATO Summit on 4 and 5 September 2014 stated that the presence of IS in both Syria and Iraq is a threat to regional stability, and that the people of Syria and Iraq and elsewhere in the region need the support of the international community to counter that threat;

L. whereas the possibility has been raised of carrying out air strikes in eastern Syria; whereas at the NATO meeting of 5 September 2014 an anti-IS coalition was formed; whereas the European External Action Service (EEAS) is currently working on a comprehensive regional strategy to address the threat posed by IS; whereas on 10 September 2014 US President Barack Obama unveiled his strategy to combat IS, which includes, among other actions, a systematic campaign of air strikes against IS targets 'wherever they are', including in Syria, increased support for allied ground forces fighting IS, and greater counter-terrorism efforts aimed at cutting off the group's funding; whereas the Arab League has pledged to strengthen cooperation to bring down IS in Syria and Iraq;

M. whereas IS has secured significant income sources by looting banks and businesses on territories it controls and taking over up to six oilfields in Syria, including Syria's largest oil facility, the al-Omar field close to the border with Iraq, and is receiving funds from wealthy donors, most of whom are from the region;

N. whereas the promotion of democracy and respect for human rights, including the right to freedom of religion and belief, are fundamental principles and aims of the EU and constitute common ground for its relations with third countries;

1. Is extremely concerned at the deterioration of the security and humanitarian situation in Iraq and in Syria as a result of the occupation of parts of their territory by IS; firmly condemns the indiscriminate killings and human rights violations perpetrated by this and other terrorist organisations against religious and ethnic minorities and the most vulnerable groups; strongly condemns attacks directed at civilian targets, including hospitals, schools and places of worship, and the use of executions and sexual violence by IS in Iraq and Syria; underlines the fact that there should be no impunity for the perpetrators of these acts;

2. Strongly condemns the murders of the journalists James Foley and Steven Sotloff and the aid worker David Haines by IS, and expresses grave concern for the safety of others still being held captive by the extremists; expresses its deep sympathy and condolences to the families of these victims and to the families of all victims of the conflict;

3. Emphasises that widespread or systematic attacks directed against civilians because of their ethnic or political background, religion, belief or gender may constitute a crime against humanity; strongly condemns all forms of persecution, discrimination and intolerance based on religion and belief, and acts of violence against all religious communities; stresses once again that the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion is a fundamental human right;

4. Expresses its support for all victims of religious intolerance and hatred; expresses its solidarity with the members of the Christian communities being persecuted and facing the danger of extinction in their motherlands, Iraq and Syria, as well as with other persecuted religious minorities; confirms and supports the inalienable right of all religious and ethnic minorities living in Iraq and Syria, including Christians, to continue to live in their historical and traditional homelands in dignity, equality and safety, and to practise their religion freely; stresses that the crimes committed against Christian minorities such as Assyrians, Syriacs and Chaldeans, as well as Yazidis and Shia Muslims, represent a final push by IS for a complete religious cleansing in the region; notes that for centuries members of different religious groups coexisted peacefully in the region;

5. Rejects without reservation and considers illegitimate the announcement by the IS leadership that it has established a caliphate in the areas it now controls; emphasises that the creation and expansion of the 'Islamic caliphate', as well as activities of other extremist groups in Iraq and Syria, is a direct threat to the security of European countries; rejects the notion of any unilateral changes of internationally recognised borders by force; stresses again that IS is subject to the arms embargo and assets freeze imposed by UN Security Council resolutions 1267 (1999) and 1989 (2011), and underlines the importance of prompt and effective implementation of those measures; calls on the Council to consider more effective use of the existing restrictive measures, and in particular to deny IS the benefits of illicit oil sales or sales of other resources on international markets; is deeply concerned about the assertions that actors in some Member States are engaged in illicit oil trade with IS; asks the Commission whether it can confirm these assertions and, if so, calls on the Commission and the Member States to ensure that the illicit oil trade is immediately brought to an end;

6. Condemns the use and exploitation of oilfields and related infrastructure by IS and associated groups, which enables IS to generate substantial income, and urges all states to uphold UN Security Council resolutions 2161 (2014) and 2170 (2014), which condemn any trade, direct or indirect, with IS and associated groups; is concerned that IS is generating income through sales of oil; takes note of the EU's intention to tighten sanctions in order to prevent IS from selling oil; therefore calls for the EU to impose sanctions on all those (governments and public or private companies) involved in the transport, transformation, refinement and commercialisation of oil extracted in IS-controlled areas, together with strict controls on financial flows in order to prevent economic activity and exploitation of tax havens on the part of IS;

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7. Welcomes the appeal of 8 September 2014 by all the French Islamic federations, as well as appeals by other Islamic communities, which unequivocally and unconditionally condemns the instrumentalisation of Islam by extremist terrorist groups to justify their violence, intolerance and crimes against humanity;

8. Calls on all parties to the conflict in Iraq to ensure the protection of the civilian population and adhere to their obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law; calls for immediate support and humanitarian assistance for the displaced people of Iraq;

9. Welcomes the efforts of the United States and of all the other contributing states to support the Iraqi national and local authorities in their fight against IS, to stop the advance of IS and to facilitate access for humanitarian support; welcomes the call by the USA for an international coalition against IS, which is building up; welcomes the decision reached by the Arab League on 7 September 2014 to take the necessary measures to confront IS and cooperate with international, regional and national efforts to combat militants in Syria and Iraq, and to endorse UN Security Council resolution 2170 (2014); calls on the Arab League to discuss amending the Arab Convention for Fighting Terrorism of 1998 so that it can challenge global terrorism by all means;

10. Calls on the international community to assist the Iraqi authorities – including by providing military protection to particularly vulnerable groups – in ensuring protection of, and assistance to, those fleeing the areas affected by terrorism, in particular members of vulnerable groups and of ethnic and religious communities; calls on all regional actors to contribute to efforts to promote security and stability in Iraq; recalls that it should be the ultimate commitment and responsibility of all regional actors, as well as of the EU, to do their utmost to guarantee the return of traditional minorities and all citizens to their original places of residence from which they were forced to flee; calls on the EU Member States to assist the Iraqi and local authorities by all possible means, including appropriate military assistance, in containing and repelling the terrorist and aggressive IS expansion; underlines the necessity for coordinated action by countries in the region to counter the IS threat; calls on all regional actors to do everything in their power to stop all activities by official or private bodies intended to propagate and spread extreme Islamist ideologies; calls on Turkey to clearly and unambiguously commit itself to countering the common security threat posed by IS; calls for the EU to facilitate a regional dialogue on the problems facing the Middle East and to include all significant parties, in particular Iran and Saudi Arabia;

11. Welcomes the mobilisation of the European Emergency Response Coordination Centre and the activation of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism at the request of the Iraqi Government; welcomes the EU's humanitarian assistance to Iraq and Syria; calls for additional humanitarian support for the populations affected by the conflict, including the Syrian Kurds;

12. Calls on all parties to the conflict in Syria, in particular the Syrian regime, to ensure the protection of the civilian population, to adhere to their obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law, to facilitate the provision of humanitarian aid and assistance through all possible channels, including across borders and conflict lines, and to ensure the safety of all medical personnel and humanitarian workers; commends the role of Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey in accepting refugees; calls on the international community to be more active and forthcoming in burden-sharing and to provide direct financial support to the host countries; calls for the EU to put pressure on all donors to fulfil their promises and deliver their pledges in a swift manner; welcomes the commitments by the Member States, since the EU is the biggest donor of financial aid and source of future pledges;

13. Emphasises the need to seize all possibilities with a view to effectively countering the IS threat in Syria, with full respect for international law; stresses that in the long term only a lasting and inclusive political solution entailing a peaceful transition to a genuinely representative government in Syria would help to neutralise the threat of IS and other extremist organisations;

14. Calls on all parties to the conflict in Syria to respect the mandate of the UN's Disengagement Observer Force and ensure the safety and freedom of movement of UN troops, including those from EU Member States; condemns the fact that 45 Fijian peacekeepers were detained by an armed group; welcomes the release of the peacekeepers on 11 September 2014;

15. Recalls the statement by the Special Coordinator for the Joint Mission of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the United Nations (OPCW-UN), who declared that 96 % of Syrian chemical weapons have been destroyed; calls for the remaining weapons to be deactivated in accordance with the Framework for Elimination of Syrian Chemical Weapons;

16. Welcomes the decision by individual Member States to respond positively to the call by the Kurdish regional authorities to urgently provide military material; stresses that such responses reflect the capabilities and national laws of the Member States and have the consent of the Iraqi national authorities; calls on those Member States which are providing military material to the Kurdish regional authorities to coordinate their efforts and to implement effective monitoring measures in order to prevent uncontrolled dissemination and the use of military material against civilians;

17. Reiterates its concern that thousands of transnational foreign fighters, including citizens of the Member States, have joined the IS insurgency; calls on the Member States to take appropriate measures to prevent fighters from travelling from their soil, in line with UN Security Council resolution 2170 (2014), and to develop a common strategy for security services and EU agencies in monitoring and controlling jihadists; calls for cooperation in the EU and at international level with a view to appropriate legal action against any individual suspected of being involved in acts of terrorism; calls on the Member States to intensify cooperation and exchange of information among themselves and with EU bodies, and to ensure efficient cooperation with Turkey; stresses the importance of prevention, prosecution, outreach, rehabilitation and reintegration;

18. Welcomes the formation of a new and inclusive government in Iraq, as well as the adoption of the ministerial programme; supports the Prime Minister's efforts to finalise the formation of the government; calls on the government to be truly representative, with an inclusive agenda; stresses that the government should properly represent the political, religious and ethnic diversity of Iraqi society, including its Sunni minority, in order to stop the bloodshed and the fragmentation of the country; calls on all participants to work together in the interests of political stability and peace, and in combating the IS insurgency; underlines the fact that Iraq's unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity are essential for stability and economic development in the country and the region;

19. Calls on the Iraqi Government and Parliament to urgently review legislation and legal practice, reform the country's judicial system and security apparatus and implement inclusive policies towards all Iraqis with a view to ending the policy of discrimination;

20. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to take specific actions to address the situation of women in Iraq and Syria and guarantee their freedom and respect for their most fundamental rights, and to adopt measures to prevent exploitation of, and abuse and violence against, women and children, in particular the early marriage of girls; is particularly concerned at the increase in all forms of violence against Yazidi women, who are imprisoned, raped, sexually abused and sold by the members of IS;

21. Expresses concern at the increasing number of cases of recruitment of children and young people in Iraq and Syria; encourages the Commission to engage with partners – including international organisations – to prepare a comprehensive programme to address the need to protect children and women affected by armed conflict;

22. Supports the request by the UN Human Rights Council to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights for the urgent dispatching of a mission to Iraq, to investigate the violations and abuses of international human rights law committed by IS and associated terrorist groups and establish the facts and circumstances of such abuses and violations, with a view to avoiding impunity and ensuring full accountability;

23. Remains convinced that there can be no sustainable peace in Syria and Iraq without accountability for the crimes committed by all sides during the conflict, in particular those based on religious or ethnic grounds; reiterates its call for the referral of those suspected of committing crimes against humanity in Syria and Iraq to the International Criminal Court and supports all initiatives in this direction;

24. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the Council, the Commission, the EU Special Representative for Human Rights, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the Government and Council of Representatives of Iraq, the Regional Government of Kurdistan, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, and the United Nations Human Rights Council and all the parties involved in the conflict in Syria.