Thursday 7 July 2011

Situation in Syria, Yemen and Bahrain in the context of the situation in the Arab world and North Africa

P7_TA(2011)0333

European Parliament resolution of 7 July 2011 on the situation in Syria, Yemen and Bahrain in the context of the situation in the Arab world and North Africa

(2013/C 33 E/16)

The European Parliament,

— having regard to its previous resolutions on Syria, Yemen and Bahrain, in particular that of 7 April 2011 on the situation in Syria, Bahrain and Yemen ([1]),

— having regard to its resolution of 24 March 2011 on European Union relations with the Gulf Cooperation Council ([2]),

— having regard to its resolution on the review of the European Neighbourhood Policy - Southern Dimension of 7 April 2011 ([3]),

— having regard to the statements by the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative (VP/HR) on Syria of 18, 22, 24 and 26 March, 23 April and 6 and 11 June 2011; on Yemen of 10, 12 and 18 March, 27 April, 11, 26 and 31 May and 3 June 2011, and on Bahrain of 10, 12 and 18 March; 3 May and 1 July 2011,

— having regard to the declaration by the VP/HR on behalf of the EU on Syria of 29 April 2011,

— having regard to the Joint Communication entitled 'A new response to a changing Neighbourhood' of 25 May 2011, which complements the Joint Communication on 'A Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean' of 8 March 2011,

— having regard to the declaration on the Southern Neighbourhood issued at the European Council meeting of 23 and 24 June 2011,

— having regard to the Human Rights Council resolution on Syria of 29 April 2011,

— having regard to Council Decisions 2011/273/CFSP of 9 May 2011, 2011/302/CFSP of 23 May 2011 and 2011/367/CFSP of 23 June 2011 on Syria,

— having regard to the conclusions of the Foreign Affairs Council of 23 May and 20 June 2011,

— having regard to the statement of 3 June 2011 by the UN Secretary-General on Syria,

— having regard to the statement of 23 June 2011 by the UN Secretary-General on the sentences imposed on 21 Bahraini political activists, human rights defenders and opposition leaders,

— having regard to the preliminary report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on Syria of 14 June 2011,

([1]) Texts adopted, P7_TA(2011)0148.
([2]) Texts adopted, P7_TA(2011)0109.
([3]) Texts adopted, P7_TA(2011)0154.

— having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948,

— having regard to the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child of 1990,

— having regard to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966,

— having regard to the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment of 1975,

— having regard to the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders of 2004, as updated in 2008,

— having regard to Rule 110(4) of its Rules of Procedure,

A. whereas peaceful demonstrators in countries in North Africa and the Middle East have expressed legitimate democratic aspirations and strong calls for institutional, political, economic and social reforms aimed at achieving genuine democracy, fighting corruption and nepotism, ensuring respect for the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, reducing social inequalities and creating better economic and social conditions,

B. whereas the Joint Communication entitled 'A new response to a changing Neighbourhood' of 25 May 2011 takes a new approach, reviewing the implementation of the basic principles governing the Union's external action, namely the universal values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law, which are at the centre of the Neighbourhood Policy, whilst reflecting the need for the EU to support democratic change in North Africa and in the Middle East,

Syria

C. whereas, since the beginning of the crackdown in Syria in March 2011, violence has been escalating and the security forces have been responding to the continuous protests with mass arrests and increasing brutality, killing more than 400 civilians in the Daraa governorate alone and possibly more than 1 000 in total across Syria,

D. whereas recent videos, which were broadcast worldwide, showed disturbing images of arbitrarily detained Syrian children who had been victims of torture or ill-treatment, which in some cases had led to their death, as in the tragic case of Hamza al-Khateeb, a 13-year-old boy; whereas, in addition, the use of live ammunition against demonstrators has already resulted in the deaths of at least 30 children, as reported by UNICEF, the UN children's agency, on 31 May 2011,

E. whereas in his third address of 20 June 2011 President Bashar al-Assad said that a national dialogue would shape Syria's future; whereas, despite repeated commitments to implement political reform and change in Syria, the authorities have failed to take any credible step to fulfil them; whereas more than 800 cases of forced disappearances and 11 000 cases of arbitrary detention have already been documented by human rights organisations,

F. whereas on 23 June 2011, in view of the gravity of the situation in Syria, the Council adopted a decision and a regulation imposing restrictive measures on seven additional persons added to the list drawn up on 9 May 2011, introducing special measures, such as a visa ban and a freezing of assets, and also imposed an embargo on arms and equipment which might be used for internal repression against four entities associated with the Syrian regime,

G. whereas the Association Agreement between the European Community and its Member States, of the one part, and the Syrian Arab Republic, of the other part, has never been signed; whereas the signing of this Agreement has been delayed at Syria's request since October 2009 and the Council had already decided not to take further steps; whereas respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms constitutes an essential part of this Agreement,

H. whereas there is a serious risk of an increase in violent attacks by extremist groups, including armed jihadi groups; whereas it is important to ensure protection for the various religious communities in Syria, including the large number of Iraqi refugees that have arrived in the country,

I. whereas, after the siege in Daraa, security forces launched a large-scale military operation and campaign of arbitrary arrests in neighbouring towns; whereas an estimated 12 000 Syrians from Jisr al-Shughour and surrounding areas have crossed the Syrian-Turkish border, fearing reprisals by the security forces, and according to the Red Crescent 17 000 more are waiting to cross the border,

Yemen

J. whereas the situation in Yemen remains of deep concern following months of violence and turmoil that have inflicted substantial suffering on the Yemeni people, resulting in large-scale loss of life and serious injuries, the imprisonment of protesters and a more serious economic and political crisis in the country,

K. whereas the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) has initiated a plan for the peaceful transfer of power, which has not been signed by the President of Yemen, Ali Abdullah Saleh,

L. whereas during recent attacks on his compound on 3 June 2011, President Saleh was seriously injured and is now receiving medical treatment in Saudi Arabia; whereas power has been temporarily transferred to the Vice-President of the country, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi,

M. whereas Yemen is the poorest country in the Middle East, with widespread malnutrition, dwindling oil reserves, a growing population, weak central government, worsening water shortages and little investment in the country's economy; whereas there is serious concern that the Yemeni State will disintegrate, with a fragile truce having been in force since February with the Shiite rebels in the North, a secessionist movement in the South and many al-Qaeda fighters reportedly using Yemen as a sanctuary,

Bahrain

N. whereas the state of national safety in Bahrain was lifted on 1 June 2011 and King Hamad Bin Isa al-Khalifa made a call for a national dialogue, which began on 2 July 2011,

O. whereas on 29 June 2011 an independent commission with an international independent component was set up by King Hamad in order to investigate human rights violations during recent government crackdowns on pro-reform protesters,

P. whereas on 22 June 2011 Bahrain's National Safety Court, a military court, announced its verdict against 21 Bahraini opposition activists, including seven in absentia; whereas eight opposition activists were sentenced to life in prison and 13 received jail sentences of up to 15 years for 'plotting to topple the government'; whereas many other political activists, human rights defenders and journalists were detained during the recent pro-reform protests, and whereas according to human rights organisations they have been tortured, ill-treated and harassed,

Q. whereas on 22 May 2011 the death sentences imposed on Ali Abdullah Hassan al-Sankis and Abdulaziz Abdulridha Ibrahim Hussain for killing two policemen during anti-government protests in Bahrain were upheld by the National Safety Court of Appeal; whereas the executions have been postponed until September,

R. whereas 47 Bahraini doctors and nurses have been accused of 'incitement to overthrow the regime by force' and are facing trial by a Bahraini military court; whereas the medical professionals treated all injured people equally, in keeping with the ethical code for their profession,

S. whereas following the request from the Bahraini Government foreign forces under the banner of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) have been deployed in Bahrain,

1. Strongly condemns the disproportionate use of force by the regimes against peaceful demonstrators and deplores the large number of persons killed and wounded; extends its condolences to the families of the victims and wounded; calls for an immediate end to the bloodshed and the release of the people arrested; calls for an investigation into the killings, arrests and alleged use of torture;

2. Praises the people for the courage they have demonstrated in their peaceful fight for democratic change, in particular the women, who have been and often still are at the forefront of the protests;

3. Calls on the political leaderships of the Arab countries to honour their commitments by engaging without delay or precondition in an open and constructive political dialogue, involving all democratic political parties and movements and representatives of civil society, aimed at paving the way for genuine democracy and the implementation of real, ambitious and significant institutional, political, economic and social reforms, which are essential for long-term stability and development in these countries and in the region as a whole;

Syria

4. Strongly condemns the escalation of violence in Syria and the continuing serious violations of human rights, including the sieges imposed on a number of cities, such as Daraa, Jisr al-Shughour and Hama, mass arrests, extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detention, allegations of forced disappearances and torture;

5. Deplores the fact that the lifting of the state of emergency announced on 21 April 2011 and that other reforms promised by President Assad have not been implemented and that political prisoners remain in detention despite the recent amnesty announced by the President; urges the Syrian authorities to lift the siege of affected towns without delay and allow immediate and unhindered access for humanitarian agencies and workers;

6. Urges the Syrian authorities and President Bashar al Assad to put an end to the killings of unarmed protestors and to immediately release all detained demonstrators, journalists, human rights defenders and political prisoners; calls for all democratic forces and civil society actors to be involved in an immediate and genuine political process in order to contribute to a democratic transition in Syria based on a concrete agenda for fundamental reforms and respect for human rights and the rule of law;

7. Calls on the Syrian authorities to allow the foreign press into the country to verify all claims that 'armed gangs of extremists' are firing at the security forces first, which is the regime's justification for the unacceptable bloodbath that is taking place; calls on the Syrian authorities to cooperate fully with and provide unhindered access to the office of the High Commissioner and to other UN mechanisms;

8. Urges the Syrian authorities to immediately release all children arrested during the repression of the demonstrations or in related events, to thoroughly investigate reported cases of violence against children and to refrain from any further arrests of and violence against children or any other breach of children's rights;

9. Welcomes the Council's decision to impose restrictive measures on Syria and persons responsible for the violent repression against the civilian population, to suspend all preparations for new bilateral cooperation programmes, to suspend the ongoing bilateral programmes with the Syrian authorities under the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) and the MEDA instrument, to invite the European Investment Bank (EIB) not to approve new financing operations in Syria for the time being, to consider suspending further Community assistance to Syria in the light of developments and not to take further steps with regard to the Association Agreement with Syria; supports the set of smart sanctions adopted by the Council, and calls on the Council to take a strong diplomatic initiative to persuade other countries to adopt the same sanctions; takes the view that the Council should continue to extend targeted sanctions to all persons and entities linked to the regime with the view to weakening and isolating them, paving the way for a democratic transition;

10. Strongly supports the EU's diplomatic efforts with its partners in the international community to ensure that the UN Security Council (UNSC) condemns the ongoing violence in Syria, rejects impunity and urges the Syrian authorities to meet the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people; regrets the fact that these efforts have not been successful so far and that a resolution could not be introduced; calls on the EU Member States and the VP/HR to continue working with their international partners to secure the involvement of the UNSC in the situation in Syria and the implementation by the Syrian authorities of their responsibility to protect the Syrian population;

11. Welcomes Turkey's policy of maintaining open borders for Syrian refugees and the rapid mobilisation of the Red Crescent's resources;

12. Welcomes the acknowledgement by the EU of the efforts by Turkey and other regional partners to deal with the various aspects of the crisis, in particular the humanitarian aspects, and states that it will work with them to address the situation in Syria; calls on Turkey and the EU to step up their foreign policy coordination and strongly encourages the pursuit of concerted efforts in support of democratisation and development in the Middle East and North Africa;

13. Calls on the Council and the Commission to immediately provide aid and support to the Turkish and Lebanese authorities in their efforts to manage the humanitarian crisis on their borders with Syria, including by setting up a humanitarian corridor at UN level;

14. Calls on the VP/HR, the Council and the Commission to encourage the emerging democratic opposition movements inside and outside the country; calls, in that connection, for an urgent start to be made on a genuine political dialogue leading to an in-depth democratic transition in Syria;

Yemen

15. Strongly condemns the recent armed attacks in Yemen, including the attack of 3 June 2011 on the presidential compound; calls on all parties to cease all hostilities, respect human rights and abide by a permanent ceasefire;

16. Welcomes Vice-President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi's commitment to respect the ceasefire, to demilitarise Yemen's cities, and to ensure proper protection for any further peaceful protests and demonstrations;

17. Expresses its solidarity with the people of Yemen, welcomes their aspirations for democratic change in their country and supports the efforts of the GCC in as much as these are directed at finding a negotiated solution, which implies the resignation of President Saleh and his of family members who remain in positions of power, within the framework of a more inclusive political system geared towards poverty alleviation and improved living conditions for the majority of the population;

18. Deplores the failure by the Yemeni authorities to ensure the safe passage of diplomats from the Embassy of the United Arab Emirates in Sana'a on 22 May 2011, including the GCC Secretary-General, and the Ambassadors of GCC member states, the EU, the United Kingdom and the United States; calls on the Yemeni authorities to fully respect the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations;

19. Expresses its concern at the lack of any progress reports from the high-level committee appointed by the Yemeni Government to investigate the attack on protestors on 18 March 2011 in Sana'a, in which 54 people were killed and more than 300 injured; reiterates its call on the VP/HR to support the calls for an international independent investigation into the incident;

20. Welcomes the mission of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to Yemen, which assessed the human rights situation in that country and will make recommendations to the Yemeni Government and to the international community;

Bahrain

21. Condemns the repression in Bahrain and urges the immediate and unconditional release of all peaceful demonstrators, including political activists, journalists and human rights defenders, and of the 47 Bahraini doctors and nurses who were acting under professional duty; expresses its strong concern at the life sentences for eight opposition activists and at the 15-year prison sentences for 13 others;

22. Welcomes the lifting of the 'state of national safety' in Bahrain as well as the call made by King Hamad Bin Isa al-Khalifa for a national dialogue; considers that the national dialogue launched by King Hamad can only be possible with the participation of all political forces, including the opposition and civil society, with the aim of paving the way for genuine democracy and political reforms in Bahrain;

23. Calls on the Bahraini authorities to commute the death sentences of Ali Abdullah Hassan al-Sankis and Abdulaziz Abdulridha Ibrahim Hussain, and to reinstate the de facto moratorium on capital punishment;

24. Takes positive note of King Hamad's decision to set up an independent commission to investigate human rights violations during recent government crackdowns on pro-reform protesters; urges full impartiality and transparency for the commission and calls on the Bahraini Government not to interfere in its work;

25. Welcomes the setting-up of a Ministry for Human Rights and Social Development in Bahrain, and calls on that ministry to act in accordance with international human rights standards and obligations;

26. Expresses its concern at the presence of foreign troops under the GCC banner in Bahrain; reiterates its call on the GCC to contribute resources as a regional collective player in order to act constructively and mediate in the interest of peaceful reforms in Bahrain;

Arab world and North Africa

27. Supports the democratic transition process in Egypt and Tunisia, as the first examples of the current process of democratisation and new wave of participation by citizens, and notably youth, in the Arab world; strongly supports the aspirations of people for freedom, human rights and democracy; calls for a transparent, fair and free election process in both countries that takes into account their individual circumstances; calls on the international community to make further efforts to sustain and encourage the process of political reform in the countries of North Africa and the Middle East;

28. Reiterates the commitment of the international community to protect civilians in Libya, including through the intensification of pressure on the Libyan regime, and to support the building of a democratic Libyan state; welcomes the EU's decision to step up its sanctions against the regime by adding six port authorities under the regime's control to the EU asset-freeze list; reiterates its call on Colonel Muammar Mohammed Abu Minyar Gaddafi to relinquish power immediately;

29. Expresses concern at the hardship faced by the people of Libya owing to a shortage of food, lack of access to medical aid and lack of cash flows to pay salaries and to meet various administrative needs; calls on the VP/HR and EU Member States to act urgently to make part of the frozen Libyan assets available to the Transitional National Council, under the authorisation and supervision of the UN Security Council Sanctions Committee, so that emergency needs can be met;

30. Calls on the Council and the VP/HR to take further initiatives to work out a solution to the conflict, taking into account the recent ICC arrest warrant issued against Colonel Gaddafi, his son Saif al-Islam Gaddafi and Abdullah al-Sanussi;

31. Welcomes the process of reforms in Morocco, and in particular the proposed constitutional reform that has been submitted to a referendum, as a step in the right direction for the opening-up of the system of governance, modernisation and democratisation; calls on the political parties in Morocco to play an active part in this process of change; stresses that the public, civil society organisations and political parties should remain at the centre of the continuing implementation process of the reforms, and notes that Morocco was the first country in the region to be granted Advanced Status in relations with the EU;

32. Takes note of the positive announcement by the President of Algeria on the launch of the process of democratisation and on ensuring the better governance of that country, including the lifting of the state of emergency and a planned constitutional reform; underlines the need to accelerate these initiatives and calls for a strong commitment from the Algerian authorities to this process of reforms, which should be inclusive and open to civil society;

33. Welcomes the commitment to political reforms of Jordan, and in particular the review of the Jordanian Constitution and the work of the National Dialogue Committee; commends the efforts made by the Jordanian authorities and emphasises the need for the concrete implementation of reforms; notes that the EU agreed to grant Jordan 'Advanced Status' partnership in 2010;

34. Stresses that the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion is a fundamental human right which should be guaranteed by the authorities; urges the authorities to provide reliable and efficient protection for the religious denominations present in their countries and to ensure the personal safety and physical integrity of members of all religious denominations;

35. Strongly supports the Council's position that the European Neighbourhood Policy will have to be equal to the new challenges in the Southern Neighbourhood; welcomes the commitment of the EU and Member States to accompany and support concrete efforts by the governments genuinely engaged in political and economic reforms, as well as civil societies; welcomes the setting-up of the Task Force for the Southern Mediterranean by the VP/HR;

36. Calls on the Commission and the Council to follow a differentiated approach based on the 'more for more' policy as set out in the Joint Communication of 25 May 2011 with regard to Southern Mediterranean countries, under which real progress on democracy, free and fair elections and, above all, human rights should be rewarded;

37. Calls on the European Union to continue to provide the necessary humanitarian aid to the displaced people of the region, many of whom now live as refugees on the borders of their countries;

38. Welcomes the 'Deauville Partnership' with the people of the region launched by the members of the G8; notes that the first 'Partnership Countries' will be Egypt and Tunisia; calls on the Council and the EU Member Sates to coordinate their efforts with the members of the G8 who stand ready to extend this Partnership to all countries in the region engaging in a transition towards free, democratic and tolerant societies;

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39. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the Government and Parliament of the Syrian Arab Republic, the Government and Parliament of the Republic of Yemen, the Government and Parliament of the Republic of Turkey, the Government and Parliament of the Kingdom of Bahrain, the Transitional National Council, the Government and Parliament of the Kingdom of Morocco, the Government and Parliament of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, the Government and Parliament of the Kingdom of Jordan, the Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt, the Government of the Tunisian Republic, the Secretary-General of the GCC and the Secretary-General of the Union for the Mediterranean.

EU external policies in favour of democratisation

P7_TA(2011)0334

European Parliament resolution of 7 July 2011 on EU external policies in favour of democratisation (2011/2032(INI))

(2013/C 33 E/17)

The European Parliament,

— having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in particular Article 21 thereof, and to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, in particular Article 25 thereof,

— having regard to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child,