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NOTE

from: General Secretariat of the Council
to: Delegations

Subject: Summary record of the meeting of the European Parliament **Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET)** held in Brussels on 22-23 April 2013
Chairs: Mr Brok (EPP, DE), Mr Provera (EFD, IT)

I. Exchange of views with Mohammed Al Isa, Saudi Minister of Justice, on reforms of the judicial system in Saudi Arabia (*In association with the Delegation for relations with the Arab Peninsula*)

The Saudi Minister of Justice presented the reform of the country's judicial system, noting that it had offered the opportunity to strengthen the independence of justice. Justice in Saudi

Arab, he said, was transparent, open to all, objective and independent. It had to be in line with the Constitution that was inspired by Sharia law.

Members questioned the Minister on a number of points. Ms Lochbihler (Greens/EFA, DE) pointed out that Saudi Arabia had not ratified the two UN Conventions and had placed a number of reservations on other human rights instruments. The Minister said that, even if not ratified, they were implemented and placing reservations on treaties was a right for any State under international law. On the death penalty he noted that Saudi Arabia was not the only State to maintain it.

Ms Oomen-Ruijten (PPE, NL) wondered if Sharia law - which did not allow for equal rights for all - could not be replaced by a different, impartial system of law. The Minister replied that any discrimination was forbidden under Sharia law. A number of Members, including Ms Neyts (ALDE, BE) and Mr Atkins (ECR, UK), noted that women in Saudi Arabia were discriminated against and, for example, could not drive. The Minister denied that: he argued that women were an integral part of society, enjoying freedom of expression and opinion, and that they were free to drive. If they did not it was because they did not want to; it was a matter of culture and tradition, not of law, he concluded.

Mr Svensson (EPP, SE) raised the issue of freedom of religion and fact that Christians could not build churches in the country. The Minister compared Saudi Arabia to the Vatican, where mosques could not be built: both were considered sacred lands under the respective religions.

II. Exchange of views with Bob Carr, Australian Foreign Minister, on advancing the EU-Australia partnership in the "Asian Century"

The Australian Minister focused his comments on Australian-Asian relations. He said that revolution in Asia was not only an economic transformation but also a social revolution, with improvements in education, health, gender equality etc. He also insisted that the story was not just about China, because other Asian States, such as Mongolia, were changing dramatically. He mentioned the challenge of security, with a number of ongoing territorial disputes that, in his view, had to be solved according to international law, including (but not exclusively) UNCLOS. Finally he made reference to the growing importance of the ASEAN.

MEPs asked questions about the rise of China, human rights violations in a number of Asian countries, developments in Myanmar/Burma, the fight against terrorism, FTAs and the weight of Europe on the world stage compared to Asia. Minister Carr noted that the rise of China was good for the world. While he acknowledged that rule of law in China still had to be improved, he said that progress was being made and he was confident that the new leadership would continue in the right direction. On Myanmar/Burma he considered that the EU was right in lifting sanctions.

III. Topical debate: the situation in Nigeria, in the presence of John Olorunfemi Onaiyekan, Roman Catholic Cardinal Archbishop of Abuja

The Archbishop of Abuja explained that Nigeria was a religiously divided country, but the two communities - Muslim and Christian - were living together. He felt that very often religious faiths were manipulated for purposes unrelated to religion. In Nigeria groups were targeting Christians and putting pressure on the fragile relations between Muslims and Christians, but, according to the Archbishop, they had no other alternative but to live together. He was confident that in the future a peaceful environment could be restored so that the huge resources of the country could be used in a good way.

The debate that followed focused on persecution of Christians in Nigeria carried out with impunity. Many MEPs wondered who was supporting Boko Haram in their religious and cultural cleansing. Many also questioned what the EU could do to help.

The Archbishop said that he had no political influence but could only pass on the message that different faiths should coexist peacefully. On Boko Haram, he thought that they did not need much external support in terms of money (and had obtained significant quantities of arms following the fall of the regime in Libya). He added that he was sceptical on the amnesty for members of Boko Haram willing to renounce violence: it was intended to convince them to come forward and engage in reconciliation, but the strategy had failed because the killings had not stopped. As far as the EU was concerned, the Archbishop said that it should speak out wherever religious freedom was violated and not recognize dictators.

IV. Exchange of views with Commissioner Georgieva on the situation in Syria and the impact of refugees in Jordan and Lebanon (*Jointly with the Committee on Development*)

Commissioner Georgieva mentioned some figures on the dramatic rise of IDPs in Syria and refugees in the neighbouring countries, pointing out that such figures had not been reached in any recent conflict. She highlighted the spill-over effects and the risks for Europe and the world. She voiced concerns on the depletion of the resilience of Syrian people, with the number of doctors decreasing day after day. She called for a new package of measures and a new comprehensive programme with three main objectives: applying pressure to create more space for humanitarian aid (as the law of war was repeatedly violated in this conflict); delivering on what had been pledged so as to provide resources to those remaining in Syria; and supporting the neighbouring countries that had been destabilized by the flux of refugees. In replying to questions from MEPs, the Commissioner deplored the moral dilemma the EU had to face: increasing the aid to Syria implied not helping other countries in humanitarian crises. On the lifting of sanctions (Ms Gomes (S&D, PT)), she said that their refinement was not aimed at supporting the opposition but rather at helping the Syrian people. On arms, she voiced her concerns that not enough energy was being put in finding a political solution. Some MEPs asked for buffer zones and humanitarian corridors to be established (Ms Sargentini (Greens/EFA, NL), Mr Roatta (EPP, FR)), but the Commissioner replied that those were not good solutions. Buffer zones could only be established if a peace-keeping force were present to ensure their protection, otherwise they would turn into enclaves with more fighting rather than more peace. Syria was too a vast country to have safe humanitarian corridors, so that was not a viable solution either. Ms Koppa wondered if other donors had come forward, as the EU had run out of money. Commissioner Georgieva said that she was in favour of naming and shaming: China offered a tiny amount of money, Russia nothing. Whereas Ms Koppa voiced some doubt on the impact of EU funds, the Commissioner said they were "life saving". Some Members pointed out the particularly difficult situation of Palestinian refugees and the Commissioner reminded them that the EU helped UNRWA.

At the end of the debate, Mr Brok announced that, together with the chairs of the DEVE and BUDG committees, he was going to write a letter to the Council with the aim of increasing financial support for Syrian refugees (see [Annex I](#)).

V. Exchange of views with Fernando Gentilini, EEAS, on the outcome of the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina

This item was added to the agenda at the last minute and was held in camera. See separate document.

VI. Award of the 2005 Sakharov Prize to the Damas de Blanco (*Jointly with the Committee on Development and the Subcommittee on Human Rights and in the presence of Martin Schulz, President of the European Parliament*)

Representatives of the Cuban "Ladies in White" (Damas de Blanco) protest movement were at last able to receive their 2005 Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought, as Cuba had finally lifted a travel ban. However, as one of the ladies had said, their being able to receive the prize was not thanks to the good will of the government, but because of international pressure on Havana. In his address, President Schulz deplored the fact that Cuba was the only Latin America country where political opposition was still forbidden, and considered that repression was a sign of weakness, not of strength. The representatives of political groups congratulated the ladies on their prize and praised them for the courage they had demonstrated.

VII. Exchange of views with Anne E. Jensen, Rapporteur of the Committee on Budgets, on the 2014 Budget

Ms Jensen (ALDE, DK) recalled the guidelines voted for in Strasbourg in March, in particular the call for a sufficient and realistic level of payments, and the political priorities set by the EP, i.e. youth unemployment and the 2020 strategy. She hoped that an agreement on the MFF could be found.

In the absence of the AFET rapporteur, no debate followed.

VIII. Reports

a) Annual Report 2011 on the Protection of EU's Financial Interests - Fight against fraud

AFET/7/11213, 2012/2285(INI) COM(2012)0408

Rapporteur for the opinion: Renate Weber (ALDE, RO)

Responsible: CONT – Derek Vaughan (S&D)

Opinions: AFET –

BUDG – Decision: no opinion

REGI – Decision: no opinion

AGRI – Janusz Wojciechowski (ECR)

PECH – Decision: no opinion

- Deadline for tabling amendments: 18 April 2013, 12.00

Ms Neyts (ALDE, BE), speaking on behalf of the rapporteur Ms Weber, expressed her position on the few amendments that were tabled.

b) Recommendation to the Council, the Commission and the EEAS on the negotiations for an EU-Malaysia partnership and cooperation agreement

AFET/7/12224, 2013/2052(INI)

Rapporteur: Emilio Menéndez del Valle (S&D, ES)

Responsible: AFET –

Opinions: DEVE – Decision: no opinion

INTA – Niccolò Rinaldi (ALDE)

- Deadline for tabling amendments: 7 May 2013, 12.00

The rapporteur outlined the main features of its recommendation that praises Malaysia for some positive achievements and calls for further improvements in fields such as inter-faith dialogue and fundamental freedom. The shadow rapporteurs from the EPP (Mr Lisek (EPP, PL) and Ms Gomes (S&D, PT)), both welcomed the text and called for the strengthening of relations with a country that is a more and more important partner in the region. The representative of the EEAS said that the PCA was an instrument to engage on a very broad spectrum of issues and he welcomed the EP's encouragement.

IX. Votes

a) Agreement between the EU and the Republic of Turkey on the readmission of persons residing without authorisation

AFET/7/09963, *** 2012/0122(NLE) COM(2012)0239

Rapporteur for the opinion: Ria Oomen-Ruijten (PPE, NL)

Responsible: LIBE – Renate Sommer (PPE)

Opinions: AFET –

The opinion was adopted by 34 votes in favour and 5 against.

b) Arms export: implementation of Council Common Position 2008/944/CFSP

AFET/7/11287, 2012/2303(INI)

Rapporteur: Sabine Lösing (GUE/NGL, DE)

Responsible: AFET –

The initiative report was rejected by 49 votes against 1, with 2 abstentions.

c) Recommendation to the EEAS and to the Council on the 2013 review of the organisation and the functioning of the EEAS

AFET/7/10939, 2012/2253(INI)

Rapporteur: Elmar Brok (EPP, DE)

Corapporteur(s): Roberto Gualtieri (S&D, IT)

Responsible: AFET –

Opinions: DEVE – Birgit Schnieber-Jastram (PPE)

BUDG – Nadezhda Neynsky (PPE)

CONT – Ivailo Kalfin (S&D)

ENVI – Decision: no opinion

JURI – Bernhard Rapkay (S&D)

The debate that preceded the vote focused on three main issues.

Firstly, the request from the Greens to create a new directorate for crisis management. This proposal met with opposition from the rapporteur, Mr Brok, who felt that a new structure was not needed. Instead, cooperation between existing entities had to be strengthened.

Secondly, the request - also from the Greens - to have focal points in EU delegations for different matters, such as climate change or human rights. A number of MEPs and the EEAS representative warned against the proliferation of specific posts, not only for cost-related reasons but also because it would not be conducive to better internal coordination.

Finally, the issue of geographical balance in the EEAS staff was raised. Mr Saryusz-Wolski (EPP, PL) complained that his amendments were not reflected in the compromise and that, as a consequence, the EP was back-tracking from its 2010 position. The EEAS representative acknowledged that there was not yet a true geographical balance in the EEAS staff, but that this situation was inherited from the Council and Commission when their staff were transferred to the EEAS. Mr Brok also pointed out that this was not only a problem of new Member States because Germany, for example, was very much underrepresented in the EEAS staff. He also warned against the growing trend of Member States trying to be involved in the appointment of deputy heads of delegation, which was making the recruitment procedure more and more intergovernmental.

On a more general level, the ECR group expressed three different opinions on the EEAS. For Mr Van Orden (ECR, UK), the EEAS was an unnecessary luxury. Mr Atkins (ECR, UK) declared himself to be agnostic, rather than hostile, to the EEAS and his main concern was its cost. Mr Tannock (ECR, UK), the coordinator of the group, finally expressed the official group's position: the EEAS had to be supported because it was in a position to do things that single Member States could not do. The Belgrade-Pristina dialogue and the fight against piracy were some examples. But the group insisted on EEAS budget neutrality. The report was adopted by 38 votes in favour, 12 against and 1 abstention.

Mr Brok announced that the recommendation would be on the agenda of the plenary in June, rather than in May. He added that in the meantime some provisions of the recommendation could be fine-tuned so as to take into account, for example, some amendments from the ALDE group that had been rejected.

X. Debriefing by Elmar Brok on the Delegation of the Committee on Foreign Affairs to Brazil on 2-5 April 2013

It was agreed that Mr Brok would circulate a written report by the delegation rather than debate it at the meeting. Mr Brok called for a more permanent discussion with Brazil, as the visit had revealed a great deal of interest, but also of misunderstanding of the EU on the part of Brazil. Mr Tannock regretted that the Brazil embassy in Brussels never tried to reach out, but Mr Brok argued that, under the present circumstances, with Brazil rather annoyed by the US and trying not to be looked at only in the BRICS framework, the country was more likely to look more to Europe.

XI. Debriefing by Elmar Brok on the conclusions of the Inter-Parliamentary Conference for the CFSP and the CSDP in Dublin on 24-25 March 2013

Mr Brok briefed the committee on the second meeting of the conference, announcing that the next meeting would take place in Lithuania in September and would focus on the preparation of the December European Council on defence.

The Chair of the committee on foreign affairs of the Irish parliament said that, although the conference was still in its development stage, it worked well, in particular the structure of parallel workshops. Both he and Mr Brok mentioned the ad hoc committee that was set up at the Cyprus conference to reflect on working methods.

Following an intervention by The Earl of Dartmouth (EFD, UK), who was strongly critical of the very existence of the CSDP, Mr Brok and Mr Danjean (EPP, FR) reminded him that this policy had its legal basis in the treaty of Lisbon itself and that its existence in no way threatened NATO.

XII. Chair's announcements

Mr Brok announced that an extraordinary meeting of AFET would take place on 27 May, to have an exchange of views with the UNGA President, Mr Jeremić.

He also proposed issuing a press release on the abduction of Syriac Orthodox and Greek Orthodox bishops of Aleppo (see [Annex II](#)).

XIII. Next meeting(s)

6 May 2013, 15.00 – 18.30 (Brussels)

7 May 2013, 17.00 – 18.30 (Brussels)

Press release

Elmar Brok declares:

Dear Colleagues,

Commissioner Georgieva is together with us today to discuss the **humanitarian situation in Syria and the impact of refugees in Jordan and Lebanon**.

Commissioner Georgieva, last week France's foreign Minister **Laurent FABIUS** expressed to the members of this committee deep **concerns about the situation in Syria and the impact on neighbouring countries**.

According to the United Nations, **70 000 people have been killed** in the Syrian crisis so far. Other sources indicate that the number could already have reached 90 000. There are more than 4 million internally displaced persons in Syria.

The number of **Syrian refugees**, including Palestinian refugees, in Lebanon and Jordan now amounts to **10% of the population in Lebanon** and to **8% of the population in Jordan**.

Assistance to such refugees requires tremendous economic resources. In **Jordan** alone the **cost of assistance** to Syrian refugees is estimated at **3% of the GDP**.

The high number of refugees in Lebanon and Jordan could **put the stability of Lebanon and Jordan at great risk**. These refugees may have to stay in Lebanon and Jordan for a long time and more refugees may be forced to leave Syria.

Dear Colleagues, it is clear from the debate that adequate humanitarian assistance to Syria refugees in Lebanon and Jordan is essential not only for the well being of the refugees, but to protect Lebanon and Jordan from any risk of instability.

The risk of contagion from Syria into Lebanon and Jordan is too high to leave such countries alone at this very difficult time. The EU must provide its support to these countries which are facing a real humanitarian crisis.

I would therefore propose a letter signed by the AFET, DEVE and BUDG Chairs **to the Foreign Ministers and Finance Ministers of all Member States** stressing the need to mobilise as soon as possible **adequate financial resources to support Lebanon and Jordan**.

Urgent request for the release of Syrian bishops

Brussels 23 April 2013

Urgent request for the release of Syrian bishops

At today's meeting, the Foreign Affairs Committee, on a proposal by the Chair Elmar Brok, called for the immediate release of the Syriac Orthodox and Greek Orthodox bishops of Aleppo. The committee stressed that their abduction is unacceptable and inexcusable, regardless who is responsible for it.

Mr Brok asked the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Vice-President of the EU Commission, Catherine Ashton, to take urgent action. Should representatives of the Syrian opposition be responsible for this, it should be made clear to them that they are putting at stake European and international support, especially after the decision of the Council on Monday.

Baroness Ashton has already expressed her support.
