



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

Brussels, 18 January 2013

5518/13

PE 23

NOTE

from:	General Secretariat
to:	Delegations
Subject:	Joint debate - EU-Iraq partnership and cooperation agreement , Plenary session of the European Parliament, 16 January 2013

On behalf of the rapporteur, Mr MAURO (PPE, IT), Mr SALAFRANCA SANCHEZ-NEYRA (PPE, ES) presented the report which recommends that the European Parliament give its consent to the conclusion of a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the European Union and its Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Iraq, of the other part. He said that the partnership and cooperation agreement between the EU and Iraq, the first of its kind, was important for the EU from a strategic point of view and would constitute a clear signal to Iraq on the need to improve respect for human rights. He said that Iraq was still in trouble and the transition to democracy was not complete. The EU should therefore help the country to strengthen its economic infrastructure and to guarantee development and peace. Mr SALAFRANCA stressed that the situation in respect of human rights and democracy in Iraq was clearly unsatisfactory and the UE was very well aware of this, in particular as regards religious discrimination and the rights of Christians, the rights of minorities, the situation of women, freedom of the press and the death penalty. He said that the agreement would help to achieve major improvements in Iraq.

On behalf of the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Ms Catherine Ashton, Ms Lucinda CREIGHTON, Minister of State for European Affairs of Ireland, delivered the statement set out in the annex.

Ms BADIA I CUTCHET (S&D, ES), rapporteur for opinion of the Committee on International Trade, said that EU access to the Iraqi market would be improved as a result of this important agreement. She stressed that the agreement required compliance with World Trade Organisation's rules.

On behalf of the political groups, the following speakers took the floor:

Ms SAIFI (EPP, FR) supported the agreement, saying that it would be a new commitment by the two parties. She felt that Iraq was making progress towards democracy but there were still a number of issues giving cause for concern.

Ms KOPPA (S&D, EL) said that the agreement would represent both a challenge and a new opportunity for Iraq and called on the EU to be vigilant with regard to respect for human rights and the efforts required by the Iraqi authorities to improve the social situation of the population as a whole.

Mr KACIN (ALDE, SI) expressed appreciation for the new impetus provided by the Irish Presidency for cooperation with Iraq and referred to the difficult context arising from the situation in Syria and Mali. He called for the EU delegation in Iraq to be strengthened.

On behalf of the Greens, Ms CRONBERG (Green/EFA, FI) welcomed the agreement but expressed concern about human rights issues, especially the situation of minorities and women, and the violence and executions in Iraq. She called for a social responsibility clause in order to improve the situation of the population as a whole.

Mr STEVENSON (ECR, UK), however, called for the agreement to be rejected, on the grounds that the agreement favoured trade over human rights, which was unacceptable. Mr BELDER (EFD, NL) also expressed scepticism. Speaking on behalf of the GUE/NGL group, Mr MEYER (ES) was critical of the agreement and regretted the fact that it focused on business interests rather than the social situation, which was currently more difficult than before the war. Mr GRIFFIN (NI, UK) was also sceptical and felt that the disastrous situation in the country showed that the war had been a failure.

In the subsequent debate, speakers in general gave a cautious welcome to the agreement with Iraq. They said that it would enable Iraq to achieve stability and would support its institutions and economy. However, all speakers expressed very serious concerns over the human rights situation in Iraq. Several members of the ECR and EFD groups, including many Polish MEPs, stressed that the situation of the Christian minority in Iraq was unacceptable and called for this issue to be closely monitored.

In her concluding remarks, Ms Lucinda CREIGHTON pointed out that the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement should become the backbone of EU-Iraq relations and would provide the EU with a key tool for promoting and defending its interests and values. She felt that this was a unique opportunity for the EU to develop ties with a country that had the potential to become a key player in the changing Middle East.

The non-legislative resolution and the recommendation that the European Parliament should give its consent to the agreement were adopted in plenary (by a majority vote) on 17 January 2013.

**Statement by Ms Lucinda CREIGHTON, Minister of State for European Affairs of Ireland,
on behalf of the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for
Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Ms Catherine Ashton**

Mr President,

Honourable Members,

- **Let me first congratulate the Rapporteur**, Mr Mauro, and the European Parliament for this excellent and comprehensive report on the EU-Iraq Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, which highlights the main issues and challenges in the EU's relations with Iraq. While focusing on the Agreement, the report also looks into the wider context and the best ways to promote EU interests and European values in Iraq.
- The EU has a **long-standing commitment to support Iraq in its reconstruction and transition to democracy**, with the objective of helping to build a stable, prosperous and democratic Iraq, re-integrated in regional and global structures. The EU has been a major donor to Iraq, providing support in many areas, such as basic services, assistance to refugees and displaced persons, as well as the strengthening of the political system, the rule of law and the protection of human rights (for example, through a CSDP rule of law EUJUSTLEX mission). EU overall support to Iraq since 2003 has amounted to over 1 billion euro, and this without counting the bilateral contributions of Member States.
- With the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, we have opened a **new chapter of our bilateral relationship**. This is the first such agreement to frame the relations between the EU and Iraq - providing a clear legal basis and a comprehensive institutional structure.
- The HRVP was very pleased to sign in May last year, with Iraqi Foreign Minister Zebari, this historic agreement that is good for Iraq, good for the EU, and good for our long term relationship. We are now looking forward to working with Iraq on its implementation.
- That is what the Agreement is about: **the start of a new partnership**, sealing our common wish to work together on a whole range of issues where we both have much to gain. But also providing a platform to talk about difficult issues, including the promotion of security, the cooperation in countering terrorism and arms proliferation and the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The Agreement also provides for cooperation in support of Iraq's accession to the International Criminal Court.
- We are committed to boosting trade and investment between the EU and Iraq. Economics meets politics is a formula dear to the HRVP: increased trade and investment will be crucial to back the work on the political front to support Iraq's transformation into a stable and prosperous democratic nation. The Agreement will support Iraq's reform and development efforts and facilitate its integration into the wider international economy. It should also be a stepping stone to Iraq's WTO accession, supporting its adaptation to WTO rules and practice, The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Iraq is a non-preferential agreement based on Most Favoured Nation principles. It offers very substantial market access to the EU and some preferential elements in public procurement, services and investments.

- The Agreement also provides ample opportunities for enhanced cooperation on sectoral policies across the board, from energy and environment to education and innovation. Let me stress the example of energy, where the EU can help Iraq to harness its enormous energy potential, while Iraq can contribute to the diversification of the EU's energy supply and to its energy security as it is a potential source country for the Southern Corridor.
- There was a commitment with Minister Hoshyar Zebari during the signature event in May for the **rapid implementation of the main parts of the Agreement** that are provisionally applicable pending ratification. The EEAS is discussing with Iraqi counterparts the way forward so that progress is made as soon as possible.
- In this respect, I would also like to emphasise the important **role of the European Parliament**. The Parliamentary Cooperation Committee should be an important forum for the European and Iraqi Parliaments, providing excellent opportunities to exchange on democratic practice and provide further support to Iraq's transition.
- **This partnership is not without challenges**. Iraq is a young democracy, and the road ahead will not always be smooth. Iraq has made considerable progress in its transition towards democracy, but continues to face serious political, security, and socio-economic challenges. The level of violence in Iraq is still unacceptably high and recently tensions between the major political forces (Shiia, Sunni and Kurdish) are on the rise. This carries a risk of re-igniting sectarian tensions in Iraq, and threatens the fragile balance that the 'national partnership government' is based on. It also slows down the necessary reforms as well as socio-economic progress. The **human rights** situation continues to be of serious concern, with the increased use of the death penalty an unsatisfactory situation for women and vulnerable groups, including minorities.
- Camp Ashraf remains an important and sensitive issue. There has been some progress, but there are still a number of challenges in the critical process facilitated by the UN with our full support. The EU is also committed to supporting the UN process with a contribution of €12 M to support the operations of the UN monitors and the UNHCR refugee status determination process
- **The HRVP and member states all follow the recent developments in Iraq with concern**. It is in everybody's interest to see a stable, democratic and prosperous Iraq, where the political system is underpinned by a strengthened rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, therefore arrives at a very timely moment, since it creates a platform and increases the EU leverage to address these concerns with Iraqi counterparts.
- We must see Iraq's transition also in the **regional context** – in particular with respect to the dramatic and violent developments unfolding across the border in Syria but also Iran's increasing influence. This adds to the difficulty of Iraq's democratic endeavours – but makes its success even more important.
- Let me conclude by stressing that this agreement is above all, a symbol of the EU's wish to be a **constructive partner** for Iraq in its democratic endeavours. It brings together the EU and its Member States and is the main instrument to show the EU's unified determination to build a long-term partnership with a **stable and democratic Iraq**, not just for today or tomorrow, but for many years to come.