



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

Brussels, 11 March 2013

7377/13

**PE 125
COHOM 39
COASI 37
COMEM 57
ASIE 10
CHINE 2
GOLFE 1
FYROM 1**

NOTE

from: General Secretariat of the Council
to: Delegations

Subject: Summary record of the meeting of the European Parliament **Subcommittee on Human Rights** on 7 March 2013

The meeting was chaired by Mrs Lochbihler, Greens, DE.

Item 1

The agenda was adopted.

Item 2

Minutes of the meeting of 23-24 January 2013 were approved.

Item 3. Chair's announcements

The Chair announced that the report on the latest Human Rights Council in Geneva will be published in April. She also reported on the drafting of a letter to the Chair of ITER on behalf of the subcommittee concerning the difficult human rights situation in Myanmar. This letter should encourage the committee to keep the item on the agenda of EU-Myanmar negotiations.

The Chair also highlighted that for the first time since the beginning of Prime Minister Abe's government, three people had been executed in Japan. She also informed colleagues that the Lithuanian ambassador to the EU had requested a meeting to discuss the priorities of the upcoming Presidency.

Item 4. Feedback on the delegation to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (14-15 February 2013)

Mr Richard Howitt, S&D, UK, reported on the delegation to FYROM, carried out - the Chair remarked- despite the difficulties posed by the recent boycott of parliamentary activities by the opposition party. Mr Howitt highlighted that the agreement between the two main parties was brokered successfully and that it entailed a commitment to a series of political reforms and dialogues. The EU was an intrinsic part of the deal reached, and would be instrumental in the coming weeks. In particular, Mr Howitt welcomed the road map towards freedom of expression and noted that the Commissioner's report on accession talks would be submitted in April. He expressed concerns that the pressures put on accession countries might divert attention from ethnic minorities issues. He concluded that FYROM, being a small country, deserved to be a priority in accession talks.

A representative of the Commission (DG Enlargement) took the floor to highlight that the recent political impasse had only briefly sidetracked negotiations, but that enlargement discussions continued. The Spring Report to the Council would mention progress on human rights and especially freedom of expression.

Mr Kazak, ALDE, BG criticised the delegation for not devoting any attention to discriminated groups, notably the Bulgarian minority. Mr Howitt reported that the delegation had met with the Bulgarian cultural club in the course of a previous visit and that the discrimination of national minorities remained a concern. The situation, albeit not perfect, was improving, and FYROM had demonstrated its potential in overcoming a serious crisis.

Item 5. Exchange of views with Tibetan Lama, Kirti Rinpoche (Kirti Monastery) on the human rights situation in Tibet

The Chair noted that on 27 February a group of prominent scholars and activists wrote an open letter to persuade the Chinese government to ratify the international convention on civil and political rights signed in 1998. She also recalled that, regrettably, there have been about 100 self-immolations by Tibetan monks since 2009.

Lama Kirti Rinpoche took the floor to denounce the deteriorating human rights situation in Tibet. Because of the Chinese occupation, Tibetan identity was being extinguished- due to policies that foresaw birth control, a denial of healthcare facilities, the transfer of Han population to Tibet and the destruction of the Tibetan language and culture. Families and friends of self-immolators, and the few survivors of self-immolations, were being persecuted and tortured. The Lama pleaded for the European Parliament to put pressure on the Chinese government to respect international law and the rights of the Tibetan minority.

During the subsequent exchange of views, Mr Roatta, PPE, FR, highlighted that the European Parliament is taking the Tibetan situation very seriously, and that in the report tabled for discussions on EU-China relations at next week's plenary session, human rights were on the agenda. A representative of the EEAS further noted that the High Representative has issued several statements on Tibet, albeit to no avail.

Questions focused first on the issue of forced marriage between Tibetan women and Han men (Mr Roatta). Then Mrs Lichtenberger, Greens, AT asked about the respect of Tibetan traditions in the schooling system, the diversion of rivers and the forced settlement of nomads in Tibetan territories or adjacent regions. Mr Donski, ALDE, LT, drew a parallelism between the immolations of 1972 in Lithuania and the Tibetan immolations, and expressed the concern that the high number of immolations since 2009 may cause desensitisation of the public.

The Lama was not aware of any instances of forced marriage in Tibet. He did remark however that Tibetan is only taught in language classes and that Chinese is used for all other subjects. He called on the international community to intervene to prevent the extinction of Tibetan language and identity. He confirmed also that rivers are being diverted and nomads forced to settle. The social and economic consequences for Tibetan people and their neighbours were serious.

He thanked the EU for all that has been done so far, but urged for more. All this- he pleaded- needs to be translated into action.

Item 6. Exchange of views with a delegation from the Bahrain Council of Representatives (jointly with the Committee on Foreign Affairs)

Mr Salafranca, EPP, ES, Chair of AFET, opened the session with a remark concerning the recent political dialogue in Bahrain, a first important step in the transition to democracy. However, he underlined, many concerns remained, especially regarding the detention of political prisoners and the freedom of the media.

A member of the Bahrain Council of representatives detailed a number of reforms that are currently being implemented in Bahrain to improve the human rights situation - inquiries are going on, there is a new Minister for Human Rights, there has been a renewed opening towards NGOs and many observers from the international community have been welcomed in the country.

Other members of Bahrain Council of Representatives stated that the media market in Bahrain is open and that Members of the Council have no power to interfere with the judiciary system for the release of political prisoners. They also remarked that the European Union was held up as an example for the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf for closer cooperation between countries.

A question and answer session followed. Mr Roatta asked about Iranian influence on Bahrain's internal politics- which the Bahrain's representatives said was considerable and unwelcome. Mr Martin, S&D, UK remarked that in order to ease ethnic tensions it would be strategic to ensure an even representation between Sunni and Shia in the security forces - a strategy that has proven successful with Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland. Mr Tannock encouraged his colleagues to appreciate the extent of the reforms that Bahrain had undertaken and the progress being made towards democracy. Mrs Andrikiene, PPE, LT instead stated the need for a zero tolerance approach on torture, and asked further clarification concerning the national dialogue recently started. Mr Howitt expressed strong disagreement with Mr Tannock, reiterating that although Bahrain's willingness to engage in dialogue is welcomed, doubts remain concerning the human rights situation in the country. He mentioned instances of pressure on journalists and flawed trials- the progress achieved so far was not sufficient.

Bahraini representatives acknowledged that problems remained and more needed to be done. Notwithstanding this, the speed of reform and progress was the fastest the government could achieve. Furthermore, it was noted that misreporting by the press escapes government control- journalists are under similar pressures as in Europe, but that does not in itself imply a lack of freedom of expression.
