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NOTE

from : General Secretariat of the Council
To : Delegations

Subject: Summary of the meeting of the **Foreign Affairs Committee (AFET) of the European Parliament**, Brussels, 31 January 2012

The meeting was chaired by Mr Brok (EPP, DE) and Mr Paşcu (S&D, RO).

I. Exchange of views with Abdul Latif Bin Rashid Al Zayani, Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC), on EU-GCC relations

In his introductory statement, Mr Al Zayani, after recalling that the GCC now had 30 years of existence to celebrate, considered that the GCC had developed into a robust alliance in a challenging regional landscape and that it could learn from the EU's experiences. He pinpointed the advantages of the GCC and outlined the various areas of activity of the GCC, which aimed at economic diversity/ development from a resources-led to knowledge-led economy.

Mr Al Zayani stressed that a high level of human development was the highest strategic goal of the GCC.

On the topic of oil/gas resources security, he reported that the GCC was aware of the threats of organised crime and terrorism and announced that the GCC would apply the same reasoning as regards aggression as within NATO.

He added that though it had been appreciated that the security in the region had been ensured by an international presence in the past, GCC members were now striving to enhance their cooperation and security structures. He assured AFET Members that the GCC would work with the international community on concerns with regard to Iran. Mr Al Zayani welcomed the fact that the GCC initiative for Yemen was signed, though still much had to be done. Finally, he added that the GCC also fully supported the Arab League initiative in Syria.

In reaction to the statement by Mr Al Zayani, nearly all Members taking the floor asked questions relating to human rights (women, trade unions, etc.) in GCC member states. Several Members mentioned the situation in Bahrain and the cases of Iran and Syria.

Because of time constraints, Mr Al Zayani could not reply to all these questions. He said that the GCC-EU relationship was important and had to be consolidated. Regarding energy security, he recognised that it was an issue and that it had to be made certain that joint collaborative efforts would protect and ensure receipt of oil/gas. With regard to the attempt by Iran to shut the Strait of Hormuz, Mr Al Zayani said that joint efforts were essential and that threats were unwise as they would only lead to trouble and that the solution would be international and in accordance with international law. On Bahrain, he responded that the way the issue was dealt with was very satisfactory. He reported that the King had formed an unprecedented independent inquiry committee, which had presented a report that was accepted by the King. He added that the recommendations of the report were implemented and that the government was committed to ensuring that justice would be served. According to him, this was a model of how a conflict could be solved. Finally, he was of the view that the human rights situation was on the right track.

II. Trade for Change: The EU Trade and Investment Strategy for the Southern Mediterranean following the Arab Spring revolutions (AFET/7/06738, 2011/2113(INI))

- Rapporteur for the opinion: Godelieve Quisthoudt-Rowohl (EPP)
- Responsible: INTA – Niccolò Rinaldi (ALDE)
- Consideration of draft opinion
- Consideration of amendments

The rapporteur for the opinion said that after the Arab Spring the EU should assume its responsibilities. She briefly presented the opinion, which focussed on subjects such as freedoms, democracy/democratic development, stability thanks to economic prosperity, etc.

She also informed Members that she already had drafted some compromise amendments.

The draft opinion was in general welcomed by Members. Several speakers asked for an additional impact assessment of the consequences of the free trade area. Several Members stressed the view that the EU should come forward with concrete proposals. Mr Panzeri (S&D, IT) suggested a scoreboard of the free trade process. Ms Romero López (S&D, ES) asked for special treatment for agricultural products and some speakers considered that the mistakes of the European agricultural policy should not be repeated. Mr Meyer (GUE/NGL, ES) underlined that social rights had also to be taken into account, while Mr Millán Mon (EPP, ES) referred to the services industry. Ms Gomes (S&D, PT) suggested looking for synergies and insisted on democracy and the rule of law.

The rapporteur concluded the exchange of views by stating that the EU should indeed help the southern neighbouring countries to avoid making the same mistakes made by the EU. She agreed that the EU had to ask for democracy and the rule of law and agreed with the idea of transitional periods for some products, though this did not concern the AFET opinion. For formal reasons, she suggested that further changes to be made in the form of oral amendments, and Members agreed to this proposal.

III. European Parliament resolution on the 2011 progress report on Iceland (AFET/7/07419)

- Rapporteur: Cristian Dan Preda (EPP)
- Consideration of draft motion for a resolution
- Consideration of amendments

The rapporteur recalled that he had tabled five compromise amendments (constitutional reform, political division over accession, relationship with EU, reforms to be adopted for accession and open/closing chapters); whilst he also made clear that the amendments aiming at ending the accession process were not acceptable to him.

The draft resolution was welcomed in general, and Members taking the floor put questions to the rapporteur relating to (i) Icelandic opposition to EU accession and (ii) the Arctic. Mr Schulz (Greens/EFA, DE) considered that the conclusion of the negotiations should be without any pressure and endorsed by referendum.

Ms Andrikiene (EPP, LT) hoped that the reshuffle of the Icelandic government would have some new positive impact on the EU accession issue. Mr Panzeri hoped that under the Danish Presidency progress would be made, while Mr Van Baalen (ALDE, NL) said that Iceland should be clear about its obligations (Icesafe).

In reply, the rapporteur explained that among the reasons for the opposition to Iceland acceding to the EU were a feeling in favour of self-sufficiency, a preference for isolation and for re-strengthening Icelandic currency. His view was that EU involvement in the Arctic issue was well regarded in Iceland, though some opponents in Iceland mistrusted the EU. He also confirmed that there would be a referendum on accession.

IV. Recommendation to the Council, Commission and the EEAS on the negotiations of the EU-Armenia Association Agreement (AFET/7/08278, 2011/2315(INI))

- Rapporteur: Tomasz Piotr Poręba (ECR)
- Responsible: AFET
- Opinions: INTA
- Consideration of draft report

The rapporteur sketched the broad outlines of his report, which pinpointed areas of good progress and areas where progress was still needed (judiciary, openness of parliament, etc.). He also said that the overall region had been taken into account and, in his view; Armenia wanted the EU to be more present in the region. As regards the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, he said that though it was still an issue the draft report deliberately did not include detailed provisions.

In general, speakers taking the floor supported the draft report and only wanted a few further elements to be added to it (e.g. human rights/fundamental freedoms and environmental protection (Ms Lunacek (Greens/EFA, AT))). Several speakers considered that the report on the EU-Armenia Association Agreement negotiations and the report on the EU-Azerbaijan Association Agreement negotiations should be dealt with at the same time, in contrast to past procedure. However, the rapporteur's approach towards the Nagorno-Karabakh issue was questioned by several speakers, who asked for concrete demands by the Parliament in this regard.

Mr Arlacchi (S&D, IT) considered that the association negotiations had to be linked to the Nagorno-Karabakh issue and the Parliament should ask for concrete progress, while Mr Vigenin (S&D, BG) said that the Parliament had to be careful about linking the negotiations to this issue, though a strong message had to be sent. Mr Mirsky (S&D, LV) was of the opinion that the EU had to act as a catalyst. Mr Vajgl (ALDE, SI) defended the view that the Minsk group did not have enough tools to deliver and that the issue needed to be dealt with in accordance with international law. Some speakers expressed their concerns about the arms race between the parties concerned.

The rapporteur could agree with most of the comments, though on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue he said that the Parliament had to be cautious, as it could not solve the problem. In his view, the Parliament should limit itself to giving an objective description of the circumstances and suggesting recommendations without going into much detail.

V. Recommendation to the Council, Commission and the EEAS on the negotiations of the EU-Azerbaijan Association Agreement (AFET/7/08279, 2011/2316(INI))

- Rapporteur: Anneli Jäätteenmäki (ALDE)
- Responsible: AFET
- Opinions: INTA
- Consideration of draft report

The rapporteur stressed Azerbaijan's economic development and said that energy issues would be the locomotive for EU's relations with Azerbaijan. She considered that despite shared interests, the relationship must also cover human rights, which were problematic. She defended the point of view that the EU had to look at its possible role with regard to the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, as the Minsk group had failed. She also criticised the arms race between the two parties.

Mr Kirilov (S&D, BG) supported the idea of the EU playing a role in the Minsk group, while Ms Macovei (EPP, RO) considered that the Nagorno-Karabakh issue should be dealt with in accordance with international law and with the support of confidence-building measures.

Ms Lunacek stressed that additional elements pertaining to human rights and disarmament had to be included in the report.

The rapporteur concluded by saying that she would aim at finding the right balance.

VI. Date and venue of next meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for 6 February 2012 (p.m.) in Brussels.
