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NOTE

from: General Secretariat of the Council
to: Delegations

Subject: Partial summary record of the meeting of the European Parliament **Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET)** held in Brussels on 22-23 September 2014, items 4, 5, 8, and 10, 11, 12 and 14 on the agenda

The Committee, chaired by Elmar BROK (EPP, DE) and Javier COUSO PERMUY (GUE/NGL, ES), discussed the EU-Moldova Association Agreement and held two exchanges of views: the first one with EEAS representatives on crises in Ukraine, Libya, and Iraq / Syria; the second one with Robert TURNER, Director of UNWRA Operations in Gaza. The presentation of the 2014 SAKHAROV Prize nominees also featured on the agenda of AFET, in a joint meeting with the Committee on Development and the Subcommittee on Human Rights.

Agenda items 4 and 5

Association Agreement between the European Union and its Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Moldova, of the other part

The committee discussed the draft resolution recommending that the Parliament give its consent to the conclusion of the EU-Moldova Association Agreement, as well as the draft motion for a resolution accompanying it (rapporteur: Petras AUSTREVICIUS, ALDE, LT).

The chair explained that the Agreement had been ratified by the Moldovan Parliament, and that it should be ratified by the European Parliament before the Moldovan parliamentary elections scheduled for 30 November. He set the following schedule:

- 25 September: deadline for amendments;
- 16 October: vote in AFET;
- 12-13 November: vote in mini-plenary.

All the groups, except for GUE/NGL (which was divided) and EFDD, generally supported the draft resolutions, in particular:

- The EPP and ALDE stressed the need to help the Moldovan government pursue reforms.
- The EPP called on the Commission to continue initiatives aimed at countering the effects of the Russian embargo on Moldovan products.

There was broad support on the recommendation to give consent to the Agreement, with the exception of some members of GUE/NGL who considered that ratification should not be hurried through. On the contrary, other GUE/NGL members stressed the need for ratification to occur before the elections in Moldova, but urged the EU to implement transitional provisions in order to limit the social consequences stemming from the competitive disadvantage of Moldovan companies.

There was disagreement between the groups on the following points:

- To what extent the resolution should refer to Article 49 TEU: the rapporteur underlined that point 3 of the draft resolution mentioned "the European perspective" of Moldova, while Michael GAHLER (EPP, DE) considered that any references to Article 49 TEU should remain cautious. Helmut SCHOLZ (GUE/NGL, DE) said that the resolution should, in his view, clearly reflect that enlargement would not be desired by the EU. The chair considered the current provision of the draft resolution to be a good compromise.
- Settlement of the Transnistria conflict: while the draft resolution stated that the 5+2 framework for negotiations had failed and called on the EU to play a greater role in the settlement, S&D considered that the "5+2" format should remain the framework for the process. GUE/NGL took the view that the EU position on this issue should be expressed more clearly in the resolution.

- In line with the draft resolution, S&D stressed the importance of the visa-free regime for Moldovan citizens, while ALDE called for some controls to avoid criminals entering the EU. The chair stressed the importance of the issue with regard to corruption.

Finally, the EPP, S&D and EFDD suggested that the EP send a monitoring mission to observe the elections in November.

At the end of the discussion, the chair provided an indicative schedule for the Association Agreement with Georgia:

- 6 October and 4 November: discussion in AFET;
- 17 November: vote in AFET;
- week starting 15 December: plenary vote.

Agenda item 8

Exchange of views on topical issues, follow-up on adopted resolutions:

- **Ukraine: political situation and ratification of the Association Agreement**
- **Iraq-Syria and Libya**

Ukraine

In his presentation of the state of play on Ukraine, a representative of the EEAS hoped that the elections on 26 October 2014 would provide the government with a stable majority in the *Rada*. The chair, supported by the EPP, ECR, ALDE and EFDD indicated that a request would be sent to the EP Conference of Presidents to increase the number of MEPs composing the mission planned to monitor the elections. ALDE and EFDD specified that the composition of such delegation should reflect the various views. Andrej PLENKOVIC (EPP, HR) considered that the elections would further reinforce the legitimacy of the authorities, adding that the recent amnesty and decentralisation laws (also supported by the Greens/EFA) constituted a good basis. However, Michael GAHLER (EPP, DE) expressed regret that the electoral law had not been changed.

Regarding the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, Petras AUSTREVICIUS (ALDE, LT) and the Greens-EFA were concerned by Russia's pressure regarding the way the agreement was implemented, and proposed the creation of a subgroup of AFET to monitor economic and legal implementation of the agreement.

Comments on the actions to take varied according to the MEPs or the groups: reinforcing sanctions towards Russia (Jacek SARYUSZ-WOLSKI, EPP, PL, was in favour; Pablo IGLESIAS, GUE/NGL, ES was opposed); increasing the OSCE monitoring team in Ukraine and reinforcing surveillance at the borders (Tamas MESZERICS, Greens/EAF, HU; Michael GAHLER); arming the Ukrainian army (ECR and Sandra KALNIETE, EPP, LV, were in favour; Javier NART, ALDE, ES was opposed); or developing an autonomous EU policy towards Russia (GUE/NGL).

Libya

Following a presentation on the situation in Libya, a representative of the EEAS called upon all external parties to refrain from actions which might exacerbate current divisions and undermine Libya's democratic transition. He emphasised that the EU should give support to UN missions on the ground and indicated that UNSMIL had called for a dialogue on 29 September. He hoped that this dialogue would create the conditions for a Libyan-led political transition, with the consent of all factions and ethnic groups.

Charles TANNOCK (UK), on behalf of ECR, pointed to the role of other countries, such as Qatar, which he believed to be delivering weapons to extremists. Javier NART (ES), on behalf of ALDE, took a different view and considered that the resolution adopted by the EP on 18 September stated intentions which were far removed from reality on the ground. He declared for example that Libya exported rather than imported arms, that there was no functioning government or parliament in the country, and he criticised the resolution for not mentioning the link between Islamist terrorism in Libya and Boko Haram.

The other MEPs who took the floor concentrated mainly on the situation in Iraq and Syria.

Iraq and Syria

The representative of the EEAS referred to the situation in Iraq and Syria, and emphasised that, when developing a response, one needed to take into account the similarities as well as the differences between the situations in the two countries, the government of only one of them being a partner. He called for a *cordon sanitaire* to be established around ISIL, for its access to funding and weapons to be blocked, for oil smuggling to be stopped, and for the movements of foreign fighters and their return to be halted. He took the view that when delivering weapons in this region it was necessary to keep in mind the long-term consequences in order to support the region after the crisis. Finally, he called for the involvement of the countries in the region while underlining the existence of tensions between some of them.

The EPP supported the need to isolate ISIL, but also urged that the issue of other extremists groups, such as al-Nusra, be tackled. The EPP agreed on the need to involve regional actors and highlighted the need for the engagement of Turkey.

Agenda item 11

Exchange of views with Robert TURNER, Director of UNWRA Operations in Gaza

Robert TURNER, Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNWRA), stressed the urgent need for money to support the work of UNWRA as there was an immediate threat of violence breaking out again in Gaza.

He also emphasised the need for a long-term political solution which should in his view entail the withdrawal of Hamas, a strong political base for the newly installed national consensus government (Palestinian Authority), the military withdrawal of Israel from occupied Gaza land and Israeli non-intervention, as well as a concerted effort of the international community to support the plans made by the national consensus government to build up the Palestinian State.

In the exchange of views, there was the general perception of an ongoing conflict, which required ever-more money, since infrastructure was being destroyed time and again by Israel. This point of view was shared by Ana GOMES (S&D, PT), Marielle DE SARNEZ (ALDE, FR), Bodil CEBALLOS (Greens/EFA, SE), Margrete AUKEN (Greens/EFA, DK) and James CARVER (EFDD, UK).

Several MEPs questioned the usefulness of UNRWA altogether (Bodil CEBALLOS), as they felt that this organisation should contribute to the political solution (Marielle DE SARNEZ) and take clearer positions on the occupation of Gaza (Sofia SAKORAFI, GUE/NGL, EL).

Regarding the misuse of weapons by UNRWA school personnel, Robert TURNER mentioned that an investigation had been started, including into the proportionality of the actions of the Israeli forces.

On the economic situation in Gaza, he mentioned that the blockage of tunnels to Egypt had caused inflation and unemployment, the latter mainly due to the problem of construction materials no longer coming in. He felt that the EU should use its levers to stop the blockage.

Several MEPs (Takis HADJIGEORGIOU, GUE/NGL, EL, Klaus BUCHNER, Greens/EFA, DE and Amjad BASHIR, EFDD, UK) supported the idea that the EU should stop giving Israel preferential trade access to the EU.

Finally, responding to Mr JUREK on the humanitarian aid from Arab states, Robert TURNER explained that the Arab states mainly played a role in funding construction, rather than in funding education and health activities. He added that one donor from the Arab states had singlehandedly contributed more than the EU and its member states together.

He concluded that if no action was taken, the conflict would almost certainly escalate again in a matter of weeks or months.

Agenda item 12

Presentation of the 2014 Sakharov Prize nominees

In the beginning the chair, Linda MCAVAN (S&D, UK), recognised that all the nominees had made a valuable contribution to human rights in the world.

Mark DEMESMAEKER (ECR, BE), nominated Mahmoud AL'ASALI, a law professor from the University of Mosul, who stood up for Christian rights, and was killed last July, and Louis Raphael SAKO, the Iraqi-born patriarch of the Chaldean Catholic Church, for his defence of religious freedom in his country. He gave a reminder of the need for tolerance and respect for life and human rights, as well as freedom of religion.

Anna ZÁBORSKÁ (EPP, SK), highlighted the divided nature of the government of Iraq, as well as the need to act. She stated that if human rights were under attack, this required action rather than mere compassion. She and 66 other MEPs supported the two candidates mentioned above, believing that the nomination of a Muslim and a Christian showed the need for "mutual solutions".

Marie-Christine VERGIAT (GUE/NGL, FR) nominated Mouad BELGHOUATE from Morocco, and Ala YAACOUBI from Tunisia, both rappers who faced repression by the state regime, and Egyptian blogger and political activist Alaa Abdel FATTAH, who was tortured in the 1980s by the Egyptian regime and part of a generation that believed in freedom of expression but suffered harsh consequences for that belief. GUE/NGL believed that in giving these people the SAKHAROV prize, a signal would be sent out to them in recognition, but also to the governments that human rights are not to be breached.

Maurice PONGA (EPP, FR), nominated a cluster of candidate organisations for the EPP. Chredo, Open Doors, Oeuvre d'Orient, and Aid to the Church in Need are organisations for the protection of Christian minorities. They were nominated by Philippe JUVIN (EPP, FR) and 60 other MEPs. This prize, Mr PONGA pointed out, would be a reminder of freedom and democracy, and a symbol of the multireligious, multicultural forces in the world that are united in peaceful protest.

Jacek SARYUSZ-WOLSKI (EPP, PL), together with 52 other MEPs, put forward pro-European Ukrainian movement EuroMaidan, represented by the journalist Mustafa NAYEM, the musician and Eurovision winner Ruslana LYZHCHKO, activist Yelyzaveta SCHEPETYLNYKOVA and journalist Tetiana CHORNOVOL. He commended the peaceful character of protests by this citizens' rights movement.

James CARVER (EFDD, UK), nominated Ayaan HIRSI ALI, a defender of women's rights in Islamic societies and known for her opposition to female genital mutilation.

Elena VALENCIANO MARTÍNEZ-OROZCO (S&D, ES) chaired the exchange of views on the nominees, and introduced Denis MUKWEGE, a Congolese gynaecologist specialising in the treatment of rape victims and founder of the Panzi Hospital in Bukavu, which he defended without any direct government protection in the DRC. He was nominated by the S&D and ALDE groups and Barbara LOCHBIHLER (Greens/EFA, DE). Several MEPs supported Mr MUKWEGE for the SAKHAROV prize.

Marina ALBIOL GUZMÁN (ES), on behalf of the GUE/NGL, questioned the legitimacy of the prize itself, partly as a result of the past and present choices of candidates. The chair and the room generally rejected the argument, underlining that this prize had been democratically instituted, and would be democratically decided upon.

In general, it seemed that the nominations of Euromaidan and of Denis MUKWEGE were particularly appreciated by the MEPs, without prejudice to the other nominations.

The next step is a vote for a shortlist of three candidates on 7 October (joint AFET/DEVE meeting), with the final vote due to take place in Strasbourg on 16 October.

Agenda item 14

Next meetings

6-7 October 2014