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*Plenary sitting*

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9.6.2015

B8-0579/2015

## MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

with request for inclusion in the agenda for a debate on cases of breaches of human rights, democracy and the rule of law

pursuant to Rule 135 of the Rules of Procedure

on Syria, the situation in Palmyra and the case of Mazen Darwish  
(2015/2732(RSP))

**Marietje Schaake, Ilhan Kyuchyuk, Frédérique Ries, Marielle de Sarnez, Filiz Hyusmenova, Hilde Vautmans, Martina Dlabajová, Ivo Vajgl, Beatriz Becerra Basterrechea, Ramon Tremosa i Balcells, Gérard Deprez, Jozo Radoš, Petras Auštrevičius, Johannes Cornelis van Baalen, Maite Pagazaurtundúa Ruiz, Ivan Jakovčić, Fredrick Federley, Robert Rochefort, Louis Michel, Pavel Telička, Petr Ježek, Dita Charanzová, Antanas Guoga, Hannu Takkula, Izaskun Bilbao Barandica, Nedzhmi Ali, Nathalie Griesbeck, Urmas Paet, José Inácio Faria**  
on behalf of the ALDE Group

**European Parliament resolution on Syria, the situation in Palmyra and the case of Mazen Darwish  
(2015/2732(RSP))**

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to its previous resolution on Syria and in particular the Oral Question to the Council on the destruction of cultural sites perpetrated by ISIS/Da'esh on 7 April 2015,
- having regard to the statement by the High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini on 21 May 2015, on the situation in Palmyra; having regard to the statement by the Spokesperson of High Representative Catherine Ashton of 17 February 2012, condemning the arrest of Mazen Darwish and to the Local European Union Statement of 3 April 2012 on the continued detention without charge of Mr. Mazen Darwish and seven other human rights defenders;
- having regard to the press statement of the United Nations Security Council on 22 May 2015, on ISIL's Violent seizure of Palmyra; having regard to the United Nations General Assembly resolution of 8 May 2013, on the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic;
- having regard to the statement by the UNESCO Director-General on 20 May 2015, calling for immediate cessation of hostilities in Palmyra,
- having regard to art. 11 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union which declares everyone's right to freedom of expression, and art. 4 which prohibits torture,
- having regard to the European Union Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders, adopted in June 2004, and reviewed in 2008,
- having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,
- having regard to Rule 135 of its Rules of Procedure,

*On Palmyra*

- A. whereas ISIS/Daesh captured the Syrian historical city of Palmyra on May 22, 2015, after a week of battling government forces and forcing them to retreat; whereas at least 300 soldiers were killed in the days of fighting before the city was captured; whereas fighting as well as several military operations, including air raids, are still ongoing in the area around al-Suknah, Palmyra, the Arak and al-Hail gas fields and all the roads leading to Palmyra;
- B. whereas ISIS/Daesh has killed at least 400 people, including women and children, in Palmyra since capturing the ancient Syrian city and according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, they have executed at least 217 people and detained 600 people, including women and children accused of dealing with the regime forces and hiding regime's members in their houses;

- C. whereas situated in the north-east of Damascus, Palmyra is a symbol of Syria's rich cultural heritage, containing the monumental ruins of a great city that was one of the most important cultural centres of the ancient world; whereas ISIS/Daesh mass killings and acts of destruction of archaeological and cultural heritage have been considered, under certain circumstances, as crimes against humanity, 'cultural cleansing' and amount to a war crime according to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court;
- D. whereas the aim of the terrorist is to use the destruction of civil and religious buildings and of archaeological sites that belong to the common heritage of humanity as a strategy to destabilise populations and destroy their identity; whereas the lootings of archaeological sites and the illicit trafficking of cultural artefacts are used as an 'instrument of war' to finance terrorist activities;
- E. whereas according to several media outlets, ISIS/Daesh announced that the ancient city of Palmyra is not in danger and that they will preserve it and will not damage it; whereas ISIS/Daesh destroyed with explosives the prison of Palmyra on 30 May 2015, symbol of the Syrian regime's repression;
- F. whereas illicit trade in cultural goods is now the third most significant illegal trade after drugs and arms, whereas this illicit trade is dominated by organised criminal networks, and whereas current national and international mechanisms are neither adequately equipped nor supported to tackle the issue; whereas the EU has taken all the appropriate steps in accordance with UNSCR 2199 to prevent the illegal trade of cultural property;
- G. whereas in the EU's regional strategy for Syria and Iraq as well as the ISIS/Daesh threat, which was adopted by the Foreign Affairs Council on 16 March 2015, the EU strongly condemns the deliberate destruction of archaeological and cultural heritage, and notes that such actions may amount to a war crime according to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC);

*On Mazen Darwish*

- H. whereas since the beginning of the Syrian conflict in March 2011, there have been several reports on human rights violations, in particular the deliberate targeting, arbitrary detention and disappearance of independent journalists, human rights defenders, humanitarian workers and medical personnel;
- I. whereas Mazen Darwish, a lawyer, journalist and president of the Damascus-based Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression, was arrested by the Syrian authorities on 16 February 2012, in Damascus when Syrian Air Force Intelligence agents raided SCM's office in Damascus and arrested all present 15 staff members; whereas all the detainees were released, except Mazen Darwish, Hani Al-Zitani and Hussein Gharir;
- J. whereas during the first months, Mazen Darwish, was imprisoned without external contact and he was reportedly subjected to severe torture and ill-treatment; whereas in November 2012, Mazen Darwish was brought to Adra prison, in the outskirts of Damascus, where he received a first visit by his relatives;
- K. whereas in February 2013 he was taken before the Anti-Terrorism Court on charges of "publicizing terrorist acts" under article 8 of the Anti-Terrorism Law of 2012; whereas the

government announced a general amnesty on June 9, 2014, that covered the charges against him, but he was not freed and on 6 May 2015, he was taken to an unknown location;

- L. whereas on 7 May 2015 the UNESCO awarded the Guillermo Cano Press Freedom Prize to Mazen Darwish for his more than 10 years of work as president of the Syrian centre for Media and Freedom of Expression;
- M. whereas prohibition of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment is included in all international and regional human rights instruments, and constitutes a rule of customary international law; whereas the EU has expressed several times its objection to any such treatment or punishment;
1. Strongly condemns the gruesome systematic and widespread human rights abuses, violations of international humanitarian law committed by the Assad regime, the terrorists of ISIL/Daesh and other jihadi groups in Syria, and the sentences and charges handed against political, civil and human rights activists, bloggers and journalists; reiterates its absolute condemnation of torture, the intensified shelling and the use of aerial bombardment, including barrel bombs, by the Syrian government; expresses its deep sympathy to the victims

#### *On Palmyra*

2. Expresses its concern for the situation at the site of Palmyra and the thousands of Palmyra residents inside the city, as well as for those displaced as a result of ISIS/Daesh advance and for the women and children in Palmyra, noting ISIS/Daesh pattern of abducting, exploiting, and abusing women and children elsewhere, including rape, sexual abuse, forced marriage and forced child recruitment committed by ISIS/Daesh.
3. Calls on the international community to do everything in its power to protect the affected civilian population and safeguard the unique cultural heritage of Palmyra and calls on all parties for an immediate end to hostilities in Palmyra and for the safe passage of civilians fleeing the violence.
4. Urges the EU to take the necessary steps to protect the heritage of Palmyra and other Syrian sites, and to strengthen its cooperation with the UN, UNESCO and the ICOM International Committee of the Blue Shield (ICBS), in order to document, counter and prevent the trade in archaeological and cultural heritage goods; emphasizes the important role of Interpol and Europol with regards to the illicit trade of these goods on European markets;
5. Urges the Syrian authorities to protect its populations as a primary responsibility and to respect international obligations to protect cultural heritage during the conflict, by avoiding direct targeting, as well as use for military purposes; takes the view that it is of paramount importance to ensure the protection of civilians who are trapped by violence and unable to access places of safety or who cannot access life-saving humanitarian assistance

#### *On Mazen Darwish*

6. Calls on Syrian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release and drop all charges against Mazen Darwish and all those detained, convicted and/or sentenced for peacefully exercising their rights of freedom of expression and association, as well as all human rights defenders and political rights activists, arbitrarily deprived of their liberty on the basis of their human rights activities.
7. Calls on the Syrian authorities to ensure that Mazen Darwish and all the other political prisoners are given any medical attention they may require, as well as immediate and regular access to their families and lawyers of their choice.
8. Is deeply concerned about the spiralling degradation of the humanitarian and human rights situation in Syria and stresses the need to respect the freedom of expression and the freedom of human rights defenders to carry out their work, in line with the Syria's international obligations.
9. Remains convinced that there can be neither effective conflict resolution nor sustainable peace in Syria without accountability for the crimes committed by all sides during the conflict.
10. Calls on all regional actors to contribute to the de-escalation efforts in Iraq and Syria and emphasises that the supply of weapons by third countries to ISIS/Daesh needs to be countered;
11. Calls on the international community to increase the efforts to find solutions in order to mitigate the crisis and end the war in Syria; urges the EU to take on a leading role in initiating diplomatic efforts to this goal with an active involvement of the countries in the region;
12. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the Council, the Commission, the EU Special Representative for Human Rights, the UNESCO Director-General, the Governments and Parliaments of the EU Member States, the Government and Council of Representatives of Iraq, the Regional Government of Kurdistan, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the United Nations Human Rights Council and all the parties involved in the conflict in Syria.