

P6_TA(2006)0279

Syria: Human rights violations

European Parliament resolution on Syria

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on Syria, notably that of 8 September 2005¹,
 - having regard to the Euro-Mediterranean Agreement, to which the European Community and Syria are parties, notably to Article 2, which stipulates that respect for democratic principles and fundamental rights inspires the domestic and external policies of the parties and constitutes an essential element of the agreement,
 - having regard to the Barcelona Process declaration of 28 November 1995 and its emphasis on enhancing human rights,
 - having regard to the political priority of its Presidency of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly in 2005 to increase its dialogue on human rights with parliaments of the partner countries,
 - having regard to the Commission communication on the Tenth Anniversary of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership: a work programme to meet the challenges of the next five years (COM(2005)0139), in particular the aim of focusing on issues such as the protection of human rights,
 - having regard to its resolution of 27 October 2005 on the Barcelona Process revisited²,
 - having regard to the guidelines on EU policy towards third countries on the death penalty (1998) and on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (2001), and EU guidelines on human rights dialogues (2001) and on human rights defenders (2004),
 - having regard to the declaration of the EU Presidency of 19 May 2006 regarding the recent arrests in Syria,
 - having regard to Article 11(1) of the Treaty on European Union and Article 177 of the EC Treaty, which establish the promotion of human rights as an objective of the common foreign and security policy,
 - having regard to Rule 115(5) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. mindful of the importance of the political, economic and cultural ties that exist between the European Union and Syria,
- B. whereas the accession to power of the current President, Bashar Al Assad, gave rise to some hope in Syria and went some way towards opening up the Syrian political system,

¹ *Texts Adopted*, P6_TA (2005)0340.

² *Texts Adopted*, P6_TA (2005)0412.

which had been dominated by the Baath Party for many years,

- C. whereas the Parliament and its President have already intervened several times to seek the release of parliamentarians detained in Syrian prisons, and whereas on 19 May 2006, the EU Presidency called on the Syrian Government to fully respect freedom of speech and freedom of assembly, which are protected under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which was ratified by Syria in 1969,
- D. whereas in May 2006, after signing a petition for improved Syrian-Lebanese relations in view of UN Security Council Resolution 1680, it was reported that several civil society activists were arrested and tortured, notably including the lawyer Anwar al Bunni, the writer Michel Kilo as well as others, such as Khalil Hussein, Dr Safwan Tayfour, Mahmoud Issa, Fateh Jammous, Professor Suleiman Achmar, Nidal Derwiche, Suleiman Shummor, Ghalem Amer, Muhammad Mahfud, and Mahmoud Meri'i, and more recently Mr Yasser Melhem and Mr Omar Adlabi;
- E. whereas Anwar Al Bunni is a lawyer specialising in human rights issues and was arrested on the streets of Damascus when he was on shortly to taking up a post as director of a human rights centre financed by the European Union,
- F. whereas as long ago as November 2005, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch reported the arrest and risk of torture of the peaceful activist Kamal Al-Labwani, who is now facing a life sentence for expressing his views,
- G. whereas the Syrian authorities are also reported to have arrested numerous journalists and civil society activists in the past two months,
- H. whereas this wave of arrests is intended to be a direct reprisal for the distribution, on 12 May 2006, of a petition signed by some 500 people, calling for the normalisation of relations between Lebanon and Syria; whereas the petition was of particular importance, being a joint initiative by Syrian and Lebanese intellectuals and human rights activists and the first of its kind,
- I. whereas in 2005 the UN Human Rights Committee expressed its concern 'at the obstacles imposed on the registration and free operation of non-governmental human rights organisations' in Syria and 'intimidation and harassment of human rights defenders',
- J. whereas Syria is governed by emergency laws introduced 43 years ago, which are used to justify the violation of human rights,
 - 1. Urges the Syrian authorities to release immediately all activists still detained for signing a petition calling for improved Syrian-Lebanese relations;
 - 2. Further urges the Syrian authorities to reconsider all cases of political prisoners and release immediately all prisoners of conscience, and to ensure that:
 - the detainees are well treated and not subject to torture or other ill-treatment,
 - detained or imprisoned persons are given prompt, regular and unrestricted access to their lawyers, doctors and families;
 - 3. Calls on the Syrian authorities to ratify the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel,

Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment;

4. Strongly endorses the declaration of 19 May 2006 by the EU Presidency on behalf of the European Union regarding the recent arrests in Syria;
5. Points out that respect for human rights constitutes a vital component in any future EU-Syria Association Agreement and calls on Syria to respect its commitments within the framework of the Barcelona Process and along the lines of the European Neighbourhood Policy;
6. Reasserts the necessity for the Commission and the Council also to do their utmost to ensure that the Association Agreement with Syria, which has not yet been signed, leads to an improvement in human rights in Syria;
7. Calls on the Commission to assess annually the human rights situation in Syria and its compliance with the obligations under the Euro-Mediterranean Agreement and to report its findings within the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership;
8. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Syrian government and the Syrian parliament.