DELEGATION FOR RELATIONS WITH THE ARAB PENINSULA

3rd EP/Qatar and 7th EP/Kuwait Interparliamentary Meetings

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Report from Ms Angelika Niebler, Chair of the European Parliament Delegation for Relations with the Arab Peninsula
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Introduction

The European Parliament’s Delegation for relations with the Arab Peninsula (DARP) conducted a visit to Qatar (23 - 25 March 2014) and Kuwait (25 - 27 March 2014). The visit aimed to hold exchanges with the Qatari Advisory Council and the Kuwait National Assembly and to discuss the state of relations on questions of mutual interest such as foreign affairs, economy, energy, education, labour legislation, research and culture with representatives of the government and several local organisations.

The DARP visit to Qatar took place at the same time as the visit of the Ad hoc delegation on the situation of migrant workers (composed of Members of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Subcommittee on Human Rights and chaired by Mario David) and both visits were coordinated. ‘The European Parliament has long promoted working towards close relations with all GCC Member States,’ Angelika Niebler and Mario David, the Chairs of the two delegations, stressed, ‘This continues to be our priority for the future.’

In Qatar, the EP DARP delegation was composed of Angelika Niebler, Chair (EPP, Germany), Holger Krahmer, Vice-Chair (ALDE, Germany), Antonio Cancian (EPP, Italy), Anna Maria Corazza Bildt (EPP, Sweden), Vicente Miguel Garcés Ramón (S&D, Spain), and Francesco Enrico Speroni (EFD, Italy). In Kuwait, the delegation was composed of Angelika Niebler, Chair (EPP, Germany), Holger Krahmer, Vice-Chair (ALDE, Germany), Vicente Miguel Garcés Ramón (S&D, Spain), and Francesco Enrico Speroni (EFD, Italy).

The Delegation for relations with the Arab Peninsula held talks in Qatar with:

- H.E. Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser bin Khalifa Al Thani, Prime Minister
- H.E. Muhammad bin Mubarak al-Khulaifi, speaker of the Qatari Advisory Council and the following members: Issa Al Kuwairi, Vice-Speaker of the Council, Mohammed Al Assulaiti, the rapporteur of Interior and Foreign Affairs Committee and H.E. Fahd Bin Mubarak Al Khayareen, the General Secretary of the Council
- H.E. Dr Hamad bin Abdulaziz al-Kuwairi, Minister of Culture
- H.E. Sheikh Mohammad Bin Adbulrahman Al Thani, Minister’s Assistant for International Cooperation Affairs
- Sheikh Khalid K. Al Thani, CEO of Qatar Gas
- Sheikh Faisal bin Saoud Al Thani, Director of Business Development of Qatar Investment Authority
- Mr David Prior, Vice-President of Hamad bin Khalifa University, Soud Abdulaziz Al-Tamimi, Vice-President of Operations and Ms Mary David, Senior adviser to the president
In Kuwait talks were held with:

- H.E. Dr Marzouq al-Ghanim, Speaker of the Kuwaiti National Assembly and the following members: Faisal al-Shaya, Ouda al-Ruwaie, Mubaral al-Harees, Jamal al-Omar and Saif al-Azmi.
- H.E. Dr Ali Saleh al-Omair, Minister of Oil and Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs and Mr Nasser Hajef, Director for Marketing at the Ministry
- H.E. Hind Subaih, Minister of Social Affairs and Labour and Minister of State for Planning and Development
- H.E. Ahmed Abdulmohsen al-Mulaifi, Minister of Education and Higher Education
- Mr Bader Mohammad al-Saad, Managing Director of the Kuwait Investment Authority
- Mr Mohammed Sulaiman al-Omar, CEO of Kuwait Finance House
- Mr Walid Saïf, Vice-Chairman of the International Islamic Charitable Organisation
- Mr Donald L. Bates, President of Gulf University for Science and Technology
- Representatives of the Kuwaiti civil society: Group 29 (Rights of the stateless), Kuwait Society for Human Rights, Kuwait Social Work Society, Kuwaiti Women Cultural and Social Society
I. Qatar:

1.1. General Context

With a population of 1.7 million, the State of Qatar ranks as the world’s richest country per capita thanks to its position as world leader of liquefied natural gas (LNG) production. Qatar has the third largest reserves of natural gas in the world and has invested heavily in infrastructure to liquefy and export the gas, as well as to diversify its economy. Qatar has lured multinational firms to the country and created the satellite campuses of distinguished western universities. The government is pouring money into infrastructure to make the country a better host for businesses and the 2022 FIFA World Cup.

Deeply involved in regional politics, Qatar provided military and political support for the 2011 revolution in Libya and has provided material support to opposition forces attempting to overthrow Bashar al-Assad in Syria. Under the rule of Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, who ascended to the throne in July 2013, Qatar is expected to moderate its foreign policy positions to improve relations with its allies in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), especially in the current context of a recent political crisis within the GCC (withdraw of KSA, UAE and Bahrain ambassadors form Doha, cf. sections 1.2 and 2.2).

1.2. Qatar regional geopolitical role and political dialogue

Qatar acts as an important player in the region and has a strong influence on geopolitical developments, especially in Egypt and Syria. Alongside with Oman, Qatar has the closest contacts with Iran of the GCC countries. Regarding EU-GCC cooperation, Qatar could act as an important ally to expand them.

The DARP visit took place at the same time of an unprecedented crisis among the members of GCC: the recall of KSA, UAE and Bahrain ambassadors from Doha that happened mid-March. The conflict within the GCC was directly addressed by several representatives of the Qatari side. While reiterating Qatar commitment and its belief in the GCC union, the Speaker of the Council minimised the crunch comparing it to a "summer cloud ''. Nevertheless, the recall of ambassadors seems to be connected to the situation in Egypt. Qatar is hosting Muslim Brotherhood activists, among them Yusuf al-Qaradawi, considered as a threat to GCC security by KSA, UAE and Bahrain. Egypt has called for his extradition; Qatar’s support to him and other Islamist leaders has soured the relations with the UAE and Saudi Arabia. During the DARP visit, Qatari Minister’s Assistant for International Cooperation Affairs stated that Qatar is committed to GCC security and hoped the crisis will not escalate (see also section 2.2 of Kuwait visit). For Egypt, the minister insisted that Qatar does not support a government not recognised by international standards. He added that Qatar’s neighbours did not appreciate this approach. Still, Qatar never compromised the GCC: as a sovereign country, Qatar has its own foreign policy. Finally he added that freedom of speech could be a source of tension, as some neighbours wanted Qatar to close down the Brookings Institute and/or Al-Jazeera in Qatar.
On Syria, Qatar has a clear position from the beginning: helping the people of Syria but not assisting any party in particular. Qatar’s Minister’s Assistant for International Cooperation Affairs urged for a UN Security Council resolution to stop the bloodshed. A political solution is needed and this is the only way to stabilise the region. Regarding Iran, Qatar has strong connexion with around 10% Shia population of Iranian origin. The Qatari representative welcomed the current on-going dialogue with the US and the EU. As Iran is an important neighbour for the region and if nuclear technology is used in a peaceful way and in compliance with international standards, this could be a factor of stabilisation in the region.

Another important point reiterated in several meetings during the visit was the exemption of visa to enter the Schengen zone by UAE citizens and officials enquired when it will be the case for Qatar. While meeting the Prime Minister, the Chair of Ad hoc delegation Mario David noted that the UAE does no longer need visas and hopefully in the future it will be the same for Qatar but several steps have to be achieved first. He also warned that it is necessary to table all the important documents and the visa issue is related to European security. Furthermore, there is a question of reciprocity: some EU countries still need prior visas to enter Qatar, such as Slovakia and the Czech Republic. These EU Member States might block Qatar’s request for Schengen exemption if there is no reciprocity applied to them. On his side, the Speaker of the Qatar Advisory council (see details below) assured that Qatar will resolve in the near future the entry visa issue for these EU countries.

Finally, on the free-trade agreement and the fact that negotiations are still in a deadlock, the Chair of the DARP delegation Angelika Niebler expressed her wish to reach an agreement at GCC level and called for deepening of strategic ties between the EU and Qatar.

1.3. **Interparliamentary meeting with the Qatar Advisory Council (Majlis al-Shura)**

During the DARP visit, the Speaker of the Majlis al-Shura and other Members presented the mandate and the structure of the Council: it is a consultative body with no independent legislative powers. All its members are appointed by the Emir. The Council was established in 1972 with 20 members, it has now 35 members and only one member is a woman. Since political parties are illegal and not considered to comply with the societal traditions of the country, all members are independent. In 2003, Qatar adopted a new constitution that provided for the direct election of members of the Advisory Council. Legislative elections have been announced but postponed several times (planned now for 2016). The Central Municipal Council is a separate body that is directly elected by the citizens and represents all the regions.

All the laws and regulations are submitted to the Council as recommendations for consultation. The Council’s mandate is to set scenarios and forecasts in several fields, such as the economy, infrastructure, health or education and it is involved in budget discussion. The Speaker added that the Council has five committees: legal aspects, economy, civil, interior & external affairs and culture & information. The Chair asked about the real impact of the Majlis on the government as it is a consultative body and about its relation with the
people. The Speaker replied that the Council plays a big role in Qatar and has its own say regarding internal affairs. It is consulted on all issues and has a quite harmonious relation with the executive branch. As in Qatar there are no political parties, at least for the time being, each member in themselves represents a political party. On the relation with the citizens, the Speaker informed that the country has a lot of traditions and customs, most Council members meet often their constituents. Majlis sessions are usually opened to public and are held on Monday.

1.4. Situation of migrant workers

The situation of migrant workers was addressed by the EP Ad hoc delegation during several meetings, but also in common meetings such as the ones with the Speaker of the Council and with the Prime minister. The Chair of the Ad hoc delegation, Mario David informed that the delegation came to study and discuss the situation of construction workers, household workers and the sponsorship system (Kefala). The Prime Minister stated that Qatar is willing to improve itself in term of legislation to comply with international standards, especially for the condition of workers in the private sector. It is very important for Qatar to share this problem with Europe and learn how it can manage it. As Prime Minister, he is following this question on a weekly basis and meeting with labourer’s leaders. He added that the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Interior will submit some updates of the Kefala law. In the meantime, he reminded that Qatar is a small country, and that it cannot be totally open to foreigners.

The Minister’s Assistant for International Cooperation Affairs affirmed that the campaign for worker’s rights was emphasised by the media in the context of the 2022 football World Cup. He recognised that there are problems and the Qatari government is working on it to find solutions: the government commissioned an independent review on the subject matter that will be made public. Any recommendation that will come out will be implemented, unless it will affect Qatar’s national security. In Qatari culture and religion, it is not accepted to let someone live in bad conditions. During the meeting with the Speaker of the Majlis, a member of the Ad hoc delegation, Jacek Protasiewicz revealed that Qatar is preparing to change the Kefala law and hoped that the Majlis member will support this. The Speaker replied he is not yet informed of a fundamental reform of the Kefala system, but this could be possible as any law to be adopted needs first to be consulted with the Council.

1.5. Energy cooperation

Qatar is a small but gas- and oil-rich high-income country. Its hydrocarbon resources have made Qatar one of the fastest growing economies in the world, and one largely untouched by the global financial and economic crisis. The country’s gas and oil revenues contribute vast savings into a sovereign wealth fund. But Qatar’s hydrocarbon strategy is currently facing challenges, mainly due to three elements: the future of the international gas market, especially with recent shale gas developments; the evolution of internal natural gas demand: its domestic natural gas consumption is increasing very fast and is supposed to double by 2020; and the real future potential of Qatari’s gas reserves, that could be revised from lasting
400 years to 100 years. Since 2005, Qatar has imposed a moratorium on the developments of new projects in the main gas field North Field that was supposed to end in 2007. Since then, the moratorium is regularly extended, with a new date at the end of 2015.

In the context of the crisis with Russia and Ukraine, the EU is intensifying its prospects to diversify its sources of energy supplies. More than ever, the EU needs to reduce its dependence on Russian gas. The discussion with Prime Minister, Minister’s Assistant for International Cooperation Affairs and the CEO of QatarGas (on behalf of the Minister of State and Industrial Affairs/Energy) conveyed the same message: Qatar is committed to support its friend (Europe) in case of any energy shortage.

The Prime Minister advised the EU to favour dialogue, to sit all together with Russia around the table and to find solutions to unlock the crisis. The CEO of QatarGas informed that Europe is an important market and a friend of Qatar. His country is keen to reply to EU demand but this is connected firstly to the availability and capacity of European terminals and, secondly, to the size of the volume requested. He informed that Qatar is open to collaborate and that Europe needs to identify which companies are interested. He reminded that Qatar signed a five years contract with E.ON and that his country supported Japan in supplying gas during the Fukushima nuclear disaster. DARP members insisted on the necessity to establish a partnership in the longer term.

The Qatari side does not see shale gas developments as a threat, on the contrary, shale gas is considered as complementary in order to diversify the energy mix, especially with increasing demand. Asia represents the first market for Qatar, and Europe, could be the market for the US in the near future. Qatar does not want to compete with the US but needs to be flexible. As an example, the Golden Pass terminal in the US could be transformed in an export terminal.

1.6. **Building a knowledge-based economy: Research and education cooperation**

Qatar is massively investing in research, innovation and education in a broader strategy to capitalise on a sustainable “knowledge-based economy”. Part of Qatar National Vision 2030 describes how the nation’s vast revenues from hydrocarbon resources will be used to transform Qatar into a modern knowledge-based economy, prioritising the development of human resources over the next 20 years, for the improvement of not only the nation, but also of the region and the world. Qatar is currently spending billions to transform from a natural resources-based economy to a knowledge-based economy, with the declared political ambition to become a major cradle of innovation, not only at regional level, but in global in scope and impact.

During the visit of the Hamad Bin Khalifa University, the Chair stated that the European Parliament is very keen to engage in cooperation in the fields of education, research and innovation. The Vice-President of the University informed that Qatar intends to develop collaboration with foreign universities and invited these to establish branches in Qatar. The universities are mainly from North America (6) with only two from Europe (one French and one British). There is a huge opportunity to develop further cooperation with European
universities. On a total of 2,400 students, an average of 42% is of Qatari origin. After graduation, most of the students remain in Qatar to find employment in the country.

The Chair of the DARP delegation asked how the University was contributing to Qatar’s aim to become a knowledge-based economy and about women’s participation in the programmes of the University. She also asked about the hosts’ perception of European education and research systems and if they were aware of activities and programmes such as the European Research Council or Erasmus Mundus. The Vice-President answered that the University is first working on engaging in research to provide new knowledge on the short and longer term with more focus on fundamental research; and second on building strong human capacity (Master degrees and PhD programmes). He added that women are very well represented and they are very active: the first Qatari faculty member is a woman. The Vice-President of Operations asked if Europe encouraged a balanced approach towards gender representation or whether skills were the deciding factors. MEP Anna Maria Corazza Bildt replied that this is a major debate in Europe: the EP adopted the quota system but she personally disagrees, this has to be driven by competences and not only because of being a woman. There is now a new EP law facilitating access to students from third countries and to encourage exchanges. To the question raised by the Vice-Chair of DARP if the University is having programmes on political sciences and humanities, the hosts replied that for the moment the University was more focusing on hard sciences but humanities programmes will be developed as a next step.

1.7. Culture cooperation: Manage the bridge between tradition and modernism

Culture represents for Qatar another massive field of investment and an important axis of cooperation with Europe. Since 2008, Doha is very active in the cultural domain with the launching of a large cultural programme. It comprises the construction of several museums: of Modern art, Islamic museum, in partnership with the Louvre, an orientalist museum and the national museum of Qatar, edified by the French architect, Jean Nouvel. In three years, around 15 museums opened or are planned to open in the country. The meeting with the Minister of Culture, Art and Heritage was fruitful; he asked if the EP members had any suggestions to enhance the relationship between Europe and Qatar in the cultural sphere.

The minister recognised that the biggest challenge for Qatar is how to manage the bridge between tradition and modernism. The Chair of the DARP delegation indicated that at the EP, there are a variety of cultures and that cultural heritage is alive. It could be interesting to have his perception of the EU and if the Europeans are doing a good job. The minister replied that Europe has a multicultural nature. Qatar admires it and sees it as a source of strength. Gulf countries have only one language and one culture, and they are not so united. Europe built something that is admirable. In the meantime, Gulf countries have all foreign cultures that live and work there, represented by small or large communities. As mentioned previously, the biggest challenge is to cope with fast development and to keep our identity and culture: this is not an easy job. Qatar welcomes all different cultures and considers this as a privilege. If we go back to the time of Arab civilisation, all cultures were represented: this was not a problem but an advantage.
In 2010, Doha was the capital of Arab culture and this is considered as a turning point for Doha in becoming a cultural hub. The public sector started to invest more in culture. Furthermore, the father of the current Emir established an endowment from a percentage (2.5%) of the profits of Qatari companies; as the budget from the state is quite limited. The minister added that music is also very important in the cultural programme of the Qatari University, but also soft sciences courses are given in Education City in agreement with Qatar University, and courses such as calligraphy. Culture is not only for and from the Qatari people. The Ministry has special programmes for foreigners in order to entertain them and to get them in touch with culture: in Qatar there are big communities coming from Asia, as well as from Arab countries (Egypt, Lebanon and Palestine) with dedicated programmes to keep them in touch with their culture. English is the second language of the country but French is also very important. Qatar is an associated member of the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie as there is a big tendency to speak French in Qatar (3 schools and around 200.000 people speaking French).

As stated at the press conference, the EP delegation noted that there are several possibilities to further expand EU-Qatari cooperation in areas such as research, education, technology and culture. The main challenge in these fields is to combine modernity and tradition and to empower women in Qatari society. A strengthened EU-Qatari partnership in all these fields would contribute to achieving Qatar’s objective of developing a knowledge-based society and economy. The delegation encourages Qatari efforts to diversify the country’s economy. One of the most visible aspects of the diversification policy is the way Qatar manages its foreign investments in the non-hydrocarbon sector.

1.8 Diversification of the economy, meeting with Qatar Investment Advisory

Qatar’s goal is to become a major international centre for finance and to diversify its oil and gas revenue in long-term strategic investments and foreign investments. Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) was founded in 2005 to strengthen the country’s economy by diversifying into new asset classes; Qatar Holding is its investment arm. QIA is very active and visible in international investments but stays relatively modest in term of size compared to other Gulf neighbours. According to various sources, the company manages a portfolio of 80 billion euros whereas Abu Dhabi Investment Authority manages 500 billion euros and Kuwait Investment Authority Manages more than 200 billion euros. The investments are done in several asset classes with an important presence abroad in many European countries such as Switzerland, France or Italy. They are open to do any type of investments with a prospect of good return. QIA has a separate management from the government and the company could refuse the government’s indications if it does not agree on an investment.

QIA has a simple investment strategy: it is driven by the opportunities themselves. The company is keen to invest in private companies, SMEs (there is a vehicle in France) but there is a need to build some knowledge. There are opportunities in Italy, Spain (Iberdola, W Hotel chain in Barcelona) where the risk is being evaluated. QIA does not control any business; the company owns 20-25%. There is also an interest to invest in the US and in China if opportunities appear.
The Vice-Chair of the DARP, Holger Krahmer asked for further details about risk investments and about QIA’s volume of the portfolio. The representative replied that this information could not be disclosed even if QIA is signatory of the Santiago principles applied to Sovereign Wealth Funds (signatory countries committed themselves to transparency, good governance, and accountability standards). From day one, QIA invested in Europe (France and the UK) and is still looking for new EU investments. The most important aim is to create synergies. QIA is trying to expand its business, such as in the research domain in order to create jobs. MEP Speroni asked if there are looking for opportunities in Africa but QIA representative replied that this is not easy to invest there. QIA faced challenges for investments in Africa as some countries do not have protection investment agreements or double taxation agreements. MEP Corazza Bildt informed that the EU was open again to business, with a recovery process going on in order to put the economy back on track through reforms. The EU represents a market that allows access to 500 million customers. The EP adopted important legislation to harmonise the legislation on investments: common payment systems, facilitating conversion of standards, facilitating free trade, investing in the digital revolution. The QIA representative informed that they are working with largest banks in Europe helping them to identify and explore best investment opportunities. He added that the free-trade agreement is considered as a positive thing but it is in the remit of the Ministry of Finance. Digital business represents a huge challenge as there is a technology aspect in this type of investments. QIA has already done 2 or 3 investments in technology (automotive sector) such as green cars, batteries but it is highly risky. The QIA is now building a team to move towards more technology oriented investments. He added that QIA usually does not invest in geopolitically unstable areas as it takes minimum risks for a high return on investments but sometimes special situations can be taken into account, and exceptions made, such as was the case with QIA investing in Europe during the crisis. Ambassador Kulach concluded that events will be held beginning of April in Brussels to explore ways of reinforcing investment opportunities between the EU and GCC. He informed that the automotive industry (that involves manufactures, suppliers...) and also the SMEs sector are both attractive investment opportunities in Europe.
II. Kuwait:

2.1. General Context

Kuwait, one of the richest Arab nations, is a constitutional monarchy ruled by the Al Sabah dynasty. Kuwaiti oil makes up roughly 7% of the world’s oil reserves, accounts for nearly 50% of the country’s GDP and 95% of its export revenues. The Kuwaiti political system is a mixture of monarchy and democracy. The ruling dynasty holds the reins of power firmly in its hands, but the Kuwaiti Parliament is by far the strongest in the region and the forum of lively debates.

Since December 2013, Kuwait holds the rotating Presidency of the Gulf Corporation Council (GCC) for one year and serves as an instrumental partner to the EU in re-launching of bilateral relations between the Council and the Union after years of inertia. Kuwait is also a valued international partner and has been a major donor of humanitarian assistance to the victims of the civil war in Syria. During its visit to Kuwait City, the Delegation for relations with the Arab Peninsula reinforced strongly the cooperation with the National Assembly (Majlis al-Umma), with Kuwaiti government officials and representatives from the various sectors of Kuwaiti society. The visit occurred at the same time of the Arab League Summit and Kuwait took this opportunity to act as a mediator, especially in the context of the political tension among Qatar and the other GCC members.

2.2. Political dialogue with the Speaker and Members of the Kuwait National Assembly

Kuwait has the most representative political system in the Gulf and it can be regarded in many ways as model for the region’s other monarchies. While the development of parliamentary powers is not a contentious issue in the country, Kuwaiti society has developed to a point where its citizens are claiming a more representative government, accountable to them. The National Assembly (50 Members) is the first elected parliament in the Gulf (established in 1963) and considered to be the one of the most powerful parliaments in the GCC. It is often in disagreements with the cabinet. It has the power to propose legislations, to consider and vote on legislation introduced by Emir Sheikh Abdullah Al-Sabah, to scrutinise cabinet minister’s activities and to provide opposition to policy proposals from the ruling family. However, it lacks independent legislative powers and cannot establish new policies without the executive branch's approval. Often, the parliament is used as a tool by the opposition in order to try to limit the political influence and economic power of the Al-Sabah family. The current system offers no tools for dispute resolution and therefore, the Emir often dissolved parliament in the past. The most recent election took place in July 2013 with the results of a decreased number of women and Shia representatives. The EP has established strong relations with the National Assembly of Kuwait: six inter-parliamentary meetings took place in the past. The National Assembly has 10 permanent and 8 temporary committees. On 17 December 2013, the Speaker visited Brussels on his own initiative, heading a large delegation with 11 Members of the Kuwait
Parliament.

During the visit to Kuwait, the exchange of views between the Speaker (and five other members) and the members of the DARP were fruitful. The Chair of the DARP informed that the visit to the Kuwait National Assembly was the highlight of the visit to Kuwait. She asked the Speaker to give the delegation his assessment about the geopolitical situation in the region (Iraq, Iran and Syria) and if he could draw a picture about recent GCC developments, especially regarding the tension with Qatar. She noted that the Emir showed greatness and diplomacy, acting as a mediator at the Arab League summit. She added that two further questions interested the EP delegation: the situation of stateless people (Bidoons) and the situation of domestic workers and the underlying employment sponsorship system.

The Speaker informed that the current problem within the GCC (the recall of KSA, UAE and Bahrain ambassadors from Doha that happened mid-March) is considered as a step back and Kuwait is doing its best to contain this problem and to solve it. KSA claims that Qatar is supporting the Muslim Brotherhood. Regarding Egypt, there is a major difference of points of views regarding the issue of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Regarding Syria, all GCC members are against the current regime, but the opposition could be worse than the regime itself. The current bloodshed in Syria must stop. Kuwait has assumed a prominent role in mobilising international humanitarian assistance to the victims of the Syrian civil war. The country has hosted two major donors' conferences, with the second Pledging Conference taking place in Kuwait City on 15 January 2014. EU total funding since the start of the crisis reached over €1.1 billion, including €615 million in life saving humanitarian aid alone. Regarding the recent developments with Iran, Kuwait is cautiously monitoring the negotiations with the US and Europe, and the Speaker hopes they will succeed. He added that the British Foreign Affairs ministry sent a clear message that the negotiation with Iran will not affect or change the relation with the GCC countries. Kuwait believes that Iranian president Rohani is regarded in a much more positive manner than former president Ahmadinejad. At present, Iran needs to open up politically, as during the last 10 years Iran exported its local problems in the region (Iraq, Lebanon). The last elections showed the will of the people of Iran. The Speaker also informed that as long as the Arab-Israeli conflict will remain, there will never be stability in the region. He felt that Israel was overly supported by the West. Solving this conflict would solve all the conflicts in the region. Turkey is a major player in the region and there is a disagreement between Turkey and the GCC members on Egypt.

About the reform of the Kefala system, the member of the National Assembly Ouda al-Ruwaie informed that some members asked to increase minimum salaries but this could be

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1 The DARP delegation met also with the Vice-Chairman of the International Islamic Charitable Organisation, Walid Saïf. IICO is the biggest Organisation taking care of the Kuwaiti humanitarian assistance to Syria. He informed that his Organisation chooses not to work inside Syria because the money could go to the wrong side. IICO works through Kuwait embassies in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan. On the Kuwaiti side, IICO formed a union from around 11 Kuwait societies in order to coordinate the help. The assistance contributes to build houses (for example in Jordan Zaatari camp and in Lebanon too) and to provide healthcare and food. The origin of the funding comes mainly from the Kuwaiti people and each Kuwaiti embassy in the respective countries neighboring Syria decides to whom the aid should be dedicated. IICO is also cooperating with other organisation, such as UN-OCHA (Office for the Coordination of the Humanitarian Affairs).
very harmful for the established work contracts. There is a need to review the status of legislation and the issue will be debated this year. The stateless people file represents a major issue and Kuwaitis have to approach this problem cautiously. Many of the Bidoons are people that came from Iraq or Syria and destroyed their papers, claiming they are stateless people. Prudence is required and the members of Kuwaiti Parliament doubted about the figure stating that 120,000 stateless people are currently living in their country. This is a complicated case, and there was the risk that these people wanted to benefit from the privileges Kuwait was offering. As a conclusion, finding a solution would be complicated, but both issues (Domestic workers and Bidoons) are being reviewed within the National Assembly and with the government.

Inclusion of Kuwait in the Schengen visa waiver programme

Kuwaiti officials (Minister of Oil, Speaker of Kuwait National Assembly and Managing Director of KIA) raised the question of the exemption of Kuwaiti nationals of the Schengen visa. The request followed the recent adoption by the EP of a resolution 2014 exempting UAE nationals of visas (24/02/2014). Kuwaiti officials informed that the EU has to consider the GCC as a whole entity and that the exemption was given only to one country, namely the UAE. The Chair of the DARP delegation replied that UAE compiled all necessary steps to achieve this goal and encouraged Kuwait to take the same steps to apply. In addition, the delegation stated in the press release: "Regarding the issue of the inclusion of Kuwait in the Schengen visa waiver programme, the Delegation took note of the Kuwaiti request to achieve a consistent and fair visa regime for all GCC countries".

2.3. Energy cooperation

The Kuwaiti energy sector accounts for 70 % of gross domestic product. In 2012, with oil production of 3.2 million barrels per day and gas production of 1.5 billion cubic feet per day, the energy sector was - with a share of 64 % - the most important contributor to Kuwait's GDP. Restructuring the economy to be less dependent on oil and to enlarge the private sector has lagged. Oil and gas will continue to be the major export commodities in the short term. Subsidies in the energy sector inflict a high burden on state budget and cheap energy is taken for granted, reinforcing the tendency to waste energy. The review of reforms of the oil subsidies are currently going-on in the country but government encounters difficulties to make them accepted by citizens. In 2011, Kuwait announced its aim to produce 10% of its electricity from renewable sources by 2030, but it has not yet established the required legislative and regulatory frameworks to reach this target. A national renewable energy policy is being drafted to fill the emerging gaps between electric energy demand and supply.

The meeting with the new Minister of Oil was very constructive as Ali al-Omair was a former Member of Parliament and he is also Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs. At this stage, he represents the link between the Kuwait National Assembly and the Kuwaiti government, especially in the context of challenges and heated debates between the two institutions. The Minister informed that there are differences between Kuwait and Europe: Kuwaiti government is not composed of representatives of parties. The difficulty remains in the fact that MPs do not have parties in the government and some MPs are defining
themselves as one-person political parties. He added that there were numerous efforts to reform the political situation in the country and to amend the constitution. But the constitution of Kuwait is very rigid: the National Assembly cannot amend it without the government's green light, that's why it has not been revised since 1962. However, the National Assembly takes decisions on behalf of the people and the government cannot take any decision without the Assembly. He is proud of what Kuwait has achieved as a democracy.

The director of Marketing of the Ministry informed about Kuwait’s oil strategy: its oil production is about 3 million barrels per day (mb/d) and forecasts to reach 4 mb/d by 2030. Kuwait has a very important presence in Europe since 1980-1981 with two refineries and owns more than 500 gas stations in Europe (Q8 network). Its market share in Europe represents around 6-7% and is planning to increase this share. For Kuwait, it is important to maintain the crude production in order to ensure market stability. Kuwait is also facing some challenges for its energy sector. First, there is a need to modernise facilities and infrastructures. Second, the production of electricity and the use of water is a very big issue in the country (with electricity shortages occurring in summertime). Thirdly, the future entry in the market of Iraq and Iran will represent the biggest challenge for Kuwait and its position on the market. To conclude, the main objective of OPEC is to stabilise prices. As international production and demand will rise, Kuwait will try to keep crude prices as constant as it can, and 100$ per barrel seems to be the appropriate price. Kuwaiti officials welcomed the shale gas/oil revolution as it is important to see other alternative sources of energy in the market and this might help to keep oil reserves lasting longer.

2.4. Kuwait investment strategies

The Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA) is an autonomous government body responsible for the management and administration of the General Reserve Fund (GRF) and the assets of the Future Generations Fund (FGF) as well as any other funds entrusted to it by the Minister of Finance for and on behalf of the State of Kuwait. The KIA invests in the local and Arab market through GRF and on international markets through FGF with its main office located in Kuwait City and two other branches (China and London). One of the most important aims of the State Vision Kuwait 2035 is to turn Kuwait into a regional trade and financial hub for the northern Gulf through economic development, diversification and GDP growth.

The Managing Director of KIA presented the investment strategy: KIA allocates assets globally for example in the EU, North and South America, Asia and Emerging Markets. The asset classes are equity, fixed income, real estate, private equity and non-traditional asset classes. He added that KIA has two main funds: GRF and FGF. The first one is more dedicated to Kuwait and the Arab world and comes from oil revenues. It aims to finance the budget. KIA started to invest in Europe in early 60’s and the volume is around 120-150 billion dollars (for the FGF). Its asset allocation in Europe is the second after the US and it is mitigating risks in Europe. KIA is trying to expand in Europe, beyond Eurozone (Central and Eastern Europe). Many investment companies are owned by KIA and Kuwait is interested in joint-ventures with EU companies.

The Vice-Chair of the DARP, Holger Krahmer asked KIA representative in which sector does
KIA invest. The Managing Director replied that it depends on the strategy, KIA has a roadmap and if one sector is interesting, the company hires a portfolio manager on the ground. Private equity is more dedicated to start-ups and entrepreneurship. Investments in agricultural land could be interesting only if the investment is safe. KIA invests more in real estate. The Chair of DARP Angelika Niebler asked about his perception of the Eurozone crisis. He replied that his worry is about the monetary policy and how to create a balance between large currencies ($/Euro) to diversify risks. US and Japan are pushing for liquidity, but it is not the case with the ECB. Europe is facing problems with a strong Euro. With a weaker Euro, employment and growth could be re-launched. Europe should balance the situation between North and South, and this could stabilise the system on the longer term. In the meantime, the crisis has been managed very well by the ECB. A probability is that Spain and Italy will recover economic growth, while Germany’s growth will slow down. He is also worried about growth gap between North and South of Europe: this could be a heavy burden on the economy, Europe needs to achieve convergence between North and South.

The second meeting was held at Kuwait Finance House, the leader in Islamic banking. Kuwait has been one of the pioneer countries in Islamic banking activities and Kuwait Finance House was founded in 1977. The future of the Islamic finance industry in Kuwait is very promising, also stemming from the largely established regulatory and supervisory framework. The presence of the Islamic finance industry and development have become tangibly organised in terms of number of institutions and volume of market activity. It has become an effective resource of actual banking activity with a noticeable role in the economic and social development in Kuwait.

Islamic finance institutions consist of investment banks and companies operating in accordance with the provisions of the Shari’a, comprising seven Islamic banks listed with the Central Bank of Kuwait -two of which were converted from conventional to Islamic banks- and one foreign Islamic bank, in addition to investment companies operating in accordance with the provisions of the Islamic Shari’a (they do not deal with deposits). The KFH Chief Operating Officer informed that the company buys assets itself and resells them to buyers, with a margin. The volume of assets managed represents more than 50 billion euros. KFH has three main branches on the international market: in Malaysia, Turkey and Bahrain. It is planning to open a new branch in Germany (Mannheim) through the Turkish branch. KFH opens branches where there is a clear need for Islamic banking that they can provide. The bank is open to clients of any religion and nationality. Clients are sharing the risks with investors. Depositors are more like shareholders in conventional banks. The COO added that EU countries need to encourage investors, and that the business environment has too many barriers. Europe needs to remove or at least lighten them (taxation, regulatory obstacles...). KFH is doing a lot of business in Europe in various sectors: real estate (purchasing the real estate os post offices in Sweden), energy and electricity. In addition, he informed that KFH has established a strategic partnership with the World Bank for sharing data.

2.5. Education and labour fields

As many other Gulf countries, Kuwait is investing a lot in education and research. Since 2010, and according to its long term plan State Vision Kuwait 2035 the country has set education
and research (particularly health research) as a priority. The country is also planning to develop towards a "knowledge-based economy", and for Kuwait, the key ingredients to achieve this aim are: health, energy and environment, computer science and ICT and social sciences.

The Minister of Education and Higher Education presented the education system in Kuwait as a priority for the government. He stressed that there is an equal treatment for women and men and that Kuwait is strongly supporting private universities. Kuwait has one public university and 12 private ones.

On the international aspects, Kuwait is sending a lot of students in foreign universities (12,000 students benefiting of exchanges and scholarships) and cooperate a lot with foreign universities (top 100 universities). Every year, there are 50 places for foreign students holding a scholarship. The Chair expressed EU interest to expand cooperation with EU universities. Regarding primary education, the Minister informed that a law against illiteracy was reinforced with severe penalties if not respected by parents. The biggest challenge for Kuwaiti education is competition and electronic teaching, identified as a priority on the education agenda. The DARP delegation held also a very interesting visit of the Gulf University for Science and Technology, the first private university established in Kuwait. It has an agreement with the University of Missouri Saint-Louis. The visit comprised a tour of the university and a short discussion with the President who presented the curriculum of the university.

Regarding the labour market, Kuwaiti nationals are a minority amongst the country's population and labour force: of 2.3 million, 83 % are expatriates (2012). The government follows a general policy of reducing the number of expatriates by 100,000 annually. Kuwait is considering introducing a quota on the number of expatriates allowed in the country as it aims to halve the number of foreigners by 2023. Kuwait as in the other Gulf countries problems regarding labour standards will continue being viewed critically by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and human rights groups. In the centre of criticism is the still existing employment sponsorship system (Kefala) for the tens of thousands of guest workers. A major reform is required in this field.

The Minister of Labour H.E. Hind Subaih Barrak al-Subaih is the only woman in the government. On her large portfolio, the Chair of the DARP asked her about the status of infrastructure projects, about the social agenda -especially on the status of foreign workers- and about the status of Stateless people (Bidoon) and about women empowerment in the country. She replied that the Ministry supports women empowerment at every level and any projects involving women. She personally tries to reinforce women representation in the ministries. Each project is reviewed on a weekly basis and even if some of them are blocked, the leaders of ministerial committees are meeting to solve the administrative obstacles. For the status of foreign workers, the Ministry needs to have all the statistics to balance the representation of nationalities. Each foreign worker knows well their rights, especially the one working in the private sector. The Ministry is working with the United Nations to review the law and also involved the Ministry of Interior. For the Bidoons, the idea is to work with NGOs to let them lead this issue because NGOs have excellent ideas that could be implemented quickly.
2.6. Meeting with civil society and human rights organisations

The meetings with Kuwaiti civil society and human rights organisations took place the day before the talks with the members of the Kuwait National Assembly. This allowed the members of the DARP to raise many important issues while meeting the Speaker of the Assembly.

Group 29 for the Stateless people (Bidoon)

This organisation was born referring to the constitution of Kuwait and precisely to the humanitarian point available in Article 29 of Kuwait constitution: it stipulates that "people are equal in human dignity, and they are equal in front of the law in public rights and duties without discrimination of sex, origin, language or religion." It is an alliance of 22 civil society groups, and it is composed of 29 members with 7 women. The group presented a report to the National Assembly as they wanted to come up with practical solutions: the legalisation of the status of the Bidoon people, the recognition of their basic rights and also civil, socio-economic rights, their rehabilitation and naturalisation. According to Group 29, stateless people represent about 120,000 persons in Kuwait, and they are deprived of healthcare, not allowed to study and are even without birth certificate. According to their representatives, the Kuwaiti government refuses to sit and talk with them.

Kuwait Social Work Society

The Social Work Society (SWS) was formed in 2002 but officially established in 2005 with 50 members, which included ministers, businessmen, and university professors. The SWS is primarily concerned with the safety and development of the country. Hence, it conducts ample research in fields that might trigger instability in national security, mostly by carrying out personal interviews and surveys. Among many of its charter points, the SWS conducts "studies and research in social, psychological, legal, and economic fields, the relationships of work, performance evaluation and measurement, updating and developing systems according to the needs and requirements of Kuwaiti society." The main work now is on the Kefala system (sponsorship) and on domestic workers that represent around 600,000 persons without an appropriate law for them. SWS wants to eliminate the sponsorship system and wants the government to become the sponsor. The group leader informed there have been efforts to improve the legislation, with the involvement of three parties in the contract, including the state (together with the Kafeel and the recruiting office). The draft law seems to be blocked since 2010.

Kuwait Society for Human Rights

Kuwait Society for Human Rights was established in November 6, 2004 officially. It aims to raise awareness among people about the international covenants on human rights. It has the task to spread awareness among the people on the international covenants on human rights, and to work through legal channels in order to respect and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms of the citizens, and other people living in Kuwait.

Their representatives raised three main points: women rights in general, violence against
women and the Kefala system. They informed that there are two types of Kefala: one for the migrant domestic workers and one for migrant workers of the private sector. The Society asked the DARP members to encourage the National Assembly to adopt a law for domestic workers as the other Kefala system for the private sector is fine. They added that Kuwait has to tackle the problems for all their migrant workers.

**Kuwait Women Cultural and Social Society**

This is the first women’s society to be established in Kuwait, founded in 1963 by a group of Kuwaiti women who were among the first to graduate from universities and higher education institutes. In 1992, the aim was to empower women, to help them to fight for their rights, especially for their political rights. The Society is involved in many fields such as human rights, heath issues, youth and poverty. In 2005, women received the right to vote but for the Society, empowerment does not stop in gaining right to vote but to advance the judiciary field (women face problems in becoming a judge) in the country and is for equality of treatment in the society, such as for women married to non-Kuwaiti citizens. The Society brings also assistance for health issues, cancer or medical but also natural disaster happening outside Kuwait (in Kosovo for example). The representatives of the Society noted that abortion is allowed in Kuwait only if the life of the mother is in danger.

On the Kefala system, they informed the MEPs that sometimes the system is misused, but the majority of the people use the Kefala properly. According to them, it is difficult to monitor each household but 95% of the domestic workers are fine, only 5% complain. The Vice-Chair of the DARP asked about the status of religious minorities, the representatives replied that this is not an issue as in Kuwait, their rights are respected and there are large communities of Christians (3 churches) and of Hindus. The Chair asked about women empowerment in politics. She noticed that four years ago there were four members in the National Assembly but now there is only one. The Society representatives replied that the political situation is difficult with frequent dissolution of the Assembly. Furthermore, women lack funding for their campaigns and they revealed the lack of young women involvement.

**Conclusion**

The visits to Qatar and Kuwait enabled the European Parliament’s Delegation for relations with the Arab Peninsula to enhance relations in various fields. Both visits confirmed the good cooperation with the counterpart bodies (Qatar Advisory Council and Kuwait National Assembly) and engagement in dialogue with civil society and human rights organisations.

In Qatar, high level meetings allowed to re-launch the dialogue on regional and political developments in the GCC and in the region. The meeting with the Qatar Advisory Council was fruitful but given that Qatar’s parliamentary elections are foreseen for 2016, there is an need to promote deeper collaboration with this institution and to support its consolidation as a parliamentary institution (through the development of its human resources of the administration and the gradual increase of its parliament’s political prerogatives).

During its visit to Kuwait City, the Delegation for relations with the Arab Peninsula reinforced
strongly the cooperation with the National Assembly (Majlis al-Umma), with Kuwaiti government officials and representatives from the various sectors of Kuwaiti society. Kuwait has the most developed and powerful democratically elected parliament in the region and represents a model for the neighbouring countries for its political institutions and its lively civil society. The Delegation welcomes the active role of Kuwait in the League of Arab States and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which is an important partner for the European Union in a number of domains.

Furthermore, both visits to Qatar and Kuwait contributed to identify fields of cooperation to be reinforced such as energy, trade, education, technology, research and culture. Opportunities for investments in different sectors and industries, SMEs and entrepreneurship should be also explored as an axis of further collaboration.

III. ANNEXES

3.1. Programmes of the visits
3.2. List of Participants
3.3. Press statements
3.4. Press releases
DELEGATION FOR RELATIONS WITH THE ARAB PENINSULA

3rd EP/Qatar Interparliamentary Meeting
7th EP/Kuwait Interparliamentary Meeting

22-28 March 2014

PROGRAMME

Saturday 22 March 2014

Individual Arrivals from Europe to Doha Airport

*Check in at Hotel Intercontinental city -Doha*
*Off Al Wahda Road, West Bay, Doha, Qatar*
*Tel. +974 4015 8888*

Sunday 23 March 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>08.00-08.30</td>
<td>Briefing by H.E. Ambassador Adam Kulach, Head of the EU Delegation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09.00-10.00</td>
<td>Meeting with the Prime Minister, H.E. Abdullah bin Nasser bin Khalifa Al Thani</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.00-12.00</td>
<td>Meeting with Vice-President of Hamad Bin Khalifa University, David Prior</td>
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<tr>
<td>16.00-18.00</td>
<td>Meeting with the EU Heads of Missions</td>
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<tr>
<td>20.00-22.30</td>
<td>Dinner hosted by Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs</td>
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Monday 24 March 2014

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>09.00-10.00</td>
<td>Meeting with Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, H.E. Sheikh Mohammad Bin Abdulrahman Al Thani</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.00-12.00</td>
<td>Meeting with the Speaker of Qatari Advisory Council (Majlis al-Shura), Mohammad bin Mubarak al-Khulaifi and members of the Foreign Affairs Committee (3rd EP/Qatar Interparliamentary Meeting)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Event Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.30-13.30</td>
<td>Meeting with the Minister of Culture, Arts and Heritage, H.E. Dr Hamad Bin Abdulaziz Al-Kuwari</td>
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<tr>
<td>14.00-15.30</td>
<td>Lunch with Doha-based Think Tanks and ambassadors of labour-sending countries</td>
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<td>18.00-18.30</td>
<td>Internal Negotiation meeting of the two delegations (preparatory meeting for the press conference)</td>
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<tr>
<td>19.00-19.45</td>
<td>Joint Press Conference + issue of Statement</td>
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<tr>
<td>20.30-22.30</td>
<td>Official reception hosted by the Greek Embassy on the occasion of the National Day</td>
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**Tuesday 25 March 2014  Doha**

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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>09.00-10.00</td>
<td>Meeting with Director of Business Development of Qatar Investment Authority, Sheikh Faisal bin Saoud Al Thani</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.30-11.30</td>
<td>Meeting with the CEO of Qatar Gas, Sheikh Khalid K. Al Thani</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.30</td>
<td>Transfer to the airport</td>
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<tr>
<td>15.15</td>
<td>Departure from Doha to Kuwait City (flight QR1072)</td>
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<tr>
<td>16.40</td>
<td>Arrival in Kuwait City</td>
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<tr>
<td>17.30</td>
<td>Arrival at the hotel</td>
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<td>Check-in at</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Hotel Holiday inn down town –Kuwait</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Abdulla Al Ahmed Street, Dasman, Safat, Kuwait City 13087, Koweït</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Tel. +965 1841 000</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>18.30-19.00</td>
<td>Briefing with EU delegation staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>19.00-20.30</td>
<td>Meeting with the EU Member States Heads of Missions in Kuwait</td>
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**Wednesday 26 March 2014  Kuwait City**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>09.00-10.00</td>
<td>Meeting with Dr Ali Saleh al-Omair, Minister of Oil and Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.00-10.30</td>
<td>Meeting with Mrs Hind Subaih, Minister of Social Affairs and Labour and Minister of State for Planning and Development</td>
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</table>
11.00-12.00 Meeting with Managing Director of Kuwait Investment Authority, Mr Bader Mohammad al-Saad

12.00-13.00 Meeting with CEO of Kuwait Finance House, Mr Mohammed Sulaiman al-Omar

13.30-15.00 Visit of Gulf University for Science and Technology, meeting with the President Donald L. Bates

15.30-16.15 Meeting with Group 29 (Rights of the Bidoon)

16.30-17.15 Meeting with the Kuwait Social Work Society

17.30-18.30 Meeting with the Kuwait Society for Human Rights

19.30-20.30 Meeting with the Kuwaiti Women Cultural and Social Society

Thursday 27 March 2014  Kuwait City

08.00-09.00 Meeting with Mr Ahmed Abdulmohsen al-Mulaifi, Minister of Education and Higher Education

09.30-11.00 Meeting with Vice-Chairman of the International Islamic Charitable Organisation, Walid Saïf

13.00-13.45 Meeting with the Speaker of the Kuwaiti National Assembly, H.E. Dr Marzouq al-Ghanim

Visit of the National Assembly Hemicycle

14.00-15.30 Exchange of views with the Kuwaiti National Assembly Speaker and Members of Parliament (7th EP/Kuwait Interparliamentary Meeting)

16.00-16.30 Internal Negotiation meeting (preparatory meeting for the press conference)

18.00-19.30 Press conference

19.30-20.00 Meeting with the EU Ambassador, Mr Kulach

Friday 28 March 2014

Individual Departure of members of the delegation to Europe
# EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

**DELEGATION FOR RELATIONS WITH THE ARAB PENINSULA**

**3RD EP/QATAR INTERPARLIAMENTARY MEETINGS**

**DOHA, 22-25 MARCH 2014**

## LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Members (6)</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Country</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Angelika <strong>NIEBLER</strong>, Chair</td>
<td>EPP</td>
<td>Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Antonio <strong>CANCIAN</strong></td>
<td>EPP</td>
<td>Italy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Anna Maria <strong>CORAZZA BILDT</strong></td>
<td>EPP</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Vicente Miguel <strong>GARCÉS RAMÓN</strong></td>
<td>S&amp;D</td>
<td>Spain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Holger <strong>KRAHMER</strong>, Vice-Chair</td>
<td>ALDE</td>
<td>Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Francesco Enrico <strong>SPERONI</strong></td>
<td>EFD</td>
<td>Italy</td>
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- **EPP** European People’s Party in the European Parliament
- **S&D** Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists & Democrats in the European Parliament
- **ALDE** Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
- **EFD** Europe of Freedom and Democracy Group

### Staff DG EXPO (2)

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<tr>
<td>Mrs Perla SROUR-GANDON</td>
<td>Administrator, Euromed&amp;Middle East unit</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr Pekka HAKALA</td>
<td>Administrator, Policy Department</td>
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### Political groups (2)

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<tr>
<td>Mr Viktor SATA</td>
<td>Political group advisor, EPP group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Eldar MAMEDOVS</td>
<td>Political group advisor, S&amp;D group</td>
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### Interpreters (9)

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<th>Language</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mrs Barbara CARLI-GANOTIS, Team leader</td>
<td>IT</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mrs Elisabetta PALMIERI</td>
<td>IT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Fenella DODD</td>
<td>EN</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mrs Claire FERGUSON</td>
<td>EN</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr Fernando LASARTE PRIETO</td>
<td>ES</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mrs Beatriz LOPEZ EWERT</td>
<td>ES</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mrs Rima REYMOND</td>
<td>AR</td>
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<tr>
<td>Miss Mirna TABET</td>
<td>AR</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mrs Radhia ZRIBI-BEN HASSINE</td>
<td>AR</td>
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EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

DELEGATION FOR RELATIONS WITH THE ARAB PENINSULA

7TH EP/KUWAIT INTERPARLIAMENTARY MEETINGS

KUWAIT-CITY, 25 -28 MARCH 2014

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Members (4)</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Angelika NIEBLER, Chair</td>
<td>EPP</td>
<td>Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Vicente Miguel GARCES RAMON</td>
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Staff DG EXPO (2)

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| Mr Pekka HAKALA        | Administrator, Policy Department       |

Political groups (2)

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| Mr Eldar MAMEDOVS      | Political group advisor, S&D group     |

Interpreters (9)

| Mrs Barbara CARLI-GANOTIS, Team leader | IT |
| Mrs Elisabetta PALMIERI               | IT |
| Mrs Fenella DODD                     | EN |
| Mrs Claire FERGUSON                  | EN |
| Mr Fernando LASARTE PRIETO           | ES |
| Mrs Beatriz LOPEZ EWERT              | ES |
| Mrs Rima REYMOND                    | AR |
| Miss Mirna TABET                     | AR |
| Mrs Radhia ZRIBI-BEN HASSINE         | AR |
JOINT STATEMENT OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT’S DELEGATION FOR RELATIONS WITH THE ARAB PENINSULA AND THE AD HOC DELEGATION ON THE SITUATION ON MIGRANT WORKERS

Doha, 24 March 2014

The European Parliament’s standing Delegation for relations with the Arab Peninsula (DARP), and the Ad hoc delegation on the situation of migrant workers (composed of Members of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Subcommittee on Human Rights) conducted a visit to Qatar on 23-25 March 2014.

The delegations welcome the active role of Qatar in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), an important partner for the European Union in a number of domains. In 2011, the European Parliament, as the first EU institution, called for a strategic partnership between the EU and the GCC countries. ‘The European Parliament has long promoted working towards close relations with all GCC Member States,’ Angelika Niebler and Mario David, the Chairs of the two delegations, stressed, ‘This continues to be our priority for the future.’

Delegation for relations with the Arab Peninsula

During its visit to Qatar, the delegation has held fruitful discussions on issues of mutual interest with H.E. Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser bin Khalifa Al Thani, Prime Minister, H.E. Muhammad bin Mubarak al-Khulaifi, speaker of the Qatari Majlis al-Shura, H.E. Dr Hamad bin Abdulaziz al-Kuwairi, Minister of Culture, senior government officials and representatives of Hamad bin Khalifa University, Qatar Investment Authority and Qatar Gas.

EU–GCC relations have developed positively in the last few years, although negotiations on a free trade agreement – which would potentially expand trade significantly – have been at a deadlock since 2005. The delegation calls for deepening strategic ties between the EU and Qatar. As one of the key suppliers of LNG to Europe, Qatar is a vital partner for European energy security. The delegation warmly welcomes the commitment of Qatar to support the EU in its efforts to diversify the sources of its energy supply. Given the extent of trade relations, the Delegation hopes that Qatar can promote a region-to-region free-trade agreement.

The delegation notes that there are several possibilities to further expand EU-Qatari cooperation in areas such as research, education, technology and culture. The main challenge in these fields is to combine modernity and tradition and to empower women in Qatari society. A strengthened EU-Qatari partnership in all these fields would contribute to achieving Qatar’s objective of developing a knowledge-based society and economy. The delegation encourages Qatari efforts to diversify the country’s economy.
The delegation has also discussed the political and security situation in the region, in particular the Syrian civil war, the volatile situation in Egypt, the Middle East Peace Process, Gulf Cooperation Council relations and the recent developments with Iran. The delegation takes note of Qatar’s efforts to mediate in international conflicts and encourages all GCC countries to resolve their differences through dialogue.

**Ad Hoc delegation on the situation on migrant workers**

The Chair of the delegation was able to meet and discuss the situation of migrant workers with H.E. Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser bin Khalifa Al Thani, Prime Minister. The delegation also discussed with H.E. Muhammad bin Mubarak al-Khulaifi, speaker of the Qatari Majlis al-Shura, other representatives of the Government and the Shura Council, as well as the Supreme Committee in charge of World Cup preparations, and civil society.

The delegation welcomes the Qatari authorities’ openness to dialogue on all issues related to the situation of migrant workers. The delegation was encouraged by several reform announcements by the Qatari authorities. However, it stresses the importance of effective implementation of the existing legislation aimed at protecting migrant workers, as well as establishing a credible timetable for the planned reforms and ensuring that they are guaranteed via benchmarks.

The delegation welcomes the assurances by the Qatari authorities regarding measures aiming at raising awareness amongst migrant workers of their rights, the planned construction of new accommodation centres with appropriate facilities, and the efforts to establish effective monitoring mechanisms. The delegation was informed of a planned significant transformation of the Kafala system, and encourages the Qatar government to use this opportunity to abolish the current exit visa procedure, to create transparent mechanisms to change employers without penalties, and to give serious consideration to alternatives which would allow for the replacement of the sponsorship system as a whole. In this context the delegation welcomes assurances by the Qatari interlocutors that a law for the protection of domestic workers is under preparation. Considering the linkages to human trafficking and violence against women, the delegation urges the government to adopt the new law without delay. The delegation supports the recommendation of the UN Special Rapporteur to Qatar to ratify the ILO Conventions 87 and 98 on freedom of association, the right to organize and collective bargaining, as well as the ILO Convention 189 on domestic workers.

While visiting the Detention and Deportation Center, the delegation was able to hold direct discussions with detained migrants. These discussions reinforced the assessment of the delegation that many of the problems related to the Kafala system remain very serious. Notably, the Qatari authorities should further step up their efforts to enforce the ban on confiscating passports, and to ensure due accountability and prosecution for all violators of the laws designed to protect the migrants’ rights. The delegation expresses particular concern about the detention of children, and of individuals detained solely because they have fled their employers, and calls on the Qatari authorities to follow the UN recommendation to replace that practice with appropriate shelters designed to protect the people concerned.

The European Parliament looks forward to a constructive continuation of the dialogue with the Qatari authorities on this issue that will be closely followed internationally, also with a view to the preparations of the FIFA World Cup 2022.
The delegation for relations with the Arab Peninsula was composed of Angelika Niebler, Chair (EPP, Germany), Holger Krahmer, Vice-Chair (ALDE, Germany), Antonio Cancian (EPP, Italy), Anna Maria Corazza Bildt (EPP, Sweden), Vicente Miguel García Ramón (S&D, Spain), and Francesco Enrico Speroni (EFD, Italy).

The Ad hoc delegation on the situation of migrant workers was composed of Mr Mario David, Chair (EPP/Portugal), Ms Elena Oana Antonescu (EPP/Romania), Mr Richard Howitt (S&D/United Kingdom), Ms Barbara Lochbihler (Greens/Germany), Mr Jacek Protasiewicz (EPP/Poland) and Ms Nicole Sinclaire (NI/United Kingdom).
The European Parliament’s standing Delegation for relations with the Arab Peninsula (D-ARP), visited Kuwait for the 7th EP-Kuwait interparliamentary meeting on 25-27 March 2014. The visit coincided with the Summit of the League of Arab States held under the Presidency of H.H. Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jaber Al Sabah, Emir of the State of Kuwait.

The delegation welcomes the active role of Kuwait in the League of Arab States and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which is an important partner for the European Union in a number of domains. In 2011, the European Parliament was the first of the EU institutions to call for a strategic partnership between the EU and the GCC countries. ‘The European Parliament has long promoted working towards close relations with all GCC Member States,’ Angelika Niebler, the Chair of the delegation, stressed, ‘We hope that during the Kuwaiti Presidency, relations will develop positively.’

During the visit to Kuwait, the delegation held fruitful discussions on issues of mutual interest with H.E. Mr Marzouq al-Ghanim, speaker of the Kuwaiti Majlis al-Umma, other members of the Majlis, H.E. Dr Saleh al-Omair, Minister of Oil and Minister of State for National Assembly, H.E. Mrs Hind Subaih Barrak al-Subaih, Minister of Social Affairs and Labour and Minister of State for Planning and Development, H.E. Mr Ahmad al-Mulaifi, Minister of Higher Education as well as representatives of Kuwaiti civil society organisations, the Kuwait Investment Authority and the International Islamic Charitable Organisation.

Kuwait has the most developed and powerful parliament in the region. ‘With its democratic institutions and lively civil society, Kuwait can serve as a source of inspiration to its neighbours in the region’, Angelika Niebler says.

The delegation also focused on the recent setbacks in relations among GCC Member States. The delegation supports the efforts of GCC countries with the objective of resolving their differences through dialogue.

EU–GCC relations have developed positively in the last few years, although negotiations on a free trade agreement – which could potentially expand trade significantly – have been deadlocked since 2005. The delegation calls for deeper strategic ties between the EU and the GCC. As important suppliers of oil and gas to Europe, GCC countries are vital partners when it comes to ensuring European energy security. This is particularly important as the European Union seeks to diversify the sources of its energy supply. The delegation notes the prospect of
extending cooperation to other areas such as investment, research, education, technology and culture.

The delegation also discussed the political situation in the region, inter alia the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Iran, Iraq, the Syrian civil war, the humanitarian crisis in Syria and its neighbouring countries. The Delegation commends the prominent role Kuwait has taken in organising international donors’ conferences to mobilise assistance to respond to humanitarian and development needs.

The delegation discussed issues related to migrant domestic workers and their rights with Kuwaiti representatives and civil society organisations. The delegation encourages the Kuwaiti authorities to reform the Kafala system. Reforms to this system have already been initiated in Bahrain and the UAE. It is particularly important to address the lack of legislation regarding domestic workers, considering the links to human trafficking and violence against women. The delegation welcomes the information it received on parliamentary initiatives to resolve this situation.

The delegation also addressed the situation of stateless people in Kuwait (bidoon) and takes note that this issue will also be examined in the National Assembly.

Regarding the issue of the inclusion of Kuwait in the Schengen visa waiver programme, the Delegation took note of the Kuwaiti request to achieve a consistent and fair visa regime for all GCC countries.

The delegation for relations with the Arab Peninsula was composed of Angelika Niebler, Chair (EPP, Germany), Holger Krahmer, Vice-Chair (ALDE, Germany), Vicente Miguel Garcés Ramón (S&D, Spain), and Francesco Enrico Speroni (EFD, Italy).
Qatar-EU ties reviewed

HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser bin Khalifa al-Thani yesterday met members of the European Parliament, Angelika Niebler and Holger Krahmer, and the accompanying delegation in Doha yesterday. During the meeting, they discussed aspects of co-operation between the State of Qatar and the European Union and ways of enhancing them, in addition to issues of mutual interest.
Delegation seeks to boost strategic ties with Qatar

By Joseph Varghese/ Staff Reporter

24 March 2014

The European Parliament delegation that is visiting Qatar is exploring the possibilities of expanding relations with Qatar in the fields of research, education, technology and culture, said Angelika Niebler, the chair of the delegation for relations with Arab peninsula.

The delegation held discussions on issues of mutual interest with Prime Minister and Interior Minister HE Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser bin Khalifa al-Thani, Advisory Council Speaker HE Mohammed bin Mubarak al-Khalifa, Minister of Culture, Art and Heritage HE Dr Hamad bin Abdulaziz al-Kuwari, senior government officials and representatives of Hamad bin Khalifa University, Qatar Investment Authority and Qatargas.

Speaking to the media yesterday, Niebler said that the delegation was here to foster deep relationship between Qatar and the EU countries in various areas.

"There are several possibilities to further expand EU-Qatari co-operation in areas such as research, culture and technology among others. A strengthened EU-Qatari partnership in all these fields would contribute to achieving Qatar’s objective of developing a knowledge-based society and economy. The delegation encourages Qatari efforts to diversify the country’s economy."

The chair said that the delegation visited the Hamad Bin Khalifa University and was exploring options of co-operation on education, research and technology. She added that efforts will be taken to bring in more collaboration in these fields.

Niebler observed that the EU–GCC relations have developed positively in the last few years. "Although negotiations on a free trade agreement which would potentially expand trade significantly have been at a deadlock since 2005, the delegation calls for deepening strategic ties between the EU and Qatar."

Niebler also said that LNG is an important area of co-operation between Qatar and the EU. "As one of the key suppliers of LNG to Europe, Qatar is a vital partner for European energy security."

The delegation warmly welcomes the commitment of Qatar to support the EU in its efforts to diversify the sources of its energy supply. Given the extent of trade relations, the delegation hopes that Qatar can promote a region-to-region free-trade agreement," she added.
Doha, March 23 (QNA) - The Advisory Council Speaker HE Mohamed Bin Mubarak Al Khulaifi, conferred here on Monday with the European Parliament’s delegation for Relations with the Arabian Peninsula, and a delegation of the European Parliament of the Human Rights’ Subcommittee, affiliating to the Foreign Affairs Committee, on the occasion of their current visit to Qatar. The two sides discussed during the meeting relations existing between the Advisory Council and the European Parliament and means of bolstering and developing them with emphasis on the parliamentary and legislative areas. The meeting was attended by HE Elissa Bin Rabia Al Kuwari, the Advisory Council’s Deputy Speaker, the Council’s Member Mohamed Abdullah Al Yusuf As-Sulaiti and the Council’s General Secretary HE Fahd Bin Mubarak Al Khayareen. Earlier today, HE the Assistant Foreign Minister for International Cooperation Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani met with the European Parliament’s delegation for Relations with the Arabian Peninsula and discussed aspects of cooperation between the State of Qatar and the European Parliament and ways of developing them, as well as issues of common interest. (QNA)
Qatar plans to revamp sponsorship system

By Joseph Varghese/ Staff Reporter

24 March 2014

Qatar plans to transform the sponsorship system by effecting significant changes to the rules that govern the employee-employer relationship in the country, a visiting European Parliament delegation yesterday quoted local officials as saying.

The European Parliament’s standing delegation for relations with the Arab peninsula and the ad hoc delegation on the situation of migrant workers, composed of the members of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Sub Committee on Human Rights, are currently on a three-day visit to Qatar.

Addressing mediapersons, representatives of the delegation said that Qatari authorities have informed them of a “planned significant transformation of the Kafala system” and a law for the protection of domestic workers, which is now under preparation.

The Chair of the ad hoc delegation on migrant workers, Mário David said that the delegation welcomed the Qatari authorities’ openness to dialogue on all issues related to the situation of migrant workers.

He pointed out that he discussed the situation of migrant workers with the Prime Minister HE Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser bin Khalifa al-Thani and also met HE Mohamed bin Mubarak al-Khulafi, speaker of the Advisory Council, representatives of the government as well as the Supreme Committee in charge of World Cup 2022 preparations, and members of the civil society.

David said: “The delegation was informed that there will be a deep and comprehensive revision of the sponsorship system in the country. The government is seriously thinking on this issue and we hope that it will take place sooner than later as migrant workers constitute 95% of the workforce in the country.”

The delegation has urged Qatar to make use of the opportunity to abolish the current exit visa procedure, to create transparent mechanisms to change employers without penalties, and to give serious consideration to alternatives which would allow for the replacement of the sponsorship system as a whole.

Commenting on the steps taken by the government to improve the lot of expatriate workers, David said the delegation was encouraged by several reforms announced by the Qatari authorities.

“The delegation welcomes the assurances by the Qatari authorities regarding measures aiming at raising awareness amongst migrant workers of their rights, the planned construction of new accommodation centres with appropriate facilities, and the efforts to establish effective monitoring mechanisms. ”

However, the delegation stressed the importance of effective implementation of the existing legislation aimed at protecting migrant workers. It called for establishing a credible timetable for the planned reforms and ensuring that they are guaranteed via benchmarks.

The ad hoc delegation’s chairman expressed the hope that the new law on domestic workers will be in effect soon. “The delegation supports the recommendation of the UN Special Rapporteur to Qatar to ratify the ILO Conventions 87 and 98 on freedom of association, the right to organise and collective bargaining, as well as the ILO Convention 189 on domestic workers,” he added.
EU delegation hints at sponsorship reform

March 25, 2014 - 4:30:15 am

DOHA: A change in the sponsorship law is expected to be made by Qatari authorities soon, according to a European Parliament delegation visiting Doha.

Mario David, chair of the delegation, said they had been informed of a significant change to be made in the ‘kafala’ system; however, a time frame was not specified.

The six-member delegation is on a two-day visit to see the working and living conditions of migrant workers.

“We have witnessed the commitment of the government, and even among the teams that are working on the subject. They have told us at what stage the work is now. I’m very, very confident that this time it is not far away,” said David, on the sidelines of a press conference yesterday.

“We are absolutely satisfied with what has been told,” he added.

The delegation will report to the European Parliament about its observations in Doha.

“The next (European) parliament, when it convenes next September, will certainly do a follow-up, but then almost sure, already with the new law,” David said.

Earlier, speaking at the press conference, David said the Qatar government should give serious consideration to alternatives to the sponsorship system and allow migrant workers to change jobs freely.

The delegation held discussions about migrant workers with the Prime Minister and Interior Minister H E Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser bin Khalifa Al Thani, the Shura council speaker, H E Muhammad bin Mubarak Al Khulaifi, other representatives of the government and the Shura Council, members of the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy, which is in charge of preparations for the 2022 World Cup, and civil society representatives.

The delegation appreciated Qatari authorities’ openness on issues related to migrant workers.

“The Qatari authorities have also assured (us of) aiming at raising awareness among migrant workers about their rights, the planned construction of new accommodation centres with appropriate facilities, and efforts to establish effective monitoring mechanisms,” said David.

However, the delegation stressed the importance of effective implementation of existing legislation aimed at protecting migrant workers, establishing a credible time table for planned reforms and ensuring they are guaranteed via benchmarks.

The delegation urged authorities to step up efforts to enforce a ban on confiscation of passports and ensure accountability and prosecution of all violators of laws designed to protect migrant workers. It also discussed the condition of domestic workers, women’s rights and human trafficking with officials and visited detention and deportation centres and spoke to some migrant detainees.
Qatar - H.E Advisory Council Speaker Meets EU Parliament Delegation

Qatar News Agency - 26/03/2014

(MENAfn - Qatar News Agency) The Advisory Council Speaker His Excellency Sheikh Meshal Al Thani met on Monday with the European Parliament's delegation for relations with the Arab Peninsula and a delegation of the European Parliament of the Human Rights Subcommittee, affiliating to the Foreign Affairs Committee, on the occasion of their current visit to Qatar. The two sides discussed during the meeting the relations existing between the Advisory Council and the European Parliament and means of boosting and developing them with emphasis on the parliamentary and educational areas. The meeting was attended by the Undersecretary for Political Affairs, the Advisory Council's Deputy Speaker, the Committee's Chairperson Moha Al Khalifa Al Khalifa and the Council's General Secretary. C. T. Ahmed bin Muhammad Al Khoula. Earlier today, H.E. the Assistant Foreign Minister for International Cooperation Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani met with the European Parliament's delegation for relations with the Arab Peninsula and discussed aspects of cooperation between the State of Qatar and the European Parliament and ways of developing them, as well as issues of common interest.

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Qatar - Assistant FM for International Cooperation Meets EU Parliament Delegation

Qatar News Agency - 26/03/2014

(MENAfn - Qatar News Agency) H.E. the Assistant Foreign Minister for International Cooperation Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani has met with the European Parliament's delegation for relations with the Arab Peninsula, on the occasion of visiting the State of Qatar. During the meeting, they discussed aspects of cooperation between the State of Qatar and the European Parliament and ways of developing them, as well as issues of common interest.

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HE CULTURE MINISTER DR. AL KUWARI MEETS A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT DELEGATION

Doha, March 23 (QNA) - Doha, March 21 (QNA) - H.E. the Minister of Culture, Arts and Heritage Dr. Hamad bin Abdul Aziz Al Kuwari met at Bait Al Ilma (House of Wisdom) Centre at the Ministry Headquarters here on Monday with a delegation of the European Parliament group members for Relations with the Arabian Peninsula, chaired by Ms. Angelika Nagl, on the occasion of their current visit to Qatar. The meeting was attended by a number of officials of the ministry.

Talks during the meeting dealt with aspects of cooperation between Qatar and the EU member states in the cultural and artistic areas and means of boosting and further enhancing such cooperation.

The talks also touched on the Qatar UK 2013 which is a year-long cultural exchange programme between the State of Qatar and the United Kingdom, aiming to strengthen bilateral relations by creating lasting partnerships between institutions and individuals. Mutual recognition, understanding and appreciation of Qatari and British cultures are cultivated through over 70 entertaining and educational events throughout the year in both nations.

The European Parliament delegation listened to a detailed explanation on part of H.E. the Culture Minister on the Qatar culture scene and the complete and grand support such a sector receives as part of the wise leadership in the state plus the variety and conformity it enjoys as far as the large number of communities, having numerous global cultures, and living in Qatar are concerned.

Qatar UK 2013 is coordinated by the British Council and Qatar Museums Authority (QMA) with the support of Platinum Sponsor Qatargas, Shell and Vodafone.

Qatar UK 2013 is a season of events to celebrate the strong relationship between Qatar and the United Kingdom, and to develop new partnerships between our organisations and institutions. The year will see increased engagement between the people of both countries in a spirit of innovation, openness and learning.

Earlier today, Advisory Council Speaker H.E. Mohamed Bin Mubarak Al Khalfi, and H.E. the Assistant Foreign Minister for International Cooperation Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdullah Al Thani, separately met with the European Parliament’s delegation and discussed bilateral relations and means of bolstering and developing them with emphasis on the parliamentary and legislative areas. (QNA)
European Parliament team urges stronger Qatar ties

A delegation of the European Parliament has called for deepening strategic ties between EU and Qatar.

The parliament’s standing delegation for relations with the Arab Peninsula is on a two-day visit to Doha.

As a key supplier of LNG to Europe, Qatar is a vital partner for European energy security, the delegation said, welcoming Qatar’s commitment to support EU in its efforts to diversify sources of its energy supply.

Given the extent of trade relations with Qatar, the delegation hoped the country can promote a region-to-region free trade agreement.

"EU–GCC relations have developed positively in the past few years, although negotiations on a free trade agreement – which would expedite trade significantly – have been at a deadlock since 2005," Angelika Niebler, head of the delegation, told a press conference yesterday.

"The delegation calls for deepening strategic ties between EU and Qatar," she adding.

The team held separate meetings with the Prime Minister and Interior Minister H E Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser bin Khalifa Al Thani, the Speaker of Shura Council H E Muhammad bin Mubarak Al Khulafi and the Minister of Culture, Arts and Heritage H E Dr Hamad bin Abdulaziz Al Kuwari and discussed issues of mutual interest.

The also met senior government officials and representatives of Hamad Bin Khalifa University, Qatar Investment Authority and Qatar Gas.

The delegation noted that there was possibility of expanding cooperation in areas such as research, education, technology and culture. The main challenge in the fields is to combine modernity and tradition and empower women in Qatari society, it said.

"A strengthened EU-Qatari partnership in all these fields would contribute to achieving Qatar's goal of developing a knowledge-based society and economy. The delegation encourages Qatar efforts to diversify the country's economy," Niebler said.

The delegation also discussed political and security situation in the region, in particular the Syrian civil war, the volatile situation in Egypt, the Middle East peace process, GCC relations and latest developments in Iran.

It also praised Qatar's efforts to mediate in international conflicts and encouraged all GCC countries to resolve their differences through dialogue, according to Niebler.

The Peninsula March-25-2014
Al-Ghanim, EP official discuss dispensing with Schengen visa for Kuwaiti nationals

Date: 27/03/2014

KUWAIT, March 27 (KUNA) -- Speaker of the National Assembly Marzouq Al-Ghania greeted in his office on Thursday Angelika Niebler, head of the European Parliament's delegation to the Arabian Peninsula, who is currently visiting Kuwait. Among a gamut of topics Al-Ghanim and Niebler discussed were dispensing with the requirement for a Schengen visa for Kuwaiti visitors to European countries, the Syrian crisis, the situation in Palestinian territories, and EU-Gulf region relations. The two officials also reviewed the progress of democracy, the performance of civil society organizations, and human rights in Kuwait. (end) rkd.ajs KUNA 271654 Mar 14NNNN
EP lauds Kuwaiti democracy as "most powerful" in region

By Muhammad Al-Mumen

KUWAIT, March 27 (KUNA) -- A visiting European Parliament (EP) delegation lauded on Thursday Kuwaiti democracy, indicating that Kuwait has the most powerful and developed parliament in the region.

"With its democratic institutions and lively civil society, Kuwait can serve as a source of inspiration to its neighbors in the region," Angelika Niebler, Chair of the European Parliament's standing Delegation for relations with the Arab Peninsula (D-ARP), said in a press conference on the sidelines of the three-day Seventh EP-Kuwait inter-parliamentary meeting.

On the EP delegation's visit, which coincided with the 25th summit of the Arab League member states, held in Kuwait between March 25 and 26, she said that D-ARP welcomes the active roles of Kuwait assumed both in the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), pointing out that the GCC is an important partner for the European Union (EU) in a number of domains.

"The delegation's mission is to deepen relationships between with Gulf states, particularly with Kuwait, as well as engaging in a better understanding of each other." During the visit to Kuwait, the delegation held fruitful discussions on issues of mutual interests with Kuwaiti parliament Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanim, Minister of Oil and Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs Dr. Ali Al-Omair, Minister of Social Affairs and Labor and Minister of State for Planning and Development Hind Al-Sabeh, Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education Ahmad Al-Mulaifi, said the EP official.

She added that other discussions on issues of joint interests were also held with a number of Kuwaiti MPs, representatives of Kuwaiti civil society organizations - such as Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA) - and the International Islamic Charitable Organization (IICO).

"The delegation commends the prominent role Kuwait has taken in organizing international donors' conferences to mobilize assistance to respond to humanitarian and development needs (worldwide)," said Niebler.

She added that issues concerning human rights in Kuwait were also addressed during the talks, especially those related to migrant domestic workers and illegal residents.

On the subject of the inclusion of Kuwait in the Schengen visa waiver program, she said that "the delegation took note of the Kuwaiti request to achieve a consistent and fair visa regime for all GCC countries. However, "the procedures for obtaining consent on this regard needs a long breath at the EP," noted Niebler.

On the regional level, she pointed out to the recent "setbacks" in relations among GCC member states, expressing keenness to support GCC countries' efforts with the objective of resolving their differences through dialogue.

These notions mirrored those made by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in his speech on the first day of the Arab summit last Tuesday.

Mentioning that disputes in the Arab world were widening, he said they were also "undermining our (the Arab world) existence, values, hopes and aspirations, and we have become preoccupied with them at the expense of our ability to confront challenges." He called for "an honest stance to achieve unity" among Arab nations.

"We should address these differences, unite and work together to overcome these disputes. We cannot go ahead with our common Arab action with differences looming in the horizon ... (which are) a waste of time." On this, Niebler went on to suggest the prospect of extending EU-GCC cooperation in areas such as energy, investment, research, education, technology, and culture.