



Bahrain: MEPs welcome national dialogue but say it must include the opposition

DROI AFET [Human rights / External relations](#) – 07-03-2013 - 18:49

National dialogue among Bahrain's conflicting parties is seen as hopeful by MEPs, despite concerns about ongoing violations of human rights. However, to be truly democratic, this dialogue must also include civil society and the political opposition, MEPs from the Foreign Affairs and Human Rights committees told members of Bahrain parliament (Council of Representatives) on Thursday.

"We see the recent political dialogue between communities in Bahrain as a step in the right direction. However it should involve wider range of Bahraini society, including the opposition, thereby forming solid foundations for the next elections", said Jose Ignacio Salafranca (EPP, ES), opening the exchange of views.

In debate, most MEPs harshly criticised persistent human rights violations in the country, such as pre-trial torture in prisons, lack of balance among Sunnis and Shias in the national security forces and denial of access for foreign journalists.

Others argued that Bahrain was at least "trying to move towards democracy", and allowed more societal freedoms, such as religious freedom, than its neighbours. They asked how the EU could help to improve situation in Bahrain.

Examples of progress were cited by Bahraini MPs, MP Somaya Abdul Rahman Al Jowder warned that pushing too hard for it would "not be healthy" for Bahrain's stability. MP Isa Abdul Jabbar Al Kooheji reassured MEPs that the many reports of torture were being investigated and that the situation was improving "step by step".

Bahraini MPs also said they wished to learn from EU experience in promoting human rights, to which EP Human Rights Subcommittee chair Barbara Lochbihler (Greens/EFA, DE) replied that if Bahrain really wanted to learn from the EU, the best way was to "address and follow up the human rights violation cases. It is not the law that is the problem, but its implementation", she said.

In the chair: Jose Ignacio Salafranca (EPP, ES), Barbara Lochbihler (Greens/EFA, DE)

REF.: 20130304IPR06212

Further information

Links

[Watch the recording of debate](#)

[Human rights in Bahrain - EP resolution \(17/01/2013\)](#)

Raluca Viviana HULUBAN

Contacts Press Unit
(+32) 2 28 41498 (BXL)
(+33) 3 881 74005 (STR)
foreign-press@europarl.europa.eu