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## **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 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 Garcés 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 Sinclair (NI/United Kingdom).