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RECOMMENDATION

on the proposal for a Council decision on the conclusion of a Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreement between the European Community and its Member States of the one part, and the Republic of Lebanon, of the other part

(10820/2002 – COM(2002) 170 – C5-0395/2002 – 2002/0083(AVC))

Committee on Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Security and Defence Policy

Rapporteur: Gerardo Galeote Quecedo

Symbols for procedures

- * Consultation procedure
majority of the votes cast
- **I Cooperation procedure (first reading)
majority of the votes cast
- **II Cooperation procedure (second reading)
*majority of the votes cast, to approve the common position
majority of Parliament's component Members, to reject or amend
the common position*
- *** Assent procedure
*majority of Parliament's component Members except in cases
covered by Articles 105, 107, 161 and 300 of the EC Treaty and
Article 7 of the EU Treaty*
- ***I Codecision procedure (first reading)
majority of the votes cast
- ***II Codecision procedure (second reading)
*majority of the votes cast, to approve the common position
majority of Parliament's component Members, to reject or amend
the common position*
- ***III Codecision procedure (third reading)
majority of the votes cast, to approve the joint text

(The type of procedure depends on the legal basis proposed by the Commission)

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PROCEDURAL PAGE

By letter of 29 August 2002 the Council requested Parliament's assent pursuant to Article 300(3), second subparagraph, in conjunction with Article 310 of the EC Treaty on the proposal for a Council decision on the conclusion of a Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreement between the European Community and its Member States of the one part, and the Republic of Lebanon, of the other part (10820/2002 – COM(2002) 170 – 2002/0083(AVC)).

At the sitting of 23 September 2002 the President of Parliament announced that he had referred the proposal to the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Security and Defence Policy as the committee responsible and the Committee on Industry, External Trade, Research and Energy for its opinion (C5-0395/2002).

The Committee on Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Security and Defence Policy appointed Gerardo Galeote Quecedo rapporteur at its meeting of 23 September 2002.

The committee considered the proposal for a Council decision and the draft recommendation at its meetings of 8 October, 5 November and 26-27 November 2002.

At the last meeting it adopted the draft legislative resolution by 38 votes to 1.

The following were present for the vote: Elmar Brok, chairman; Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne and Christos Zacharakis, vice-chairmen; Gerardo Galeote Quecedo, rapporteur; Ole Andreasen, Per-Arne Arvidsson, Alexandros Baltas, André Brie, John Walls Cushnahan, Véronique De Keyser, Rosa M. Díez González, Hélène Flautre (for Joost Lagendijk), Michael Gahler, Per Gahrton, Alfred Gomolka, Vasco Graça Moura (for Jas Gawronski), Ulpu Iivari (for Glyn Ford), Marie Anne Isler Béguin (for Reinhold Messner), Catherine Lalumière, Hugues Martin, Miguel Angel Martínez Martínez (for Klaus Hänsch), Philippe Morillon, Pasqualina Napoletano, Raimon Obiols i Germà, Reino Paasilinna (for Magdalene Hoff), Doris Pack (for Alain Lamassoure), Jacques F. Poos, Amalia Sartori, Jürgen Schröder, Ioannis Soulidakis, Ursula Stenzel, Ilkka Suominen, Hannes Swoboda, Maj Britt Theorin (for Linda McAvan), Bob van den Bos, Karl von Wogau, Matti Wuori and María Izquierdo Rojo (for Emilio Menéndez del Valle, pursuant to Rule 153(2)).

On 22 May 2002 the Committee on Industry, External Trade, Research and Energy decided not to deliver an opinion.

The recommendation was tabled on 29 November 2002.

DRAFT LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION

European Parliament legislative resolution on the proposal for a Council decision on the conclusion of a Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreement between the European Community and its Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Lebanon, of the other part (10820/2002 – COM(2002) 170 – C5-0395/2002 – 2002/0083(AVC))

(Assent procedure)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the proposal for a Council decision (COM(2002) 170¹),
 - having regard to the draft Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreement between the European Community and its Member States of the one part, and the Republic of Lebanon, of the other part (10820/2002),
 - having regard to the Council's request for Parliament's assent pursuant to Article 300(3), second subparagraph, in conjunction with Article 310 of the EC Treaty (C5-0395/2002),
 - having regard to Rules 86 and 97(7) of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the recommendation of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Security and Defence Policy (A5-0410/2002),
1. Gives its assent to the conclusion of the Agreement;
 2. Instructs its President to forward its position to the Council and Commission, and the governments and parliaments of the Member States and the Republic of Lebanon.

¹ Not yet published in OJ.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

Relations between the EU and Lebanon have been close since before the Cooperation Agreement was signed in 1978. The EU is its main trading partner: according to figures for the year 2000 44% of Lebanese imports come from the EU, whilst 20% of Lebanese exports go to the EU.

Lebanon, which is still suffering the after-effects of a tragic and extremely destructive civil war lasting 16 years, plays an important role in the complex interplay of relations in the Middle East. The withdrawal of Israeli troops from the south of the country in May 2000 marked a step forward in the process of normalisation in the country. Even so, a number of issues such as the definitive demarcation of borders with Israel, especially because of the 'Shebaa Farms', and the presence of a between 200 000 and 300 000 Palestinian refugees in the country, half of them accommodated in 12 refugee camps, are causing concern. Furthermore, the Islamic group Hezbollah has 12 members in the Lebanese Parliament. Syria, for its part, still has a considerable number of troops stationed in the country by virtue of the agreement with the Lebanese government.

As far as internal affairs are concerned, the second term of office of Prime Minister Rafiki Hariri, which began in September 2000, has been marked by attempts to carry forward his economic reform plans against a complicated political background. The balanced power structure designed to ensure coexistence between the various groups makes for a complex but peaceful internal political situation. As far as the economic situation is concerned, the country is faced with a national debt of around Euro 30 billion, i.e. 160% of its GNP, and the interest on the debt repayments accounts for a large proportion of public revenue. The official unemployment rate is estimated at around 8.5%. The reform project launched by the present government has already had some success in financing the enormous deficit, for example by means of the introduction of value added tax (VAT) in February 2002 and a privatisation programme.

Although negotiations were launched as early as 1995 it was only from the end of 2000 to December 2001 that intensive talks were held on the Agreement, in accordance with the timetable agreed on by Prime Minister Hariri and President Prodi. The agreement was initialled by Lebanon and the Commission on 10 January 2002 and signed on 17 June.

The recent Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference, held in Valencia on 22 and 23 April this year, acknowledged the need to relaunch the Barcelona Process by means of tangible measures leading to greater institutionalisation of the Process. The Action Plan approved in Valencia contains important proposals such as the creation of a Foundation for dialogue between cultures and the immediate introduction of the reinforced EIB lending facility, although this does not prevent the EU from continuing to consider the creation of a Mediterranean Development Bank and a Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly. The parliamentary dimension of the process is often absent from Association Agreements, and the creation of a Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly would therefore facilitate global and unified monitoring of the application of the agreements and provide the Euro-Mediterranean process with necessary parliamentary cover, thus making up for the current deficiency.

Political dialogue and the fight against terrorism

As regards the political chapter of the Agreement, the democratic clause inserted in the agreement should facilitate fluent and intense dialogue between the partners on human rights and democracy, including the fight against corruption and money-laundering. The framework for dialogue between the partners should also encourage the country to pursue the path of commitment to international agreements protecting human rights – as on 31 December 2000 with the signing of the International Women's Convention – by signing all international agreements, in particular the Convention against Torture.

One of the most significant events accompanying the signing of the Agreement was the exchange of letters between the two sides on cooperation in the fight against terrorism, which demonstrated the concern felt by both sides and the priority they gave to the issue, especially after the terrorist attacks of 11 September, which were condemned emphatically by both sides. In the letters the two sides undertake to co-operate in preventing and punishing acts of terrorism, in particular by means of the full implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1373, to exchange information on terrorist groups and their support networks and on the resources and methods used against terrorism, as well as sharing their experiences in the prevention of terrorism. The commitment made in these letters must, like the other provisions of the Agreement, be assessed and its application monitored. The exchange of letters is undoubtedly a good interim solution in response to the concern expressed in the European Council's declaration on the contribution of the CFSP, including the ESDP, to the fight against terrorism, annexed to the Conclusions of the Presidency of the European Council in Seville, not least the need to incorporate anti-terrorist clauses in the agreements which the EU signs with third countries.