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# REPORT

on Saudi Arabia, its relations with the EU and its role in the Middle East and North Africa  
(2013/2147(INI))

Committee on Foreign Affairs

Rapporteur: Ana Gomes

**CONTENTS**

	<b>Page</b>
MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION.....	3
OPINION OF THE COMMITTEE ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY	14
RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE.....	19

## MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

### on Saudi Arabia, its relations with the EU and its role in the Middle East and North Africa (2013/2147(INI))

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to the cooperation agreement of 25 February 1989 between the European Union and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC),
- having regard to its resolution of 13 July 1990 on the significance of the free trade agreement to be concluded between the EEC and the Gulf Cooperation Council<sup>1</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 18 January 1996 on Saudi Arabia<sup>2</sup>,
- having regard to the Economic Agreement between the GCC member states, adopted on 31 December 2001 in Muscat (Oman), and to the GCC's Doha declaration on the launch of the customs union for the Cooperation Council of the Arab States of the Gulf, of 21 December 2002,
- having regard to the ratification in October 2004 by Saudi Arabia of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), with particular reference to Article 7 thereof on political and public life,
- having regard to its resolution of 10 March 2005 on Saudi Arabia<sup>3</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 6 July 2006 on the freedom of expression on the Internet<sup>4</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 10 May 2007 entitled 'Reforms in the Arab world: what strategy should the European Union adopt?'<sup>5</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 13 December 2007 on women's rights in Saudi Arabia<sup>6</sup>,
- having regard to the report on 'Implementation of the European Security Strategy: Providing Security in a Changing World', adopted by the Council in December 2008,
- having regard to the joint communiqué of the 19th EU-GCC Joint Council and Ministerial Meeting of 29 April 2009, held in Muscat,
- having regard to the Joint Action Programme (2010-2013) for implementation of the EU-GCC Cooperation Agreement of 1989,

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<sup>1</sup> OJ C 231, 17.9.1990, p. 216

<sup>2</sup> OJ C 032 5.2.1996, p. 75

<sup>3</sup> OJ C 320 15.12.2005, p. 178

<sup>4</sup> OJ C 303E, 13.12.2006, p. 879

<sup>5</sup> OJ C 76 E, 27.3.2008, p. 100

<sup>6</sup> OJ C 323E, 18.12.2008, p. 529

- having regard to its resolution of 20 May 2010 on the Union for the Mediterranean<sup>1</sup>,
  - having regard to the joint communiqué of the 20th EU-GCC Joint Council and Ministerial Meeting of 14 June 2010, held in Luxembourg,
  - having regard to its resolution of 24 March 2011 on the relations of the European Union with the Gulf Cooperation Council<sup>2</sup>,
  - having regard to its resolution of 7 April 2011 on the situation in Syria, Bahrain and Yemen<sup>3</sup>,
  - having regard to its resolution of 7 July 2011 on the situation in Syria, Yemen and Bahrain in the context of the situation in the Arab world and North Africa<sup>4</sup>,
  - having regard to its resolution of 15 September 2011 on the situation in Syria<sup>5</sup>,
  - having regard to its resolution of 27 October 2011 on Bahrain<sup>6</sup>,
  - having regard to its resolutions on the annual meetings of the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva (2000-2012),
  - having regard to the visit of the European Parliament’s Chair of the Subcommittee on Human Rights on behalf of President Martin Schulz to Saudi Arabia from 24-25 November 2013,
  - having regard to its annual human rights reports,
  - having regard to Rule 48 of its Rules of Procedure,
  - having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the opinion of the Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality (A7-0125/2014),
- A. whereas the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) is an influential political, economic and religious actor in the Middle East and the Islamic world, the world’s leading oil producer, and a founder and leading member of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and of the G-20 group; whereas the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is an important partner for the EU;
- B. whereas the EU is Saudi Arabia’s main trading partner with 15% of total trade and KSA is the 11<sup>th</sup>-largest trade partner for the EU; whereas a large number of EU companies are investors in the Saudi economy, especially in the country’s petroleum industry and KSA is an important market for the export of EU industrial goods in areas such as defence, transport, automotive, medical and chemical exports;

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<sup>1</sup> OJ C 161 E, 31.5.2011, p. 126.

<sup>2</sup> OJ C 247 E, 17.8.2012, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> OJ C 296E, 2.10.2012, p. 81

<sup>4</sup> OJ C 33E, 5.2.2013, p. 158

<sup>5</sup> OJ C 51E, 22.2.2013, p. 118

<sup>6</sup> OJ C 48 E/228, 18.2.2012, p. 238

- C. whereas the imports of goods from KSA to the EU, and the exports of goods from the EU to KSA increased considerably from 2010 to 2012;
- D. whereas the negotiations on a free trade agreement between the EU and the GCC, which were opened 20 years ago, are still not concluded;
- E. whereas the EU and KSA face common challenges that are global in origin and impact, such as a rapidly changing economy, migration, energy security, international terrorism, the spread of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and environmental degradation;
- F. whereas the changing political and strategic context in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region necessitates a reassessment of EU-KSA relations;
- G. whereas KSA is a hereditary absolute monarchy without an elected parliament; whereas it faces the challenge of royal succession; whereas KSA has a population of 28 million, including 9 million foreigners and 10 million young people aged under 18; whereas modest and gradual reforms have been implemented in KSA since 2001, but are not institutionalised and can thus be easily reversed; whereas the country's record in the field of human rights remains dismal, with fundamental gaps between its international obligations and their implementation;
- H. whereas Saudi Arabia's first-ever municipal elections in 2005 constituted the first electoral process in the history of the country; whereas in 2015 only half of the members of the municipal councils will be elected, while the other half will still be appointed by the King;
- I. whereas only this year 30 women were appointed, for the first time, to the consultative Shura Council, and whereas only in 2015 will women be allowed to vote in municipal elections;
- J. whereas the World Bank report entitled 'Women, Business and the Law 2014 – Removing Restrictions to Enhance Gender Equality'<sup>1</sup> places Saudi Arabia as the first in the list of countries whose laws limit the economic potential of women;
- K. whereas KSA is the only country in the world in which women are not allowed to drive and, although there is no official law banning women from driving, a ministerial decree in 1990 formalised an existing customary ban and women who attempt to drive face arrest;
- L. whereas the UNDP 2012 Gender Inequality Index (GII) ranks Saudi Arabia 145th out of 148 countries, making it one of the world's most unequal countries; whereas the Global Gender Gap Report 2012 (World Economic Forum) ranks women's labour market participation in KSA as one of the weakest in the world (133rd out of 135 countries);
- M. whereas the death penalty is carried out in KSA for a variety of crimes and at least 24 individuals were executed in 2013; whereas at least 80 people were executed in 2011 and

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<sup>1</sup> <http://wbl.worldbank.org/~media/FPDKM/WBL/Documents/Reports/2014/Women-Business-and-the-Law-2014-Key-Findings.pdf>

a similar number in 2012 – more than triple the figure for 2010 – including minors and foreign nationals; whereas KSA is one of the rare countries to still carry out public executions; whereas there have been reports of women being executed by stoning in Saudi Arabia, contravening the standards laid down by the UN Commission on the Status of Women, which has condemned this as a barbaric form of torture;

- N. whereas KSA has taken strong and decisive action and enforced severe measures to combat terrorism and financial activities linked to terrorism; whereas, at the same time, KSA plays a leading role in disseminating and promoting worldwide a particularly rigorous Salafi/Wahhabi interpretation of Islam; whereas the most extreme manifestations of Salafism/Wahhabism have inspired terrorist organisations such as Al-Qaeda and pose a global security threat, including for KSA itself; whereas KSA has developed a system to control financial transactions to ensure that no funds are being channelled into terrorist organisations, which must be further reinforced;
- O. whereas UN human rights experts have expressed long-standing concerns about overly broad counter-terrorism measures, involving secret detention, which have also exposed peaceful dissidents to detention and imprisonment under terrorism charges; whereas international human rights organisations have urged King Abdullah to reject the counter-terrorism law adopted by the Council of Ministers on 16 December 2013, because of its overly broad definition of terrorism imposing unfair restrictions on free speech by potentially criminalising any speech critical of the Saudi Arabian government or society;
- P. whereas freedom of expression and freedom of the press and media, both online and offline, are crucial preconditions and catalysts for democratisation and reform and are essential checks on power;
- Q. whereas KSA has a lively community of online activists and the highest number of Twitter users in the Middle East;
- R. whereas the work of human rights organisations in KSA is severely restricted, as evidenced by the authorities' refusal to register the Adala Centre for Human Rights or the Union for Human Rights; whereas charities are still the only type of civil society organisations allowed in the kingdom;
- S. whereas KSA needs to improve its laws on religious practices, particularly those regarding public practice and religious minorities, enshrined in the true values of the Islamic religion based on tolerance and acceptance of others; whereas KSA plays an important role as custodian of the Two Holy Mosques of Islam in Mecca and Medina;
- T. whereas KSA continues to commit widespread violations of basic human rights despite its declared acceptance of numerous recommendations in the 2009 Universal Periodic Review before the UN Human Rights Council; whereas these recommendations include reform of its criminal justice system, which violates the most basic international standards with detainees routinely facing systematic violations of due process, because there is no written penal code which clearly defines what constitutes a criminal offence and judges are free to rule according to their interpretations of Islamic law and prophetic traditions; whereas the current Minister of Justice has emphasised his intent to codify

Shari'a and to issue sentencing guidelines;

- U. whereas a number of gradual judicial reforms were initiated in 2007 by King Abdullah when he approved the plan for a new judicial system, including the establishment of a Supreme Court and special commercial, labour and administrative courts;
  - V. whereas over one million Ethiopians, Bangladeshis, Indians, Filipinos, Pakistanis and Yemenis have been sent home in the last few months after a labour law reform was introduced to reduce the high number of migrant workers with the aim of combating unemployment among Saudi citizens; whereas the accelerated influx of huge numbers of returnees puts an extraordinary strain on the often poor and fragile countries of origin;
  - W. whereas on 12 November 2013 the United Nations General Assembly elected KSA to serve a three-year term, beginning on 1 January 2014, on the Human Rights Council;
  - X. whereas the opening of a dialogue between KSA and the EU on human rights could provide a very useful opportunity to enhance mutual understanding and promote further reforms in the country;
1. Recognises the interdependence between the EU and KSA in terms of regional stability, relations with the Islamic world, the fate of the transitions in the Arab Spring countries, the Israel-Palestine peace process, the war in Syria, improving relations with Iran, counter-terrorism, stability of the global oil and financial markets, trade, investment and global governance issues, especially through the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the G-20 framework; underlines that the geopolitical environment makes KSA and other GCC member states a focus of security challenges that have regional and global implications;
  2. Shares some of the concerns expressed by KSA, but urges the government to actively and constructively engage with the international community; welcomes in this context notably the agreement between the United States and Russia on ridding Syria of chemical weapons while avoiding a military confrontation;
  3. Appeals also to KSA to actively support the recent interim agreement between the E3+3 and Iran and to help secure a diplomatic resolution of outstanding nuclear issues in a more comprehensive agreement within the next 6 months in the interests of peace and security for the whole region;
  4. Underlines the European interest in a peaceful and orderly evolution and political reform process in KSA, as a key factor for long-term peace, stability and development in the region;
  5. Calls on the KSA authorities to open a dialogue on human rights with the EU, so as to enable better understanding and identification of the changes needed;
  6. Calls on the KSA authorities to enable the work of human rights organisations by facilitating the licence registration process; regrets the harassment of human rights activists and their detention without charges;

7. Calls on the KSA authorities to allow its National Human Rights Association to operate with independence and to comply with the UN standards on national human rights institutions (the Paris Principles);
8. Recalls that KSA's human rights record was assessed under the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the UN Human Rights Council in February 2009, and that the KSA authorities formally accepted a significant number of the recommendations put forward by EU Member States during the review, including, for example, those calling for the abolition of male guardianship and those aimed at limiting the application of the death penalty and corporal punishment; awaits more substantive progress in implementing these recommendations and urges KSA to adopt a constructive approach with regard to the recommendations presented in the context of the ongoing 2013 Universal Periodic Review;
9. Expresses grave concern that human rights violations such as arbitrary arrests and detention, torture, travel bans, judicial harassment and unfair trials continue to be widespread; is particularly concerned that alleged counter-terrorism measures are being increasingly used as a tool to arrest human rights defenders and that impunity for human rights violations is reportedly increasing; calls on the Saudi government to urgently act upon the recommendations of the 2009 UPR, including by continuing and intensifying its reform of the judicial system;
10. Welcomes the engagement of KSA with the UN human rights system through the Human Rights Council and the universal human rights conventions it has ratified so far; calls, however, on KSA to sign and ratify the other core UN human rights treaties and agreements such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights and the Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families;
11. Believes that being a member of the UN Human Rights Council raises worldwide expectations to show particular respect for human rights and democracy, and appeals to KSA to increase its reform efforts; expects Human Rights Council members to fully cooperate with its special procedures and to allow unhampered visits by all UN Special Rapporteurs, notably to accept the visit of the UN Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment;
12. Notes that KSA has, reportedly, the highest ratio of Twitter users in the world indicating the strong role of internet-based social networks in the country and the increasing use of the internet and social networks among women; calls on the KSA authorities to allow independent press and media and ensure freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly for all inhabitants of KSA; regrets the repression of activists and protesters when they demonstrate peacefully; stresses that the peaceful advocacy of basic legal rights or making critical remarks using social media are expressions of an indispensable right, as Parliament has stressed in its report on digital freedom; emphasises that freedom of the press and media, both online and offline, is essential in a free society and forms a crucial check on power;

13. Calls on the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to honour its commitments to several human rights instruments, including the Arab Charter on Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention against Torture, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;
14. Calls on KSA to sign and ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC);
15. Calls on the KSA authorities to improve their Shari'a-based criminal justice system in order to meet the international standards governing procedures for arrest, detention and trials, as well as prisoners' rights;
16. Calls on the KSA authorities to release prisoners of conscience, to end judicial and extra-judicial harassment of human rights defenders and to speed up the implementation of the new legislation on NGOs, ensuring their registration, freedom to operate and ability to operate legally;
17. Calls on the EEAS to actively support civil society groups who work to enhance human rights and democracy in Saudi Arabia; calls on the EU Delegation in Riyadh to pursue an active human rights agenda by following law suits as observers and carrying out prison visits;
18. Reiterates its call for the universal abolition of torture, corporal punishment, and the death penalty, and calls for an immediate moratorium on the carrying out of death sentences in KSA; regrets that KSA continues to apply the death penalty for a wide variety of crimes; calls also on the Saudi authorities to reform the justice system in order to eliminate all forms of corporal punishment; welcomes in this context the fact that KSA has recently passed legislation making domestic abuse a crime;
19. Deplores the beheading in KSA last January of a Sri Lankan domestic worker, Rizana Nafeek, for a crime she allegedly committed while still a child, this being a clear violation of the Convention of the Rights of the Child which specifically prohibits capital punishment of persons under 18 at the time of the offence;
20. Calls on the KSA authorities to ensure that all allegations of torture and other ill-treatment are thoroughly and impartially investigated, that all alleged perpetrators are prosecuted, and that any statement that may have been extracted under torture is not used as evidence in criminal proceedings;
21. Deplores the fact that, despite ratification of the International Convention against Torture, confessions obtained under duress or as a result of torture are common; urges the KSA authorities to ensure the complete eradication of torture from the Saudi justice and prison system;
22. Expresses its grave consternation that KSA is one of the countries in the world that still practises lapidation (stoning); calls on the KSA authorities to pass legislation outlawing the practice of lapidation, which constitutes a gross violation of a number of international human rights instruments to which KSA is a party;

23. Regrets that the KSA authorities have not extended an invitation to the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, despite the recommendation of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) for all states to extend official invitations to UN Special Rapporteurs;
24. Calls on the KSA authorities to respect the public worship of any faith; welcomes the establishment of the 'King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID)' in Vienna, which seeks to encourage dialogue among followers of different religions and cultures around the world; encourages the authorities to foster moderation and tolerance of religious diversity at all levels of the education system, including in religious establishments, as well as in the public discourse of officials and civil servants;
25. Emphasises the need to respect the fundamental rights of all religious minorities; calls on the authorities to make greater efforts to ensure tolerance and coexistence among all religious groups; urges them to continue reviewing the education system, in order to eliminate existing discriminatory references to believers in other religions or beliefs;
26. Calls on the KSA authorities to define a minimum age for marriage and take steps to ban child marriage in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which were both ratified by KSA;
27. Notes the King's appointment in 2013 of the first women to serve in the Consultative Assembly (Shura council) of KSA, occupying 30 seats out of 150, and looks forward to further developing the contacts and institutional links between the European Parliament and the Shura Council; expects the implementation of the King's declaration that women will be allowed to vote and stand for office in the next municipal elections, to be held in 2015, and that they will subsequently be allowed to vote and stand for office in all other elections;
28. Urges the KSA authorities to revoke the male guardianship system, and warns that the implementation of the law protecting women against domestic violence, adopted on 26 August 2013, will only be effective if the male guardianship system is removed, since the latter impedes the ability of women to report incidents of domestic or sexual abuse; urges the KSA authorities to also eliminate all restrictions on women's human rights, freedom of movement, health, education, marriage, employment opportunities, legal personality and representation in judicial processes, and all forms of discrimination against women in family law and in private and public life in order to promote their participation in the economic, social, cultural, civic and political spheres; welcomes the global campaign in support of lifting the ban on women driving; calls on the authorities to stop exerting pressure on those who campaign for the right of women to drive; further reminds the Saudi Government of its commitments under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child and of those which are incumbent upon it under UN General Assembly resolution 53/144 adopting the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders; draws attention to the need to promote awareness-raising campaigns and to also direct these at men, so that they too are

aware of women's rights and of the overall repercussions on society if those rights are not respected; stresses that this information should also reach rural areas and areas that are isolated from the rest of the country;

29. Welcomes the recent legislation allowing Saudi girls in private schools to play sports, while regretting that girls in public schools are left out; welcomes also the great number of female university graduates who nowadays outnumber male graduates and encourages the government to intensify efforts to promote women's education; stresses, however, that, while Saudi women make up 57 % of the country's graduates, only 18 % of Saudi women over the age of 15 are employed – one of the lowest rates in the world; thus, calls on the Saudi Government to review and reform women's education in order to increase their economic participation, ensure greater focus on fostering entrepreneurship competencies and address gender-specific challenges in the regulatory environment to improve women's access to government business licensing services; welcomes the training programme established with the National Organisation for Joint Training, aimed at preparing girls to enter the labour market, and underlines the efforts made by the Saudi authorities to improve the status of girls in relation to training and to expanding their opportunities in new, usually male, sectors;
30. Encourages efforts in KSA to promote higher education for women, resulting in new education trends in the Kingdom; notes that the number of women enrolled in institutions of higher education in 2011 amounted to 473 725 (429 842 males), whereas in 1961 only 4 women were enrolled, and that the number of women graduating from these institutions amounted to 59 948 (55 842 males); notes also that the percentage of female students at all school levels increased from 33% in 1974-75 to 81% in 2013; welcomes the international scholarship programme which allowed the number of female scholarship students abroad to stand at 24 581;
31. Welcomes the first licences issued to women lawyers, but deplores the fact that the legal system is in the hands of male judges of religious background; takes note of the gradual codification of the Sharia which is underway and urges that it be speeded up, since lack of codification and the judicial precedent tradition often result in considerable uncertainty in the scope and content of the country's laws and in miscarriages of justice; asserts the crucial importance of securing judicial independence and adequate legal training for judges;
32. Welcomes KSA's ratification of four UN human rights treaties, namely: the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, ratified in 2000), the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT, 1997), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1996), and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1997);
33. Stresses the importance of the debate opened among Islamic women scholars with a view to interpreting religious texts from the perspective of women's rights and equality;
34. Stresses that any negotiations on an EU free trade agreement that includes Saudi Arabia must first provide for strict obligations that safeguard the protection of women and girls;

35. Welcomes the recent decision by the Ministry of Labour to accelerate the recruitment of women in various private-sector spheres, which has led to an increase in the number of Saudi women working in the private sector from 55 600 in 2010 to about 100 000 in 2011 and 215 840 at the end of 2012; welcomes the decision by the Ministry of Labour in conjunction with the Human Resources Development Fund to introduce programmes to promote women's employment;
36. Calls on the authorities to improve the working conditions and treatment of immigrant workers, with special attention to the situation of women working as domestic helpers, who are at particular risk of sexual violence and who often find themselves in conditions of virtual slavery; encourages the Saudi government to continue the reforms of the labour laws and notably to fully abolish the sponsorship ('Kafala') system, and welcomes the recent appeal by the National Society for Human Rights to the government to recruit foreign workers under a Labour Ministry agency instead; welcomes recent efforts to introduce national labour laws in order to provide standardised protection for domestic workers and ensure the prosecution of employers responsible for sexual, physical and labour rights abuses;
37. Calls on the Saudi authorities to stop the recent violent attacks against migrant workers and to release the thousands who have been arrested and are being kept in makeshift centres, reportedly often without adequate shelter or medical attention; urges the home countries to cooperate with the Saudi authorities in order to organise the return of these workers in as humane a manner as possible; deplores the fact that the implementation of labour laws is often not conducted in line with international standards and that unjustified violence is used against irregular migrants, such as in the crackdown of November 2013 which ended with the deaths of three Ethiopian citizens, 33 000 persons in detention and the deportation of around 200 000 irregular migrants;
38. Welcomes the ratification by KSA of some of the main ILO conventions, namely Convention No 182 concerning elimination of the worst forms of child labour; applauds its accession to the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (Palermo Protocol); expects the implementation of legal and political reforms to ensure that all those international treaties are enacted;
39. Takes note of the fact that KSA has recently rejected a non-permanent seat at the UN Security Council;
40. Believes that the solution to the region's escalating security problems lies in establishing a common security framework, from which no country is excluded and in which the legitimate security interests of all countries are taken into consideration;
41. Underlines the critical importance of EU-KSA cooperation in countering terrorism and violent extremism, and stresses that in order for it to be effective it must respect basic human rights and civil liberties; calls on the KSA authorities to improve control over the funding of radical militant groups abroad by Saudi citizens and charities; welcomes contribution agreement to launch the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre signed by the United Nations and KSA on 19 September 2011, and the decision of KSA to fund it for three years;

42. Is concerned that KSA's financial and political support for some religious and political groups notably in North Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and in particular in South Asia (namely Pakistan and Afghanistan), Chechnya and Dagestan may result in reinforcing fundamentalist and obscurantist forces that undermine efforts to nurture democratic governance and oppose the participation of women in public life;
43. Calls on the KSA authorities to work with the EU and internationally to stop Salafi movements supporting the anti-state activities of the military rebels in Mali, which are leading to the destabilisation of the entire region;
44. Stresses that KSA is a key member of the 'Friends of Syria Group'; calls on KSA to contribute to a peaceful, inclusive solution to the Syrian conflict notably through support for the Geneva II talks, without preconditions; calls also for more active support and the provision of all possible humanitarian assistance to the Syrian people affected by the Syrian civil war; calls on KSA to stop any financial, military and political support of extremist groups and to encourage other countries to do the same;
45. Reiterates its call on KSA to contribute constructively and to mediate in the interests of peaceful reforms and national dialogue in Bahrain;
46. Calls on the KSA authorities to engage in peaceful dialogue with Iran over bilateral relations and the future of the region; further welcomes the 24 November 2013 statement by the KSA Government on the outcome of the Geneva Agreement with Iran;
47. Calls on the EU and KSA to collaborate effectively with a view to bringing about a just and sustainable outcome for ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict;
48. Urges the EU institutions to increase their presence in the region and to strengthen working relations with KSA, by increasing resources to the Delegation in Riyadh and by planning regular visits to the Kingdom, namely by the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy;
49. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission, the European External Action Service, the UN Secretary General, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, H.M. King Abdullah Ibn Abdul Aziz, the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the Secretary-General of the Centre for National Dialogue of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

29.11.2013

## **OPINION OF THE COMMITTEE ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY**

for the Committee on Foreign Affairs

on Saudi Arabia, its relations with the EU and its role in the Middle East and North Africa (2013/2147(INI))

Rapporteur: Barbara Matera

### **SUGGESTIONS**

The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality calls on the Committee on Foreign Affairs, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions in its motion for a resolution:

- A. whereas women in Saudi Arabia continue to face various forms of discrimination and segregation in private and public life and must obtain permission from a male guardian for some of their most basic life decisions, in particular for certain medical procedures,
- B. whereas the Saudi Government has recently made efforts to promote and defend the rights of women, particularly in education, decision-making and employment issues,
- C. whereas the World Bank report entitled 'Women, Business and the Law 2014 – Removing Restrictions to Enhance Gender Equality'<sup>1</sup> places Saudi Arabia as the first in the list of countries whose laws limit the economic potential of women,
  1. Encourages the commitments made by Saudi Arabia in favour of women (the right to vote and stand as candidates in the municipal elections of 2015; the nomination of 30 women to the Shura Council – 20 % of the total number of members of this Council; the introduction of a law to protect women, children and domestic workers from abuse; the granting of licences allowing women to practice law); encourages the Saudi authorities to ensure that measures taken in support of women's rights are implemented in both urban and rural areas; calls for the EU to pursue a dialogue with Saudi Arabia in support of further reforms with a view to greater gender equality, empowering women and promoting their welfare, and encourages the presence of women at negotiating tables for bilateral agreements;

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<sup>1</sup> <http://wbl.worldbank.org/~media/FDPKM/WBL/Documents/Reports/2014/Women-Business-and-the-Law-2014-Key-Findings.pdf>

2. Regrets the fact that the implementation of the law protecting women against domestic violence, adopted on 26 August 2013, will not be effective as long as Saudi Arabia's male guardianship system, which impedes the ability of women to report incidents of domestic or sexual abuse, is de facto still applicable;
3. Stresses the importance of strengthening the political, economic and social rights of women, especially in the context of family law (for example, with regard to marriage, divorce, child custody, parental rights, nationality, heritage, legal capacity, etc.), in compliance with international instruments;
4. Calls on the Saudi Government to establish policies promoting women and their role in civil society, business and political activities and encouraging female education; welcomes, in this connection, the information campaign launched by the national authorities, in collaboration with civil society organisations, to raise awareness among women of their rights and the measures put in place to protect them; draws attention to the need to target such awareness-raising campaigns at men too, so that they too are aware of women's rights and of the overall repercussions on society if those rights are not respected; stresses that this information should also reach rural areas and areas that are isolated from the rest of the country;
5. Welcomes the recent legislation allowing Saudi girls in private schools to play sports; regrets the fact that girls in public schools are left out;
6. Recognises the efforts made by the Saudi authorities in drawing up legislation in favour of women and encouraging the debates which have recently been opened on such matters; calls, however, on the Saudi Government to abolish the restrictions on the free movement of women, notably the ban on driving, and on their employment opportunities, legal personality and representation in judicial processes;
7. Welcomes the decisions of the Ministry of Labour, in collaboration with the Human Development Fund, to expedite and promote the recruitment of women in various private sectors, and calls on the ministry to take action to ensure that the measures in question are effectively implemented and followed up;
8. Calls on the Saudi authorities to fight against the tradition of forced and early marriages, which constitute a violation of human rights causing social unrest, a form of torture and a barrier to development;
9. Calls on the Saudi Government to address reports that execution by stoning, with and without legal proceedings, has allegedly occurred in Saudi Arabia, which contravenes the standards laid down by the UN Commission on the Status of Women, which identify it as a barbaric form of torture;
10. Stresses that, while Saudi women make up 57 % of the country's university graduates, only 18 % of Saudi women over the age of 15 are employed – one of the lowest rates in the world; calls for girls to be given the same opportunities of access to primary and secondary education as boys;
11. Calls on the Saudi Government to review and reform women's education in order to

increase their economic participation, ensure greater focus on fostering entrepreneurship competencies and address gender-specific challenges in the regulatory environment to improve women's access to government business licensing services;

12. Highlights and welcomes the training programme established with the National Organisation for Joint Training, aimed at preparing girls to enter the labour market, and underlines the efforts made by the Saudi authorities to improve the status of girls in relation to training and to expanding their opportunities in new, usually male, sectors;
13. Stresses the importance acquired over recent years by the practice of blogging and the use of the internet and social networks, particularly among women;
14. Reminds the Saudi Government of its commitments under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child and those which are incumbent upon it under UN General Assembly resolution 53/144 adopting the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders; reminds it, on this basis, of its duty to unequivocally sanction the principle of equality between men and women and the prohibition of any form of discrimination or violence against women and girls, and regrets, therefore, the recent sentencing of two Saudi women activists to 10 months in prison and a ban on leaving the country for two years, for having rescued a woman who was a victim of domestic violence;
15. Regrets the fact that LGBT persons rights are unrecognised by the Saudi Government and expresses its deep concern that human rights abuses have been reported against presumed or actual LGBT persons;
16. Urges the Saudi authorities to ensure that the legal measures recently adopted with regard to the protection of domestic workers are fully and effectively implemented and to pay special attention to female migrant domestic workers suffering abuse and living in conditions amounting to forced labour or slavery;
17. Calls on the Saudi Government to use its influence as one of the leaders in the Islamic and Arab world to take more targeted and effective action to defend and promote the integrity, dignity and fundamental rights and freedoms of women and girls and the equal value of both genders in everyday society;
18. Calls for the EU to promote the prevention, investigation and prosecution of violence against women in its human rights dialogues with Saudi Arabia, and calls for Saudi Arabia to promote the importance of human rights dialogue with other third countries in the Middle East and in North Africa;
19. Stresses the importance of the debate opened among Islamic women scholars with a view to interpreting religious texts from the perspective of women's rights and equality;
20. Stresses that any negotiations on an EU free trade agreement that includes Saudi Arabia must first provide for strict obligations that safeguard the protection of women and girls;
21. Encourages the Saudi Government to support forms of partnership, exchanges of good practice and networks – including international ones – involving artistic and professional

women in the culture, media and journalism sectors;

22. Encourages the Saudi Government to support and promote forms of intercultural and interreligious dialogue, especially among women.

## RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE

<b>Date adopted</b>	26.11.2013
<b>Result of final vote</b>	+: 25 -: 0 0: 0
<b>Members present for the final vote</b>	Regina Bastos, Andrea Češková, Edite Estrela, Iratxe García Pérez, Zita Gurmai, Mikael Gustafsson, Mary Honeyball, Sophia in 't Veld, Silvana Koch-Mehrin, Rodi Kratsa-Tsagaropoulou, Constance Le Grip, Barbara Matera, Elisabeth Morin-Chartier, Antonia Parvanova, Marc Tarabella, Britta Thomsen, Marina Yannakoudakis, Anna Záborská, Inês Cristina Zuber
<b>Substitute(s) present for the final vote</b>	Iñaki Irazabalbeitia Fernández, Kent Johansson, Nicole Kiil-Nielsen, Doris Pack
<b>Substitute(s) under Rule 187(2) present for the final vote</b>	Jill Evans, María Irigoyen Pérez

## RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE

<b>Date adopted</b>	6.2.2014
<b>Result of final vote</b>	+: 49 -: 4 0: 0
<b>Members present for the final vote</b>	Bastiaan Belder, Hiltrud Breyer, Elmar Brok, Jerzy Buzek, Tarja Cronberg, Arnaud Danjean, Mário David, Mark Demesmaeker, Michael Gahler, Marietta Giannakou, Ana Gomes, Andrzej Grzyb, Richard Howitt, Liisa Jaakonsaari, Anneli Jäätteenmäki, Jelko Kacin, Tunne Kelam, Nicole Kiil-Nielsen, Maria Eleni Koppa, Andrey Kovatchev, Eduard Kukan, Vytautas Landsbergis, Ryszard Antoni Legutko, Krzysztof Lisek, Ulrike Lunacek, Marusya Lyubcheva, Willy Meyer, María Muñoz De Urquiza, Annemie Neyts-Uyttebroeck, Norica Nicolai, Raimon Obiols, Ria Oomen-Ruijten, Pier Antonio Panzeri, Ioan Mircea Pașcu, Bernd Posselt, Hans-Gert Pöttering, Cristian Dan Preda, José Ignacio Salafranca Sánchez-Neyra, Nikolaos Salavrakos, György Schöpflin, Werner Schulz, Sophocles Sophocleous, Geoffrey Van Orden, Nikola Vuljanić, Boris Zala
<b>Substitute(s) present for the final vote</b>	Charalampos Angourakis, Reinhard Bütikofer, Véronique De Keyser, Kinga Gál, Antonio López-Istúriz White
<b>Substitute(s) under Rule 187(2) present for the final vote</b>	María Auxiliadora Correa Zamora, Leonidas Donskis, Marie-Christine Vergiat