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Plenary sitting

24.10.2011

B7-0542/2011

MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

to wind up the debate on the statement by the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

pursuant to Rule 110(2) of the Rules of Procedure

on the situation in Egypt and Syria, in particular of Christian communities

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European Parliament resolution on the situation in Egypt and Syria, in particular of Christian communities

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions, in particular of 15 September 2011 on the situation in Syria, 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, and of 17 February 2011 on the situation in Egypt,
 - having regard to Council regulation (EU) No 1011/2011 of 13 October 2011 amending Regulation (EU) No 442/2011 concerning restrictive measures in view of the situation in Syria,
 - having regard to the Council conclusions on Syria of 10 October 2011,
 - having regard to the statement of High Representative/Vice President Catherine Ashton on the violence in Egypt of 10 October 2011,
 - having regard to the statement by the spokesperson of EU High Representative Catherine Ashton on targeted killings in Syria and other incidents of 8 October 2011,
 - having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948,
 - having regard to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966, to which both Egypt and Syria are parties,
 - having regard to the Joint Communication on ‘A new response to a changing neighbourhood’ of the European Commission and the High Representative to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions of 25 May 2011,
 - having regard to Rule 110(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas the freedoms of religion, belief, conscience and thought are fundamental and universal values and are essential elements of democracy; whereas the European Union has repeatedly expressed its commitment to the freedoms of religion, belief, conscience and thought, and has stressed that governments have a duty to guarantee these freedoms all over the world;

Egypt

- B. whereas Egypt is a key partner to the European Union in the Arab world; whereas political and social events in Egypt have a considerable impact on developments in other countries in North Africa and the Middle East;

- C. whereas Egypt is going through a critical period of democratic transition and faces considerable challenges and difficulties in this process; whereas economic development and a higher standard of living of the population are essential for long-term political and social stability in the country;
- D. whereas the coming parliamentary elections to the People's Assembly and to the Shoura Council, to be held in late 2011 and early 2012, as well as the presidential election to be held in 2012 will be milestones in the process of democratic transition in Egypt;
- E. whereas, on 9 October 2011, violent incidents during a peaceful march organised by Coptic Christians in Cairo, following an attack on a Coptic church in Aswan, resulted in the death of 25 civilians and members of the military, and in more than 300 injured;
- F. whereas Coptic Pope Shenouda III blamed the incitement to violence on infiltrators who had joined the peaceful demonstration; whereas religious leaders, including Al-Azhar Grand Imam Ahmed al-Tayeb, reiterated their call and support for national unity and inter-faith dialogue in Egypt;
- G. whereas the Egyptian government established a fact-finding committee composed by members of the judiciary to investigate into these incidents with the aim of holding accountable those responsible for inciting violence and for violent actions;
- H. whereas, in its statement of 12 October 2011, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces reaffirmed its commitment to the rule of law, to respect the right of all citizens to protest peacefully, and to the freedoms of assembly, belief and expression;
- I. whereas civilians continue being brought before military tribunals in Egypt; whereas 25-year-old blogger Maikel Nabil Sanad was arrested on 28 March 2011 in Cairo and sentenced to three years in prison by a military tribunal without the presence of his lawyers; whereas he has been on a hunger and thirst strike for weeks and is currently in a critical health condition;
- J. whereas, in its statement on freedom of association in Egypt of 18 October 2011, the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network expressed its concerns about the situation of NGOs in the country;

Syria

- K. whereas, according to UN estimates, more than 3000 people have lost their lives, including at least 187 children, and many more have been injured and detained since March 2011 as a result of the brutal repression by the Syrian regime against its population; whereas, despite widespread international condemnation, violent crackdowns and human rights violations by security forces against civilians and their families continue and further increase in Syria;
- L. whereas the reforms and amnesties announced and promised by President Bashar al-Assad have never been put into practice;
- M. whereas, in its conclusions of 10 October 2011, the Council welcomed the efforts of the

Syrian political opposition to establish a united platform, called on the international community also to welcome these efforts, noted the creation of the Syrian National Council (SNC) as a positive step forward, and welcomed the SNC's commitment to non-violence and democratic values; whereas Members of the European Parliament have exchanged views with representatives of the Syrian opposition in exile on several occasions in the past months;

- N. whereas ongoing events in Syria are accompanied by actions aimed at inciting inter-ethnic and inter-confessional conflict and increasing sectarian tensions; whereas Christian communities, which make up about 10 per cent of the population, have an important role to play in the democratisation of the country;

Egypt

1. Expresses again its solidarity with the Egyptian people in this critical and difficult period of democratic transition in the country and continues supporting their democratic aspirations; encourages the EU and its Member States to continue supporting the efforts aimed at accelerating democratic, economic and social reforms in Egypt;
2. Stresses, in this context, the importance of holding free, fair and transparent elections to the People's Assembly and to the Shoura Council in late 2011 and early 2012, and presidential elections in 2012 in Egypt; encourages the EU and its Member States to continue supporting and assisting the Egyptian authorities, political parties and civil society in the efforts aimed at achieving this goal; encourages the Egyptian authorities to facilitate the work of foreign organisations that intend following the electoral process on the ground;
3. Expresses its concerns about the violent incidents that took place on 9 October 2011 in Cairo, which resulted in the death of 25 civilians and members of the military, and in more than 300 injured, and extends its condolences to the families of the victims;
4. Welcomes the setting up by the Egyptian government of a fact-finding committee composed of members of the judiciary investigating into these incidents; notes the government's announcements about the immediate consideration of a draft decree aiming to legalise the status of places of worship built without proper authorisation as well as about strengthening legal instruments aimed at fighting discrimination both in public and private domains; stresses, however, the responsibility of the Egyptian government and authorities to ensure the safety of all citizens in the country and that those responsible for the violence be brought to justice;
5. Expresses its deep concerns about the health condition of imprisoned blogger Maikel Nabil Sanad and calls for his immediate release; urges the Egyptian government and authorities to put an end without delay to military trials of civilians; urges the Egyptian authorities to ensure that no civil society organisation is subject of direct or indirect intimidation in the country and to facilitate the participation of these organisations in the process of democratic transition, including the electoral process;

Syria

6. Strongly condemns again the brutal repression by the Syrian regime against its population; extends its condolences to the families of the victims and reiterates its solidarity with the Syrian people; calls on President Bashar al-Assad to step aside to allow a democratic transition to take place in Syria;
7. Reiterates its call for an independent, transparent and effective investigation into the killings, arrests, arbitrary detention and alleged forced disappearances and instances of torture by the Syrian security forces in order to ensure that the perpetrators of such acts are held to account by the international community;
8. Welcomes the adoption by the Council on 13 October 2011 of new restrictive measures against the Syrian regime as well as the Council conclusions of 10 October which reiterated the EU's determination to pursue actively its current policy on Syria, including through its targeted sanctions against the Syrian regime and those supporting it, until there is an end to the unacceptable violence and decisive progress towards a genuine, peaceful and democratic transition addressing the legitimate demands of the Syrian people; calls, in this context, for further sanctions that target the regime but minimise the negative impacts on the living conditions of the population;
9. Regrets deeply that the UN Security Council (UNSC) has not been able to give adequate answer to the ongoing brutal events in Syria so far; expresses its full support for the efforts of the EU and its Member States to proceed with a UNSC resolution condemning the use of lethal force by the Syrian regime and calling for an end to this use of force, and to put in place sanctions for failure to do so; urges all members of the UNSC to assume their responsibilities in relation to the situation in Syria;
10. Welcomes the positive statement made by the Council on the efforts of the Syrian political opposition to establish a united platform; reiterates its call to HR/VP Ashton, the Council and the Commission to further encourage and support the emergence of organised Syrian democratic opposition forces both within and outside the country;
11. Stresses the importance of the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in Syria, and notably the freedom of religion, belief, conscience and thought; expresses, in this context, its support to the Christian community in the country and, at the same time, encourages this community to play a positive and constructive role in the ongoing events in Syria; encourages also Syrian opposition forces to declare or reconfirm their commitment to human rights and fundamental freedoms, and notably the freedom of religion, belief, conscience and thought;
12. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the Government and Parliament of Egypt and the Government and Parliament of Syria.