



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

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Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality

2013/2147(INI)

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

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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'¹ 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;
 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

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

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

Date adopted	26.11.2013
Result of final vote	+: 25 -: 0 0: 0
Members present for the final vote	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, Antonyia Parvanova, Marc Tarabella, Britta Thomsen, Marina Yannakoudakis, Anna Záborská, Inês Cristina Zuber
Substitute(s) present for the final vote	Iñaki Irazabalbeitia Fernández, Kent Johansson, Nicole Kiil-Nielsen, Doris Pack
Substitute(s) under Rule 187(2) present for the final vote	Jill Evans, María Irigoyen Pérez