



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

2014 - 2019

Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality

2014/2229(INI)

11.5.2015

OPINION

of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality

for the Committee on Foreign Affairs

on the security challenges in the MENA region and the prospects for political stability
(2014/2229(INI))

Rapporteur: Maria Arena

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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 into its motion for a resolution:

- A. whereas in line with the 2008 EU guidelines on violence against women and girls, the promotion of women's rights and gender equality should be basic components of the political and human rights dialogue between the EU and the countries of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region;
- B. whereas women's rights are indivisible and non-negotiable and the EU must adopt a gender-equality-based foreign policy when addressing nations that violate women's rights and do not enshrine gender equality;
- C. whereas women and girls, particularly those from religious and ethnic minorities, are victims of the violence perpetrated by IS, which includes enslavement, sexual exploitation and violence, forced pregnancies, extrajudicial killings, unlawful trials with inhuman punishments, attacks amounting to war crimes and crimes against humanity;
- D. whereas the political instability in the region is leading to significant increases in the number of refugees, who often risk their lives to flee, being victims of human trafficking, with the most vulnerable groups being women and children; whereas women's participation, particularly that of women from religious and ethnic minorities, in peace negotiations, peace building and peace-keeping processes is key to achieving long-lasting results in this field;
- E. whereas numerous challenges remain to be met to ensure the security and protection of women who are victims of violence, given that the incidence of rape and other forms of violence against women seems to be increasing in the MENA region; whereas women's access to justice is limited; whereas the persistence of gender inequality needs to be addressed;
- F. whereas many women continue to be oppressed by the institutionalised patriarchal structures of state and society and continue to suffer from state violence and a lack of infrastructure for assisting women victims of violence;
- G. whereas the engagement and empowerment of women in the public, political, economic and cultural spheres in MENA countries is key to fostering stability, peace and economic prosperity in the long run; whereas the empowerment of women and girls through education is central to promoting their role in all these spheres; whereas women's rights and gender equality civil society organisations can play an important role in empowering women in MENA countries;
- H. whereas on 25 June 2012 the European Council adopted a Strategic Framework on Human Rights and Democracy, under which human rights are to be mainstreamed in all EU policies, including foreign policy, and whereas combating violence against women is a priority of that Strategic Framework;

- I. whereas cultural cooperation and exchange, as well as academic exchanges between and among EU and MENA countries, play an important role in building understanding, stability and peace across the region; whereas the role of women and girls in cultural exchange and cooperation must be encouraged and promoted;
1. Reiterates that the EU firmly condemns slavery, forced marriages, rape, child labour, the use of child soldiers, female genital mutilation, crimes of honour and all other forms of human rights violations;
 2. Calls on the Commission to ensure that gender equality and women's rights – notably the right to security, the right to proper reproductive health services and the right to redress and compensation as victims of conflicts – are included in all partnership agreements and negotiations with the countries of the MENA region;
 3. Calls on the parties to the armed conflicts to respect the provisions of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, to take measures to protect women and girls, in particular from sexual abuse, smuggling and the sex trade, and to fight against the impunity of perpetrators;
 4. Considers that women's rights organisations can promote a culture of peace and security and that the adoption of measures aimed at ensuring the participation of women in conflict prevention will enable Council Resolution 1325 to be properly implemented in the field;
 5. Calls on national and local authorities to respect the fundamental rights of women, including the right to actively participate in political life, to make sure that women have access to participation in decision-making in their communities and countries and to offer protection to female politicians and activists, and calls on the Commission to design specific support measures in the field of gender equality in the countries concerned;
 6. Is convinced that gender equality and women's rights and participation must be dealt with in an explicit and systematic manner in all EU cooperation and free trade negotiations and further included in all political and cultural dialogues with the countries of the MENA region, including the League of Arab States;
 7. Stresses the utmost importance of including a gender perspective in the promoting and funding of cultural and academic cooperation and exchanges, vocational training and circular mobility programmes between the EU and MENA partner countries, using these as a tool for empowerment of women and girls, strengthening and promoting their participation in their economies and fostering gender equality; calls on the Commission to include a gender perspective in the European Parliament's proposal of a Euro-Mediterranean Erasmus programme;
 8. Stresses that ensuring gender balance in its missions, delegations and mediation teams is also a way for the EU to promote women's rights and participation in partner countries;
 9. Calls for the governments of the countries of the MENA region, the UN, the EU and the NGOs concerned to take into account the particular vulnerability of refugee women and girls, especially those who are isolated from their families, to provide them with appropriate protection and to step up their efforts to assist survivors of sexual violence, while introducing social policies that enable them to reintegrate into society;

10. Calls on the EU and its Member States to set up a special programme for the support and rehabilitation of women and girls who are victims of sexual violence and slavery in conflict areas in the MENA region, and especially Syria and Iraq;
11. Urges the governments of the countries of the MENA region to sign and ratify the Istanbul Convention, which is a powerful instrument for comprehensively tackling violence against women and girls, including domestic violence and female genital mutilation (FGM);
12. Calls on the Commission and the EEAS to include a women and gender equality perspective in the development direct dialogue with civil society in the MENA countries, and to provide a voice for women activists and academics in the region; stresses the importance of women and gender rights organisations in processes of civil society consultation within the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) framework, and also in consultation on ENP renewal; acknowledges that an effective political and human rights dialogue must place women's perspectives at its centre and be sensitive to different and changing socio-cultural and religious contexts calls on the EEAS and the Commission to include gender equality and the role of women in society as key considerations and central elements in their strategy to encourage democratic reform in EU neighbouring countries; stresses that the importance of promoting gender equality and empowerment of women in society as part of democratic reform should be reflected in ENP funding, and in the development of political and strategic dimensions;
13. Points to the major role that the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (EMPA) can play as a forum for democratic and political debate among the representatives of the two sides of the Mediterranean; calls for this institution to be given fresh political impetus, and highlights the progress made in previous years in the political dialogue on gender matters and the promotion of women's rights;
14. Regrets the extent of reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which has profoundly limited the impact and protection it can provide; strongly urges the governments of the countries of the MENA region to fully implement CEDAW and to criminalise all forms of violence against women, including sexual and domestic violence within marriage;
15. Notes that any sustainable economic development resulting from strategic dialogue and cooperation between the EU and MENA countries must increase the participation of women in MENA economies, promoting gender equality and creating opportunities for young people and women, including women from marginalised groups.

RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE

Date adopted	6.5.2015
Result of final vote	+: 30 -: 1 0: 1
Members present for the final vote	Maria Arena, Catherine Bearder, Beatriz Becerra Basterrechea, Vilija Blinkevičiūtė, Anna Maria Corazza Bildt, Viorica Dăncilă, Iratxe García Pérez, Anna Hedh, Mary Honeyball, Teresa Jiménez-Becerril Barrio, Elisabeth Köstinger, Agnieszka Kozłowska-Rajewicz, Vicky Maeijer, Angelika Mlinar, Angelika Niebler, Maria Noichl, Marijana Petir, Terry Reintke, Liliana Rodrigues, Jordi Sebastià, Michaela Šojdrová, Ernest Urtasun, Ángela Vallina, Beatrix von Storch, Anna Záborská, Jana Žitňanská, Inês Cristina Zuber
Substitutes present for the final vote	Stefan Eck, Constance Le Grip, Sirpa Pietikäinen, Monika Vana, Julie Ward