

# 1. EU relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran

A5-0418/2001

## European Parliament resolution on the communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on EU relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran (COM(2001) 71 - C5-0338/2001 - 2001/2138(COS))

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to the Commission communication (COM(2001) 71 - C5-0338/2001),
- having regard to Resolution 2001/17 of 20 April 2001 of the UN Human Rights Commission on the human rights situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran,
- having regard to the final report of 12 November, as well as the interim report of 10 August 2001 (A/56/278) and the report of 16 January 2001 (E/CN.4/2001/39) of the Special Envoy of the UN Committee on Human Rights for Iran, Maurice Copithorne, on the human rights situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran,
- having regard to its previous resolutions of 18 May 2000 in Iran<sup>1</sup>, 13 April 2000 on the prisoners facing trial in Iran on charges of espionage on behalf of Israel and the United States<sup>2</sup>, and 16 September 1999 on the situation of the prisoners accused of spying in Iran<sup>3</sup>,
- having regard to the draft resolution on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran tabled by the Member States and others for the 56th UN General Assembly on 20 November 2001 (A/C.3/56/L.50),
- having regard to its resolution of 5 July 2001 on human rights in the world in 2000 and the European Union Human Rights Policy<sup>4</sup>,
- having regard to the dialogue established in 1995 and extended in October 1998 through an exchange of views between the European Union and Iran on global issues such as terrorism and human rights, regional issues and the areas of cooperation such as drugs, refugees and energy,
- having regard to the Commission's regret at the extension by five years of the sanctions imposed on Iran and Libya (ILSA, HR 1954) by the US Congress on 26 July 2001,
- having regard its resolution of 25 October 2001<sup>1</sup> on the progress achieved in the implementation of the common foreign and security policy which recommends opening the way to the conclusion of a trade and cooperation agreement with Iran,

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<sup>1</sup> OJ C 59, 23.2.2001, p. 282.

<sup>2</sup> OJ C 40, 7.2.2001, p. 421.

<sup>3</sup> OJ C 54, 25.2.2000, p. 112.

<sup>4</sup> Texts Adopted, Item 13.

- having regard to the Commission’s statement in its communication that it ‘goes without saying that the scope for promoting bilateral relations will depend on the progress of political, economic and legislative reform in Iran’,
  - having regard to the condemnation by President Khatami and other senior figures in Iran of the terrorist attacks on the USA of 11 September 2001,
  - having regard to the visit by the Iranian Foreign Minister, Kamal Kharrasi, to the European Union institutions on 10 September 2001, which represents a major step forward in diplomatic contacts between Iran and the EU since the Islamic Revolution of 1979,
  - having regard to the ad hoc visit by the EU’s Foreign Policy Troika to the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Mashreq States and Pakistan, which resulted from the action plan adopted at the special summit of Foreign Ministers on 21 September 2001 in Brussels<sup>2</sup> on measures to increase the fight against terrorism,
  - having regard to Rule 47(1) of its Rules of Procedure,
  - having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Security and Defence Policy and the opinion of the Committee on Industry, External Trade, Research and Energy (A5-0418/2001),
- A. whereas virtually all Iran’s neighbours are sources of permanent instability and it is very much in the EU's interest, as part of a foreign policy strategy for conflict prevention, that Iran should become a factor for stability in the region,
  - B. whereas the EU can help Iran to develop good-neighbourly relations with all the countries in the area and contribute effectively to the development of regional cooperation,
  - C. whereas the EU should do everything within its power to further the continuation of Iran’s constructive participation in the international coalition against terrorism under the auspices of the UN,
  - D. whereas Iran is already host to some 2.8 million refugees, mainly from Afghanistan and Iraq, who pose a threat to the stability of Iran and beyond and who therefore need substantially increased international humanitarian aid, which is all the more urgent in view of the massive increase in the influx of refugees into Iran as a consequence of the fighting in Afghanistan,
  - E. whereas Iran has now had a government for 22 years which persecutes and oppresses adherents of other faiths; disappointed that the election of President Khatami, which for the first time seemed to give grounds for hope, did not bring about substantial democratic and political changes,

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<sup>1</sup> Texts Adopted, Item 15.

<sup>2</sup> SN 140/01 of 21.9.2001.

- F. whereas more democracy and greater respect for human rights would allow the human resources in Iran to be tapped on a large scale and thereby substantially boost Iran's position as a regional economic player, which might make it a more stable partner in the region,
- G. whereas the EU, with an annual volume of exports in excess of EUR 4 billion, is Iran's main trading partner and Iran exports goods with a value of EUR 4.5 billion to the EU every year, with oil accounting for 75% of these exports, and whereas there still remains a great potential for expansion of cooperation in other areas,
- H. whereas the peaceful development of civil society and of the economy depends on the continued evolution of domestic political, legislative and economic framework conditions in Iran, away from autocratic and repressive structures, towards more democracy and economic and political liberalisation,
- I. whereas a large majority of Iran's electorate, through its extremely high turnout at the parliamentary, presidential (67% turnout in 2001) and municipal elections since 1996, has shown not only an acceptance of political institutions, but also a considerable desire to press ahead with both political and economic reform (77% majority for President Khatami in 2001), in contrast with 'the desire of a majority of the Shiite religious leaders to consolidate an Islamic theocracy',
- J. having regard to President Khatami's declaration of 8 August 2001, inaugurating his second term of office, that he intends to strengthen the civil institutions of the country,
- K. whereas any EU policy vis-à-vis Iran must take into account the contradictions in the social and political system, and a policy of closer cooperation therefore makes sense only if further progress in political, economic and social reforms in Iran is encouraged,
- L. whereas a 'cultural dialogue' will have an important part to play in this context in promoting understanding and exchange between religions and societies; whereas the European Union intends to intensify its relations with the Arab States and Iran along these lines,
- M. whereas, despite the progress made, the human rights situation in Iran is still a serious matter for concern; whereas the Special Envoy of the UNCHR for Iran, Maurice Copithorne, in his most recent report of 12 November 2001 stated that "in some important areas such as punishments, and other aspects of the legal system there has been a serious backsliding" since his last report in August; whereas the promised reform of the press and the judicial system has not taken place and, particularly in the last few months, freedom of the press and freedom of assembly have again been severely curtailed, the last example of this development being the arrest of the film director Tahmineh Milani on 31 August 2001 for 'insulting Islamic values',
- N. associates itself with the concerns expressed by the Member States in the UN draft resolution,
- O. particularly concerned about the imprisonment of Ali Afshari, Akbar Ganji, Ezzatollah Sahabi, Yussefi Eshkevari, Khalil Rostamkhani and Said Sadr for participating in the Conference 'Iran after elections - The dynamics of reform in the Islamic Republic', which

took place in Berlin in April 2000, and about the fate of Abbas Amir Entezam, Iran's longest-serving prisoner of conscience,

- P. whereas women continue to be subject to severe restrictions, despite the fact that their situation is substantially better than in most countries in the region; whereas female members have been elected to Parliament, with the highest proportion so far of 5.5% in the 2000 parliamentary elections; whereas there are some women in leading positions in ministries and business, and female students represent over 50% of enrolments at university level,
  - Q. whereas Iran is a multi-ethnic country in which minorities amount to approximately 50% of the whole population, and whereas minorities' rights are not fully respected with regard, in particular, to the Azeri minority, who represent a large part of Iranian society,
  - R. whereas President Khatami has appealed to ethnic minorities, offering the prospect of a relaxation of cultural restrictions,
  - S. whereas Iran faces substantial economic and social problems, such as high inflation and unemployment, foreign debts, low production output and low levels of industrial capacity utilisation, rapid demographic growth and alarming environmental pollution and is therefore, in view of its high economic potential and rich energy resources, interested in increased foreign investments and closer trade and cooperation ties with the EU,
  - T. whereas the cultivation of drugs in Afghanistan, formerly sponsored by the Taliban, is responsible not only for between 1.5 and 2 million Iranian drug addicts - which is a tragedy in itself – and for causing serious economic, social, cultural and security-related harm in Iran, but is also making Iran, because of its geographical location, a transit country for the bulk of EU drug imports,
  - U. whereas Iran, a partner of the United Nations Drugs Control Programme, has made considerable efforts to fight against drug smugglers equipped with military weapons such as armoured vehicles and anti-aircraft missiles, and has paid a heavy price for its fight against drugs with more than 3 000 law enforcement officials killed over the last 10 years,
1. Is in favour of closer cooperation between the EU and Iran, and advocates a two-pronged policy for this, comprising on the one hand a critical dialogue to raise the issues of the human rights situation, nuclear, chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction and the need for economic reforms in Iran and, on the other hand, arrangements for cooperation in various fields with a view, inter alia, to promoting the rule of law and democracy, which would provide a more solid base for this cooperation in the abovementioned areas;
  2. Stresses this need once again in the light of the events of 11 September and the associated far-reaching changes in foreign policy, and calls on the Commission, in view of the extraordinary circumstances, to make humanitarian assistance available to Afghan refugees in Iran without delay;
  3. Hopes that the readiness for political action displayed by the international community after the terrorist attacks will remain in evidence;

4. Calls on Iran to reconsider its policy in the Middle East and help to reconcile two objectives: firstly, the creation of a viable and democratic Palestinian State and the end of the occupations, and secondly, the right of Israel to live in peace and security within internationally recognised borders; calls on Iran, furthermore, to confirm this right and use its influence in the Middle East to persuade those movements with which it maintains relations to refrain from the use of violence; calls on Iran to further use its influence to secure the release of Israeli soldiers being held by these groups;
5. Urges Iran to adopt a constructive attitude vis-à-vis the other coastal countries as regards the delimitation of boundaries in the Caspian, refraining from unilateral initiatives which could endanger the ongoing process that should lead to a new international agreement on the matter;
6. Supports the desire for political, economic and social reform democratically expressed by the people of Iran and its recently elected representatives at the presidential, parliamentary and municipal elections, and hopes that efforts to achieve political, economic and judicial reform will finally bear fruit during this second term of office;
7. Considers that the readiness expressed by Iran to discuss human rights issues is a positive development with a view to the normalisation of relations between the EU and Iran, and expects that, in consequence, the rights of the individual in criminal cases and minority rights, for instance, will no longer be denied in future on grounds of national security; expects improvements, notably concerning the release of prisoners of conscience and compliance with international standards for fair trial, the prohibition of torture, the abolition of special courts such as Revolutionary and Press Courts and the Special Court for the Clergy for offences which can be dealt with in the normal judicial framework, freedom of belief for all religions (not only those recognised in the Constitution) and the abolition of the death penalty;
8. Assumes that any future trade and cooperation agreement with Iran will contain a substantive human rights clause based on the corresponding articles in the Cotonou Agreement;
9. Advocates a selective rapprochement between the EU and Iran with the aim, inter alia, of strengthening the existing moves towards democratic institutions and the development of civil society, asks to be kept fully informed of the specific rapprochement measures chosen in the future by the Commission;
10. Believes, in this respect, that the Commission should implement ad-hoc programmes in order to help civil society, independent media and non-governmental organisations enhance their profile and play a decisive role in the process of democratisation of Iranian society;
11. Considers that closer trade and economic cooperation between the EU and Iran is possible if Iran adopts a policy of economic liberalisation, as provided for in the five-year plan launched in 1999; recommends a reinforced economic liberalisation and privatisation process and a greater openness to foreign investment and economic activities through the removal of tariff and non-tariff trade barriers;

12. Welcomes, therefore, the exploratory talks between the Commission and the Iranian Government in the fields of energy, trade and investment, drugs and refugee and asylum issues, and advocates extending these talks to other fields of mutual interest, especially in the field of the fight against drugs, which requires further steps in order to meet Iran's technical and educational needs; calls on the Council and Commission to urge the future rulers of Afghanistan to put an immediate end to the widespread production of drugs in their country and their illegal export;
13. Takes the view that it is necessary to embark on a dialogue on further areas of mutual interest, such as human rights, foreign and security policy, weapons of mass destruction and the proliferation of nuclear weapons;
14. Draws attention to the importance of cultural dialogue in this context, for example by the establishment of a forum for dialogue and other mutual cultural contacts;
15. Underscores the need to sensitively and effectively improve the precarious human rights situation, and calls for the rights of religious minorities and the dignity of women to be respected, the violation of which is apparent in the imposed dress code, as well as in the numerous provisions of family law which discriminate against women; supports therefore the proposal by the UN Special Envoy, Mr Copithorne, to draw up a timetable for implementing the requisite legal and administrative changes in order to ensure equal legal status for women;
16. Notes the existence of many ambitious young people in Iran and recognises their role in Iran's reform process; wishes to strengthen contacts and relations between young Iranians and young people from other countries, as well as access by young Iranians to the world outside their country, in particular through the development of academic exchanges; wishes the cultural, scientific and cooperation departments of the EU and its Member States to be given more facilities to set up missions in Iran;
17. Hopes that, for the first time since 1996, the UN General Assembly's special human rights envoy will be invited back to the country;
18. Calls also on Iran to empower the Islamic Human Rights Commission to carry out impartial and thorough investigations into allegations of human rights violations including torture, disappearances and extrajudicial executions, and calls for the methods and findings of such investigations to be made public;
19. Hopes that further efforts will be made to carry out the promised reform of the press and judiciary; calls for the abolition of the present measures, many of which are arbitrary and punitive, by a predictable, judicially based system with suspension provisions limited to six months;
20. Encourages the forces of reform in parliament and in civil society to continue to address boldly the task entrusted to them by the electorate of consolidating democratic structures and building an open democratic society; notes, however, that since President Khatami's re-election in his second term of office there have been no signs of any significantly more far-reaching approach to reform and that, on the contrary, the number of executions, for example, has drastically increased since then; believes that the return of an almost unchanged cabinet has reduced the hopes of the reformist parliament;

21. Considers that the conclusion of a trade and cooperation agreement with Iran is possible if it makes substantive progress in amending its legislation governing the market and investments to comply with WTO requirements; welcomes in consequence the forwarding of a proposal from the Commission to the Council on 19 November 2001 concerning such a trade agreement between the EU and Iran and the positive evaluation of and support for this expressed at the General Affairs Council on 17 October 2001;
22. Favours converting Iran's current observer status within the Commission-funded Inogate programme into full-member status, in the light of the importance attached in the Green Paper on the security of energy supply to establishing ongoing dialogue with producer countries with a view to achieving greater transparency on the market and price stability;
23. Welcomes the adoption by Iran, on 16 July 2000, of Regulation 14.4 establishing a list of 77 mainly industrial products to which import liberalisation is to apply; urges the Iranian Government to pursue this liberalisation process further, since it is certain to be conducive to the start of its negotiations on WTO membership;
24. Welcomes further the Iranian Parliament's approval of the Bill on foreign investment in Iran in May 2001, which is more flexible than the 1955 Act currently in force, as well as its recent approval of a law enabling Iran to join the New York Convention on international arbitration, which will help build the climate of confidence required to attract investment from abroad;
25. Recommends that the Commission and the Council call on Iran to participate in the Sixth Framework Programme in order to encourage the country's research and innovation activities, as well as promoting research relations between the EU and Iran;
26. Welcomes, at all events, the progress made to date in the area of rights and freedoms, and encourages Iran to make further progress in liberalisation in such areas as the rule of law, the rights of minorities and freedom of the press;
27. Recognises the very large economic and financial burden of Iran's refugee population and regrets the relatively low commitment of the EU and international institutions to help; believes that the new pressure of Afghan refugees calls for immediate EU action; encourages the Commission to launch a humanitarian aid programme to help Afghan and Iraqi refugees in Iran and to coordinate technical aid from the EU Member States to secure Iran's borders;
28. Encourages the Commission to launch a humanitarian aid programme to help Afghan and Iraqi refugees in Iran and to coordinate technical aid from the EU Member States to secure Iran's borders;
29. Proposes, therefore, to send an ad hoc delegation to Teheran, and to invite the Iranian Parliament to send a delegation to Brussels in return, in order to prepare future parliamentary relations between the European Parliament and the Majlis, for example in the form of Iran's inclusion in a parliamentary delegation for the Persian Gulf;
30. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and Commission.