The Union's Mediterranean policy

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The signing of five association agreements under the Barcelona process has been welcomed by the Committee, although it deplores the delay in ratifying the agreements, which is holding up their entry into force. The committee, voiced these views when it unanimously adopted an own-initiative report by Jannis SAKELLARIOU (PES, D). The report's proposal for a recommendation regrets that, nearly three years after the Barcelona Conference, not all Mediterranean states have yet been invited to participate in the Barcelona process. It stresses that if the current deadlock in the Middle East peace process is not overcome the Barcelona process will not be able to move forward. It also calls on the Union to play a more prominent role in the process. The committee emphasises the need to ensure compliance with the human rights provisions in the Barcelona Declaration and asks the Council to instruct the Commission to compile an annual report on the human rights situation in countries which have signed the declaration. It also says that support should be given to active participation in the Barcelona process by "civil society" in the countries concerned. Libya, it says, should be invited to attend the next conference in Stuttgart, provided it fulfils the commitments it made concerning the relevant UN resolutions and recognises the principles of the Barcelona Conference regarding the right of all partners in the dialogue to exist. In addition, the Mediterranean third countries not currently involved in the Barcelona process should be granted observer status and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia should be given a status similar to that of Mauritania. Lastly, the report wants the Commission's negotiating mandate for the Euro-Mediterranean agreements to be placed on a fundamentally more flexible footing (apart from the democracy and human rights clauses) so that the specific needs of each of the partners can better be taken into account, and for debt cancellation to be made part of a strategy whereby the indebted state undertakes to reinvest the money owed in projects for economic recovery and reform measures.