

EC/Syria agreement: negotiations with a view to the conclusion of a Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreement

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Véronique DE KEYSER (PSE, BE) containing Parliament's recommendation to the Council on the conclusion of an EU-Syria Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreement.

The committee expressed its conviction that the association agreement could give a "decisive impetus" to the political, economic and social reforms needed to improve the situation in Syria. It reiterated, however, that respect for democratic values, human rights and civil liberties were prerequisites and that an effective control mechanism should therefore be included in the agreement's human rights clause. The report called in particular for greater respect for ethnic minorities and reiterated the need to maintain freedom of religion.

MEPs said that anchoring Syria firmly within the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership would reinforce the country's relations with the Member States of the European Union and its partners in the Southern Mediterranean, and facilitate the Middle East peace process. The committee asked the Council to strengthen its initiatives "with a view to deepening the cooperation between the EU and Syria and ultimately signing that agreement", while taking account of a number of recommendations. These included:

- urging the Syrian Government to adopt measures in the fields of democracy and human rights so as to comply with international human rights law on freedom of expression, the protection of human rights defenders, the prevention of torture and the abolition of the death penalty;
- expressing "serious concerns" to the Syrian Government about the lack of progress in such areas as opening up to multi-party politics, and calling on it to respect its commitments within the framework of the Barcelona Process and to immediately lift the state of emergency;
- calling on the Syrian Government to report on the progress regarding respect for the rights of religious and other minorities and of the Kurds in particular;
- calling on Syria to respect Lebanon's security, refrain from interfering in its internal affairs, establish formal diplomatic relations with Lebanon and stop supporting Hezbollah;
- drawing the attention of Syria to "the importance of its potential role in the Near and Middle East" for the peaceful resolution of conflicts in the region.

Finally, the report asked the Council to consider "additional incentives and benefits for Syria, going beyond those granted through the association agreement, in order to encourage Syria to review its current foreign policy and regional alignment in ways that will help promote regional peace, stability and prosperity and, in particular, recognition of the State of Israel's right to exist and support by Syria for progress in the Middle East peace process".