Security challenges in the Middle East and North Africa and prospects for political stability

European Parliament resolution of 9 July 2015 on the security challenges in the Middle East and North Africa region and the prospects for political stability (2014/2229(INI))

(2017/C 265/12)

The European Parliament,

— having regard to Articles 8 and 21 of the Treaty on European Union,

— having regard to the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the European Union and its Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Iraq, of the other part and its position of 17 January 2013 on that agreement (1),

— having regard to the European Security Strategy of 12 December 2003 and the Council Declaration of 11 December 2008 on strengthening capabilities,

— having regard to the Joint Communication of 8 March 2011 of the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and of the Commission on a partnership for democracy and shared prosperity with the southern Mediterranean (COM(2011)0200),

— having regard to the Deauville Partnership launched by the G8 at the Deauville Heads of State or Government Summit on 21 May 2011,

— having regard to the Joint Communication of 25 May 2011 of the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and of the Commission on a new response to a changing neighbourhood (COM(2011)0303),

— having regard to the Joint Communication of 6 February 2015 of the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and of the Commission on elements for an EU regional strategy for Syria and Iraq as well as the Da’esh threat (JOIN(2015)0002),

— having regard to the Declaration adopted at the third meeting of Foreign Ministers of the European Union and the League of Arab States (LAS) in Athens on 11 June 2014, as well as the Memorandum of Understanding signed in Brussels on 19 January 2015 between the European External Action Service and the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States,

— having regard to the Council conclusions of 30 August 2014 on Iraq and Syria,

— having regard to the conclusions of the International Conference on Peace and Security in Iraq held on 15 September 2014 in Paris,

— having regard to the conclusions of the Foreign Affairs Council of 17 November 2014 on the Middle East Peace Process,

— having regard to the conclusions of the Foreign Affairs Council of 15 December 2014 regarding an EU regional strategy for Syria and Iraq,

— having regard to the conclusions of the Foreign Affairs Council of 9 February 2015 on combating terrorism,

— having regard to its resolution of 24 March 2011 on European Union relations with the Gulf Cooperation Council (2),

— having regard to its relations of 10 March 2011 on the EU’s approach towards Iran (1),

— having regard to its resolution of 14 December 2011 on the review of the European Neighbourhood Policy (2),

— having regard to its resolution of 10 May 2012 on trade for change: EU trade and investment strategy for the southern Mediterranean following the Arab Spring revolutions (3),

— having regard to its resolution of 11 March 2014 on Saudi Arabia, its relations with the EU and its role in the Middle East and North Africa (4),

— having regard to its resolution of 18 September 2014 on the situation in Iraq and Syria, the Islamic State offensive and the persecution of minorities (5),

— having regard to its resolution of 15 January 2015 on the situation in Libya (6),

— having regard to its resolution of 12 February 2015 on the humanitarian crisis in Iraq and Syria, in particular with regard to the Islamic State (7),

— having regard to its resolution of 12 March 2015 on relations between the European Union and the League of Arab States and cooperation in countering terrorism (8),

— having regard to its resolution of 12 March 2015 on recent attacks and abductions by ISIS/Da'esh in the Middle East, notably of Assyrians (9),

— having regard to the conclusions of the meeting of 23 March 2015 in Brussels of Libyan municipality representatives, convened by the United Nations Support Mission in Libya and hosted by the European Union,

— having regard to the meeting held in Barcelona on 13 April 2015 of the EU and Southern Mediterranean countries’ Foreign Affairs Ministers, organised by Spain, the Latvian presidency and the EU to discuss the future of the European Neighbourhood,

— having regard to UN Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014) authorising cross-border and cross-line access for the UN and its partners to deliver humanitarian aid in Syria without state consent,

— having regard to Rule 52 of its Rules of Procedure,

— having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the opinion of the Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality (A8-0193/2015),

A. whereas the conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Libya and the increase in tensions in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region are major sources of destabilisation of that region; whereas there is a junction between the Sahel and Middle-Eastern fronts in the fight against terrorism, and these fronts are close to the sensitive area of the Horn of Africa; whereas the consequences of such a situation for the security of the whole region are disastrous as they lastingly damage political and economic development, critical infrastructures and demographic cohesion in the region; whereas the risks which these developments entail for European security, citizens and interests are serious; whereas there is a high number of civilian victims and acts of terror committed against civilians; whereas the violations of human rights and
humanitarian law, particularly against ethnic and religious minorities are severe; whereas the serious humanitarian crisis caused by these conflicts is causing massive population displacements and creating enormous difficulties for refugees and their host communities; whereas there are persistent difficulties in discerning a coherent conflict resolution strategy and establishing a legitimate and reliable basis for inclusive dialogue with the various parties concerned;

B. whereas it is necessary to review EU action in the MENA area in the light of the implications of the Arab uprisings for the countries concerned, the new and complex situation thus created and the imperative need to combat ISIS and other terrorist organisations; whereas there is a need to step up pressure on authoritarian regimes for the introduction of inclusive policies; whereas stabilisation in the region is not a security issue alone, but also has economic, political and social implications, requiring the Union and its Member States to develop strategic global and multifaceted policies and full cooperation with parties the region, in the medium and long term;

C. whereas the terrorist organization ISIL/Da'esh has launched systematic campaigns of ethnic cleansing in northern Iraq and Syria, carrying out war crimes, including mass summary killings and abductions, against ethnic and religious minorities; whereas the UN has already reported on targeted killings, forced conversions, abductions, the selling of women, the enslavement of women and children, the recruitment of children for suicide bombings, and sexual and physical abuse and torture; whereas Christian, Yazidi, Turkmen, Shabak, Kakai’s, Sabean and Shia communities, as well as many Arabs and Sunni Muslims, have been targeted by ISIL/Da'esh;

D. whereas the Middle East and North Africa are in a state of geopolitical turmoil that is likely to bring about deep and unpredictable changes to regional balances; whereas there are escalating crises and conflicts, with a political, ethnic and sectarian dimension, the rise of paramilitary groups and the weakness or collapse of certain states or regimes in the region; whereas there are many human rights violations resulting from this; whereas the MENA countries and international community have shared security interests in fighting terrorism and supporting inclusive genuine democratic reform in the region;

E. whereas the conflicts in Iraq and Syria, like the conflict in Yemen and Libya, are exacerbating regional and international tensions; whereas the religious and ethnic cause is being used as a tool to further interests of politics and power; whereas this creates a risk of confrontation between Sunni and Shia that extends beyond immediate geographical borders;

F. whereas Tunisia is the most remarkable example of democratisation after the Arab uprisings but has been affected by an ISIL/Da'esh-proclaimed terrorist attack on 18 March 2015, which recalls the need for strong and continued support to the region’s countries, in particular Tunisia;

G. 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; 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 the influence of Member States in the region is very unequal; whereas there is a need to increase the influence of the European Union; whereas long-term political and economic stability in the MENA region is of fundamental strategic importance to the Union; whereas the Union accordingly has a major role to play in promoting conflict resolution and democratic governance in the MENA region;

I. whereas EU aid to MENA countries has in the past been too fragmented and too slow to adapt to the political and economic needs of the countries concerned, thereby undermining the EU’s capacity to play a major role in the region;

J. whereas EU assistance to the MENA countries, particularly under the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), has in the past too often adopted the same indiscriminate strategic approach, failing to distinguish sufficiently between the specific
situations in the countries concerned and failing to identify civil society partners needing support and capacity-building assistance; whereas the attempts at democratisation that were made following the ‘Arab Spring’ uprisings need to be actively supported on the basis of an organised, long-term approach:

K. whereas the upheavals in the MENA region have an impact on the EU’s capacity to promote its political and democratic values; whereas such upheavals affect the development of the economic relations of the EU with the countries in question and could jeopardise the EU’s energy security;

L. whereas having been forced to take emergency measures in response to successive crises that it failed to anticipate in the MENA region despite some signals, the EU has been unable to analyse the key elements or deal with the complexity of the situation, expectations and prospects created by the Arab uprisings of 2011; whereas, above all, the EU has failed to respond to the need for a very long-term strategy to sustain and assist genuine democratic transition, economic development and political stability; whereas, acting on the instructions issued by the European Council of December 2013, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (VP/HR) launched a major strategic reflection process; whereas a broad consultation process was launched by the Commission, the European External Action Service (EEAS) for a review of the ENP; whereas the set-up of the EEAS provides the possibility of a country-by-country political and strategic analysis which should be a key factor in planning of assistance to the countries of the region, including in the framework of the ENP;

M. whereas the EU, if it is to exert a positive influence on the MENA countries, must be able to do more than just hold out the prospect of economic cooperation, in particular by offering a large-scale political and strategic partnership;

N. whereas the attacks which occurred between 26 June 2015 and 30 June 2015 in Tunisia, Kuwait and Yemen, for which Da’esh/ISIL has claimed responsibility, killed 92 people and wounded several hundred others; whereas those attacks emphasise once again the need to address efficiently the security challenges and the lack of political stability in the region;

Addressing the threats and the security situation

1. Calls on the EU and its Member States to address the root causes of the rapidly deteriorating situation across the MENA region through a holistic and ambitious approach; supports the international campaign against ISIL/Da’esh and welcomes the commitment of the coalition partners to working together under a common strategy; welcomes, in particular, the action taken by the EU Member States participating in the international coalition against ISIS, whether in the form of military strikes or through logistical, financial and humanitarian participation; calls, however, for increased mobilisation in all spheres and emphasises the need for better-articulated actions; notes that these actions could usefully be coordinated under the auspices of the EU, if necessary as part of a Common Security and Defence (CSDP) operation, and to this end calls on the EU to develop sufficient operational capacity and to put in place a true common European defence; stresses, however, that a tailored response must be found, based on political and cross-regional differences, to the issue of combating ISIL/Da’esh, the al-Nusra Front and other terrorist groups; calls on the EU to take on the role of main facilitator of a regional dialogue involving all regional stakeholders, in particular the LAS, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey and Iran; recalls the importance of addressing the legitimate demands of local populations, notably as expressed during the Arab uprisings of 2011, with a view to ensuring the long-term stability of the region; notes the recent announcement by the LAS of the formation of a standing rapid-response unit, with a particular emphasis on fighting ISIS and other emerging terrorist groups;

2. Underlines the importance of a constant EU political presence at the highest level to secure a long-term strategic political dialogue and a genuine joint debate with the MENA countries on what they need in order to achieve regional stability; stresses that the European Union will only be an effective player on the international scene if it is able to speak with one voice; calls, therefore, on the EU to speedily put in place a genuine common foreign policy with close coordination between internal and external actions; calls on the VP/HR to work with EU foreign ministers or political figures recognised by regional actors to ensure, under her authority and on behalf of the Union, a constant high-level dialogue with the countries of the region; recalls the need to identify and rely on key partner countries, to ensure political and security stability in the long term;
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3. Stresses the importance and necessity of effective implementation of the following initiatives in the course of 2015: supporting capacity-building projects and activities with MENA countries, countering radicalisation and violent extremism, promoting international cooperation, addressing underlying factors and ongoing crises and strengthening partnership with key countries, including strengthening political dialogue with the LAS, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the African Union (AU) and other relevant regional coordination structures such as G5 Sahel;

4. Insists on the fact that the stability and security of the MENA region are fundamental to the security of the EU; recalls that ISIL/Da'esh and other terrorist organisations have had their roots in Iraq and Syria for many years, and aim to establish a regional influence; notes that the group’s victories are the result of institutional, democratic and security crises in these countries and the porosity of their common border; stresses that the recruitment capacity and expansion of ISIL/Da'esh and the al-Nusra Front are fuelled by the economic, political, social and cultural crisis afflicting the region; calls on the EU, together with the Arab world, to assess the root causes of radicalisation and adopt a global approach based on security, capacity for democratic governance, and political, economic, social and cultural development, whereby inclusivity should be a guiding principle; believes that, unless a practical, sustainable solution is found to these problems, any action to neutralise the threat posed by ISIL/Da'esh and other terrorist groups will encounter increased and persistent difficulties;

5. Notes the allocation of EUR one billion under the EU strategy entitled ‘Elements of an EU Regional Strategy for Syria and Iraq as well as the ISIL/Da’esh threat’, under which EUR 400 million have been earmarked for humanitarian aid; welcomes the attempts to tailor EU humanitarian assistance to gender- and age-specific needs; calls for special attention to be given to Jordan and Lebanon, which are absorbing the biggest share of refugees in proportion to their population; stresses the importance of these two countries facilitating refugees’ safe passage into their territories and respecting the principle of non-refoulement; also recalls the consequences of the refugee crisis for the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq (KRG); is concerned that, as a result of extreme poverty and deprivation, refugee camps may become a hotbed of radicalisation; believes that they constitute, in the long term, destabilising factors for their host countries, and therefore asks that long-term solutions be found that will help both the refugees and their host countries; calls on the EU to work with other partners, namely the UNHCR and UNICEF, to address persisting problems in refugee and IDPs camps in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, especially in relation to lack of schooling for young people and children; welcomes the funds for host populations under the new strategy and under the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP); calls on all EU Member States to increase their commitments in relation to the refugee crisis in terms of financial resources and resettlement of the most vulnerable refugees;

6. Notes the continuous increase in asylum applications from Syria and Iraq and calls on the EU Member States to step up their efforts in hosting asylum seekers and in swiftly addressing the build-up of pending cases;

7. Welcomes the involvement of some countries of the MENA region in the international coalition against ISIL/Da’esh; urges their governments and the international community to redouble their efforts to prevent the financing of international terrorism and wars in Syria and Libya; reiterates its call on all countries of the region to prevent individuals and private and public entities from funding or facilitating funding of terrorist organisations or Syrian individuals or companies affiliated to the Syrian Government currently under EU sanctions, which must be sufficiently severe; calls for their participation in schemes for regional cooperation in monitoring capital movements, establishing collaboration between the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the LAS, the OIC and the EU institutions; stresses the urgent need to introduce an efficient system of penalties coordinated with the LAS, OIC and GCC so as to put an end to ISIL/Da’esh financing by international actors and commercialisation of illegally produced oil by the terrorist organisation; stresses also, in this regard, the urgent need for increased cooperation between customs authorities at the border of Turkey, Iraq and Syria to prevent ISIL/Da’esh from selling illegal oil;

8. Stresses the importance of long-term strategic dialogue with the LAS, OIC and GCC; welcomes, in this regard, the declaration adopted in Athens on 11 June 2014 and the memorandum of understanding of January 2015, and calls for their full implementation; stresses the crucial importance of the organisation of frequent summits between the EU and LAS, OIC and GCC; stresses the central role to be played by the LAS in terms of crisis resolution; believes that these crises highlight the need for the LAS to be transformed by its members into a fully-fledged executive body genuinely capable of taking binding decisions; notes the strategic cooperation between the European Union and the GCC; stresses that the GCC could exert a positive political influence in the management of crises and conflicts in the MENA countries;
9. Stresses equally the importance of regional dialogues with Turkey and Iran; welcomes the recent agreement reached by the EU3+3 and Iran on the latter's nuclear programme, and hopes to see it translated into a final comprehensive agreement by the agreed deadline; calls on the VP/HR and the Member States, in the event of a final agreement on the nuclear issue, to hold in-depth consultations with Iran and to ensure, at the same time, its commitment to non-proliferation until confirmation by the relevant international bodies, including the IAEA; to this end, urges the EU to actively engage in promoting confidence-building measures between Iran and Saudi Arabia; stresses the need to step up the counter-terrorism cooperation with Turkey; insists on the major role Turkey can play, as a member of NATO, in the fight against ISIL/Da'esh and in stabilising Iraq and Syria; calls on Turkey to clear away certain ambiguities and to play its full role as a stabilising force in the region by effectively controlling its border with Syria and by playing a more active part in combating Da'esh/ISIL in cooperation with the EU;

10. Calls on countries in the region to refrain from exporting terrorism and arms into neighbouring countries as this could further destabilise the situation there;

11. Recalls the need to put in place the conditions for a resumption of peace talks between Israel and the Palestinian Authority for a definitive settlement of the conflict based on a solution enabling both countries to live side by side in peace and security, based on the 1967 borders and with Jerusalem as capital of both states in accordance with international law; expresses again its deep concern over the rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip; is gravely concerned about the Israeli settlements policy in the West Bank; is deeply concerned by the stalemate in the dialogue and the mounting tensions between Israelis and Palestinians; calls for serious and credible efforts by both sides, the EU and the international community in achieving this; welcomes and supports High Representative Mogherini's determination for the EU to step up its engagement in the Middle East Peace Process and assert itself as a facilitator; urges all parties to refrain from any action that would worsen the situation in the form of incitement, provocation, excessive use of force or retaliation; reiterates its full support for the 2002 Arab peace initiative and calls on the LAS countries and Israel to put it into effect; stresses that any debate on resuming the peace process and on administrative and political control of the Gaza Strip by the Palestinian Authority would gain greatly by including the LAS; stresses the crucial role played by Egypt in bringing about the final ceasefire in the conflict between Hamas and Israel in summer 2014; calls on international donors to honour the commitments made by them at the Cairo Conference of October 2014;

12. Expresses full support for concrete actions to be enacted by the EU in the framework of a strong CSDP to promote stability and security in the MENA countries; deplores the fact that CSDP missions and operations deployed in the region (EUBAM Libya, EUPOL COPPS and EUBAM Rafah) are too small and out of step with the security challenges in the region, and calls for a strategic reassessment of these deployments; points out that the EU, in the framework of this commitment to human rights and the rule of law, could play a major role in providing specific assistance and training in specific skills in the field of criminal justice reform, SSR and DDR, border surveillance, the fight against terrorism and radicalisation, and prevention of trafficking in arms, drugs and human beings; calls for a particular focus to be put on Libya; stresses the importance of dialogue and cooperation with the LAS and the AU so that partner countries can develop skills and have the necessary military and human resources to combat extremism;

13. Firmly opposes the use of drones in extrajudicial and extraterritorial killings of terror suspects, and demands a ban on the use of drones for this purpose;

14. Calls on the authorities in the EU Member States and in the countries of the Middle East and North Africa to uphold the ban on torture as enshrined in particular in the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which most of them have signed and ratified; reiterates that confessions obtained under torture are invalid, and condemns that practice;

15. Is particularly concerned that the various political crises in the region have reduced the intelligence capacity of the Member States; recalls the crucial importance of promoting improved cooperation between the EU Member States and the MENA countries in combating terrorism within a human rights and international law framework; calls for systematic and effective cooperation between these countries and with Europol and Interpol, to help them develop the necessary structures and resources in the field of anti-terrorism, counter-terrorism and organised crime, including human trafficking, by implementing integrated defence systems designed chiefly to protect the human rights of each individual involved, provided adequate human rights safeguards are in place; highlights the 5+5 dialogue, which supplements the action of the Union for
the Mediterranean (UfM) and enables work on security cooperation; underlines the need to overcome the persisting shortcomings in cooperation with foreign fighters’ countries of origin, transit and destination; calls on the EU Member States to pool their resources, enhance the existing mechanisms (Frontex, Eurosur) and establish a European PNR in order to improve controls at the EU’s external borders; stresses that the active collaboration between foreign and home affairs ministers should be strengthened, particularly concerning judicial and police cooperation and information-sharing;

16. Stresses the urgent need for a political solution to the conflict in Syria; maintains that a sustainable solution requires an inclusive Syrian-led political process leading to a transition, based on the Geneva Communiqué of 30 June 2012 and in line with relevant UNSC Resolutions in order to maintain the country’s unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity; welcomes the Syrian National Coalition’s effort in broadening its membership and engaging with other opposition groups, including through recent engagement with the National Coordination Committee to set out the opposition’s vision for political transition; supports the efforts of UN special envoy Staffan de Mistura to end the armed conflicts and re-launch the political dialogue; stresses the importance to safeguard and support the democratic Syrian opposition; recalls the necessity of accountability for the crimes against humanity, war crimes and gross human rights violations perpetrated by Bashar Al-Assad’s regime during the conflict;

17. Calls for any initiative to end the fighting in Syria to take into account the requirements of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, the latter being applicable during wartime and peacetime, as well as of international criminal law; calls on the European Union to increase pressure on the Assad regime to comply with UN Security Council Resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014) and to step up its efforts to channel humanitarian aid, including in areas controlled by the Syrian moderate opposition and to assist in their capacity building; welcomes the pledges made during the Kuwait III conference, and calls on the EU and other international donors to fulfil their financial commitments in response to the Syria crisis; supports the Commission’s recommendation to encourage restoration of the administration and public services in the devastated regions of Syria, and calls urgently for help to be provided for the reconstruction of Kobane;

18. Expresses its deep concern over Syria’s deteriorating humanitarian situation four years on; notes that humanitarian access has been decreasing as a consequence of deliberate obstruction of aid which must be halted immediately; notes with grave concern that the number of people living in areas that are difficult or impossible for aid agencies to reach has almost doubled over the past two years;

19. Points out that war rape against women and girls has been documented, notably in Syria, Iraq, and territories controlled by Da’esh; urges that female victims of rape in the context of armed conflict be offered the full range of sexual and reproductive health services, including abortion, in EU-funded humanitarian facilities, in accordance with international humanitarian law, UN Security Council resolutions, and the common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions, guaranteeing all necessary medical care required by the wounded and sick without any adverse distinction;

20. Stresses the need for the Iraqi Government to promote the sharing of political responsibilities, power and oil profits in an inclusive manner, which should encompass all religious and ethnic communities in that country and, specifically, the Sunni minorities; calls for this to be made an essential condition for implementation of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the EU and Iraq; calls on the Iraqi Government to provide protection for ethnic and religious minorities without delay, to prevent Shia militias from exercising violence against Sunni minorities and to provide refugees who have fled ISIS terror with safe havens and essential aid; notes the agreement reached by the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq (KRG) and urges its full implementation, and calls on Iraq to fully respect the financial entitlements of the KRG, as provided for in the constitution; stresses the importance, and encourages further enhancement, of cooperation between Baghdad and Erbil, for the security and economic prosperity of Iraq and the region; calls on the EU to contribute to the political, administrative and military capacity building of the Iraqi Government in particular in order to address the challenges posed by the social and economic crisis and the insufficient protection of human rights;

21. Is convinced that in order to achieve long-lasting security in regions that have already been freed from ISIS or other terrorist groups, it is necessary to further stabilise those areas; points out that this can happen by means of providing humanitarian aid, de-mining programmes and policing;
22. Strongly condemns the attack on the Bardo Museum in Tunis on 18 March 2015, for which the Islamic State has claimed responsibility; is concerned about the enrolment capacity of terrorist networks in a country run by a national unity government involving the moderate Islamic party Ennahda; is also concerned about Tunisia’s porous borders with Libya, which are used notably for drug and arms trafficking, and welcomes the latest cooperation between Tunisia and the EU and its Member States in this regard; remains worried by the huge influx of Libyan refugees into Tunisia, which is putting great pressure on the country’s stability, and welcomes their reception by Tunisia, which now has more than a million Libyan refugees; stresses the importance for the EU and for Tunisia of pursuing and strengthening their security cooperation, in particular by establishing joint security programmes; considers that it is vital for the Tunisian issue to be given more support, by making specific commitments including from an economic and investment point of view; in order to support the fragile democratic transition, mindful that it is in the interest of the entire region and of the EU that the Tunisian experiment succeeds; urges the Commission to underline the importance of democratisation and to send a symbolic message after the Arab uprisings by organising an EU-MENA summit in Tunis;

23. Expresses its deep concern at the deteriorating security and humanitarian situation in Libya; is deeply worried by the expansion of terrorist groups in the country, especially ISIL/Da’esh, which are taking advantage of the political vacuum and the escalation of violence; underlines the importance of urgent measures to limit and eradicate the influence of terrorist organisations on Libyan territory; is alarmed by the particularly serious situation in the south of the country, as it is used as a platform for organised crime and armed groups; stresses the need to maintain Libya’s territorial integrity and national unity, which can only be realised through a policy that includes all well-identified actors; reaffirms its support for the UN-led talks conducted by the SRSG Bernardino Léon in seeking a negotiated solution that will lead to the formation of a Libyan unity government; welcomes the efforts made by Algeria and Morocco to foster the intra-Libyan dialogue; underlines that the EU has already expressed its readiness to introduce restrictive measures against spoilers of the dialogue process, in line with UNSCR 2174 (2014); highlights that the EU should be ready to lend support to institutions in Libya as soon as a political solution and a ceasefire are achieved; stresses that the EU should contribute to a DDR and SSR effort in Libya as soon as a unity government is inaugurated and at its request; warns, however, that in the event of a stalemate in the political negotiations and an increase in the armed conflict, the EU must stand ready to contribute to any UNSC-mandated peacekeeping intervention;

24. Expresses its concern at the deterioration of the security situation in Yemen; stresses that the political crisis has turned into a security and humanitarian crisis, which is destabilising the entire Arabian peninsula and, beyond that, all of the MENA countries; supports the UN in its efforts to resume negotiations; stresses that only a broad political consensus through peaceful negotiations amongst the main political groups, in an atmosphere free of fear, can provide a sustainable solution to the current crisis and preserve the unity and territorial integrity of the country; calls on the EU and the Member States to take practical measures to help civilians and to end the crisis;

25. Strongly condemns attacks on the civilian infrastructure and population in Yemen that have resulted in a high number of casualties and seriously worsened the already dire humanitarian situation; calls on the EU, together with international and regional actors, to mediate an immediate ceasefire and end of violence targeting civilians; calls on additional funds in coordination with other international donors to be made available to prevent a humanitarian crisis and provide essential aid to those in need;

26. Urges the Commission to address structurally, together with the countries in the MENA region, the problem of young people leaving the EU to fight on the side of ISIS/Da’esh and other terrorist organisations in Syria and Iraq; calls on the Member States to take appropriate measures to prevent fighters from travelling from their territory, in line with UN Security Council resolution 2170 (2014), and to develop a common strategy for security services and EU agencies with regard to monitoring and controlling jihadists; calls for cooperation in the EU and at international level with a view to appropriate legal action against any individual suspected of being involved in acts of terrorism and with a view to other preventive measures aiming to detect and stop radicalisation; calls on the Member States to intensify cooperation and the exchange of information among themselves and with EU bodies;
27. Stresses the importance that, in its fight against terrorism, the Government of Egypt respects basic human rights and political freedoms, halts the systematic arrest of peaceful protestors and activists and upholds the right to a fair trial; notes that it would welcome a ban on the death penalty that could benefit those members of political and social organisations that have been recently condemned;

28. Welcomes the preliminary agreement on the Nile river's flow reached between Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia on 23 March 2015; Emphasises that a jointly agreed use of the waters of the Nile river is fundamental to the security of all the countries involved; Stresses that the EU should be ready to facilitate further dialogue between all parties if deemed helpful to negotiations;

Stepping up the global strategy for democracy and human rights

29. Is convinced that the lack of democracy is one of the fundamental causes of political instability in the region and that respect for human rights and basic democratic principles is the strongest safeguard in the long term against chronic instability in the countries of the MENA region; calls on the EU and its Member States not to view the MENA region through the lens of short-term security threats only and to provide active and sustainable support to the democratic aspirations of societies in the region; highlights the need for balanced action to be taken, in the framework of a holistic and ambitious approach for democracy, to couple the security policy with that on human rights, which is one of the EU's priorities; stresses the importance of enhancing long-term stability in the MENA region through continuing EU support to civil society, notably through the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) and the ENI Civil Society Facility, as well as through new pro-democracy tools such as the European Endowment for Democracy (EED); calls on the Member States, in a spirit of solidarity and commitment, to provide the Endowment's budget with sufficient funding to ensure the most flexible and effective support for local actors of democratic change in the region; calls on the EEAS to redouble its efforts to spread and explain European values, in particular through its regular contacts with the authorities and, at the same time, with representatives of civil societies;

30. Welcomes the launch by the VP/HR and the Commission of a broad consultation on ENP revision; calls on the Commission, the EEAS, the Council and the Member States to develop a more effective and innovative political and strategic ENP dimension; welcomes the meeting of the EU and Southern Mediterranean countries' Foreign Affairs Ministers; recalls that this meeting was the first time for seven years that the Foreign Ministers had come together; believes that Ministers should meet annually; calls on the EEAS and the Commission to continue to encourage democratic reforms and support democratic actors within the MENA region, notably the EU’s neighbouring countries; stresses the importance of preserving the current balance of distribution of funds for the allocation of ENP funding; recalls that countries that are making progress in implementing reforms and following European policy should be granted decisive additional support, with particular attention to Tunisia, and stresses the need to foster women rights;

31. 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, especially Syria and Iraq; 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; calls on the parties to the armed conflicts to respect the provisions of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), 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; 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);

32. Underlines the opportunity that negotiations on Association Agreements provide to boost reforms; stresses that all the dimensions should be linked in order for the EU to deepen its relationship in a comprehensive and coherent manner; stresses the need to include real and tangible incentives for partners in these agreements in order to make the path of reform more attractive, effective and discernible to civilian populations;
33. Emphasises that the EU and the MENA countries need to work more closely together on a basis of mutually acceptable objectives based on common interests; stresses the advantages of coordinating EU aid to the MENA countries with that of other international donors; calls on the Commission to recommend improvements in this respect and stresses the need to coordinate emergency aid with long-term development assistance;

34. Strongly believes that the development of local democracy and effective local governance is crucial to the stabilisation of MENA countries, and therefore calls for institutionalisation and capacity development of associations of local and regional authorities in MENA countries;

35. Condemns the continued violations of the right to freedom of religion or belief in the region and reiterates the importance the EU gives to this issue; restates once again that freedom of thought, conscience and religion is a fundamental human right; stresses, therefore, the need to effectively combat all forms of discrimination against religious minorities; calls on the governments of the MENA countries to defend religious pluralism; calls on the European Union to step up its efforts in advocating for active protection of religious minorities and providing safe havens; welcomes the adoption during the 2013 reporting year of the EU Guidelines on the Promotion and Protection of Freedom of Religion or Belief, and calls on the EU institutions and the Member States to pay particular attention to the implementation of these guidelines, both in international and regional forums and in bilateral relations with third countries; encourages the VP/HR and the EEAS to engage in a permanent dialogue with NGOs, religious or belief groups and religious leaders;

36. Is convinced that cultural cooperation and diplomacy, as well as academic cooperation and religious dialogue, are essential in order to combat terrorism and all forms of radicalism; emphasises that education and the development of minds capable of critical thinking also constitute a bastion against radicalisation for both Europe and the MENA region, and calls therefore on the EU and its Member States to support the investment needed in this regard; stresses the utmost importance of promoting cultural and academic exchanges, including with representatives of Islam in MENA countries and with Islamic communities in Europe; urges partner countries to participate in EU cultural programmes; calls on the Commission to act on the European Parliament's proposal for the creation of an ambitious Euro-Mediterranean Erasmus programme distinct from the Erasmus+ programme; invites the Commission to pay particular attention, in the immediate term, to the Erasmus+ programmes drawn up for the southern Mediterranean; encourages exchange programmes to also include participants from MENA countries that are not members of the ENP;

37. Stresses the need to develop an effective common European response by all Member States to jihadist propaganda and to home-grown radicalisation, taking into account the use of digital tools, the internet and social networks and involving Europe's local authorities, and working with communities of European citizens who have strong cultural ties with MENA countries; considers that this counter-narrative should be based on the promotion of common values founded on the universality of human rights and should discredit the idea of a conflict between religions or civilisations; calls for the appointment in the EEAS of staff speaking the languages of the MENA region to increase the effectiveness of communication; underlines the need to send a positive message accompanied by specific examples regarding relations between the European Union and the MENA countries and cooperation between them; stresses the need to raise the profile of the European Union and its Member States in the region;

38. Emphasises the potential for cultural and interreligious dialogue offered by the ENP; stresses the connection between, on the one hand, exchange and cooperation between the EU and the ENP countries in the fields of culture and education and, on the other hand, the building and strengthening of an open civil society, democracy, the rule of law and the promotion of fundamental freedoms and human rights;

39. Stresses the importance of developing direct dialogue with civil societies in the MENA countries in order to understand their expectations more clearly; stresses its support for the consultation and enhancement of civil society organisations and new generations within the ENP framework; emphasises in particular the importance of involving the young people of these countries in a dialogue based on a frank and direct relationship, on equal terms; recalls the importance of election observation missions, and urges the European Parliament and EEAS to send such missions to all countries in the region, at the invitation of the governments of those countries, when the prospects for genuine democratic elections are real and to ensure that such missions do not end up legitimising manipulated orchestration; asks for regular follow-up of the recommendations made by these missions;

40. Stresses the need to highlight the central role of the UfM, which, as a unique forum for dialogue on partnership between the European Union and all the countries in the Mediterranean region, needs to become a driving force for investment in the region's sustainable socioeconomic development; points out that the UfM should itself be able to raise the necessary funds for these projects; endorses the direction being taken by ministerial meetings; calls for wider dissemination
of resulting programmes and actions, including joint election observation missions and joint assessment missions, and for
greater cooperation with the European Union; reiterates the importance of revitalising the Euro-Mediterranean
Parliamentary Assembly and reviving its political ambition, with a view to addressing the challenges posed by the
security and stability of the Mediterranean area in a manner that is genuinely acceptable to both sides;

41. Expresses deep concern about the human rights violations, especially against vulnerable groups, in the MENA
countries facing conflicts; considers children to be one of the most vulnerable groups and therefore reiterates the need to
step up efforts to implement the revised implementation strategy for the EU Guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict;
encourages the EU to further deepen its cooperation with the UN Special Representative for Children affected by Armed
Conflicts, supporting the associated action plans and monitoring and reporting mechanisms;

**Strengthening cooperation for economic development**

42. Notes that the MENA region is affected particularly by poverty and inequalities; is convinced that economic and
social development, combined with greater democracy and justice, is what is needed for political stability to become a fact;
is worried by the situation of young people and believes it essential that they have decent and legitimate prospects for their
future; stresses the fundamental importance of the fight against corruption in MENA countries, not only to attract European
investments and to allow for sustainable economic development, but also to tackle security challenges; underlines the
established relationship between transparency, the rule of law and counter-terrorism, which all need to be addressed
together; calls on the EEAS, the Commission and the Member States to increase their cooperation in the field of the fight
against corruption in MENA countries, which should be a priority in the fight against terrorism;

43. Takes the view that strategic dialogue between the EU and the MENA countries should be given further impetus in
the direction of sustainable economic development, helping to iron out inequalities and creating job and education
opportunities, mainly for young people; stresses the importance of facilitating access to the EU single market for the MENA
countries, while providing all necessary protection; stresses the importance of encouraging European investments in MENA
countries, including energy and infrastructure projects, with the strategic objective of fostering sustainable development and
democratic accountability;

44. Recalls that 2015 is the European Year for Development, which aims to inspire more Europeans to get involved in
the eradication of poverty worldwide, and which coincides with the international community’s plans to agree on a set of
Sustainable Development Goals; calls on public authorities at all levels of government in MENA countries to make the
achievement of these goals a priority;

45. Stresses that enhanced dialogue on energy-related issues in the Mediterranean could help spur regional cooperation,
promote regional stability and ensure environmental integrity; suggests, therefore, that the EU engage more strongly in
energy diplomacy in the MENA region, as outlined in the Energy Union; stresses that supplying energy to countries in the
EU’s southern neighbourhood is important both strategically and in economic terms; welcomes the setting up of the Euro-
Mediterranean gas platform and affirms that Euro-Mediterranean interconnections in the gas and electricity sectors need to
be encouraged;

46. Supports the funding of academic and vocational training to create wide reserves of professional skills in the MENA
countries; notes that EU vocational training circular mobility programme should be extended as far as possible to all MENA
countries, by means of flexible and evolving tools such as mobility partnerships;

47. Calls on the EU to affirm its involvement in all stages of the economic development of the states in the region,
assisted by all the tools placed at its disposal; recalls that these tools range from humanitarian aid to full and deep free trade
agreements and enable it to cover a process that goes from exiting the crisis to the establishment of stable institutions;

48. Regrets that a minimum one-year period is necessary for the release of macro-financial assistance to countries in a
very precarious financial situation; urges the EU to mobilise or redirect funding very promptly; urges the deployment of a
new procedural dimension for EU aid, both in regard to aid through EU external action financial instruments and at macro-
financial assistance level; underlines in the context of macro-financial assistance the need for the EU to adequately assess the
socio-economic and human rights impact of the measures requested from beneficiary countries in order to ensure that such
assistance does not constitute a factor of instability, for example by undermining welfare services; calls on Arab donors to coordinate aid within the LAS and the GCC and, as far as possible, together with the EU;

49. Calls on the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) to coordinate their investment strategies with the Union for the Mediterranean so as to create positive synergies;

50. Calls on the EU to develop partnerships with countries in the region that are not direct neighbours; supports the conclusion of a convention to establish a free-trade area between the EU and GCC in so far as a mutually profitable agreement can be found which would offer the EU a greater presence and a further lever in the region, notably through the resumption of negotiations for a new joint action programme; recalls that an agreement of this kind between the GCC and EFTA came into force on 1 July 2014;

51. Encourages the EU to pursue discussions on the launch of negotiations on full and deep free trade agreements with certain countries in the region, in accordance with the commitments made by the European Union following the Deauville Partnership; reiterates that the development of trade relations forms part of the EU’s external policy and contributes to achieving the goals of peace, prosperity and stability;

52. Stresses that regional integration of the MENA countries would enable political links to be strengthened and would further trade and development; calls on the MENA countries to diversify their economies and imports; notes that the great majority of the MENA countries' trade is with non-MENA countries; regrets the deadlock faced by the EU with regard to the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU); calls on the EU to make every effort, at the diplomatic, political and financial level, to assist with the regional integration of the Maghreb countries under the AMU or the geographically broader Agadir agreements;

53. Welcomes the support of the Foreign Affairs Council for the Southern Mediterranean Investment Coordination Initiative (AMICI); stresses the importance of initiatives that further consistency and efficiency in the European Union’s external action;

54. Supports further cooperation in the transport sector, including by linking the infrastructure network of the European Union and partner countries more tightly in order to facilitate the movement of people and goods;

55. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the European Committee of the Regions, the governments and parliaments of all the EU Member States, the Secretaries-General of the League of Arab States and the Union for the Mediterranean and the governments and parliaments of their member countries.