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96. Welcomes the Commission's legislative proposal for a regulation on electronic identification and trust services for electronic transactions in the internal market, which will strengthen trust and convenience in the context of a secure digital environment, and, by covering the mutual recognition and acceptance at EU level of notified electronic identification schemes, has the potential to enable secure and seamless electronic interactions between businesses, citizens and public authorities, thereby increasing the effectiveness of public and private online services, e-business and electronic commerce in the EU; stresses the importance of e-signatures and the mutual recognition of eIDs at the European level, so as to ensure legal certainty for European consumers and businesses; underlines the importance of simultaneously ensuring both EU-wide interoperability and the protection of personal data

97. Points out that the public sector's use of information and communication technologies is the cornerstone for the development of the digital and knowledge society, and therefore urges the Commission and the Member States to further develop secure and effective e-services; notes, particularly where e-identification and e-signatures are concerned, that crossborder interoperability is a prerequisite for the adoption of crossborder e-invoicing solutions;

98. Recalls that in its resolution of 20 April 2012 on 'a competitive digital single market — e-government as a spearhead', Parliament stressed the importance for the facilitation of mass adoption of factors including legal certainty, a clear technical environment, and open and interoperable e-invoicing solutions based on common legal requirements, business processes and technical standards; calls on the Commission to assess the need for uniform, open Union-wide standards for e-identification and e-signatures; notes that the major obstacles to crossborder access to the electronic services provided by public administrations are linked to the use of electronic signatures and identification and to the problem of non-compatibility of e-government systems at EU level; welcomes the Commission's proposal for a regulation on electronic identification and trust services for electronic transactions in the internal market;

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99. Instructs its President to forward its position to the Council, the Commission and the national parliaments.

P7_TA(2012)0469

Financing SME trade and investment

European Parliament resolution of 11 December 2012 on financing EU SMEs' trade and investment: facilitated access to credit in support of internationalisation (2012/2114(INI))

(2015/C 434/02)

The European Parliament,

— having regard to the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions entitled 'Global Europe: Competing in the World — A contribution to the EU's Growth and Jobs Strategy' (COM(2006)0567),

— having regard to the Commission Communication entitled 'Towards a comprehensive European international investment policy' (COM(2010)0343),

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- having regard to the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions entitled ‘Trade, Growth and World Affairs — Trade Policy as a core component of the EU’s 2020 Strategy’ (COM(2010)0612),
- having regard to the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT Agreement) adopted in 1994 as part of the Uruguay Round of Multilateral Trade Negotiations under the GATT ⁽¹⁾,
- having regard to Council Regulation (EC) No 3286/94 of 22 December 1994 laying down Community procedures in the field of the common commercial policy in order to ensure the exercise of the Community’s rights under international trade rules, in particular those established under the auspices of the World Trade Organisation ⁽²⁾ (Trade Barriers Regulation, TBR),
- having regard to the UNCTAD 2011 Report on World Investments,
- having regard to the OECD/WTO/UNCTAD reports on G20 trade and investment measures (mid-October 2010 to April 2011),
- having regard to the OECD Policy Framework for Investment (PFI),
- having regard to its position of 13 September 2011 on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the application of certain guidelines in the field of officially supported export credits ⁽³⁾,
- having regard to its earlier resolutions, in particular the resolution of 13 October 2005 on prospects for trade relations between the EU and China ⁽⁴⁾, the resolution of 1 June 2006 on EU-US transatlantic economic relations ⁽⁵⁾, the resolution of 28 September 2006 on the EU’s economic and trade relations with India ⁽⁶⁾, the resolution of 12 October 2006 on economic and trade relations between the EU and Mercosur with a view to the conclusion of an Interregional Association Agreement ⁽⁷⁾, the resolution of 22 May 2007 on ‘Global Europe — external aspects of competitiveness’ ⁽⁸⁾, the resolution of 19 June 2007 on EU economic and trade relations with Russia ⁽⁹⁾, the resolution of 19 February 2008 on the EU’s Strategy to deliver market access for European companies ⁽¹⁰⁾, the resolution of 24 April 2008 on ‘Towards a reform of the World Trade Organisation’ ⁽¹¹⁾, the resolution of 5 February 2009 on trade and economic relations with China ⁽¹²⁾, the resolution of 26 March 2009 on an EU-India Free Trade Agreement ⁽¹³⁾, the resolution of 21 October 2010 on the European Union’s trade relations with Latin America ⁽¹⁴⁾, the resolution of 17 February 2011 on the Free Trade Agreement between the EU and the Republic of Korea ⁽¹⁵⁾, the resolution of 6 April 2011 on European international investment policy ⁽¹⁶⁾, the legislative resolution of 10 May 2011 on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing transitional arrangements for bilateral investment agreements between Member States and third countries ⁽¹⁷⁾, the resolution of 11 May 2011 on the state of play in the EU-India free trade agreement negotiations ⁽¹⁸⁾, the resolution of 11 May 2011 on EU-Japan trade relations ⁽¹⁹⁾, the resolution of 8 June 2011 on EU-Canada trade relations ⁽²⁰⁾, and the resolution of 27 September 2011 on a New Trade Policy for Europe under the Europe 2020 Strategy ⁽²¹⁾,

⁽¹⁾ http://www.wto.org/english/docs_e/legal_e/17-tbt.pdf

⁽²⁾ OJ L 349, 31.12.1994, p. 71.

⁽³⁾ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2011)0363.

⁽⁴⁾ OJ C 233 E, 28.9.2006, p. 103.

⁽⁵⁾ OJ C 298 E, 8.12.2006, p. 235.

⁽⁶⁾ OJ C 306 E, 15.12.2006, p. 400.

⁽⁷⁾ OJ C 308 E, 16.12.2006, p. 182.

⁽⁸⁾ OJ C 102 E, 24.4.2008, p. 128.

⁽⁹⁾ OJ C 146 E, 12.6.2008, p. 95.

⁽¹⁰⁾ OJ C 184 E, 6.8.2009, p. 16.

⁽¹¹⁾ OJ C 259 E, 29.10.2009, p. 77.

⁽¹²⁾ OJ C 67 E, 18.3.2010, p. 132.

⁽¹³⁾ OJ C 117 E, 6.5.2010, p. 166.

⁽¹⁴⁾ OJ C 70 E, 8.3.2012, p. 79.

⁽¹⁵⁾ OJ C 188 E, 28.6.2012, p. 113.

⁽¹⁶⁾ OJ C 296 E, 2.10.2012, p. 34.

⁽¹⁷⁾ OJ C 377 E, 7.12.2012, p. 203.

⁽¹⁸⁾ OJ C 377 E, 7.12.2012, p. 13.

⁽¹⁹⁾ OJ C 377 E, 7.12.2012, p. 19.

⁽²⁰⁾ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2011)0257.

⁽²¹⁾ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2011)0412.

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- having regard to the report from the Commission to the European Council entitled ‘Trade and Investment Barriers Report 2011 — Engaging our strategic economic partners on improved market access: Priorities for action on breaking down barriers to trade’ (COM(2011)0114),
 - having regard to its resolution of 13 December 2011 on trade and investment barriers ⁽¹⁾,
 - having regard to the Commission Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions entitled ‘Small Business, Big World — a new partnership to help SMEs seize global opportunities’ (COM(2011)0702),
 - having regard to the Commission Communication on an action plan to improve access to finance for SMEs (COM(2011)0870),
 - having regard to the report from the Commission to the European Council entitled ‘Trade and Investment Barriers Report 2012’ (COM(2012)0070),
 - having regard to the IFC/World Bank Report ‘Doing Business 2012: Doing Business in a More Transparent World’(hereinafter ‘Doing Business 2012 index’),
 - having regard to its resolution of 3 July 2012 on the attractiveness of investing in Europe ⁽²⁾,
 - having regard to Rule 48 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on International Trade (A7-0367/2012),
- A. whereas since the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, the common commercial policy (CCP) has, pursuant to Article 207 TFEU, included foreign direct investment (FDI), and falls under the exclusive competence of the EU; whereas Member States may negotiate and conclude bilateral investment agreements only when empowered to do so by the Union; whereas Parliament’s assent is required for all trade and investment agreements negotiated by the Commission on behalf of the Union;
- B. whereas according to the UNCTAD report for 2011, the EU remains a key destination that attracts FDI; whereas, in contrast, Eurostat figures show that total EU-27 FDI outflows fell by 30 % in 2008, by a further 28 % in 2009 and by an additional 62 % in 2010;
- C. whereas, according to the Doing Business 2012 index, Member States represent only 40 % (and eurozone members just 26 %) of the top 35 countries in terms of entrepreneurship at global level;
- D. whereas the Commission estimates that 99 % of all enterprises in the EU are small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and whereas 92 % of these SMEs are micro-firms employing one to nine employees, 6,7 % are small firms employing 10 to 49 employees and 1,1 % are medium-sized firms employing 50 to 249 employees; whereas SMEs number 23 million and form the backbone of the Union’s economy, providing two-thirds of private-sector jobs;
- E. whereas micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), are diverse in nature and have different needs stemming from the specific nature of the industrial or services sector they operate in, the Member State or even region they operate from, their size, their business model, the entrepreneurial culture and business environment, whether it be internationally or within the single market; whereas they face disparate challenges across their respective business cycles;
- F. whereas lack of finance, alongside a weaker entrepreneurial spirit than in other industrialised economies, remains one of the main challenges to EU enterprises’ competitiveness and entrepreneurship, and whereas persistent regulatory fragmentation and red tape continue to limit SMEs’ capacity, especially that of small and microenterprises, to adapt to an energy- and resource-efficient economy and expand into markets beyond their home country, both within the single market and worldwide;
- G. whereas 44 % of SMEs have reported a lack of adequate information as an important barrier to internationalisation;

⁽¹⁾ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2011)0565.

⁽²⁾ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2012)0275.

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- H. whereas the reluctance of European SMEs to develop their international activities is mainly due to the lack of analysis or pre-analysis of their export opportunities;
- I. whereas a considerable number of European SMEs are engaged in international export activities (25 % of the total), and whereas only 13 % of European SMEs conduct activities in markets outside the EU and only 4 % of internationally inactive SMEs have specific plans to start up international activities in the foreseeable future; whereas certain SMEs are incapable of internationalisation due to their business profiles and size;
- J. whereas only 10 % of micro firms make use of the 300+ public support programmes that are already available, and whereas the large number of support programmes makes it difficult for SMEs to identify and make use of the assistance that is actually available;
- K. whereas European SMEs have been particularly affected by the worldwide economic and financial crisis and whereas their internationalisation beyond the single market should also be promoted;
- L. whereas consistently over the last two years almost a third of SMEs which applied for a bank loan did not obtain any credit, or obtained less than they applied for; and whereas the highest rejection rate was among microenterprises;
- M. whereas the Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme (CIP) enabled financial institutions to provide EUR 30 billion in new finance to more than 315 000 SMEs in the period of 2007-2013; and whereas the European Investment Bank (EIB) provided around EUR 40 billion in lending to SMEs, which benefitted more than 210 000 SMEs in the period 2008-2011;
- N. whereas the Commission's proposed new Programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and SMEs (COSME) will provide enterprises and SMEs with a Loan Guarantee Facility, offering guarantees for debt financing via ordinary loans, subordinated and participating loans or leasing to reduce the particular difficulties SMEs face in accessing finance for their growth, will offer securitisation of SME debt finance portfolios, aimed at mobilising additional debt financing for SMEs, and will run from 2014 to 2020, with a planned budget of EUR 2,5 billion;
- O. whereas the experience gained by Member States from policies supporting the internationalisation of SMEs and microenterprises, plus that of civil society institutions (chambers of commerce, employers' associations, etc.), constitutes a formidable pool of lessons learned with a view to designing efficient and successful new policies in this field;
- P. whereas any SME support policy undertaken at European level should be subsidiary, supplementary and complementary to the existing policy, provide European added value, avoid duplication and overlap with existing national, regional and local programmes and optimise planning and operational coordination;
- Q. whereas the Commission's Trade and Investment Barriers reports list examples of how the EU's market access to different countries around the world, including industrialised economies and major emerging economies in the WTO, is being constrained more by various non-tariff barriers (NTBs) than by trade tariffs, the latter tending to be waived substantially as globalisation progresses; whereas WTO rules prohibit unjustified NTBs;
- R. whereas the EU, whenever necessary, needs to support and actively defend its industries and companies, including SMEs, against violations of agreed rules, WTO standards and principles by its trading partners, using all appropriate and proportionate means; whereas using multilateral and bilateral dispute settlement mechanisms, and in particular WTO-compatible trade defence instruments (TDIs), should be a measure of last resort;
- S. whereas legal insecurity of investment is a key disincentive for SMEs to internationalise and whereas a legal framework with our trade partners which guarantees legal security is absolutely essential; whereas the EU must defend the interests of European companies, especially SMEs, against violations of the legal security of investments in non-EU countries;

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1. Urges the Commission, and where appropriate the Member States, to foster the participation of SMEs, and where relevant microenterprises, in global markets by implementing appropriate measures for their internationalisation and in particular their further integration into the EU single market, including easier access to capital and regularly updated information on business opportunities abroad, as well as efficient TDIs aimed at ensuring their rightful protection against unfair dumping and subsidies in order to safeguard fair competition with third countries, while ensuring that human, labour and social rights and the environment in third countries are protected;
2. Notes that SMEs are also facing difficulties as a result of the decline in domestic demand due to the economic crisis;

I. Access to information

3. Stresses the need to improve enterprise-level data collection in order to raise awareness of the needs of MSMEs, share best practice and provide them with better targeted support at both national and EU level; calls also for regular cost-benefit analyses to assess the effectiveness of such support, with a focus on increasing MSMEs' innovativeness and competitiveness, both in the single market and globally;
4. Stresses the need, first of all, for a mapping exercise to identify existing and missing support programmes at national and EU level in order to avoid overlaps or gaps, incorporating existing service providers and support strategies in cooperation with national agencies; encourages Member States' authorities to create similar single online databases of national and regional sources of finance;
5. Stresses the need to evaluate the available market for growing internationalisation and further promote SME development within the internal market, and consider the development of SMEs within the internal market to be equally important as the development of SMEs abroad;
6. Considers it essential for the EU's competitiveness and growth to create a network, as part of a digital platform, bringing together national SME helpdesks, chambers of commerce, Export Credit Agencies (ECAs), business associations and the Commission, in order to provide enterprises in the EU, especially exporters and importers, with precise, timely and reader-friendly information on a one-stop-shop basis, so that they can fully benefit from the Union's new common commercial policy;

II. Access to capital

7. Stresses that recurrent difficulties in accessing capital are one of the key reasons preventing SMEs' internationalisation; calls on the national governments to support SMEs by means of officially supported export credits, without distorting intra-EU competition, and also to earmark sufficient funding for SMEs (e.g. special loans, cofinancing and venture capital), so as to help overcome disinvestment and deleveraging by banks; stresses that such funding should be provided to SMEs that are already exporting and which can present a viable business plan for improving or consolidating their existing market share and creating jobs, especially for young people;
8. Considers that, in order to bolster the EU economy, support for start-ups offering innovative goods and services and for SMEs in need of initial or further investment should not be overlooked, either when they are operating within the single market or when they want to grow through internationalisation;
9. Calls, therefore, on the national governments to help SMEs by exploring the possibility of creating, among other things, investment funds for SMEs in which any European citizen could invest savings;
10. Calls for officially supported export credits to comply with OECD guidelines and foster projects that comply with international labour and environmental standards;
11. Calls for the support made available to SMEs for accessing capital to be modulated in accordance with respective and specific SME demands, in order to avoid a one-size-fits-all approach; notes, in this regard, that industry in the EU displays a wide range of business profiles and necessities reflecting SMEs' size, structure, sector of activity and geographic location;

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12. Considers that a holistic strategy for trade finance, aimed at fostering internationalisation of SMEs, is urgently needed; believes that the EU should promote and support incentives to develop SMEs in strategic sectors in a proactive fashion, especially in the case of high-value-added manufacturing activities that offer a competitive edge over emerging economies as well as high-quality jobs for European citizens; stresses the need, therefore, to identify promising niche markets and foster their development;

13. Calls on the Commission to study the European business angel market and similar markets worldwide in order to learn from and build up the capacity of business angel network managers in the EU; encourages banks and other financial institutions to provide their SME clients with regularly updated information on available financial instruments, including SME support networks and business angels; calls also on the Commission to provide relevant information in this respect;

14. Recognises the existence of well-established and experienced systems of SME support at the national level offering access to export credits through ECAs, and considers it reasonable to continue this support; takes the position, however, that in the medium term the establishment of systematic support for export credits at EU level, with the establishment of an SME export/import facility to disburse additional support to SMEs via ECAs on the basis of national best practice, requires further discussion; notes that this additional support could possibly involve soft and fixed-interest-rate loans, short-term working capital and refinancing, equity funding and business insurance solutions;

15. Draws attention to the regulatory and legal steps that need to be taken in order to improve SMEs' access to collateral, i.e.:

— reducing barriers to property registration (e.g. by establishing credit bureaux);

— lowering enforcement costs for lenders and raising the overall quality of financial information concerning SMEs, in order to enhance their creditworthiness in the eyes of lenders;

16. Highlights the need to provide SMEs with financial and technical assistance focused on market research, project and export finance advice, legal counselling (e.g. on escape clauses or penalties for late payment or default), customs and tax obligations, the fight against counterfeiting, and company presentations at trade fairs and business networking events (e.g. to find distributors in a third country);

17. Insists that it is also necessary to focus on closing the credit gap for microenterprises; stresses the beneficial role of small loans in enabling such enterprises to establish themselves; reiterates that even where a niche market is concerned, small amounts of FDI can also spur grassroots business initiatives in terms of generating growth and sustainable development at local level (e.g. developing craftsmanship);

18. Calls for increased public-private partnerships in the provision of seed money and venture capital to MSMEs in the EU, while sharing the entrepreneurial risk; points, in this regard, to the positive role that both micro-finance institutions and social entrepreneurship funds can play in developing business opportunities that also have strong social, ethical and environmental goals;

III. Recommendations for concrete actions

19. Calls for endeavours at national and EU level to simplify the business environment for SMEs, in close consultation with EU SME associations and chambers of commerce and industry, as well as other relevant stakeholders, in support of both cutting red tape and internationalising SMEs;

20. Urges the Member States to adopt single enterprise helpdesks at the local level, run in cooperation with EU businesses, so that SMEs can receive information, in their own language and for immediate use, regarding export/import opportunities, existing barriers to trade (both tariffs and NTBs), investment protection, dispute settlement provisions and competitors, and gain a knowledge and understanding of cultural and human practices in third markets;

21. Calls for a network to be set up between SMEs and large European companies to enable SMEs to reap the benefits of these companies' expertise and export and innovation capacities;

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22. Calls on the Commission to promote exchanges between the heads of EU and third-country SMEs along the lines of the 'Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs' programme that currently exists at European Union level;
23. Stresses the need to foster cooperation between European SMEs and third-country enterprises in order to facilitate market entry as well as integration into third-country markets;
24. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to make European SMEs more aware of trade agreements that are being negotiated and international investment opportunities open to SMEs;
25. Encourages EU businesses and exporters to actively use TDIs, such as TBR complaints or the complaints register in the Market Access Database, in order to report to the Commission material injuries resulting from trade barriers and enable, where appropriate, ex officio initiation of anti-dumping (AD) and countervailing duties (CVD) investigations by the Commission, in close collaboration with industry, so as to minimise the risk of retaliation;
26. Considers that the effective protection of SMEs against unfair trading practices by EU partner states is just as important as helping SMEs wishing to internationalise; considers internationalisation and protection to be two sides of the same coin in the globalisation process;
27. Calls on the Commission to pay due consideration to improved SME access to anti-dumping and anti-subsidy procedures when reforming the EU's Trade Defence Instruments;
28. Calls on the Commission to involve SMEs in the establishment of international standards (e.g. ISO), since changes in regulatory regimes directly impact their profitability; insists that tackling unjustified NTBs must be regarded as one of the Commission's top priorities, in particular through the harmonisation of technical rules based on relevant global standards;
29. Calls on the Commission to address these widespread and persistent issues in all multilateral and bilateral trade agreements, and especially in free trade agreements with both industrialised and emerging economies, and to ensure that in the WTO, NTBs receive, at the very least, as much attention as is currently paid to tariff elimination;
30. Regrets the lack of specific means available to European businesses, and particularly SMEs, to counter intellectual property rights (IPR) infringements effectively; welcomes the Commission's decision to propose a review of the directive on the enforcement of IPR; calls on the Commission and the Member States to improve the defence of IPR in all relevant multilateral organisations (WTO, World Health Organisation, World Intellectual Property Organisation);
31. Points out that SMEs are vulnerable to price fluctuations; calls, therefore, on the Commission to work actively at EU level and in international forums such as the G20 to tackle harmful financial speculation on food and raw materials;
32. Calls on the Union to fully exploit the investment opportunities for EU SMEs stemming from the European Neighbourhood Policy, with particular focus on cross-border investment in the countries of the Eastern and Southern Mediterranean partnerships; points out that investment opportunities in those areas should contribute substantially towards meeting the socioeconomic needs of the populations of the countries concerned and promoting sustainable economic development, deeper regional cooperation and regional stability;
33. Considers that the Commission and the European External Action Service should develop synergies in order to further enhance the Union's commercial diplomacy worldwide;
34. Calls on the EU to develop an ambitious common industrial policy based on fostering research and innovation that benefits from innovative financing arrangements, such as project bonds, and supports the development of SMEs, via access

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to public procurement, in order to maintain its competitiveness vis-à-vis major players in industry and research;

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35. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.

P7_TA(2012)0470

A digital freedom strategy in EU foreign policy

European Parliament resolution of 11 December 2012 on a Digital Freedom Strategy in EU Foreign Policy (2012/2094(INI))

(2015/C 434/03)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the resolution of the UN Human Rights Council of 5 July 2012 entitled ‘The promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet’, which recognises the importance of human rights protection and the free flow of information online ⁽¹⁾,
- having regard to the reports of the UN Special Rapporteur Frank La Rue, of 16 May 2011 (A/HRC/17/27) and 10 August 2011 (A/66/290), on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, which underline the applicability of international human rights norms and standards regarding the right to freedom of opinion and expression on the internet, seen as a communications medium,
- having regard to the resolution of the UN Human Rights Council of 28 March 2008 (7/36) establishing the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression,
- having regard to the UN report of 16 June 2011 entitled ‘Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations “Protect, Respect and Remedy” Framework’ (reflecting the work of UN Special Representative John Ruggie),
- having regard to the resolution adopted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union Governing Council on 19 October 2011 ⁽²⁾,
- having regard to the Strategic Framework on Human Rights and Democracy, adopted by the Council on 25 June 2012 ⁽³⁾,
- having regard to its recommendation to the Council of 13 June 2012 concerning the EU Special Representative for Human Rights ⁽⁴⁾,
- having regard to its resolution of 12 June 2012 entitled ‘Critical information infrastructure protection — achievements and next steps: towards global cyber-security’ ⁽⁵⁾,

⁽¹⁾ <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session20/Pages/ResDecStat.aspx>

⁽²⁾ Resolution adopted unanimously by the IPU Governing Council at its 189th session (Berne, 19 October 2011) - <http://www.ipu.org/english/issues/hrdocs/189/is01.htm>

⁽³⁾ http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un_geneva/press_corner/focus/events/2012/20120625_en.htm

⁽⁴⁾ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2012)0250.

⁽⁵⁾ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2012)0237.