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P8_TA(2019)0318

Post-Arab Spring: way forward for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region

European Parliament resolution of 27 March 2019 on the post-Arab Spring: way forward for the MENA region (2018/2160(INI))

(2021/C 108/08)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the document entitled ‘Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe — A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy’, presented by the Vice-President of the Commission/ High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (VP/HR) on 28 June 2016 ⁽¹⁾, and to the 2017 and 2018 implementation reports,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) No 232/2014 ⁽²⁾ of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 March 2014 establishing a European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI),
- having regard to Regulation (EU) No 235/2014 ⁽³⁾ of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 March 2014 establishing a financing instrument for democracy and human rights worldwide,
- having regard to the Commission proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 June 2018 establishing the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (COM(2018)0460),
- having regard to the joint communication from the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of 18 November 2015 entitled ‘Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy’ (JOIN(2015)0050), and to the joint report from the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of 18 May 2017 on the Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy Review (JOIN(2017)0018),
- having regard to the joint communications from the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of 8 March 2011 entitled ‘A partnership for democracy and shared prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean’ (COM(2011)0200), and of 25 May 2011 entitled ‘A new response to a changing Neighbourhood’ (COM(2011)0303),
- having regard to the joint communication by the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to the European Parliament and the Council of 14 March 2017 entitled ‘Elements for an EU Strategy for Syria’ (JOIN(2017)0011) and to the Council conclusions on Syria of 3 April 2017, which together make up the new EU strategy on Syria,
- having regard to the partnership priorities concluded between the European Union and a variety of countries in the Middle East, including Egypt, Lebanon and Jordan,
- having regard to the 2018 NATO Summit Declaration,
- having regard to NATO’s Mediterranean Dialogue and ongoing crisis management and cooperative security efforts in the region,
- having regard to the EU Global Approach to Migration and Mobility (GAMM),

⁽¹⁾ https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf

⁽²⁾ OJ L 77, 15.3.2014, p. 27.

⁽³⁾ OJ L 77, 15.3.2014, p. 85.

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- having regard to the sets of EU thematic guidelines on human rights, including on human rights dialogues with third countries and on human rights defenders,
- having regard to the EU guidelines to promote and protect the enjoyment of all human rights by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons, adopted by the Council on 24 June 2013,
- having regard to the joint communication from the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of 25 January 2017 entitled 'Migration on the Central Mediterranean route — Managing flows, saving lives' (JOIN(2017)0004),
- having regard to the Global Compact for Migration,
- having regard to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs),
- having regard to the Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2015-2019, adopted by the Council on 20 July 2015, and to its mid-term review of June 2017,
- having regard to the joint staff working document of the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of 21 September 2015 entitled 'Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Transforming the Lives of Girls and Women through EU External Relations 2016-2020' (SWD(2015)0182),
- having regard to the recommendation of the Committee on Women's Rights of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean (PA UfM) entitled 'Participation of women in the leadership positions and decision making: Challenges and prospects', adopted at its 13th Plenary Session held in May 2017 in Rome,
- having regard to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW),
- having regard to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention),
- having regard to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of September 1995 and to the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo Conference) of September 1994, as well as to the outcomes of their review conferences,
- having regard to its resolution of 9 July 2015 on the review of the European Neighbourhood Policy ⁽¹⁾,
- having regard to its resolution of 9 July 2015 on the security challenges in the Middle East and North Africa region and the prospects for political stability ⁽²⁾,
- having regard to its resolution of 14 September 2016 on the EU relations with Tunisia in the current regional context ⁽³⁾,
- having regard to its resolution of 18 April 2018 on the implementation of the EU external financing instruments: mid-term review 2017 and the future post-2020 architecture ⁽⁴⁾,
- having regard to its recommendation of 30 May 2018 to the Council, the Commission and the VP/HR on Libya ⁽⁵⁾,
- having regard to its resolution of 14 November 2018 on the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027 ⁽⁶⁾,

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 265, 11.8.2017, p. 110.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 265, 11.8.2017, p. 98.

⁽³⁾ OJ C 204, 13.6.2018, p. 100.

⁽⁴⁾ Texts adopted, P8_TA(2018)0119.

⁽⁵⁾ Texts adopted, P8_TA(2018)0227.

⁽⁶⁾ Texts adopted, P8_TA(2018)0449.

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- having regard to the EU-Tunisia Association Agreement Councils of 11 May 2017 and 15 May 2018, the EU-Algeria Association Council of 14 May 2018, the EU-Egypt Association Council of 25 July 2017,
 - having regard to the Foreign Affairs Council conclusions on Libya of 6 February 2017 and 15 October 2018, and on Syria of 3 April 2017 and 16 April 2018,
 - 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 (A8-0077/2019),
- A. whereas the Arab uprisings that affected the MENA region in 2011 constituted a moment of mass upheavals against authoritarian regimes and deteriorating socio-economic conditions; whereas a large segment of the protesters was composed of young women and men aspiring to democracy, freedom and the rule of law, as well as to a better and more inclusive future, recognition of their dignity and better social inclusion and economic prospects; whereas the overthrow of some of the regimes and, in some cases, the introduction of democratic reforms gave rise to great hope and expectations;
- B. whereas the majority of the population in the MENA region is under the age of 35; whereas youth unemployment in the region is still among the highest in the world; whereas this gives rise to social exclusion and political disenfranchisement, as well as a brain drain towards other countries; whereas all these factors were at the root of the 2011 protests and are again generating protests in some countries; whereas young people in vulnerable settings, without agency or prospects, can constitute targeted groups for radical movements;
- C. whereas in oil-importing countries in particular, the global financial crisis, the decline in oil prices, demographic trends, conflict and terrorism have further aggravated the situation after the 2011 events; whereas the economic model typifying such countries is no longer viable, resulting in a crisis of trust that needs to be urgently addressed by the governments concerned, with a view to establishing a new social contract with their respective citizens; whereas the increasing social impact of the decline in state subsidies, public sector jobs and public services, the spread of poverty and environmental problems, especially in remote areas and among marginalised communities, have been a source of continuing unrest and spontaneous protests in the region, which are likely to continue growing in the years ahead;
- D. whereas, eight years after the Arab Spring and political developments which have led countries in the Maghreb and Mashreq regions to follow many diverse evolutionary paths in terms of politics and stability, it is still essential to assess how to respond to the legitimate democratic aspirations and the desire for sustainable stability in the region, as well as to the urgent need for jobs, the rule of law and improvement in living conditions and sustainable security; whereas it is important to take stock of the efforts and policy stance adopted by the EU in response to the Arab Spring and to assess its capacity for policy delivery; whereas it is essential to reassess and adapt the policy framework of the EU towards Southern Neighbourhood countries and its future objectives and the means to achieve them, while taking into account the diversity of the situations in the countries of the region;
- E. whereas insufficient coordination between the Member States and the EU undermines the capacity of both to exert a positive influence in the Maghreb and Mashreq regions; whereas individual Member States' action in the region needs to be coordinated, and needs to be in synergy with the EU's objectives; whereas the EU must pursue the objectives set out in Articles 8 and 21 of the Treaty on European Union; whereas the EU needs to increase its political and diplomatic leverage; whereas long-term political and economic stability, as well as resilience in the Maghreb and Mashreq regions is of fundamental strategic importance to the EU, and as such requires a longer-term, integrated and forward-looking approach as regards the policy framework and its objectives, in line with the needs of citizens in partner countries and the EU's strategic interests;
- F. whereas the EU's policy towards North African and Middle Eastern countries has two main objectives, namely to encourage political and economic reforms in each individual country taking due account of its specific features, and to encourage regional cooperation among the countries of the region themselves and with the EU;

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- G. whereas the EU should play a central role in promoting conflict prevention, mediation and resolution, the protection and promotion of human rights, the rule of law and space for civil society, as well as democratic, social and fair economic governance in the Maghreb and Mashreq regions; whereas an open civil society and the work of human rights defenders as actors for social change are fundamental to the long-term resilience and prosperity of the region;
- H. whereas any detention that results from the exercise of the rights or freedoms guaranteed by international law, such as freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, constitutes arbitrary detention that is prohibited under international law; whereas, in significant swathes of the MENA region, human rights defenders, journalists, lawyers, political opposition activists and civil society at large have faced increasing systematic persecution, threats, attacks, reprisals, judicial harassment, arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment; whereas the EU and the Member States must significantly step up their efforts in order to adequately address this issue;
- I. whereas in the region, there are numerous armed conflicts and thousands of people have been murdered and disappeared and millions displaced; whereas ISIS/Daesh and other jihadist groups have committed atrocities, including brutal executions and unspeakable sexual violence, abductions, torture, forced conversions and the enslavement of women and girls; whereas children have been recruited and used in terrorist attacks; whereas there are serious concerns about the welfare of the population currently under the control of ISIS/Daesh and their possible use as human shields during the liberation campaign; whereas these crimes may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity;
- J. whereas in response to the developments in the region, the EU revised its Neighbourhood Policy in 2015; whereas the review provides for a deeper involvement of Member States in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP);
- K. whereas state and societal resilience are among the key priorities of the EU Global Strategy; whereas the latter recognises that a resilient society hallmarked by democracy, trust in institutions, and sustainable development lies at the heart of a resilient state, while repressive states are inherently fragile in the long term;
- L. whereas, for those countries with which the EU has signed association agreements, the legally binding commitments of these agreements, including on human rights, should form a basis for relations and, notably, the partnership priorities agreed between the EU and certain neighbourhood countries;
- M. whereas according to UNICEF, the first threat affecting children living in MENA conflict areas is child labour; whereas 2,1 million children in Syria and 700 000 Syrian refugee children do not have access to education; whereas continuing violence and external displacement, natural disasters, growing economic and gender inequality, and high rates of youth unemployment and poverty in several MENA countries have left 28 million children in need of humanitarian assistance;
1. Notes with concern that, eight years after the first upheavals, most of the legitimate aspirations of the peaceful protesters for dignity, human rights and progressive social, economic and political reforms have still not been met in most countries; acknowledges that in some cases there have been a few positive developments and some democratic gains have been consolidated, but points to the fact that these are still insufficient; condemns the persistent and continuing violations of human rights, the rule of law and fundamental freedoms, and widespread discrimination against minorities; is very worried about the continued dire socio-economic situation in the region and, in particular, about the high levels of unemployment (affecting, in particular, women and young people) and social exclusion, which cause disillusionment and disenfranchisement on a large scale, especially among young people, pushing them into despair, to irregular migration as a way out or making them more vulnerable to radicalisation; stresses that the economic situation of these countries has a strong impact on their security situation as well; deplors the persistent levels of corruption, nepotism and unaccountability in the region;
2. Stresses that the long-term prosperity of post-Arab Spring countries goes hand in hand with their capacity to actively ensure the protection of universal human rights and the establishment and anchorage of democratic and transparent institutions that are engaged in protecting citizens' fundamental rights; is, therefore, very concerned about ongoing human rights violations, the shrinking or closing space for democracy and local civil society organisations, the rollback of gains in

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freedom of expression — both online and offline — and of assembly and association, the repression of human rights defenders and the suppression of the role of the media — including through abuses of anti-terrorism legislation and surveillance technology and the curtailment of the rule of law, in a number of MENA countries; notes with concern the particular role and responsibility of the military and the security services in the deterioration in the political trajectory of several countries in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, and their persistent and dominating control over State and economic resources; calls, therefore, for the EU and the Member States to adequately incorporate this fundamental dimension within their engagement with the MENA region; calls for the EU and Member States to engage with third-country governments to end such practices and repeal repressive legislation, as well as to ensure proper vetting of the exports of European surveillance technology and technical assistance; urges the EU to give priority to supporting parliamentary and civil society efforts towards greater accountability and transparency of the security and military services;

3. Welcomes the EU and its Member States' continued efforts to promote democracy, the rule of law, human rights, fundamental freedoms, as well as economic development and the important nexus between democracy and sustainable security in post-Arab Spring countries, and acknowledges the complexity of such a task; takes the view, however, that, despite a fifteen-year policy focus on Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries, renewed policy efforts and increased budgetary resources in the wake of the Arab Spring (or Arab Springs), the EU's goals and policies have not yet been achieved to the extent needed (and in some instances the situation has become worse), and that a real process of socio-economic inclusion has yet to begin; stresses that the external action of the EU vis-à-vis post-Arab Spring countries should factor in the realities on the ground and adapt policy strategies and their implementation accordingly; considers that insufficient EU leadership and initiative in working towards the resolution of protracted conflicts have weakened the EU's capacity to make a diplomatic impact in the region; calls for the EU to strongly support the UN peace processes aimed at the resolution of conflicts in the MENA region;

4. Recalls the harm and suffering caused by extremism and terrorism in the region, and highlights that violence is a serious threat to its stability and that security cooperation within the region, as well as cooperation with the EU and its Member States, in full respect for international human rights law, remains of the utmost importance in order to successfully overcome terrorist organisations such as Daesh and, in so doing, help the people in the region to eventually live in peace and in an environment of stability and progress; welcomes, therefore, EU initiatives aimed at addressing the terrorist threat in the MENA region; underlines the importance of strengthening the capacity of state actors that play a key role in countering terrorism and violent extremism, as well as the essential need to focus on partnerships between the authorities, young people and communities to address underlying factors that can make communities vulnerable to violent extremism, and to tackle the root causes of conflict;

5. Expresses concern about the fact that, in spite of its considerable political and budgetary investments and continuous political and economic outreach, the EU has not been able to gain real, substantive political and economic leverage, that the impact of EU policies remains limited, and the EU is not perceived as a game changer by the countries in the region; points to the dissatisfaction felt by civil society, local NGOs and young people in general at how the EU fails to fully translate its vision into action on the ground; is concerned about the increasingly complex political situation in the Maghreb and Mashreq regions, and notes the emergence of new and resurgent political and economic regional players such as Russia and China in addition to the competing narratives and financing from the Gulf countries and Iran, which pursue objectives that could even be in conflict with those of the EU; calls for a stronger commitment by and firmer vision on the part of the EU to enable it to become a more central player; calls for the EU to engage in more dialogue with civil society organisations (CSOs) in order to pursue policies which are able to meet the expectations of all democratic stakeholders; emphasises the need for the EU to engage in dialogue with all political actors in the MENA countries;

6. Highlights the importance of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), which is the only political forum that brings together the EU Member States and all the Mediterranean countries; stresses that the UfM that has recently celebrated its 10th anniversary, must play a greater role in jointly addressing the challenges we have in common; takes positive note of the Third Regional Forum of the UfM on 8 October 2018, which commemorated the 10th Anniversary of the Paris Summit for the Mediterranean, recognised the usefulness of continuing to develop the interactions between the UfM and other actors in the Euro-Mediterranean region; calls on the Commission, the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the High Representative to substantially rethink and revive the project of the UfM; encourages the use of this project as a means of fostering closer cooperation between the EU and Mediterranean countries;

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7. Regrets that partnership priorities are being concluded with countries without any conditions attached and despite significant and continuing backsliding in the field of democracy, human rights and the rule of law;

8. Takes the view that for far too long the policy stance towards Maghreb and Mashreq countries was marred by an approach which was based to too great an extent on the EU's expectations and objectives, which did not fully take into account the interests and realities of the EU's partner countries, and with little incentive for and ownership by the latter and too little consideration for the aspirations of the populations who ought to benefit from EU policies, and for the particular political situation in different countries; regrets that the initial efforts after the Arab Spring (or Arab Springs) to introduce stricter conditionality and delivery incentives for beneficiary countries through the 'more for more' principle did not lead to greater leverage on the part of the EU in its ability to promote real change in the areas of democracy, the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, economic and social development and sustainable security in most countries; stresses that differentiation and enhanced mutual ownership are the hallmarks of the ENP, recognising different levels of engagement, and reflecting the interests of each country in relation to the nature and focus of its partnership with the Union; calls for a more consistent application of the 'more for more' principle by defining, at policy, programme and project levels in bilateral relations, concrete goals and benchmarks for increased support; recalls that the goal of democratisation can only be achieved in a sustainable manner if it is thoroughly pursued throughout the respective countries in both urban as well as, in particular, rural areas, and highlights that stability supports the development of a democracy, and that a well-timed preparation process which should include a wide consultation and inclusion of relevant societal groups and leaders, is beneficial to achieving this goal; further underlines that democratisation both supports economic development and strengthens the rule of law;

9. Acknowledges the initial efforts by the EEAS and the Commission, in cooperation and dialogue with the European Parliament, to substantially reform the EU policy framework for post-Arab Spring countries in order to increase its political leverage capacity in the Maghreb and Mashreq regions; points to the Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy and its added value as regards the potential for achieving synergies in actions at EU level, building on political, economic and social dialogue, stressing further the nexus between socio-economic development and sustainable security, and ensuring adequate support and implementation through the Financial Instruments for the external action of the EU; takes note of the 2015 revision of the ENP aimed at taking into account the changing scenarios in the region; insists on the importance of in-depth, annual country-by-country reporting on the implementation of the ENP; recalls also the important support provided by the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) in the implementation of the EU's Strategic Framework and Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy and its human rights guidelines and country strategies, which has enabled the EU to act more strategically in this area, including in the Southern Neighbourhood, and has ensured greater accountability, visibility and effectiveness;

10. Stresses the need to strive for the most efficient use of available resources in order to optimise the impact of the EU's external action that should be achieved through coherence and complementarity among the Union's external action financing instruments;

11. Points out the complexity of responding appropriately to the migration and refugee flows from and through the Maghreb and Mashreq regions, of a security-focused perspective on migration, of the challenge of terrorism and the legitimate concerns about the fragility of certain countries in the region, and the need for stronger consideration of climate change imperatives, as well as the challenges arising from the lack of a cohesive approach by the Member States; is concerned that these factors are leading the EU's action in relation to the region to rely excessively on an ideology of short-term stability, thereby disregarding other important aspects; takes the view that when stability and security become the predominant objectives, they lead to a shorter-term and short-sighted policy vision and deprive EU action directed at reaffirming human rights and fundamental freedoms of the required intensity; recalls that fostering state and societal resilience should not lead to the continuation of authoritarian regimes; reiterates that human rights are not subordinate to migration management or counter-terrorism actions, and is convinced that a credible and coherent stability and sustainable security policy can only be achieved through the pursuit of longer-term interests and principles, such as inclusive and beneficial economic and social development, as well as the strengthening of human rights and fundamental freedoms, in the framework of a human-centred and conflict-sensitive approach; recalls, however, that the long-term stability of those countries can only be achieved through a balanced relationship between security requirements and development, based on the rule of law and human rights;

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12. Calls for the EU to address the root causes of migration such as conflicts, environmental issues, extreme poverty and social exclusion and to re-orient political cooperation towards a more balanced and equal partnership with the MENA region, putting youth policies and investments towards local small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) at its heart;

13. Notes that some countries host millions of refugees, the majority of whom are women and children living in poverty, which exacerbates domestic violence, the prostitution of women and young girls, forced child marriage and child labour in the community;

14. Calls for the European institutions, its Member States as well as national development agencies, to strive to provide a unified European stance towards the region, focusing on our common interests, to ensure a single and coherent European strategy, in order to fulfil the EU's full potential as a meaningful supporter of democratic, economic and social reforms;

15. Notes with particular concern that civil society and human rights defenders across the MENA region face increasing threats, reprisals, judicial harassment, arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment as well as other forms of persecution; underlines that the work of human rights defenders is crucial for the long-term development and stability of the region; reiterates, in this context, its call for full implementation of the EU guidelines on human rights defenders; emphasises the need for EU and Member State leaders and diplomats at all levels to raise cases of individual human rights defenders at risk with third-country governments including, where appropriate, through public statements, démarches and regular dialogue, meetings with defenders, visiting defenders in detention, and observing defenders' trials; highlights the need for the EU and Member States to increase their funding and capacity for supporting human rights defenders at risk, through emergency grants as well as through support for civil society protection mechanisms such as ProtectDefenders.eu; welcomes the European Endowment for Democracy and the EIDHR's consistent efforts to promote democracy and respect for fundamental rights and freedoms in the Southern Neighbourhood of the EU; insists that the EU and its Member States must actively seek to engage with and support the most vulnerable human rights defenders and civil society actors across the region, including those in remote and rural regions, those fighting for LGBTI, indigenous, environmental and land rights, refugee and labour rights defenders, and women, who face specific risks and threats due to their gender;

16. Welcomes the concept of co-ownership put forward by the revised ENP; is concerned, however, that it runs the risk of allowing authoritarian regimes in certain partner countries to cherry-pick priorities according to their national agenda, instead of advancing along the path towards democratisation; stresses, therefore, the importance of a long-term policy framework and synergies in programming for post-Arab Springs countries based on the primacy of democracy, the inclusion of all democratic political forces and the primacy of the rule of law, human rights and fundamental values; reiterates that strengthening these aspects, as well as developing an attractive economic climate and support for positive reforms are in the interests of the partner countries and their populations, as well as of the EU, and calls for stronger conditionality in cases of systematic violations of human rights by the authorities; recalls that partner countries that are willing to pursue reforms, closer political dialogue and that attain more should be given new incentives and support adequate to their aspirations and commitment, and demands a performance-based approach, based on inclusive dialogue, clear priorities and objectives in this sense; insists that in cases of systematic violations of human rights by the authorities, EU budgetary assistance should be redirected to local civil society;

17. Supports the aspirations of all those in the MENA region, including the majority of young people, who want to establish free, stable, prosperous, inclusive, and democratic countries which respect their national and international commitments on human rights and fundamental freedoms; welcomes democratic processes in the region and the sustained partnership with the EU; calls for the EU to take this into account in all its policy areas, in order to enhance their coherence and to assist the partner countries in a more effective way; highlights that, for any political transformation to be fully sustainable, it is important and necessary to come to terms with the past and, in this context, points to the important work of the 'Truth and Dignity Commission' of Tunisia, which sets an example for the entire region;

18. Regrets that in certain instances, bilateral investigative and judicial cooperation on cases of detention, violence or the deaths of EU citizens has been inadequate, as in the case of the Italian researcher Giulio Regeni; considers it essential to link further collaboration in other sectors to substantial improvements in this field;

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19. Is convinced that where the prerequisites for the negotiation of Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFATs), conditional on democratic progress, are not yet in place or do not meet the respective countries' aspirations, the EU should provide increased access to sustainable trade and investment, notably for the benefit of Southern Mediterranean populations and economies, supporting production capacities, the modernisation of infrastructure and the creation of attractive economic climates, with a focus on the domestic and regional markets, fostering decent work, social protection and inclusive socio-economic development;

20. Takes the view that, as the EU struggles to come up with a forward-looking, rights-based and people-centred vision for its migration and asylum policy, there is an increasing risk that some countries in the region might use migration containment and their role therein to seek greater leverage in their political and policy dialogue with the EU; considers that more assistance should be provided to the MENA countries to deal with the influx of immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa, and, in this context, welcomes the efforts made by the EU to tackle the root causes of migration, but recalls that more efforts will be needed to be successful in this endeavour; considers it important to involve MENA region partners in the implementation of common solutions to tackle issues such as the fight against human trafficking; is concerned, however, about the possible instrumentalisation of EU foreign policy as 'migration management', and emphasises that all attempts to work with post-Arab Springs countries, including countries of origin and transit, on migration must go hand in hand with improving human rights conditions within these countries and their compliance with international human rights and refugee law; stresses that the challenge posed by migration flows is a common challenge for the countries of the MENA region (countries of origin and transit) and those of the Union (countries of destination); stresses, in addition, the importance of a policy framework promoting democratic, political and socio-economic inclusion as mutually reinforcing factors, including with regard to fostering conditions for a safe, dignified life for people in the region and reducing forced displacement;

21. Points out the risk that the EU's action for the region and the approach pursued by Member States through bilateral relations may be undermined by uncoordinated and unilateral approaches, and that the EU's capacity to make a political impact might be lost as a result; welcomes, in this context, the proposal made by the President of the Commission to move beyond unanimity in Council decision-making in common foreign and security policy areas, as it could help the EU to speak with one voice, unite behind one clear strategy in its foreign relations and have greater leverage; takes the view that the deeper involvement of Member States in the ENP as envisaged in the 2015 review of the ENP, although positive, should be better pursued; stresses the importance and the depth of the links between several Member States and their peoples and many Southern Mediterranean countries; calls, in this context, on EU Member States to strengthen the coordination of their actions in the region and examine ways in which they can act more effectively;

22. Calls for the EU and the Member States, taking into account the EU anti-corruption *acquis*, to strengthen their judicial cooperation programmes with partner countries in the region in order to promote the exchange of best practices and establish an effective legal arsenal to fight corruption; believes that reforms of the public administrations and the public sector in the Southern Neighbourhood should be a priority, together with the fight against corruption, and should be pursued through increased financial resources, capacity building and closer cooperation with the Member States, as well as support to civil society actors in the areas of anti-corruption, transparency and accountability;

23. Reiterates that the promotion and protection of human rights, democracy and the rule of law are among the fundamental tenets of the EU's foreign policy; is concerned about the ongoing sales of arms and security equipment from EU Member States, including of surveillance technologies used for internal repression, to authorities in the region which fail to respect human rights and international humanitarian law; urges Member States to strictly comply with Council Common Position 2008/994/CFSP of 8 December 2008 defining common rules governing control of exports of military technology and equipment ⁽¹⁾, which among other things states that export licences should be denied where there is a clear risk that the military technology or equipment to be exported might be used for internal repression, or for the commission of serious violations of international humanitarian law; reiterates its position as laid down in its amendments to the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council setting up a Union regime for the control of exports, transfer, brokering, technical assistance and transit of dual-use items, as adopted on 17 January 2018 ⁽²⁾; urges the EU Member States to give the utmost importance to this file in trying to reach agreement with the Council;

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 335, 13.12.2008, p. 99.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 458, 19.12.2018, p. 187.

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24. Considers that the partnership priorities agreed between the EU and partner countries under the ENP should make explicit reference to the relevant association agreement, notably its human rights clause, ensuring that human rights constitute an essential and transversal aspect of the agreed partnership priorities, to be discussed at all levels, notably at the highest political level, and not confined to low-level sub-committee meetings;

25. Calls for greater inclusiveness and a closer involvement of local civil society in the identification of needs in the partner countries; welcomes the efforts by the EEAS and the Commission to broaden civil society outreach and include the private sector, and encourages them to do more in this regard; emphasises the need to ensure the participation of independent civil society representatives, including unregistered human rights groups and human rights defenders, and regrets that this is being hindered in particular in instances where dialogue and support pass through government-controlled agencies or focus solely on pro-government organisations; takes the view that the EU should facilitate access to available funds for smaller and local CSOs, including social partners, and streamline the application processes and focus on local CSOs; points out the perception among local civil society interlocutors of a primary focus by the EU on large, international CSOs; calls for the EU to invest more resources in promoting the capacity building of local CSOs and facilitating enhanced partnerships between them and large, international CSOs, as well as improving social partners' capacity for social dialogue with the government, with a view to increasing local ownership;

26. Calls on the EEAS to step up its efforts to exchange best practices when it comes to women's role in public life;

27. Underlines that women's commitment and empowerment in the public, political, economic and cultural spheres of the countries in the MENA region are vital if long-term stability, peace and economic prosperity are to be achieved; underlines that in the countries in which the Arab Spring has led to ongoing conflict, women's involvement in peace-making processes and mediation are essential to restoring a non-violent society; considers that women's access to education, supported by CSOs, and gender equality are essential in order to accomplish this;

28. Stresses that strengthening local authorities contributes to the spread of democracy and the principles of the rule of law; calls, therefore, for the process of decentralisation to be encouraged and for empowerment of the regions through the development of local autonomies; encourages and supports partnerships with EU Member States and decentralised cooperation projects carried out by Member States' local authorities with the aim of developing municipal and regional governance in the countries of the region;

29. Recalls the importance of securing adequate visibility for EU efforts and EU assistance and investment in the region by means of enhanced strategic communication, public diplomacy, people-to-people contacts, cultural diplomacy, cooperation in educational and academic matters, and outreach activities to promote the Union's values; calls, in particular, for the reinstatement of the mandate of an EU Special Representative for the Southern Mediterranean, which would spearhead EU engagement with the region and ensure heightened EU visibility;

30. Believes that with a view to increasing the EU's capacity to make a political and policy impact and to promoting ownership and widespread support by beneficiary countries, each EU Delegation should envisage regular consultations with experts and CSO representatives, and should, in particular, set up high-level advisory councils reflecting the social, economic and political diversity of the country concerned, comprising economic, media, cultural, academic, civil society and prominent youth leaders, as well as social partners and leading human rights defenders from the country concerned and providing input as regards policy priorities and the policy architecture devised by the EU;

31. Is convinced that young people should be a primary focus of the EU's action towards the region, with an intersectional approach; calls for youth policies to be mainstreamed in all the Union's policies in the MENA region; believes it is crucial to devise durable solutions commensurate to the scale of the youth employment challenge, and underlines the relevance of promoting decent job, entrepreneurship and self-employment opportunities; proposes, in this context, that each EU Delegation work to set up informal youth boards comprising young political, social, economic, media, cultural and CSO leaders with a view to providing input and advice on policy priorities, the capacity of EU policies to make an impact in the country and introduce an additional element of accountability in relation to policy choices; calls on European political families and think tanks to engage in enhanced exchanges with active local young people from the MENA countries, with a view to promoting their empowerment, training and capacity-building to enable them to stand in local elections and become new actors of positive change in their respective countries;

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32. Calls for the EU to assist its partners in addressing the root causes of radicalisation such as poverty, unemployment, social and political exclusion and society's inability to address people's needs and create opportunities for young people through enhanced cooperation with the MENA region putting people, especially youngsters, at its heart; calls for the EU to support young people's access to entrepreneurship through, for example, encouraging and supporting investments in start-ups; believes that the EU's action in relation to the region should put greater emphasis on inclusive economic and social development to promote job creation, the employability of young people, the introduction of training better tailored to the labour market and labour rights reforms, together with reforms aimed at establishing strong universal social protection systems, with a specific focus on the most vulnerable groups; calls for the EU to invest more resources in actions aimed at improving access to quality essential services for all, such as education and healthcare, and to increase its efforts to enhance social dialogue as well as in promoting legislative reforms in relation to freedom of association, peaceful assembly and expression, freedom of the press, fighting corruption and ensuring access to resources and information as key ingredients for stability and for an open, dynamic and resilient society;

33. Is very concerned about the escalation of tensions in the region; denounces the instrumentalisation of religious differences in order to instigate political crises and sectarian wars;

34. Calls for the EU to strongly support the countries of the MENA region in their fight against the dangers of religious radicalism to which unemployed young people are particularly exposed;

35. Believes that mechanisms are required to stop the financing of terrorism through offshore entities involving states and financial institutions, and to stop arms trafficking and the buying and selling of energy resources and raw materials which benefit terrorist groups;

36. Points to the challenges of climate change, desertification and water shortages that are deeply affecting the region; strongly encourages policymakers as well as all actors in both the EU and the MENA region to step up their cooperation with partner countries, including local authorities and CSOs, on energy security, promoting renewable and sustainable energy and energy efficiency targets, in order to contribute to the implementation of the Paris Agreement; highlights the opportunity for the region to move forward in its energy transition through increased exploitation of renewable energy sources that hold great economic potential for many of the MENA countries; points to the opportunities for sustainable growth and job creation this would bring about, as well as to the opportunities for regional cooperation on energy and climate change; stresses, in this context, the opportunity that recent discoveries of natural gas reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean can constitute for all the countries involved;

37. Points to the fact that opening the private sector and further differentiating economies can contribute to much-needed job creation in the area, particularly for young people and women; welcomes the positive signs of recovery in the tourism sector in the area, recognises its great potential to foster sustainable growth and job opportunities, and calls for particular EU attention and support for the areas affected by infrastructural and/or security challenges; calls for the EU to enhance its support to the countries more willing to advance on democratisation, the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms by using all the available financial tools at its disposal, from macro-financial assistance, through the ENI, to the European External Investment Plan, as well as to the future Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI);

38. Recalls the need to exploit the largely untapped potential for innovation and dynamism of the private sector in the region to a greater extent; encourages the EU to step up its dialogue and financial and technical assistance in this sense; welcomes initiatives such as Startup Europe Mediterranean (SEMED) aimed at mapping and establishing a network between startups, investors, universities, research institutions and policymakers on the two shores of the Mediterranean, as a key action to stimulate cooperation on innovation, job creation and sustainable economic growth;

39. Stresses the importance of linking all reforms and investments, as well as the EU's action in relation to the area, to the achievement of the SDGs and to sustainable development in general;

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40. Recalls the added value of parliamentary diplomacy and of the regular bilateral interparliamentary meetings which Parliament holds with its counterparts from the Southern Neighbourhood as a tool for exchanging experiences and fostering mutual understanding; points out the importance of the Joint Parliamentary Committees in this context as a unique instrument for formulating ambitious joint policies between the EU and its closest partners; encourages the EU's national parliaments to hold bilateral interparliamentary meetings within the framework of the ENP; underlines once more that political parties in the national parliaments and the European Parliament can play a role in this regard; takes the view that dialogue between the European Parliament, EU national parliaments and the parliaments of the Southern Neighbourhood could provide a very valuable opportunity to foster regional dialogue and cooperation in the Southern Neighbourhood; points in this regard to the important role which PA UfM could play as a venue where regional integration and an ambitious political and economic agenda for this organisation could be dynamised; notes the overlap between the PA UfM and the Parliamentary Assembly for the Mediterranean; takes the view that the PA UfM should play a more important role within the regional framework of the Union for the Mediterranean, ensuring transparency and parliamentary oversight of UfM activities, notably the UfM-labelled projects;

41. Emphasises that women can be powerful drivers in promoting and building peace, conflict resolution and stabilisation processes, and highlights the vital role of women in preventing radicalisation, tackling violent extremism and counterterrorism; recalls that women's participation at all levels of decision-making in designing and implementing these strategies contributes to the effectiveness and sustainability of policies and programmes; calls on the Commission and the Member States to support women in the MENA region and organisations that defend and promote their rights; highlights the need for easy access to justice and transitional justice, focusing on women survivors of conflict-related sexual violence;

42. Reiterates the call of the PA UfM for support for a Euro-Mediterranean project on gender gaps, to include an analysis of the rate of women's representation in national and regional parliaments and in local institutions; takes the view that the Committee on Women's Rights of that Parliamentary Assembly and the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality of the European Parliament should receive information annually on gender inequality indicators in the Euro-Mediterranean region;

43. Recalls that women's rights, women's empowerment, gender equality, children's rights, freedom of religion or belief and the right to non-discrimination of ethnic and religious minorities and vulnerable groups, including people with disabilities and LGBTQI people, are fundamental rights and key principles of the EU's external action;

44. Calls for the gender equality and women's rights dimension of the ENP to be strengthened, in line with the GAP II priorities; welcomes the recent reforms approved in some of the countries on matters such as the exoneration of rapists who subsequently marry their victims, violence against women and inheritance rights; calls for strong enforcement of such laws; is concerned, however, that — overall — the situation of women has not improved in most countries affected by the Arab Spring; underlines that women's commitment and empowerment in the public, political, economic and cultural spheres of the countries in the region are vital if long-term stability, peace and economic prosperity are to be achieved; considers that women's access to education is essential in order to accomplish this; is further concerned about the fact that female participation in the labour market in the region is one of the lowest in the world, causing social exclusion and a substantial loss for the economy as a whole; points out the importance of addressing this issue as a fundamental component of sustainable economic growth and social cohesion; notes also that women's rights defenders face arbitrary detention, judicial harassment, smear campaigns and intimidation;

45. Denounces the widespread persecution of LGBTI persons and LGBTI rights defenders across the MENA region, including judicial harassment, torture, physical attacks and smear campaigns; calls for the Commission, the European Parliament and Member States to actively and consistently defend the indivisibility of human rights, including LGBTQI rights, in the framework of their cooperation with MENA states, and to emphasise that these rights need to be upheld through state practice as well as legislation;

46. Calls on the MENA countries to play an active part in tackling all forms of violence against women; calls on the MENA countries to sign and ratify the Istanbul Convention, an instrument for tackling violence against women and girls, including domestic violence and female genital mutilation (FGM); calls, in particular, on countries that have yet to do so to revise their legislation by adding wording on gender-based violence and honour crimes, by making threats to commit such acts an offence and by imposing more severe penalties for all crimes of that kind;

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47. Calls on the countries in the MENA region to implement the Beijing Action Plan for women's access to education and health as fundamental human rights, including access to voluntary family planning and sexual reproductive health and rights, such as access to free contraception, safe and legal abortions, and sex and relationship education for girls and boys;

48. Is concerned about restrictions on access to public healthcare and, in particular, on access to sexual and reproductive health, especially for women and girls in rural areas;

49. Urges all these countries to ratify and lift all existing reservations to CEDAW; urges these countries to take the requisite measures to uphold gender equality in society, for example by adopting national action plans that include effective gender equality measures, in conjunction with women's organisations and other civil society stakeholders;

50. Believes that the EU should develop a more comprehensive approach to assistance on education reforms in partner countries and devote the relevant resources and programmes to early education, including pre-school level, as well as to ensuring the development of competencies and skills, including digital skills, adequate vocational and educational training and entrepreneurship education programmes, critical thinking and social awareness within society at large, and from a very young age; stresses the importance of providing quality education as a means of empowering young people and strengthening social cohesion;

51. Welcomes programmes developed by the Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean, such as Med4Jobs, as means of addressing the problem of the employability of young people and women in the Mediterranean; calls on the member states of the Union for the Mediterranean to instruct its Secretariat to focus its work on the economic and social development of MENA countries with a view to supporting the consolidation of its transition process, giving particular prominence to women and girls;

52. Calls once again on the Commission to act on Parliament's proposal for the creation of an ambitious Euro-Mediterranean Erasmus programme separate from Erasmus+, with dedicated funds and an ambitious dimension in terms of scope and available resources, and with a focus not only on primary, secondary and higher education cycles, but also on vocational and educational learning; reiterates that investing in youth will provide a solid basis for the long-term resilience and prosperity of the region; calls for the Commission and Parliament to increase the scope and participation of their European Union Visitors programme and to facilitate the participation of young people and of women political leaders; calls, furthermore, for the EU to support reforms to modernise education systems in these countries;

53. Recalls its support for the funding of academic and vocational training programmes to create wide reserves of professional skills in the MENA countries, as well as for actions such as the Erasmus+ VET Mobility Charter, that should be extended as far as possible to all MENA countries by means of flexible and evolving tools such as mobility partnerships;

54. Strongly condemns, once again, all atrocities and the widespread violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed during the conflict, and in particular those committed by forces of the Assad regime, including with the support of its allies, as well as by the UN-listed terrorist organisations; deeply regrets the failure of repeated regional and international attempts to end the war, and urges renewed and intensive global cooperation to achieve a peaceful, sustainable solution to the conflict; stresses that there should not be any tolerance of or impunity for the horrific crimes committed in Syria; reiterates its call for independent, impartial, thorough and credible investigations and prosecutions of those responsible, and supports the work of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism on international crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2012 (IIIM); calls, furthermore, for support for CSOs and NGOs, which are gathering and helping to preserve evidence of human rights abuses and humanitarian law violations;

55. Regrets that since the 2015 ENP revision, only one report, of 18 May 2017 on the Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy Review (JOIN(2017)0018), has assessed developments in the neighbourhood at a regional level, despite the commitment contained in the 2015 communication on the ENP review to produce regular reports at

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neighbourhood level, in addition to country-specific reporting, including information on fundamental freedoms, the rule of law, gender equality and human rights issues; calls for country-level and regional reports to include adequate outcome analyses and human rights impact assessments of EU and Member State policies;

56. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the VP/HR.
