

*Wednesday, 14 September 2011 - Strasbourg*

*Debate*

*Pino Arlacchi (S&D)*. - Madam President, I am happy to see that the whole Parliament has a clear and strong position on the tragedy that is unfolding in Syria.

The S&D Group has just tabled a joint motion for a resolution which reflects the deep concern of Europe, the Arab world and the rest of the planet over the continued brutal crackdown on peaceful protesters perpetrated by the al-Assad regime. The figure of 2 600 has been quoted as the number of people whose lives have been destroyed by the brutality of the regime, but many more have been injured, tortured or detained.

Demonstrations and protests in Syria are demanding the ousting of al-Assad and his family and an end to the rule of the Baa'th party. The same demand comes from the EU and the most important international actors. The protesters insist on the peaceful nature of their political movement but, in order to justify the atrocities against them, the Syrian regime claims it is confronting religious extremists. This message is false and misleading. All indicators and information show that no extremists are leading the democratic protests in Syria. We must reject the invitation of the al-Assad regime to listen to them and to the other Arab tyrannies on the spectre of mujahidism and similar threats. Our support for the Syrian democratic forces should continue and our revulsion towards the current regime's course of action must continue to be total.

Just one final word about sanctions. Sanctions by the international community should be maintained, but we should be very careful to keep in place smart sanctions: sanctions against individuals, against prominent members of the Government and the al-Assad circle of power. That approach works. They should be different from the sanctions of the past that strengthened authoritarian regimes instead of weakening them.

I associate myself with the call by several colleagues for a ban on European companies which invest in energy and other sectors in Syria.

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