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REGIONS:

AFRICA

Chad

► **EU Presidency Statement on the Republic of Chad** (03/02/2008)

The Presidency of the European Union expresses its great concern over the continued attempts of armed groups in Chad to seize power unconstitutionally. The Presidency calls for an immediate cessation of hostilities.

A political settlement of the conflict remains the only viable perspective for peace and stability in Chad. Recalling the accord of 13 August 2007, the Presidency emphasises the urgency of returning to the inclusive political process. The Presidency strongly supports the African Union's call for a peaceful solution. The Presidency stresses that the European Union remains deeply concerned about the humanitarian and security situation of internally displaced people and refugees for which a multidimensional and international presence remains indispensable. The European Union will continue its close coordination with the United Nations in this regard. The Presidency underlines the European Union's commitment to the achievement of the objectives of the EUFOR Tchad/RCA operation under UNSC Resolution 1778 (2007), and to continue with the deployment when circumstances permit.

Stressing its deep concern over the implications of the current crisis in Chad for regional stability, the Presidency reiterates the EU's full support for the ongoing UN/AU efforts in the region.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/CFSP_Statements/February/0203MZZ_Chad.html

Sudan/Chad/Central African Republic

► **Council Conclusions on Sudan/Chad/Central African Republic 2846th EXTERNAL RELATIONS Council meeting** (28/01/2008)

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

1. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) is the basis for sustainable peace and development throughout Sudan and its implementation must be pursued as a key priority. Therefore the Council welcomes that the parties to the CPA have resumed their cooperation in the Government of National Unity (GNU) and agreed on the full and timely implementation of all the provisions of the CPA. The Council urges the parties to ensure their commitments are honoured, including on still outstanding issues such as the status of Abyei and the formation, training and deployment of the Joint Integrated Units (JIU). It also calls for concrete steps to revitalise and strengthen the Assessment and Evaluation Commission. The Council supports the important role of UNMIS and encourages the parties to take full advantage of its presence and mandate, including its tasks to provide support to reconciliation in all its aspects, emphasising the role of women and civil society, and with regard to the necessary preparation (including the census) for the conduct of the general elections in 2009.

2. The Council welcomes the transfer of authority from AMIS to UNAMID for the operation in Darfur and underlines the need to address the considerable challenges facing the deployment of UNAMID. It calls on the Sudanese authorities, notably the GNU, to lend their full support to the effective establishment of

UNAMID, including necessary technical and administrative arrangements for this purpose and to accept all troops deemed necessary by the UN and the AU for successful discharge of its mandate. In this context, the Council deplores the unwillingness of the Sudanese Authorities to accept Sweden's and Norway's contributions to UNAMID. Furthermore, the Council strongly condemns the attack on 7 January by elements of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) on a UNAMID supply convoy and calls on the Government of Sudan (GoS) to fulfil its promises of full cooperation. The Council reiterates its readiness to take necessary measures, notably within a UN-framework, against any party that impedes the establishment of an effective UNAMID force.

3. The Council attaches utmost importance to the continued, unimpeded and safe humanitarian access to the population in Darfur. It urges the GoS to respect its commitment to a Moratorium on restrictions and obstacles to all humanitarian work in Darfur, as set out in the Joint Communique on this matter, and to review issues of concern through established channels (for example the High Level Committee). The Council welcomes the recent announcement of the extension of this Moratorium on restrictions and obstacles to all humanitarian work in Darfur. In this connection, the Council stands ready to consider further measures, notably within a UN-framework, against any party that undermines peace and security in Darfur or the region by committing acts of violence and especially against any party that obstructs humanitarian access.

4. There can be no impunity for the crimes committed in Darfur. The Council calls on the GoS to cooperate unconditionally with the International Criminal Court (ICC) and to surrender the two individuals for whom it issued arrest warrants on 27 April 2007 in relation to alleged crimes against humanity and war crimes in Darfur.

5. The Council calls on all parties in the Darfur conflict to cease their hostilities and engage in the peace process mediated by the UN and AU Special Envoys. It underlines that the effectiveness of UNAMID will only be guaranteed if an inclusive political agreement between the parties to the conflict in Darfur is reached. The Council therefore recalls its position that any party failing to engage constructively in the peace process is to be considered as an obstacle to peace and that it will promote appropriate further measures against it, notably in the UN framework.

6. The Council is seriously concerned over the deterioration of the security situation in the border region of Sudan and Chad, including the recent attacks by rebel groups from Darfur in eastern Chad as well as the incursions of Chadian armed forces into Sudan. The Council urges the Chadian and the Sudanese governments to abstain from any action that could further destabilise the current situation whilst exercising the utmost restraint and settling differences through dialogue and diplomatic channels. The Council urges the governments of Sudan and Chad to terminate support to armed groups operating in Eastern Chad or Darfur and recalls their responsibility in accordance with their agreements to prevent armed groups from crossing the common border.

7. Deploring the renewed attacks by Chadian rebel groups, the Council stresses the importance and urgency to foster a continuous peace process between the Chadian government and the armed rebel groups. In this perspective the Council welcomes the efforts of regional neighbours, particularly Libya. It also welcomes the progress made in implementing the accord of 13 August 2007 committing the Chadian authorities to work closely with the unarmed political opposition in addressing defined shortfalls notably in view of the legislative elections in 2009. In this context, the Council calls upon the still active armed rebel groups to abandon all attempts of further pursuing military options and instead, pursuing a democratic path. It reminds all parties that an internal political settlement remains the only viable perspective for peace and stability in Chad.

8. The Council launched the military bridging operation EUFOR Tchad/RCA. It authorised the EU operation commander, with immediate effect, to release the activation order in order to execute the deployment of the forces and start the execution of the mission. The Council reaffirms its full commitment to contribute to the implementation of the UNSC-Resolution 1778 (2007) which authorises the deployment in Chad and Central African Republic of a multidimensional presence, including the EU providing the military element of it. In accordance with this resolution, the EU conducts this military bridging operation for a period of 12 months from the declaration of Initial Operational Capability which is planned to be reached in March 2008. A mid mandate review after 6 months, conducted in conjunction with the UN, will assess the need for a possible UN follow-on capability.

9. In conducting this operation the EU is stepping up its longstanding action in support of efforts to tackle the crisis in Darfur and to address its regional ramifications, notably in Eastern Chad and North-eastern Central African Republic. In this context, EUFOR Tchad/RCA will ensure a high degree of coordination with UNAMID. The deployment of this EU operation has been welcomed by both the governments of Chad and Central African Republic. EUFOR Tchad/RCA will actively work for the improvement of the security situation in Chad and Central African Republic. It will contribute to protecting civilians in danger, particularly displaced persons and refugees, to facilitating the delivery of humanitarian aid and the free movement of humanitarian personnel and to protecting UN personnel, facilities, installations and equipment. It is part of the EU's multifaceted support to the area, which includes European Commission support to the UN police mission in Chad. The European Commission and Member States will also continue their ongoing development cooperation and humanitarian aid.

10. The Council underlined that the bridging military operation EUFOR Tchad/RCA will be conducted in a neutral, impartial and independent manner. Throughout the mission, EUFOR Tchad/RCA will coordinate closely with the United Nations and cooperate with the Governments of Chad and the Central African Republic.

11. Systematic mainstreaming of Human Rights, Gender Issues and Child Protection (in line with UNSC – Resolution 1612 and the Checklist for the Protection of Children affected by Armed Conflict in ESDP Operations) into operational planning and in the execution of the operation is to be ensured by specially designated personnel at all levels.

12. The operation will be commanded from the EU Operations Head Quarter (OHQ) in Mont Valérien (Paris) by Lieutenant General Patrick NASH (Ireland); the Force in theatre will be commanded from Abeche (Chad) by Brigadier General Jean-Philippe Ganascia (France). The operation will cooperate closely with the UN mission MINURCAT and with the humanitarian and development organisations present in Chad and CAR. "

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/gena/98414.pdf

Kenya

- ▶ **Javier SOLANA, EU High Representative for the CFSP, and Louis MICHEL, Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid, deplore the deteriorating situation in Kenya (29/01/2008)**

Javier SOLANA, EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), and Louis MICHEL, Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid, issued the following joint statement today expressing their very grave concern at the rapidly degenerating situation in Kenya:

"We were shocked to learn of the murder in Nairobi this morning of a member of the Kenyan parliament and we condemn the massive human rights abuses and systematic violence being perpetrated in Kenya.

We urge all parties and their followers as well as all Kenyan people to refrain from violence and to show the utmost restraint in order to avoid disaster, at this crucial point where Kenya's future hangs in the balance. We fully support the on-going mediation efforts of Kofi Annan and we call upon all leaders to live up to their responsibilities by engaging fully and unconditionally in the search for a political solution through dialogue. We very much welcome therefore the commitment to dialogue taken by both sides today. The stability of Kenya is crucial for the people of Kenya and for the region as a whole."

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/declarations/98483.pdf

AMERICAS

ASIA

EUROPE (OUTSIDE OF UE) AND CIS

Serbia

- ▶ **Statement by the Presidency of the European Union on Presidential elections in Serbia** (03/02/2008)

The EU Presidency has closely been following the second round of the presidential elections held in Serbia held on 3 February.

The Presidency of the EU applauds the high turnout in the, according to the preliminary assessment, free and fair elections. The Presidency welcomes the fact that the Serbian people seem to have confirmed their support to the democratic and European course of their country.

The EU Presidency congratulates President Tadić on his reelection for the second term in the office.

The EU Presidency reiterates its commitment to the European perspective of Serbia, as most recently expressed at the January General Affairs and External Relations Council in the invitation to sign a Political Agreement on Co-operation with Serbia. Serbia has a crucial role to play in the Western Balkans and the people of Serbia are part of the European family. The EU wishes to deepen its relationship with Serbia and to accelerate its progress towards the EU, including candidate status. It therefore encourages Serbia to implement vigorously the reforms necessary for advancing the Stabilisation and Association process. In this respect it also stresses the key importance of achieving full cooperation with ICTY.

The Presidency expresses its confidence that the reelection of President Tadić will accelerate Serbia's progress on the road towards the EU, including the signature of the Stabilization and Association Agreement that would pave the way for acquiring a candidate status in the near future.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/CFSP_Statements/February/0203PV_Tadic.html

MAGHREB AND MIDDLE EAST

Gaza Strip

- ▶ **Euromed Assembly: focus on Gaza** (29/01/2008)

Differing views on the situation in Gaza dominated the meeting of the Committee on Political Affairs, Security and Human Rights of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (EMPA) held in Brussels on Monday.

"We disengaged unilaterally from Gaza; we are not going to make the same mistake elsewhere", said Majalli Whbee, Israel's deputy foreign minister, referring to the situation in the Gaza strip and the dismantling of Israeli settlements in the territory. "You see what has happened", he continued. "Gaza could have become the Hong Kong of the Middle East but today it's more like Somalia", added Mr Whbee, who is also vice-chair of the EMPA Political Affairs Committee.

According to the chair of the political affairs committee of the Palestinian Legislative Council, Abdellah Abdellah, "Israel is multiplying the obstacles to peace". He also criticised the Israel for attributing too much importance to the rockets launched from Gaza. "Only two people have been killed on the Israeli side compared to 437 Palestinian casualties" from the air raids of Heyl Ha Avir. Palestinian MP Zuhair Sanduka maintained that "Gaza has become a giant prison" and spoke of the plight of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians suffering from the food and petrol blockade.

EP Vice-President Luisa Morgantini (GUE/NGL, IT) said "the Annapolis final document (November 2007) speaks only of the United States, with the European Union just paying for what has been destroyed". She also spoke of the differing approaches to the peace process within Ehud Olmert's coalition. "Ehud Barak is more a minister of war than a minister of defence", argued the Italian MEP.

"The breaking down of the wall to go and fetch water and food marks the entry of Palestinian civil society into the conflict. It breaks down the blockade imposed by the Israelis, who should take note and lift the siege of Gaza", argued H  l  ne Flautre (Greens/EFA, FR). She also called on Hamas to stop firing rockets against Israel.

EP Vice-President Rodi Kratsa (EPP-ED, EL) suggested drawing up a list of all the peace plans "to see why our governments have failed so far".

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/030-19762-028-01-05-903-20080128IPR19750-28-01-2008-2008-false/default_en.htm

Iran

- **Statement to the European Parliament on Iran by Javier SOLANA, EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (30/01/2008)**

Javier SOLANA took part in the debate on Iran at this afternoon's plenary sitting of the European Parliament. He gave a wide-ranging address on the importance of Iran as a key player in the Middle East and the current political situation there. He outlined the potential areas in which the EU and Iran could work together and the obstacles that prevent a constructive partnership at the present time. The following is an edited summary of Mr SOLANA's statement:

"Mr President, Honourable Members of Parliament,

Iran is a key country in the Middle East. It is important in strategic terms. It is also important as a regional actor. We would like to have a constructive relationship with Iran. But there are many difficulties.

Iran is also a vibrant society, full of talented people. It has an exceptionally high proportion of women graduates. Persian is one of the major languages of the internet, especially for blogs as young people seek a means of self expression.

The political scene in Iran is of interest, as you well know: there are elements of democracy there not present in many other Middle Eastern countries, though the election process still leaves much to be desired. For the Majles elections in March for example, 30 per cent of candidates have been disqualified, with those of reformist tendencies suffering most. Some will have an opportunity to appeal but others will not.

Nevertheless an imperfect democracy is better than none and it is right that we should engage with Iranian parliamentarians. I am grateful to the European Parliament for sending a delegation there to meet with colleagues in the Iranian parliament.

Members of this Parliament are also right to be concerned about the rule of law and human rights in Iran. Iran is almost at the bottom of the world press freedom index. It has increased the number of executions. There are unfortunately numerous reports of torture. Such things are unacceptable and only damage Iran's image as a civilised country.

All of those who campaign for human rights in Iran, for example in the one million signatures campaign for women's rights, deserve our support and admiration. I had the opportunity to meet and talk with Mrs Souhayr Belhassen, President of the International Federation of Human Rights, today. With greater freedom, greater accountability and a more even-handed justice, Iran could be one of the most creative and dynamic societies in the Middle East. The European Union had in the past a human rights dialogue with Iran but since 2006 the Iranians have been unwilling to participate.

But we have many areas of common interest with Iran that are not fully exploited. The most obvious of these is the energy sector. But there is also more we could do together on drug trafficking and against terrorism.

It would be good if we were able to work better with Iran in the region. But for the moment, as you know, it is difficult to see Iran as a constructive partner. In almost every area we seem to find ourselves pursuing different, sometimes contradictory, policies. We want a two-state solution in Palestine. We want Annapolis to work. Iran, by contrast, urged Muslim countries to boycott the Annapolis conference. It is still the only country in the Middle East that does not accept the idea of a two-state solution. It is a key supplier of arms to Hamas. The remarks of President Ahmadinejad concerning Israel and his support for holocaust denial are entirely unacceptable for all of us. Iran also plays a destabilising factor in Lebanon. It is the most important supplier of weapons to Hezbollah. It has also worked with groups pursuing violence in Iraq.

All of these activities make Iran, from our point of view, a troublesome and difficult actor in the Middle East. But it remains one that we need to understand and engage with better. There have been periods of cooperation with Iran, for example in Afghanistan, that have been fruitful and I believe we should continue to seek such opportunities.

As you know, the most important subject of concern is the Iranian nuclear program. Were Iran to develop a weapon this could be a cause of radical instability and danger in the Middle East. It would also be very damaging to the whole non-proliferation system. Even the suspicion that Iran is pursuing a nuclear weapon can destabilise the Middle East. Our objective is to remove those suspicions. In the end this can be done only through a negotiated solution.

It is welcome that Iran is working with the IAEA to deal with some of the so called "Outstanding Issues". The current phase, with Dr El Baradei, in which Iran needs to answer questions about a possible weaponisation programme, and especially other questions relating to contamination, is especially important.

But even if these questions about the past are answered that does not provide the transparency for which we have been asking about Iran's present activities nor its future intentions. Present transparency requires Iran to ratify and implement the Additional Protocol, as we have said many times.

Confidence about its future intentions is more difficult. Supposing Iran did have a weaponisation programme in the past, how can we be sure today that its present enrichment activity is exclusively civil? It is especially difficult to believe this when we see no sign of Iran signing a contract to build nuclear power plant (apart from Bushehr for which the Russians supply the fuel). All we hear about is enrichment. When I ask

representatives of the Iranian government - and you asked the question the other day - what they plan to do with the enriched uranium they are producing, I never get an answer.

The fact is that Iran can develop a civil programme only with assistance of Europe, the USA, Russia or Japan. None of us have a problem with an Iranian civil programme, indeed we are offering to help. But none of us, in the group of six countries plus Japan, will do so unless we are certain that Iran's intentions are exclusively peaceful.

That is why we try continually to get a negotiated solution. So far, unfortunately, we have not been able to succeed. Also, unfortunately, it is impossible to do nothing while Iran continues to ignore resolutions of the IAEA and the UN Security Council. Work is therefore going on in New York on a further resolution. The objective of these resolutions is not to punish Iran but to persuade it to come to the negotiating table. As far as I am concerned, the sooner the better. The European Union and the permanent members of the Security Council are fully united in this and, as you know, we had an important meeting last week.

Perhaps I could add one further comment that goes beyond Iran itself. In a world where there is increasing interest in nuclear power we need to find ways of assuring countries that they can obtain nuclear fuel without having to do their own enrichment - which is expensive for them and gives rise to proliferation concerns. I strongly support, myself, the ideas for the creation of international fuel supply assurances, perhaps in the form of a fuel bank. That idea has been put forward by many important figures in the international community. There are many good ideas in this area. I believe the time has come to turn those ideas into action.

Iran is a key country. I have been engaged for years now to bring it back to normal relations with us. We all have to win from that. Iranians and Europeans. I do believe in that. And I will continue relentlessly working for that objective. I think it will benefit the people of Iran and the EU.

Thank you very much."

Following interventions from the floor, Mr SOLANA responded to MEPs' questions and wound up the debate. He outlined the three main areas of concern in relations with Iran which are the human rights situation, the Middle-East peace process and Iran's nuclear programme. There is no possibility of discussing human rights issues with Iran, he said, since Iran withdrew from the human rights dialogue with the EU at the end of 2006. Iran must play a constructive role in the Middle East peace process, along with its Arab neighbours, and support the process. The EU's dual-track strategy with Iran as regards its nuclear development programme remains wholly valid. The best proof of this is that Mr SOLANA met Mr Jalili on 23 January, the day after the meeting of the EU 3 +3 in Berlin at which he was requested to reiterate to Mr Jalili the international community's readiness to enter into negotiations if Iran complies with the UN Security Council's requirements.

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/discours/98493.pdf

Syria

- ▶ **Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the EU on the arrest of mr Riyad Sheif and detention of other activists if the Damascus Declaration** (01/02/2008)

Recalling the Presidency Statement of 27 September 2007 and the Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union of 31 December 2007, the European Union condemns the arrest on 28 January 2008 of Mr Riyad Seif, the prominent member of the democratic opposition and former Member of the Syrian Parliament.

The European Union's serious concern relates also to the detention of eleven other signatories of the quoted Declaration, namely Mr Ahmed Tomeh, Mr Jaber El Choufi, Mr Akram El Bounni, Mr Walid El Bounni, Mr Mohammed Yasser El Aiti, Mrs Fida Hourani, Mr Ali Abdallah, Mr Fayez Sara, Mr Mohammed Hajji Darwish, Mr Marwan El Eich, Mr Talal Abu Dan, as well as all other prisoners of conscience and political prisoners.

The European Union calls for the immediate release of Mr Riyad Seif and the other eleven prisoners, who peacefully expressed their opinions and called for democratic reforms in Syria. Fearing for their safety and physical integrity, especially because of the serious health condition of Mr Riyad Seif and some other detainees, the European Union urges the Syrian authorities to respect international laws and standards and to assure to all detainees the appropriate conditions of detention and suitable medical treatment.

The European Union calls on the Syrian Government to reconsider all cases of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience in accordance with its national Constitution and international commitments, specifically the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Syria has signed and ratified in 1969 and that clearly states the right to freedom of expression, the right to freedom of assembly and the right to be treated with humanity and respect when deprived of liberty. In this sense the European Union invites Syrian authorities to re-establish dialogue with Syrian civil society.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/CFSP_Statements/February/0201MZZ_Damascus.html

Western Balkans

- ▶ **Council Conclusions on Western Balkans, 2846th EXTERNAL RELATIONS Council meeting (28/01/2008)**

"Serbia

The Council agreed on the text of the following invitation:

Invitation of the European Union to Sign a Political Agreement on Co-operation with Serbia

The European Union proposes a Political Agreement on co-operation between the European Union and Serbia, providing a framework for making progress on political dialogue, free trade, visa liberalisation, and educational co-operation, to be signed on 7 February 2008.

Serbia has a crucial role to play in the Western Balkans, both for ensuring stability and as a motor for the economic development and prosperity of the region. The European Union wishes to deepen its relationship with Serbia, which draws on a rich and diverse range of cultural, historic, economic and people to people ties.

In this context the European Union offers Serbia to intensify political co-operation with a view to accelerating Serbia's progress towards the EU, including candidate status.

The Serbian people are part of the European family. A deepening relationship between the European Union and Serbia, leading to membership, will bring concrete benefits to the people of Serbia, in particular through stimulating economic progress, commercial relations by developing a free trade area, and people to people contacts, including in particular students. The European Union will continue to reach out to the people of Serbia and recognises the importance of making it easier for Serbians to travel in the European Union. To this end the Commission will start a dialogue on visa liberalisation.

To underline their shared commitment to deepening the relationship among their peoples, the European Union agrees to take rapid steps towards increasing the number of Serbian students who study in the EU,

both through the ERASMUS Mundus programme and bilateral initiatives. In this context the European Union will urgently examine ways of increasing the funding available.

The Stabilisation and Association process remains the right vehicle to take forward this relationship. The European Union is committed to sign a Stabilisation and Association Agreement as soon as the necessary steps have been finalised. The European Union remains convinced of the benefits that the SAA will bring to both sides and of the positive effects this will have for the region as well. In this context the EU is committed to:

- support the efforts of Serbia to strengthen democracy and the rule of law;
- contribute to political, economic and institutional stability in Serbia;
- provide a framework for political dialogue, allowing the development of close political relations; - support the efforts of Serbia to develop its economic and international co-operation, including through helping Serbia prepare its laws for eventual EU membership, including integration the EU's single market;

- support Serbia's efforts to complete its transition into a functioning market economy;
- develop a free trade area between the Community and Serbia;
- and foster regional co-operation.
- With a view to achieving this, the European Union agrees to set up a Task Force to examine ways of delivering rapid progress. The work of the Task Force will start immediately with view to formulating recommendations to Serbia and the Council of the European Union as quickly as possible. We have agreed to stay in close contact with a view to furthering this process. "

Visa facilitation and readmission agreements

The Council welcomed the entry into force of the visa facilitation and readmission agreements with Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia on 1 January 2008. They will foster more people-to-people contacts and increase the economic ties between the EU and the region.

Recalling its conclusions of 10 December 2007, the Council also welcomed the intention of the European Commission to launch soon a visa dialogue with all the countries in the region and expressed its readiness to further discuss this issue, based on the Commission's forthcoming Communication on the Western Balkans, with a view to define detailed roadmaps setting clear benchmarks to be met by all the countries in the region in order to gradually advance towards visa liberalisation. This would enable the Council and the Commission to closely monitor progress in necessary reforms.

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/gena/98457.pdf

THEMATIC :

FINANCIAL PERSPECTIVES

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

EXTERNAL RELATIONS & DEVELOPMENT-RELATED ISSUES

EU / UN REFORM

MISCELLANEOUS

Women prisoners

► Special needs of women prisoners (29/01/2008)

In an own-initiative report adopted unanimously by the Women's Rights Committee on Monday, MEPs highlight the situation of female prisoners, a minority of the prison population but a fast-growing one. The report focuses on prison conditions, the preservation of family ties and reintegration into society and the workplace.

Women account for a small percentage of the prison population in the European Union - around 5% - with Spain and Portugal having the largest numbers at 8% and 10% respectively, but most European countries have experienced a significant increase. The female prison population grew by 410% in Cyprus between 1994 and 2003 and by 173% in England and Wales from 1992 to 2002.

Due to the lack of resources for prisons, "women in prison are a minority whose special needs are not sufficiently taken into account in EU countries", according to Marie Panayotopoulos-Cassiotou (EPP-ED, EL), who drafted the report.

Prison conditions

Women's needs differ from those of men, notably in health and maternity care. MEPs call on the Commission and Council to adopt a framework decision on minimum standards for prisoners' rights based on Article 6 of the EU Treaty, to reflect the special needs of women.

As a high proportion of female prisoners have been victims of violence, sexual abuse or ill treatment, Member States are urged to provide psychological support, especially to women prisoners who have suffered such violence, to mothers with family responsibilities and to minors.

On the maternity front, MEPs say pregnant women should have access to prenatal and postnatal care.

The committee also wants special arrangements for foreign prisoners, who it says should be able to contact their consulates and have access to prison resources and programmes.

Preserving social and family ties

If imprisoning women is likely to seriously disrupt family life (e.g. in cases of lone parent families or responsibility for dependants) the report suggests greater use of non-custodial punishments if the sentence is minor and the risk to public safety is low.

MEPs also call for judicial systems to guarantee the rights of children and for Member States and penal institutions to set up separate mother-and-child units with qualified staff to help prisoners who are mothers to meet their educational and care responsibilities.

Social reintegration

To encourage their reintegration into society, the report stresses the need for women prisoners to have access, without encountering discrimination, to jobs and voluntary work as well as to varied vocational and civic training courses adapted to job market requirements.

MEPs also want every detention centre to have monitoring and individual support programmes available to all prisoners on a voluntary basis, to devise and implement personal reintegration plans.

Lastly, the report calls on Member States to invest more in resources for prisons to develop literacy, life-long learning and vocational training programmes, partly by using financing instruments such as the European Social Fund and PROGRESS.

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+IMPRESS+20080128IPR19735+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN>

Javier Solana meets Souhayr Belhassen

- ▶ **Javier SOLANA, EU High Representative for the CFSP, met today Mrs Souhayr BELHASSEN, President of the International Federation of Human Rights** (30/01/2008)

Javier SOLANA, EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), met today Mrs. Souhayr BELHASSEN, President of the International Federation of Human Rights. He was accompanied by his Personal Representative for Human Rights Mrs. Riina Kionka.

The meeting took place when celebrations of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are being prepared. The EU, for which human rights are a fundamental value, will duly commemorate this event.

The High Representative underlined the need to do more to defend and promote human rights. On the specific question of Women's rights, Mrs Belhassen suggested that the EU might develop Guidelines on Women's Rights. Mr Solana acknowledged the importance of this issue and stressed that promoting women's rights was part of the EU's political dialogue with third countries and in connection with development policy.

On the question of counterterrorism, Javier Solana assured Mrs Belhassen that EU counterterrorism efforts were conducted in full respect of human rights.

The High Representative and Mrs Belhassen also discussed the situation of human rights in several regions of world.

Concerning the present situation in Kenya, they agreed on the very serious nature of the crisis. Mr Solana said that the EU supported all efforts deployed for a political solution, in particular those led by the African

Union and the United Nations, and that he was in close contact with former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan on this matter.

On Burma/Myanmar, the High Representative recalled the efforts being deployed by the European Union, through Special Envoy Piero Fassino, in close coordination with UN Special Advisor Ibrahim Gambari.

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/declarations/98500.pdf

Discrimination of Roma

- ▶ **MEPs highlight "ghettoisation" of Roma and call for EU anti-discrimination measures**
(31/01/2008)

The European Parliament adopted a report warning of the risks of anti-Gypsyism promoted by extremists and calling for fresh efforts to integrate Roma through positive measures in housing, health, education and employment. Of the 12 to 15 million Roma living in Europe, about 10 million live in EU countries. The majority became EU citizens after the 2004 and 2007 enlargements. Yet MEPs believe Roma communities still suffer clear discrimination.

"Anti-Gypsyism or Romaphobia is still widespread in Europe and is promoted and used by extremists, which can culminate in racist attacks, hate speech, physical attacks, unlawful evictions and police harassment", warn MEPs in an own-initiative report adopted by 510 votes to 36, with 67 abstentions. The situation of European Roma communities is distinct from other national minorities, they say, arguing that this justifies specific measures at European level. Highlighting the "lack of progress made in combating racial discrimination against the Roma" in Europe, the resolution points out that, in the negotiation and accession process, all candidate countries committed to improving the inclusion of this community. It asks "the European Commission to make an assessment of the implementation of those commitments and of the current situation of the Roma in all EU Member States".

Parliament also maintains that "the Romani holocaust (Porajmos) deserves full recognition commensurate with the gravity of Nazi crimes" and, among many other measures, calls on the relevant authorities "to abolish the pig fattening industry on the former concentration camp in Lety (Czech Republic) and to create a memorial to honour the victims of persecution".

Housing

MEPs believe that "evidence of ghettoisation exist on a wide scale", with Roma regularly being either victims of forced evictions or prevented from moving out of such neighbourhoods. The Commission should therefore support active programmes to end Romani slums and provide housing for Roma citizens. Parliament also urged Member States to solve the problem of camps, "where there are no hygienic and safety standards at all and where a large number of Romani children die in domestic accidents, particularly fires".

Health

Member States need to improve the health situation of Roma communities, say MEPs, and "remedy without delay the systemic exclusion" of certain Roma communities from health care. In addition, "extreme human rights abuses (...) including racial segregation in health facilities and coercive sterilisation of Romani women" must be ended.

Education

Deploing the fact that segregation in education is still tolerated in the Member States, MEPs call on the Commission to look for new ways of tightening up anti-discrimination legislation in this field and to report back to the EP within one year. They believe positive action is needed in most areas of education and vocational training.

Employment

The Roma community also suffers "unacceptably high levels of unemployment", according to the resolution. The Commission is urged to support the integration of the Roma into the labour market through training, retraining and other measures, and also to consider granting micro-credits to Roma to help them start up small businesses.

Go local

While the EU and the Member States have crucial roles to play in key policy areas, MEPs also stress the need to involve local authorities in all active measures to integrate the Roma.

Measures within the European Commission

Lastly, MEPs urge the Commission to "shape a Community Action Plan on Roma Inclusion", to give one Commissioner "responsibility for coordinating a Roma policy" and "to promote Roma staff within its structure".

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/019-19940-030-01-05-902-20080129IPR19931-30-01-2008-2008-false/default_en.htm