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IMPORTANT COMING MEETINGS

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◆ EU- Uzbekistan association Council

- ▶ 1 February 2005

◆ EU- Albania (Troika)

- ▶ 1 February 2005

◆ EU- Serbia-Montenegro (Troika)

- ▶ 1 February 2005

◆ EU- Ukraine cooperation Council

- ▶ 21 February 2005

◆ EU- Moldova cooperation Council

- ▶ 22 February 2005

◆ EU- Algeria association Council

- ▶ 25 April 2005

◆ EU- Croatia association Council

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- ▶ 26 may 2005

THIRD COUNTRY MEETINGS

◆ EU-Russia summit

- ▶ 10 may 2005

◆ **Plenary Session**

- ▶ 21 – 24 February 2005

◆ **Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality**

- ▶ 16 March 2005
- ▶ 17 March 2005

◆ **Subcommittee on Human Rights**

- ▶ 31 March 2005
- ▶ 25 April 2005

REGIONS:

AFRICA

◆ **Sudan**

- ▶ **Subject: Peace Agreement - European Commission and Sudanese authorities sign the Country Strategy Paper to resume co-operation** (25.01.05)

Following the signature of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the Government of the Sudan and the SPLM/A in Nairobi on 9 January 2005, the European Commission and the Government of the Sudan have finalised the Country Strategy Paper (CSP) for their cooperation. This document includes the National Indicative Programme and will be signed at 15h30 on 25 January 2005 by the Minister for International Co-operation, Mr. Takana, and the European Commissioner for Development, Mr. L. Michel. The President of the European Commission, Mr. J.M. Barroso, the Vice-president of the Sudan, Mr. Taha and Mr. Nhial Deng Nhial, Commissioner for External relations of the SPLM, will witness the signature.

In November 1999, after 9 years of suspension of co-operation, the EU and the Sudan engaged in a formal Political Dialogue. Since December 2001, the Dialogue has been intensified with a view to a gradual resumption of co-operation once a Comprehensive Peace Agreement would be signed.

The European Union has been clearly linking its future relations with the Sudan to the signing of a Comprehensive Peace Agreement. The Agreement is considered in particular as a basis to integrate in a global process the other marginalised areas of Sudan, including Darfur.

The signature of the CSP should be considered a first step to normalise the Commission's relations with the Government of the Sudan. Its implementation will be gradual and in parallel to the effective implementation of the peace agreement and the improvement of the situation in the Darfur.

This progressive approach is crucial as it aims to establish a critical dialogue with all parties in order to promote peace and development in the Darfur and in the other parts of the country (...)

This Country Strategy is centred on supporting the quest for a just peace, as well as addressing root causes of the conflict. It promotes democracy, good governance and the improvement of human rights as a basis for sustainable peace. Because of the context of the Sudan, the strategy should address also basic needs at local levels.

The CSP creates a framework structuring the EU contribution to the Sudan of an indicative allocation of around € 400M (...). **Issues such as human rights, good governance, and the rule of law are also addressed as well as direct support to the peace process and to peace building initiatives, and the strengthening of civil society and health.**

<http://europa.eu.int/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/05/94&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en> (EN)

AMERICAS

◆ **Cuba**

- ▶ **Parliamentary questions – Subject: human rights - Answer given by Mr Nielson on behalf of the Commission (written question: E-1650/03)** (26.01.05)

The Commission is closely following the human rights situation in Cuba and the recent detention and sentencing of 75 dissidents and independent journalists in Cuba, including Dr. Oscar Elias Biscet González.

The Commission, together with the Member States, has strongly condemned such arrests in a declaration published on 26 March 2003, which was followed by a Union démarche in Havana to urge the Cuban authorities to allow the prisoners' immediate release. A second Union démarche in Havana took place on 18 April 2003, following the Foreign Ministers' statement issued on 14 April 2003.

Further measures have recently been agreed, including limits to high-level visits.

The grave concern felt was also highlighted in the Union's statement on "Human Rights in the World", at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva in April 2003. The statement called for the prompt release of those arrested whom the Union considers to be prisoners of opinion.

The Commission decided on 30 April 2003 to defer the examination of the Cuban application for accession to the Cotonou Agreement, signalling that these recent developments are not conducive to co-operation between the Union and Cuba. The Cuban authorities decided on 16 May 2003 to withdraw their application.

Through these actions, **the Cuban authorities have been made aware that detentions on political grounds are not acceptable and that the Union urges the release of prisoners held due to their opinions or political activities.** In this context, we will certainly also bring the case of Dr Oscar Elías Biscet to the attention of the Cuban authorities, and will follow this matter closely, exerting continued political pressure on the Cuban authorities.

<http://www2.europarl.eu.int/omk/OM-Europarl?PROG=WQA&L=EN&PUBREF=-//EP//TEXT+WQA+E-2003-1650-N+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN> (EN)

◆ Colombia

- ▶ **Parliamentary questions - Subject: Donors conference for Colombia in Cartagena –ORAL QUESTION H-0039/05** for Question Time at the part-session in February 2005 pursuant to Rule 109 of the Rules of Procedure by Giusto Catania to the Commission (27.01.05)

The Colombian Government is inviting the international community to a conference on 3-4 February 2005 in an attempt to pin down cooperation funding for the process of the demobilisation of paramilitary groups. However, alongside an increase in militarisation and the dismantling of freedoms, it seems that in the human rights field the Colombian Government has not met the commitments made in the London Declaration or the recommendations of the UN Commission on Human Rights. Nor has it proposed a comprehensive peace plan for the country or an acceptable legal framework for the process of the demobilisation of paramilitaries that would prevent impunity for atrocities.

Does the European Commission plan to commit cooperation funding to the demobilisation process in these circumstances? Does it not feel that in doing so it could be subscribing to a process of impunity that grants legitimacy to criminal forces, thereby tying itself into the conflict in Colombia?

Will the Commission call on the Colombian Government to ensure the appropriate participation at the Cartagena conference of the Representative in Colombia of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and that of representatives of civil society?

ASIA

◆ Pakistan

- ▶ **Subject: European Commission emphasises closer ties with Pakistan** (24.01.05)

The President of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso and the Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz of Pakistan discussed matters related to bilateral relations, regional issues, trade and cooperation. These topics were later taken up during the meeting with Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy, Ferrero-Waldner.

President Barroso said: "Pakistan is a key partner for the EU, and we appreciate the very positive role Pakistan has played in enhancing stability in this important region. Our commitment to you is clear from the substantial support we have offered over the past three years and I want to see our relationship continue to deepen."

Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner raised the implementation of the Third Generation Cooperation Agreement which entered into force in September 2004. "The approval of this Agreement sent a strong political signal of support to Pakistan. I look forward to launching work within the Agreement, which will provide the basis for us to engage in new areas of co-operation".

On regional issues, Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner told Prime Minister Aziz: "We have followed reconciliation efforts with India with great interest and look to both countries to stay the course, as this will bring tremendous benefits to the region." She also commended PM Aziz for the very constructive role Pakistan played during presidential elections in Afghanistan.

http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/pakistan/intro/ip05_250105.htm (EN)

◆ Sri Lanka

► **Subject: Sri Lanka donor co-chairs meeting** (26.01.05)

The Co-chairs of the Tokyo Conference on Reconstruction and Development of Sri Lanka will meet today in Brussels to express their support to Sri Lanka in the wake of the Tsunami disaster which struck the North, East and South coasts of the country, and to **evaluate how best to assist Sri Lanka in moving the peace process forward**. The meeting will be co-chaired by European Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, and the Luxemburg presidency, Mr Nicolas Schmitt, Minister Delegate for Foreign Affairs and Immigration and will be attended by dignitaries from the United States, the European Union, Japan, and Norway. The Co-chairs will discuss the coordination of the Tsunami assistance and look for ways to ensure that the implementation of the tsunami assistance is sensitive to and strengthens the peace process. Likewise this assistance must adhere to the basic principles of disaster relief and reconstruction such as fair distribution, transparency, accountability and inclusiveness with the participation of local and international civil society and all political parties.

◆ China

► **Parliamentary questions – Subject: Human rights - Answer given by Mr Patten on behalf of the Commission (written question: E-0005/04)** (26.01.05)

The EU attaches the utmost importance to the situation of human rights throughout the world and has made it a major element of its policy towards third countries. The right to freedom of expression, association and religion has always been very high on the **agenda of the EU-China dialogue on human rights**, most recently during the last session held in Beijing on 27/28 November 2003. This has also been regularly addressed in the framework of the political dialogue, as was the case during the last EU-China bilateral Summit which took place in Beijing on 30 October 2003.

The EU has consistently called the Chinese authorities to fully respect these rights, with a special emphasis put on the rights of the minorities, especially the Uighur Community. With regard to the latter, the EU's long standing position has been to underline that **the fight against terrorism should always be conducted in a manner which respects human rights and that a clear distinction should be made between peaceful expression of dissent and violent action**.

Moreover the EU has, in its dialogue, also expressed concerns at ongoing reports on widespread use of **torture in China**. In its view, the entry into force on 1 January 2004 of a new regulation of the Ministry of Public Security designed to stop practices such as torture to secure confessions or investigate offences is a welcome step whose implementation will be closely monitored. It is also to be noted that China agreed in principle at the last session of the human rights dialogue to engage in triangular cooperation with the EU and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on torture prevention.

These matters will again be addressed during the next session of the human rights dialogue to be held in Dublin on 26/27 February 2004.

<http://www2.europarl.eu.int/omk/OM-Europarl?PROG=WQA&L=EN&PUBREF=-//EP//TEXT+WQA+E-2004-0005-N+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN> (EN)

► **Parliamentary questions - Subject: Human rights - Answer given by Mr Patten on behalf of the Commission (written question: E-0108/04)** (26.01.05)

The Commission has no information on the possible involvement of European companies in invitations to tender published by the People's Republic of China for the purchase of vehicles for the purpose of executions.

In its bilateral dialogue with China on human rights, the EU has never stopped reiterating its fundamental opposition to the death penalty, regardless of the methods used, including that cited by the Honourable Member. It has also regularly pressed — and will continue to press — the Chinese authorities, in the present circumstances, to see that the fundamental rights of the condemned, including the right to appeal against their sentence, are respected in full.)

<http://www2.europarl.eu.int/omk/OM-Europarl?PROG=WQA&L=EN&PUBREF=-//EP//TEXT+WQA+E-2004-0108-N+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN> (EN)

- ▶ **Déclaration de l'Union européenne sur la commutation de la peine de Tenzin Deleg Rinpoche** (28.01.05)

L'Union européenne salue la décision des autorités chinoises de commuer la peine de mort prononcée à l'encontre de Tenzin Deleg Rinpoche en peine de prison à perpétuité. L'Union européenne reste toutefois très préoccupée par les doutes persistants qui planent sur l'impartialité du procès intenté contre Tenzin Deleg Rinpoche, ainsi que par la lourdeur de la peine à laquelle il a été condamné.

L'Union européenne serait reconnaissante envers les autorités chinoises de continuer à l'informer sur les développements à suivre concernant le cas de Tenzin Deleg Rinpoche.

<http://www.eu2005.lu/fr/actualites/pesc/2005/01/28tenzin/index.htm> (FR)

◆ **Vietnam**

- ▶ **Parliamentary questions - Subject: Incommunicado detention - Answer given by Mr Patten on behalf of the Commission written question: E-2929/03** (26.01.05)

The Commission wishes to recall that its reply given to the Honourable Member's Written Question E-2607/03(1) on the same issue remains entirely valid in the light of recent developments. The following elements complement the Commission's previous answer.

The circumstances of Thich Tri Luc's arrest remain unclear. The Commission is concerned about Luc's incommunicado detention. The Commission will therefore continue to seek clarifications from the Vietnamese authorities.

The case of Thich Tri Luc illustrates that the implementation and regular update of the ten year legal reforms plan of the Government of Vietnam is of crucial importance with a view to enhance good governance and a properly functioning judiciary system. These objectives are priorities for Community cooperation with Vietnam under the Country Strategy Paper 2002-2006.

<http://www2.europarl.eu.int/omk/OM-Europarl?PROG=WQA&L=EN&PUBREF=-//EP//TEXT+WQA+E-2003-2929-N+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN> (EN)

◆ **Afghanistan**

- ▶ **Déclaration de la Présidence de l'UE, du représentant spécial de l'UE en Afghanistan et de la Commission européenne sur la publication du rapport de la Commission afghane indépendante des droits de l'homme consacré à la justice de transition** (30.01.05)

La Présidence de l'Union européenne, le représentant spécial de l'Union européenne pour l'Afghanistan et la Commission européenne saluent du rapport de la Commission afghane indépendante des droits de l'homme (AIHRC) consacré à la justice de transition, publié ce jour.

Le rapport soulève des questions pertinentes en matière de justice de transition et montre à quel point le peuple afghan souhaiterait que ces questions soient abordées. Le rapport constitue en soi un appel vigoureux au gouvernement afghan et mérite, selon nous, d'être pris en considération et étudié de près.

L'UE est impressionnée par les résultats de la consultation nationale entreprise par l'AIHRC sur la base d'un décret présidentiel. Ils montrent que les Afghans ont une notion claire de la justice et qu'ils sont profondément conscients des violations, passées et présentes, des droits de l'homme, dont ils ont été les victimes. La conclusion la plus frappante du rapport est le souhait exprimé par une écrasante majorité des personnes consultées d'exclure les individus généralement considérés comme les auteurs de crimes de guerre des fonctions politiques et des hautes fonctions publiques, à la fois sur le plan national et provincial. La lutte contre l'impunité des ceux qui ont dans le passé commis des violations flagrantes des droits de l'homme constitue un enjeu crucial pour la réconciliation nationale, comme de nombreuses autres sociétés en situation de post-conflit en ont fait l'expérience.

L'UE félicite l'AIHRC pour le travail important accompli sur la question de la justice de transition et exprime son soutien à la Commission. Nous espérons sincèrement que le nouveau cabinet afghan prendra en compte les recommandations de l'AIHRC et développera une stratégie respectueuse des souhaits du peuple afghan, tels qu'exprimés dans le rapport de la Commission, pour régler les questions liées à la justice de transition.

L'UE a l'intention de suivre de très près les développements en matière de justice de transition en Afghanistan et se tient prête à soutenir les initiatives du gouvernement afghan dans l'élaboration d'une stratégie nationale de justice de transition, ainsi que tous les autres efforts menés par des Afghans dans ce domaine.

<http://www.eu2005.lu/fr/actualites/pesc/2005/01/29aihrc/index.html> (FR)

◆ **Ukraine**

- ▶ **Subject: Ukraine wants to join the European Union** – by Honor Mahony_(26.01.05)

The new Ukraine president has said that his country wants to join the European Union despite efforts by the European Commission to dampen Kiev's membership ambitions.

Speaking before the Council of Europe in Strasbourg on Tuesday (25 January), Victor Yushchenko said "our strategic aim, our vision is membership in the European Union".

"Inside the country, we are going to reorganize the government so the process of integration into the EU becomes a real one", the President told the human rights body.

He called EU membership "a simple formula for well-being and security".

"A new nation, a proud nation, has emerged in Europe", said Mr Yushchenko, who has already visited Moscow and plans to visit the European Parliament on Thursday (27 January).

However, the EU is doing its best to play down talk of membership, instead concentrating on a ten-point plan with Kiev.

Elaborating on the plan, which will be discussed by EU foreign ministers on Monday, the chief Commission spokesperson said it concerned accelerating a free-trade agreement with Kiev, bringing legislation on both sides closer and co-operating on energy, transport and the environment.

Muddled words?

But the EU appears to be sending out conflicting messages on Ukraine's ambitions to join the club.

A spokesperson reiterated on Tuesday that the EU's policy towards the country is a "neighbourhood policy" - and as much was said to MEPs by external relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner.

But the Communications commissioner Margot Wallström was seemingly much more forthcoming about Kiev's membership prospects.

She reportedly said on Monday that the issue had been discussed "a lot" in the Brussels executive.

The Commission agrees "that eventually it is a realistic vision for the future that Ukraine should join [the EU] without today going out and saying we have a concrete date or an offer", she is reported to have said.

But Françoise Le Bail, the chief spokesperson of the Commission, blamed the interpretation for having gone "too far".

To actually make a formal request for EU membership, Ukraine would have to send in an application to the council of ministers.

The council would then have to decide whether to pass it on to the Commission for its opinion.

<http://www.euobserver.com/?sid=24&aid=18242> (EN)

◆ **Iraq**

- ▶ **Parliamentary questions – Subject: American prisoners situation - Answer given by Mr Patten on behalf of the Commission (written question: E-1285/03)** (25.01.05)

The Commission is very concerned by the inhuman treatments of prisoners of war, in violation of the provision of the Geneva Convention, in this war as in any other conflict. In this regard, **the behaviour of the Iraqi authorities interviewing publicly American prisoners, with intimidatory intent, represents a clear violation of the Geneva Convention. This behaviour is to be condemned.**

The Iraqi government has been dissolved following the United States military occupation. Therefore, the risk of Union citizens becoming prisoners of the Iraqi authorities no longer exists.

<http://www2.europarl.eu.int/omk/OM-Europarl?PROG=WQA&L=EN&PUBREF=-//EP//TEXT+WQA+E-2003-1285-N+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN> (EN)

◆ Gulf

- ▶ **Parliamentary questions – Subject: Agreement with Gulf Cooperation Council - Answer given by Mr Patten on behalf of the Commission (written question: E-0192/03)** (26.01.05)

The Commission does not have any precise information on the case raised by the Honourable Member. Without a delegation in the country, it is difficult to obtain details.

If it possesses the necessary evidence, the European Union can intervene in individual cases of abuse of human rights by making representations to the authorities of the countries concerned. The appropriateness of such representations is assessed on a case by case basis through a confidential consultation procedure.

In addition it should be pointed out that **the Commission is in the process of negotiating a free trade agreement between the Community and the Gulf Cooperation Council which would include the human rights clause as one of the essential elements. The Commission has also put a proposal to the Gulf Cooperation Council on opening a political dialogue on human rights.** The purpose of this dialogue would be to regularly discuss issues of respect for fundamental rights as enshrined in particular in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and its complementary International Covenants, and to encourage the GCC party states which have not yet signed and ratified these instruments to do so. Individual cases might also be raised during this dialogue.

<http://www2.europarl.eu.int/omk/OM-Europarl?PROG=WQA&L=EN&PUBREF=-//EP//TEXT+WQA+E-2003-0192-N+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN> (EN)

◆ Tunisia

- ▶ **Parliamentary questions – Subject: Human rights respect - Reply (written question: E-2553/03)** (26.01.05)

At the last meeting of the EU-Tunisia Association Council on 29/30 September 2003, the European Union reminded Tunisia once again that respect for democracy, human rights and the rule of law are a fundamental aspect of the Association Agreement. The European Union noted on that occasion that Tunisia still had to make progress, in particular with regard to freedom of speech. It also called on Tunisia to effectively implement the commitments that it has entered into through UN international conventions.

On the basis of the May 2003 Commission communication aimed at reinvigorating EU actions on human rights and democratisation with Mediterranean partners, the European Union proposed that Tunisia enter into a dialogue on implementation of the recommendations made in that communication. Moreover, in the Decision of the Association Council setting up subcommittees of the Association Committee which was adopted at the last meeting of the Association Council, **Tunisia endorsed the provision emphasising the importance attached to issues relating to democratic principles and human rights.** The text of the Decision states that they will be afforded due attention in the various forums set up under the Association Agreement and, if the parties so decide, these issues may also be discussed within a subcommittee of the Association Committee or within a specific Working Party.

The European Union believes in the benefits of a continual dialogue and therefore intends to raise the issue of Tunisia's human rights commitments on a regular basis and at all levels.

With regard to the desirability of holding the second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society in Tunis in 2005, the Council would remind the Honourable Member that the meeting is being organised by the International Telecommunication Union under the patronage of the United Nations.

<http://www2.europarl.eu.int/omk/OM-Europarl?PROG=WQA&L=EN&PUBREF=-//EP//TEXT+WQA+E-2003-2553-N+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN> (EN)

◆ Lebanon

- ▶ **Parliamentary questions – Subject : monitoring human rights - Reply (written question: E-2652/03)** (26.01.05)

The Council shares with the Honourable Members the concerns expressed in their question and is keeping a close watch on human rights issues in Lebanon. On several occasions approaches have been made to the Lebanese authorities to raise specific cases.

On 17 June 2002 the European Union signed an Association Agreement with Lebanon, and it is currently in the process of being ratified by the Member States. The Interim Agreement on trade-related matters, which was concluded at the same time, entered into force on 1 March 2003. Once the Association Agreement applies, **the**

possibilities for monitoring human rights issues will be enhanced, on the basis of Article 2 of the Agreement which stipulates that relations between the Parties will be based on respect for democratic principles and fundamental human rights as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. These issues will then be the subject of an institutionalised political dialogue, which will take place regularly at all levels. Until the Association Agreement enters into force, the European Union is not able to invoke Article 86.

The European Union will seek to improve the human rights situation in Lebanon, by establishing a regular ongoing dialogue with the Lebanese authorities. It is planned to hold a Cooperation Council with Lebanon in the first half of 2004. On that occasion, the European Union does indeed intend to raise these issues within the political section of the meeting. (25.01.05)

<http://www2.europarl.eu.int/omk/OM-Europarl?PROG=WQA&L=EN&PUBREF=-//EP//TEXT+WQA+E-2003-2652-N+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN> (EN)

THEMATIC

EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Human rights

- ▶ **Subject: EU Presidency Statement – Commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi concentration camps** (24.01.05)

Mr. Jean Asselborn, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, to the 28th Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly, on the occasion of the commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi concentration camps, on behalf of the European Union (New York).

(...) *"In those camps, the experience of humiliation and the negation of humanity found its most absolute expression. We shall always have with us the memory of these men and women, of these children, persecuted because of their race or their religion, their political beliefs or their nationality, victims of barbarism and hate. Their suffering is untold and their experience unspeakable. All we are left with is an obligation of memory and this imprescriptible moral appeal: "never again!"*

The duty of memory also bestows upon us an obligation to educate, particularly the young generations; this is not just a moral obligation, but also a civic duty of the highest order from which we must not shrink. Fundamentally, the European project has been and continues to be a project of peace that aims—and I quote from the preamble of the 1951 Treaty of Paris—"to substitute for age old rivalries the merging of their essential interests [of the Member States]; to create, by establishing an economic community, the basis for a broader and deeper community among peoples long divided by bloody conflicts; and to lay the foundations for institutions which will give direction to a destiny henceforward shared."

http://europa-eu-un.org/articles/en/article_4250_en.htm (EN)

- ▶ **Subject : EU to have 'fundamental rights' agency by 2007 (by Lucia Kubosova)** (25.01.05)

The EU plans to set up a new fundamental rights agency by January 2007 to give an overview on human rights issues in Europe.

The new agency is supposed to extend the agenda and powers of the existing EU anti-racism center, based in Vienna.

Speaking at a public hearing on Tuesday (25 January) in Brussels, Justice Commissioner Franco Frattini said the agency "is a logical consequence of the growing importance of fundamental issues within the EU".

However, Mr Frattini's unveiling of plans for the agency had as much to do with the fact that the issue was fast-tracked following controversial statements by the Italian Commissioner-appointee, Rocco Buttiglione last year.

Mr Buttiglione's ideas about homosexuality and the role of women sparked protests among MEPs and forced Commission President José Manuel Durao Barroso to promise to put human rights at the top of his Commission's agenda.

Vague remit.

The scope of the new agency's tasks and its real powers are still not clear.

"The agency, as far as we're concerned, is not something to monitor the member states, nor should it be a forum for setting standards", said Luxembourg Justice Minister Luc Frieden, whose country currently heads the EU.

Still, **the new body is expected to make recommendations on the human rights record in Europe on the basis of its own research.**

"It should be an independent office with freedom and essential resources to collect information and then to advise the EU institutions", Commissioner Frattini told journalists.

How to be active, but not over-active

Throughout the public consultation on the issue, several speakers pointed out that the agency should not duplicate tasks already performed by other human rights organisations. (..)

Commissioner Frattini admitted that he expected concerns from some national leaders about the expanding human rights agenda initiated at the European level.

"But they should realize that it is not dangerous for them, it is in their own interest. After all, we have to realize that yes to Constitution has also been yes to the Charter of Fundamental rights. So we are not only morally, but also politically, obliged to back up its mandate".

Following the Buttiglione affair last year, a team of Commissioners focusing solely on fundamental rights was also set up - their brief is to ensure that Commission initiatives take into account human rights issues.

<http://www.euobserver.com/?sid=22&aid=18237>

► **Speech by Franco Frattini at the opening of the public hearing on fundamental rights** (25.01.05)

When I sat in front of the Parliament last November, I committed to promote the full respect of fundamental rights and to launch as soon as possible the European Agency on Fundamental Rights. Fundamental rights and Citizenship are the foundations of the European social contract. They are my guidelines as a Commissioner for Justice, Freedom and Security. I am determined to keep my commitments (...)

Fundamental rights and anti-discrimination form the guidelines for the whole Barroso Commission: Our ambition is to place the protection and the promotion of fundamental rights in their rightful position, namely at the heart of all policies and measures of the Union. This is for the direct benefit of all Europeans.

President Barroso announced last November the creation of a Group of Commissioners focused on fundamental rights. This Group started its work in December. It will drive policy and ensure the coherence of Commission initiatives in the areas of fundamental rights, anti-discrimination, equal opportunities and the social integration of minority groups (...)

The Commission aims to adopt a proposal for a Regulation on the Agency in May this year. I am very pleased that the two in-coming presidencies, Luxembourg and the United Kingdom, have included the Agency in their agenda, so we can count on swift negotiations in the Council, naturally in close co-operation with the European Parliament. Taking also into account the financial framework, in particular the fact that the new financial perspectives will be applied from 2007, I believe that it is realistic to think that the Fundamental Rights Agency will be functional as from 1 January 2007.

The Charter of Fundamental Rights has been solemnly proclaimed by the three Union institutions, the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission. (...)

► **Parliamentary questions – Subject: women’s rights - Reply (written question: E-2627/03)** (26.01.05)

From a general point of view the Council underlines that Women's rights and the issue of violence against women are matters of particular concern to the EU. In line with international human rights standards and based on the ethical and constitutional principles common to all EU Member States, the **EU consistently calls on governments of third countries to commit themselves to the resolutions and decisions of UN fora and to apply legislation, measures and programmes aiming at the full enjoyment of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of women on an equal footing with men.** At the 59th session of the UN Commission on Human Rights ("CHR"), towards the end of April this year, all EU Member States co-sponsored a resolution tabled by Canada entitled "Elimination of violence against women". Moreover, the Presidency made a speech on behalf of the EU under CHR agenda item 12 in which it highlighted the need to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls, and in this regard drew particular attention to the work of the UN's Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls. At the time of answering this question, another resolution on the issue of violence against women has been tabled, this time by the Netherlands in the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly, which it is hoped will gain widespread support.

<http://www2.europarl.eu.int/omk/OM-Europarl?PROG=WQA&L=EN&PUBREF=-//EP//TEXT+WQA+E-2003-2627-N+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN> (EN)

► **Parliamentary questions – Subject: Right to asylum –Reply (written question: E-3137/03)** (26.01.05)

The Council's activities as regards the right to asylum are focused at present on the proposal for a Directive on minimum standards on procedures in Member States for granting and withdrawing refugee status.

The Council will take care to ensure that any future Community regulations in this area respect the rights and guarantees established by the international law instruments concerned, in particular the Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

<http://www2.euoparl.eu.int/omk/OM-Europarl?PROG=WQA&L=EN&PUBREF=-//EP//TEXT+WQA+E-2003-3137-N+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN> (EN)

► **Subject: EU should co-ordinate its policies on Roma, argue MEPs** - By Lucia Kubosova (26.01.05)

The EU should unite its policies towards Roma citizens, a new forum in the European Parliament proposed on Tuesday (25 January).

"We need to move beyond declarations and to create a coordinated framework for actions that improve the economic status and social inclusion of the Roma population", said Socialist MEP Katalin Levai, who opened the first meeting of the forum held in the European Parliament.

Other participants pointed out that despite huge sums pouring into EU projects for the Roma, the biggest ethnic minority in Europe remains segregated in many countries.

"Several programmes to help the Roma people in the member states ended up, say, in 'special schools' for the mentally disabled, attended mainly by the Roma children – in many cases for behavioural or language problems, not because of real mental disabilities", Viktoria Mohacsi, a liberal Hungarian Roma MEP told the Euobserver.

She suggested that "instead of promoting their integration with children of the majority population, these funds in fact reinforce the system as it currently exists".

Statistics prove the case, according to Mrs Mohacsi: three-quarters of Roma children in the Czech Republic, as well as 80 percent in some areas of Germany attend "special schools", while a large number of Roma pupils do not go to school at all.

Ms Mohacsi said that a better quality education for Roma would contribute to the EU's Lisbon agenda, which aims to build a "knowledge-based economy" and boost employment. In some Roma communities in Europe, unemployment stands at 90 percent.

A Roma Commissioner?

Several debaters at the Roma forum suggested that the EU needs a clearly indicated authority, responsible for the Roma minorities.

"In fact, it is a 'minority' spreading across the European borders and its size is higher than the population of several member states", said Austrian MEP Hannes Swoboda, the Vice-Chairman of the European Socialists.

"So, as the smallest one of them has its own commissioner, we should also consider appointing a special commissioner for the Roma people", he added.

However, Odile Quintin, Director General of Employment and Social Affairs in the European Commission, argued that the problems of the Roma citizens would be better tackled by a coordination of actors responsible for different areas, rather than by a single person.

"We have reached an approval to use the European Social Fund for dealing with the social exclusion of the Roma people, and we are currently working on a coordinated strategy to fight the problem", Mrs Quintin told the Euobserver.

The new platform was created to provide exchange of views among MEPs and other actors involved and to monitor EU funds on Roma programmes.

There are approximately seven to nine million Roma in Europe today, according to the World Bank Group.

<http://www.euobserver.com/?aid=18252> (EN)

◆ **Asile**

► **Communiqué Informelle JAI: La dimension extérieure de la politique européenne d'asile** (29.01.05)

La réunion informelle consacrée à la justice, à la sécurité et à la liberté dans l'Union européenne s'est clôturée, samedi 29 janvier 2005, avec un débat présidé par Nicolas Schmit, ministre délégué aux Affaires étrangères et à l'Immigration, sur la question de la dimension extérieure de la politique européenne d'asile et d'immigration. Cette discussion s'est tenue en présence de Ruud Lubbers, Haut Commissaire des Nations Unies aux réfugiés.

Dans la présentation de ses priorités, Ruud Lubbers a appelé les Etats membres de l'UE, au moment où ils s'engagent dans le processus de mise en œuvre d'un régime d'asile européen commun, à partager leurs responsabilités avec ceux des pays en voie de développement abritant le plus grand nombre de réfugiés.

A l'issue de la réunion, la présidence, par la voix de Nicolas Schmit, a rappelé que "les citoyens européens veulent une réponse claire en ce qui concerne les problèmes liés à la migration et aux demandeurs d'asile. Il faut lier la solution de ces problèmes au politique extérieure et de développement. Le problème des réfugiés est un problème collectif, dont la charge doit être répartie de manière équitable sur toute la communauté internationale et non uniquement sur les pays qui se trouvent à proximité des régions de crise. Toute politique européenne dans ce domaine doit être fondée sur les principes de la Convention de Genève sur la protection des réfugiés."

Le ministre Schmit a souligné qu'"une majorité de réfugiés demandent dans un premier lieu une protection internationale dans un pays voisin de leur pays d'origine", précisant que très souvent "il s'agit de pays en voie de développement qui ne disposent que de capacités financières et institutionnelles limitées. Plutôt que de réagir aux flux migratoires qui ont déjà atteint son territoire, l'Union européenne se doit d'aider, en étroite collaboration avec le HCR, les pays dans les régions d'origine afin qu'ils puissent assurer une protection adéquate aux personnes vulnérables que sont les réfugiés."

Au nom de la Commission européenne, Franco Frattini a précisé qu'il présentera en juillet 2005 son plan d'action concernant le programme de renforcement de la protection des réfugiés dans les régions d'origines.

En ce qui concerne, les programmes de réinstallation, c'est-à-dire le transfert d'un réfugié d'un pays de la région d'origine ou de transit vers un pays de l'UE, la Commission doit présenter une proposition en juillet 2005. Pour la présidence, une telle proposition pourrait s'inspirer de la pratique actuelle de certains Etats membres.

Les mesures qui font l'objet de l'aide proposée par l'UE aux régions de transit, pourraient être similaires à celles qui font l'objet des programmes de protection pour les régions d'origines.

<http://www.eu2005.lu/fr/actualites/communiques/2005/01/2901asile/index.html> (FR)