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EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT MEETINGS

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- April, 1, 2, 2008

Committee on Foreign Affairs

- March, 26, 2008

Subcommittee on Human Rights

- March, 10, 2008 (Strasbourg)
- March, 31, April, 1, 2008

Subcommittee on security and defence

- March, 31, April 1, 2008

Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and home affairs

- March, 26, 27, 2008

Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality

- April, 2, 3, 2008

Committee on budgetary control

- March, 25, 26, 27, 2008

CONFERENCES / EVENTS

Subcommittee on Human Rights: Hearing on the rights of indigenous people

- March, 31, 2008, European Parliament

"Human Rights in Chechnya: What Can the EU Do?" - Exhibition and conference

- April, 7, 2008, Reception 18h45, ASP, Rez de Chaussée, Couloir, European Parliament
- April, 8, 2008, Conference, 9.30-12.00, Eastman 300, Rue Belliard 135, Brussels
- April, 7-11, Exhibition, ASP, Rez de Chaussée, Couloir, European Parliament

REGIONS:

AFRICA

Chad

- ▶ **Javier SOLANA, Haut Représentant de l'UE pour la PESC, exprime ses condoléances après la mort d'un militaire de EUFOR Tchad/RCA (FR) (06/03/2008)**

Javier SOLANA, Haut Représentant de l'Union européenne pour la Politique étrangère et de sécurité commune (PESC), exprime ses condoléances et sa solidarité après le décès d'un militaire français de l'opération EUFOR Tchad/RCA à la suite d'un incident survenu le 3 mars dans la région de Tissi, au sud-est de la zone d'opération d'EUFOR :

"J'apprends avec tristesse la mort d'un militaire français de l'opération EUFOR Tchad/RCA. Je souhaite avant tout présenter mes condoléances et l'expression de ma sympathie à la famille et aux proches du disparu, ainsi qu'aux autorités françaises.

J'exprime également ma solidarité aux personnels engagés dans l'opération EUFOR Tchad/RCA, qui ont perdu un de leurs camarades, et dont la mission est si importante pour apporter sécurité et stabilité aux populations réfugiées et déplacées dans la région de l'est du Tchad et du nord-est de la République centrafricaine."

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/declarations/99262.pdf

Zimbabwe

- ▶ **Council Conclusions on Zimbabwe (10/03/2008)**

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

1. "The Council remains very concerned about the humanitarian, political and economic situation in Zimbabwe and conditions on the ground, which may endanger the holding of free and fair Parliamentary and Presidential elections. The Council notes that no formal invitation has been made to the European Union to send an official EU Observation Mission.
2. The Council therefore urges the government of Zimbabwe to ensure that the forthcoming elections meet international norms and standards including the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) principles and guidelines concerning elections, of which Zimbabwe is a signatory.
3. The Council recognises the efforts of President Mbeki, on behalf of SADC, to improve relations between the Government of Zimbabwe and the opposition and the progress achieved so far. The Council hopes this process will continue in order to settle fundamental issues and that the changes agreed thereby will be implemented in such a way as to allow for the holding of free and fair elections. The Council calls on the SADC countries to remain actively engaged.

4. The Council recalls its continued commitment to the people of Zimbabwe and emphasises that the EU remains the most important donor to Zimbabwe. The Council reiterates that its targeted measures (consisting of a visa ban, an assets freeze and an arms embargo) are exclusively aimed at those leading figures responsible for Zimbabwe's crisis of governance and human rights' abuses and do not penalise the Zimbabwean population.
5. **The EU will continue to closely monitor the situation in Zimbabwe and support efforts towards ensuring democracy, stability, economic recovery and respect for human rights. The Council also wishes to confirm its willingness to continue to make use of any opportunity provided to carry on the dialogue with the Government of Zimbabwe and, as soon as conditions allow, to begin working towards the resumption of full cooperation.**

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/gena/99272.pdf

AMERICAS

i **Cuba**

- ▶ **EU Presidency statement on the announcement by Cuba of its signing of key international human rights instruments** (04/03/2008)

The Presidency welcomes the announcement on 28 February 2008 by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Cuba, Felipe Perez Roque, that Cuba has signed the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

The EU has long sought the universal ratification of these core instruments of international human rights law and the signing by Cuba of both Covenants represents a positive development.

In becoming a State Party to these legally binding international human rights law instruments, Cuba is freely assuming the obligations contained in these international documents.

The Presidency encourages Cuba to continue with these positive developments and to further strengthen its cooperation with the international human rights mechanisms. The Presidency looks forward to the implementation of these legally binding human rights obligations by Cuba.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/CFSP_Statements/March/0304MZZkuba.html

i **Ecuador, Venezuela and Colombia**

- ▶ **Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on tensions between Ecuador, Venezuela and Colombia** (04/03/2008)

The European Union is concerned about the growing tension and the deployment of armed forces between Venezuela, Ecuador and Colombia. It urges all parties involved to show restraint and to avoid any further escalation of the current situation.

The European Union encourages all countries involved to seek, through dialogue, a political solution.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/CFSP_Statements/March/0304MZZ_V-E-C.html

Afghanistan

► **Council Conclusions on Afghanistan** (10/03/2008)

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"1. In line with its previous conclusions, the Council reaffirms the EU's commitment to long-term support for the people and government of Afghanistan and the core principles of promoting Afghan leadership, good governance, responsibility and ownership, and fostering the development of a democratic, secure and sustainable Afghan State **with respect for human rights and the rule of law.**

2. The Council supports the approach launched at the Joint Co-ordination and Monitoring Board in Tokyo on 5-6 February to prepare an international conference to be held in Paris in June to review progress in implementation of the Afghanistan Compact, reaffirm the commitment of the international community to Afghanistan and discuss the way forward. The Council calls on the Government of Afghanistan to make further progress on human rights and good governance, including through establishment of an independent Senior Appointment mechanism and the implementation of the national anti-corruption strategy and the approval of a media law consistent with freedom of expression. The EU remains committed to working with the Government of Afghanistan to strengthen its human rights institutions and mechanisms. The Council recalls its urgent appeal to halt any future executions and to re-establish a de facto moratorium on the use of the death penalty and to enhance its implementation of transitional justice action plan.

3. The Council underlines the continued engagement of the EU in Afghanistan, including through the bilateral cooperation programmes of EU Member States, as well as through EC's assistance strategy, which contains substantial multi-year commitment until 2013, and focuses on governance and rule of law, particularly on the judiciary and police, and on rural development and health. The Council looks forward to the finalisation, launch and implementation of the Afghanistan National Development Strategy and welcomes the participatory process this has involved to date.

4. The Council welcomes the progress of the EU police mission in Afghanistan towards full deployment at central, regional and provincial level by the end of March. The mission is supporting the development of the Afghan police force under local ownership, respecting human rights and operating within the framework of the rule of law. The EU remains committed to addressing the multiple challenges lying ahead in close cooperation with the Afghan authorities and international partners. The Council expresses its readiness to consider further enhancement of EU engagement, particularly in the field of police and wider rule of law.

5. The EU, underlining its overall coherence in objectives with UN and NATO on the basis of Afghanistan Compact, reaffirms its readiness to closely work with UNAMA and ISAF, *inter alia* through EUPOL Afghanistan, in order to strengthen overall coordination of the international community in Afghanistan. The Council will continue to follow developments with regards to Afghanistan closely, including at the forthcoming NATO summit in Bucharest.

6. The Council will keep the EU's policy towards Afghanistan under review in the coming months, in advance of the Paris conference.

7. The Council welcomes the appointment of Mr Kai Eide as Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Afghanistan."

Pakistan

► Council Conclusions on Pakistan (10/03/2008)

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council takes note that the parliamentary and provincial elections which took place in Pakistan on 18 February 2008 were competitive, despite significant problems with the election framework and environment. The elections were an important step in the democratic development of Pakistan.

The EU remains committed to supporting Pakistan in building a prosperous and stable society based on the principles of democracy, the rule of law and human rights. The EU will support Pakistan in strengthening democratic institutions, promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as combating extremism. The EU continues to support development and economic growth in Pakistan. The EU will continue to explore ways to enhance its trade with Pakistan and trade within the South Asia region.

While underlining the importance the EU attaches to its relationship with Pakistan, and Pakistan's contribution to regional peace and security, the Council looks forward to continued engagement with Pakistan on a shared agenda based on the 2004 Cooperation Agreement and the 2007 EU-Pakistan Joint Declaration. The EU will review its policy towards Pakistan."

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/gena/99265.pdf

T Taiwan

► Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on Cross-Straits Relations (06/03/2008)

The EU has a significant stake in the maintenance of cross-strait peace and stability. Reiterating its One China Policy, the position of the EU is that the Taiwan question must be solved peacefully between the parties concerned. There should be no recourse to unilateral action, destabilizing initiatives or coercion by either side.

While recognizing the general value of referenda as democratic instruments, the EU is, nevertheless, concerned by the decision in Taiwan to proceed with the proposed referendum on joining the UN in the name of Taiwan. The proposed referendum would risk increasing cross-straits tension, to the potential detriment of all concerned, including the people of Taiwan.

The EU continues to encourage both sides to work to promote dialogue, practical cooperation and confidence-building.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/CFSP_Statements/March/0306MZZtaiwan.html

I **Armenia**

- ▶ **Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the EU on the situation after the presidential elections in Armenia on 1st March 2008** (04/03/2008)

The European Union is deeply concerned about the situation in the Republic of Armenia after the presidential elections. The EU condemns the acts of violence committed during the events of 1 March, which resulted in the loss of life and numerous injuries.

The EU calls upon the Armenian authorities to release any citizens detained for exercising their right to peaceful assembly and to lift the state of emergency, which imposes restrictions on media freedom, the freedom to assembly, and on political parties.

The EU recommends Armenia to conduct an independent investigation of the events of 1 March and what led to them.

The EU urges all political forces to refrain from unlawful acts and reengage in political dialogue as it is the only way forward. The constructive dialogue between authorities and the opposition is very important for the consolidation of peace and stability in the country.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/CFSP_Statements/March/0403MZZ_Armenia.html

T **Russian Federation**

- ▶ **Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on the Presidential Elections in Russian federation on 2 March 2008** (04/03/2008)

The European Union takes note of the provisional results of the Presidential elections which were held on 2 March in the Russian Federation and congratulates the newly elected President Dmitry Anatolyevich Medvedev.

The EU takes note of the fact that the elections took place in a generally calm and peaceful manner. The EU regrets, however, that the OSCE/ODIHR had to conclude that a meaningful election observation mission was not feasible.

The EU also regrets that the electoral process did not allow for truly competitive elections. The lack of equal media access for the opposition candidates is of particular concern.

The EU recalls the mutual interest to enhance a strategic partnership with the Russian Federation in the political, economic, cultural, scientific and other spheres. The EU expresses the hope that this partnership with Russia will be further strengthened and developed constructively during the tenure of Mr Dmitry Medvedev as President of the Russian Federation. The EU is looking forward to the implementation of political and social reforms, the strengthening of rule of law and individual freedoms as well as the economic modernisation announced by him during his election campaign.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/CFSP_Statements/March/0304MZZ_Ruska_federacija_voli_tve.html

Turkey

► EU calls on Turkey to speed up reforms (04/03/2008).

The EU on Monday urged Turkey to increase the pace of its human rights reforms, as well as to improve the situation of the country's Kurdish minority.

"Turkey needs to make speedy progress on reforms that enhance fundamental freedoms – and set up a clear and credible reform agenda for the months to come," EU enlargement commissioner Olli Rehn said at a conference on Turkey organised in the European Parliament on Monday (3 March).

One fundamental freedom - that of expression - still remains an area in which "reforms are badly overdue," Mr Rehn stressed.

He cited article 301 of Turkey's penal code, which foresees up to four years in prison for "insulting Turkishness", saying it needs to be revised.

Brussels had already insisted on that point in November last year in a report assessing progress made by Turkey on its road to EU accession.

Today, "there are signs that the government is serious about meeting this challenge," commissioner Rehn indicated, but he added: "The proof of the pudding is in the eating: what matters are not only new provisions, but the implementation on the ground."

Meanwhile, he also highlighted the progress made in some areas – such as "the extensive review and amendments to the Civil and the Criminal Codes, as well as the abolition of the death penalty, the policy of zero tolerance on torture and the measures undertaken to strengthen the civilian oversight of the military".

Improving Turkish Kurds' situation

Mr Rehn also urged Ankara to promote cultural and minority rights with up to 15 million Kurds estimated to be living in the country, highlighting the importance of language teaching.

In addition, regional disparities should be addressed and reduced, as Turkey's South-East populated mainly by Kurds is particularly poor. "Economic, social and cultural opportunities for all Turkish citizens" should be enhanced.

All in all, while "the situation of the Turkish population of Kurdish origin has improved since the turn of the millennium," said the commissioner, "resolute government action is urgently needed to pursue change."

Other areas where Ankara needs to speed up reforms according to Brussels include judicial reform, the fight against corruption, social rights, women's and children's rights.

The constitutional reform underway in the country could bring significant improvements on a number of these points, Mr Rehn stressed, while stopping short of assessing a new draft constitution, which the commission has yet to see.

Turkey, which has been an EU candidate country since 1999, started accession talks with the bloc in October 2005. It has so far opened six out the 35 chapters needed in order for the accession negotiations to be closed.

The question of its eventual EU membership is dividing the 27 member states, with some, such as France and Germany, opposing full membership of the club.

<http://euobserver.com/9/25768>

T **Western Balkans**

▶ **Council Conclusion on Western Balkans** (10/03/2008)

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

The Council noted the outcome of the last session of the Peace Implementation Council (PIC) Steering Board that took place in Brussels on 26-27 February 2008. The Council welcomed the PIC Steering Board's unanimous decision that the Office of the High Representative (OHR) will remain in place and continue to carry out its mandate under the Dayton/Paris Peace Agreement until necessary objectives and conditions as set out in the PIC Steering Board Declaration are met. The Council shared the PIC Steering Board's concern over challenges to the Dayton/Paris Peace Agreement. The Council confirmed its agreement to the goals of transition and ownership and reiterated its readiness to continue its engagement.

The Council noted that Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) has made progress with regard to the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA). It urged BiH authorities to make further efforts to ensure swift and effective fulfilment of all the four conditions necessary for signing the SAA. Furthermore, the Council noted that important underlying problems remain and called upon all parties in BiH to work together in order to overcome them as soon as possible.

The Council reiterated its full support to BiH's European perspective. Recalling its conclusions of 28 January 2008, the Council welcomed the intention of the European Commission to launch soon a visa dialogue with BiH.

STABILITY PACT/REGIONAL CO-OPERATION COUNCIL

The Council underlined the importance of regional co-operation in South Eastern Europe and welcomed the successful outcome of the joint meeting of the final Regional Table of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe and the inaugural meeting of the Regional Co-operation Council (RCC) on 27 February 2008 in Sofia, which marked the formal handover from the Stability Pact to the RCC. The establishment of the RCC is proof of substantial progress in regional co-operation on democratic, economic and security issues.

The Stability Pact has generated broad acceptance of the view that regional co-operation is necessary and has created shared understanding and strategies for common issues, in particular in the fields of energy, trade, refugee return and border control. The RCC will build on these achievements as a more regionally owned, streamlined and effective regional co-operation framework. The RCC can play its full role only if the entire region is committed to regional co-operation and if all parts of the region take an active stand in its activities. Regional co-operation is important for the European perspective of the Western Balkans.

The EU is committed to support the RCC, co-operating in the context of the SEECP (South-East European Co-operation Process), and looks forward to the RCC providing the framework for increased ownership and leadership by South Eastern European countries, while representing a forum for the continued involvement of the donor community.

The Council thanked Special Co-ordinator of the Stability Pact Dr Erhard Busek and expressed its support for the Secretary General of the RCC Mr Hido Biščević and the future activities of the RCC."

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/gena/99282.pdf

MAGHREB AND MIDDLE EAST

I **Egypt**

- ▶ **Remarks by Javier SOLANA, EU High Representative for the CFSP, during his trip to Cairo (Solana visit to Middle East) (05/03/2008)**

Javier SOLANA, European Union High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), visited Cairo on Wednesday, 5 March 2008 on the last leg of a four-day tour of the Middle East that also included Israel, the Palestinian Territories and Lebanon. He had meetings with President MUBARAK, Foreign Minister Abul GHEIT and the Secretary-General of the Arab League, Amr MOUSSA. The following is an edited summary of remarks to the press after his meeting with President MUBARAK:

"I have had very good meetings today with President MUBARAK and Foreign Minister GHEIT. I am visiting Cairo after a three-day tour of the region. I came here from Lebanon. Before that, I was in Israel and the Palestinian Territories, where I met Palestinian and Israeli leaders. I am in very close contact with US Secretary of State Condi RICE.

I am here to show the solidarity and engagement of the EU and our continued support for the Middle East peace process. We would like very much to see it resumed. I have had a very good conversation with the President on the Palestinian-Israeli situation, especially concerning Gaza. We want to see how we can cooperate to help resolve the situation.

We also talked about the preparations for the Arab League Summit at the end of March, the situation in Lebanon and wider regional questions. As always, President MUBARAK was very engaged.

I am very pleased to be back here. I was here not long ago and I am a frequent visitor."

Asked about the Rafah border crossing point between Gaza and Egypt, Mr SOLANA said that the EU was standing by, ready to continue helping with it as soon as cooperation could be resumed.

Asked about Gaza, Mr SOLANA said that it was important to help create the conditions on the ground to halt the violence and to allow negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority to resume.

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/discours/99222.pdf

T **Gaza Strip and Israel**

- ▶ **MEPs debate the situation in Gaza and in Israel (10/03/2008)**

Opening a debate on the situation in Israel and Gaza, President Pöttering asked "What can Europeans do?". In his view, the answer was that Europe must help push forward the peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians. "The peace process launched at Annapolis must not founder on violence and terror", he stressed.

On behalf of the EP, President Pöttering voiced "dismay and indignation" at the daily TV images from the region, referring both to the "disproportionate military force" deployed against Palestinians and the "murderous attack" on a Jerusalem school. He condemned the violence by Hamas and other Palestinian extremists and called on the Israeli government to listen to those Palestinian voices that were calling for peace.

The European Parliament intends to play a role, using "an even-handed approach". After highlighting the €540 million to support the Annapolis peace support pledged by the EU at the Paris Donors' Conference in December, Mr Pöttering said the EP would put itself forward as "an honest broker". In two weeks' time a new working group on the Middle East will discuss how EU aid is being used, with French foreign minister Bernard Kouchner, Norwegian foreign minister Jonas Gahr Støre, Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner and Quartet special representative Tony Blair.

Mr Pöttering also stressed that while security has a military dimension, mutual responsibility and a willingness to seek reconciliation are crucial. "Hamas must change its ways and work with moderate Palestinians towards peace", he said, and reiterated the EP's support for Palestinian president Abbas and prime minister Fayyad. He concluded by reiterating the need for Europe "to do everything in its power" to give political backing to peace as well as support to the inhabitants of the Middle East.

Political group speakers

For the EPP-ED group, Joseph DAUL (FR) said that, at Annapolis, the Israelis and Palestinians "had a dream" . In Paris, "the international community pledged to support this with resources". He believed the international community "should not judge the parties" but to lead them back to reason and the negotiating table.

He also drew three conclusions from a recent visit by the EPP to the Middle East. Firstly, Europe must be more active politically in the region. Secondly, "we must encourage the moderates in Israel and Palestine". Thirdly, we need to make it clear to both sides that they must stop building walls, firing rockets and constantly humiliating each other.

Socialist Group leader Martin SCHULTZ (DE) said "we are all agreed on what is needed". And pointing to the destruction in the region, he said it was unacceptable "that what EU money builds is destroyed unnecessarily".

It was essential, he said, that violence should stop - so why do negotiations always fail? His answer was that, on both sides, "there are those who have an interest in continuing the violence" . Above all, "the radicals need this conflict to legitimise their existence, and this has been the case for decades". It is up to Europe to tell them they cannot achieve their goals this way.

The situation in Gaza is a humanitarian disaster which "no amount of condemnation will solve", stressed Graham WATSON (ALDE, UK). Gaza is "besieged", and the trapping of 1.5 million people there, without power, water or sewage treatment, "has made matters worse than at any point since 1967", he continued, adding that he believed that a further 11,000 Palestinians are being held in Israeli jails.

On strategy, "the EU follows the USA", even though EU investments in Palestinian infrastructure "are being destroyed by the Israeli army using American weapons", he said.

Mr Watson welcomed the informal truce reached at lunchtime on Monday, and wished Egypt every success with its mediation efforts. But he stressed that the cycle of deaths would not be broken by further violence - it would continue so long as Israel seeks to "destabilise every interlocutor, and Hamas continues to fire

rockets, knowing that the response will be disproportionate", he said. "As a democracy, Israel has a duty to be more just than its disposable power implies" stressed Mr Watson, urging all parties to look again urgently at the issues and to find a way to live together.

"The reality is that every day, innocent lives are lost, families lose members, and the forces of moderation are driven further apart" said Brian CROWLEY (UEN, IE). The cynicism of Israel's attempt to "starve people into submission" is matched by that of the brutal killing of 8 people in a school, he continued, urging that every species of terrorism - "official, state, or state or state-sponsored" need to be fought with respect for all human life. A two-state solution will work only if both states are viable, he stressed, adding that "when they are recognised, then their leaders must be recognised too".

"What we need is not dialogue, but negotiations, underlined Daniel COHN-BENDIT (Greens/EFA, DE), agreeing with Mr Watson that what the EU needs is its own strategy. "Negotiations" worthy of the name would begin by organizing a ceasefire, and then aid supplies, he said, adding that Israel should be told that unless it immediately halts the building of settlements, then "the EU will no longer support you".

The EU needs to convey the political message that "this cannot go on" - the colonial policy of Israel is a danger to the state of Israel, and Palestinian attacks work against Palestinian interests", he concluded.

Francis WURTZ (GUE/NGL, FR) said: "We had scarcely decided on this Solemn Declaration after 110 Palestinians were killed by bombs in Gaza when further killings took place, this time in Jerusalem, with Israeli victims. We have all condemned these crimes each time. But everyone can see that something else is necessary to be able to hope to break this infernal cycle forever".

What is needed is the courage - over and above the necessary condemnations of all crimes committed, whoever commits them - to name THE main cause of all this evil: the occupation. "And with it, this sinister display of cruelty and humiliation, which are never-ending sources of hatred, despair and desire for vengeance. Nothing can therefore justify this continued occupation.

A distinguished Israeli peace activist, Mrs Nurit Peled, Sakharov Prizewinner, said as much when she lost her child in an attack by a Palestinian. Speaking to the then Prime Minister, Mr Netanyahu, she said: "You killed my daughter!"

Speaking on behalf of the IND/DEM group, Bastiaan BELDER claimed that the number of rocket attacks from the Palestinians increased by 500% since 2001 and that the Israeli activities are justified by its need to safeguard the security and safety of its citizens under international law. He also said that "the claim that Israel is acting with disproportionate violence is a tactic used by Hamas and other Palestinian organisations perpetrating the rocket attacks".

Jim ALLISTER (NI, UK) said that he deplored the recent violence in the Middle East and the ongoing humanitarian tragedy. He said that it was necessary to draw a distinction between the orchestrated and continued attacks from Gaza and Israel's right to defend itself. Israel, he recalled, was an internationally recognised country that accepts a two-state solution. Israel was subjected to "the most horrendous violence and Israel has the right and the necessity to defend itself, he said". Hamas, had to make the most basic of concessions which was to accept the right of Israel to exist. There was no balance between terrorist attacks and the right of a legitimate country to defend itself.

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/030-23416-070-03-11-903-20080307IPR23280-10-03-2008-2008-false/default_en.htm

Israel

- ▶ **Javier SOLANA, EU High Representative for the CFSP, condemns the terrorist attack in Jerusalem** (06/03/2008)

Javier SOLANA, EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), spoke tonight with the Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni to condemn the terrorist attack in Jerusalem that killed at least eight students and injured many more.

HR Solana transmitted to Ms Livni his condolences to the families of the victims and to the Israeli authorities.

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/declarations/99238.pdf

T Israel

- ▶ **EU Presidency statement on the terrorist attack in Jerusalem** (07/03/2008)

The Presidency of the European Union condemns in the strongest terms the terrorist attack of 6 March on a Jewish seminary in Jerusalem, which claimed so many innocent lives and wounded many. The Presidency offers its deepest sympathies to the bereaved families of the victims.

The Presidency decisively denounces terrorism. These vicious acts of horror are totally unacceptable and there can be no justification for them.

This terrorist act must not derail the peace process recently revived in Annapolis or endanger the efforts to achieve lasting peace and security in the region.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/CFSP_Statements/March/0307MZZ_Izrael_Jeruzalem.html

T Lebanon

- ▶ **Remarks to the press by Javier SOLANA, EU High Representative for the CFSP, during his visit to Beirut (Solana visit to Middle East)** (04/03/2008)

Javier SOLANA, European Union High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), visited Beirut on Tuesday, 4 March 2008 as part of a four-day tour of the Middle East that also included Israel, the Palestinian Territories and Egypt. He had meetings with Prime Minister Fouad SINIORA and Parliament Speaker Nabih BERRI at which they discussed the political situation in Lebanon and wider regional issues, in particular the situation in southern Israel and Gaza. The following is an edited summary of Mr SOLANA's remarks to reporters after his meeting with Mr SINIORA:

"It is very good to be back in Beirut. I come here as often as possible and I am very pleased to be here again. I have had very good meetings this afternoon with Prime Minister SINIORA and Speaker BERRI.

I talked about many questions with your prime minister. We have a very good relationship with your country. We have the Barcelona Process, of which Lebanon is part. We support the legitimate government of Lebanon and we have a very good relationship with your prime minister, with whom I am in close and regular contact.

We discussed the situation in Lebanon. The EU supports the Arab League's initiative and we hope that Lebanon will be represented by its newly elected president at the Arab League Summit."

Asked about fears for the stability of Lebanon in the current political impasse, Mr SOLANA said that Lebanon had a stable government, although it was not a normal situation to be without a president.

Asked about Syria, Mr SOLANA said he had been to Syria a number of times and acknowledged that relations with Syria were not easy.

On Gaza, Mr SOLANA said he had met Israeli and Palestinian leaders and had discussed with them the need to bring a halt to the violence, resume peace talks and get the Annapolis peace process back on track.

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/discours/99237.pdf

T **Palestinian Territories**

- ▶ **Remarks to the press by Javier SOLANA, EU High Representative for the CFSP, during his visit to Ramallah (Solana visit to Middle East) (04/03/2008)**

Javier SOLANA, EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), visited Israel and the Palestinian Territories yesterday, Monday, 3 March and today, Tuesday, 4 March, during a tour of the Middle East aimed at supporting the efforts to get the Annapolis peace process back on track after the latest violence in southern Israel and Gaza. He met President ABBAS, Prime Minister FAYYAD and Ahmed QUREI, Chairman of the Palestinian Negotiating Team, in Ramallah this morning, after meeting President PERES, Prime Minister OLMERT, Foreign Minister LIVNI and Defence Minister BARAK in Israel yesterday. He will continue his tour with visits to Beirut this evening and to Cairo tomorrow morning.

While he was in Ramallah today, Mr SOLANA visited the headquarters of the EU Police Mission in the Palestinian Territories (EUPOL COPPS), where he met Colin SMITH, Head of EUPOL COPPS, and Lt. General Pietro PISTOLESE, Head of EUBAM Rafah. Mr SOLANA briefed them on his trip and they then discussed the role of the mission in helping to build up effective Palestinian civilian and border policing, as well as the possibility of expanding the work to the broader area of the rule of law.

The following is an edited summary of remarks to the press by Mr SOLANA after his meeting at EUPOL COPPS:

"I am delighted to be here and to see the excellent work being done by our people on the ground in the EUPOL COPPS team. It is a vital aspect of our efforts to support the peace process. Our EUBAM Rafah mission is standing by, ready to resume its role of helping monitor the border crossing if we are asked.

I am here in the region to see how we can get the peace process back on track following the violence in southern Israel and Gaza. I have met President Abbas and Prime Fayyad and Ahmed Qurei here this morning and I had discussions with President Peres, Prime Minister Olmert, Foreign Minister Livni and Defence Minister Barak in Israel. I am now going on to Lebanon and to Egypt.

We are trying to see how we can find a solution to the complex situation and to resume dialogue and put an end to the violence. The violence must stop and the peace talks must resume. The Annapolis peace process must continue."

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/discours/99223.pdf

Palestinian Territories

- ▶ Javier SOLANA, EU High Representative for the CFSP, today met Karen KONING ABUZAYD, Under Secretary-General to the United Nations and Commissioner-General to the UNRWA (10/03/2008)

Javier SOLANA, European Union High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), today met Karen KONING ABUZAYD, Under Secretary-General to the United Nations and Commissioner-General to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency.

Mr Solana and Mrs Koning Abuzayd discussed the critical situation in the Palestinian Territories and the latest developments in UNRWA fields of operation, in particular in the West Bank and Gaza and also in Lebanon.

The High Representative commended the excellent work being done by UNWRA in an extremely difficult environment.

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/declarations/99263.pdf

THEMATIC :

FINANCIAL PERSPECTIVES

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

EXTERNAL RELATIONS & DEVELOPMENT-RELATED ISSUES

EU / UN REFORM

MISCELLANEOUS

I **Terrorist attack in Spain**

- ▶ Javier SOLANA, Alto Representante de la Unión Europea para Política Exterior y de Seguridad Común, condena enérgicamente el atentado terrorista de Mondragón (07/03/2008)

Javier SOLANA, Alto Representante de la Unión Europea para Política Exterior y de Seguridad Común, ha expresado su más enérgica condena y consternación ante el atentado terrorista que ha costado la vida al ex concejal socialista Isaías Carrasco.

Ha enviado igualmente su más sentido pésame a la familia de Isaías Carrasco y mostrado su solidaridad con las autoridades españolas.

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/es/declarations/99256.pdf

T **EU counterterrorism policy – Madrid terrorist attack Anniversary**

- ▶ EU honours victims of terrorism (11/03/2008)

The European Union will today recognise the victims of terrorism, honouring the memories of those who suffered in the biggest terrorist attack on European soil, the Madrid attack on 11 March 2004.

The terrorist bombings, which struck three packed commuter trains during the morning rush hour, left 191 dead and more than one thousand injured.

"We must continue to remember and honour those who have lost their lives in terrorist events in Europe and elsewhere in the world," EU commissioner Franco Frattini, in charge for justice and home affairs, said in a statement on Monday (10 March).

"This day should also be used to demonstrate our unwavering support for the democratic values and human rights that we share across Europe. No terrorist act can ever undermine our common belief in these rights and principles."

Between 2004 and 2006, the EU's executive body dedicated €4.8 million to numerous projects intended to help victims of terrorism and their relatives. An additional €2 million were earmarked for 2007.

The July 2005 bombings in London gave additional momentum for the EU to boost its efforts to fight terrorism.

However, EU member state cooperation in the area is still far from fluid - mainly due to a deeply ingrained dislike of sharing information on anti-terrorism activities.

As one of the first measures following the Madrid attacks, the EU created a counter-terrorism post. This was meant to bring some co-ordination between both member states' and EU institutions' activities.

Dutchman Gijs de Vries was appointed the union's first anti-terrorism tsar. He has now been replaced by the Belgian politician, Gilles de Kerchove. In practice, however, the post has very few actual powers, as well as no budget or agents in the field.

But last November, the EU moved up a gear. The European Commission announced a significant expansion into the area of member state security by tabling an extensive counter-terrorism package, which should equip the 27-nation bloc with new tools to fight extremists and militants.

The package consists of three major elements.

First, to make the dissemination of terrorist propaganda, training and financing of terrorists illegal across the EU. Secondly, to set up a European database on bombs as well as incidents involving explosives. And thirdly, to establish a European system for the exchange of passenger name records (PNR).

In addition, last month saw the commission proposing another set of measures aimed at strengthening the EU's external borders. The cornerstone of the proposals is an electronic entry/exit register, which should enable the Union to keep better track of who is entering and leaving its territory.

In the past, it has taken a long time, sometimes several years, for EU governments to strike an accord, as justice and home affairs measures require the approval of all member states. But already Brussels is preparing itself for the adoption of the EU's newest rulebook.

Known as the Lisbon Treaty, and supposed to come into force early next year, it will mean that decisions taken in the justice and interior affairs area should become easier as the right to veto by single national capitals has been removed.

Referring to victims of terrorism, Mr Frattini said: "We know that all of our efforts are never enough to offer real compensation to those whose families have been torn apart by terrorist acts."

"We can only hope that we can make a meaningful contribution, that we can offer them some assistance in their difficult situation. And we aim to honour them through our joint remembrance as we do today," he added.

<http://euobserver.com/9/25808/?rk=1>

European Day of Victims of Terrorism

- ▶ **Pöttering on European Day of the Victims of Terrorism "We will honour all victims"** (11/03/2008)

European Parliament President Hans-Gert Pöttering addressed the Chamber in Strasbourg: "Today we are commemorating the fourth European Day of the Victims of Terrorism. This is a day that we must keep in our memory in order to remember all those who have suffered the barbarities of terrorism. The terrorist attacks in Madrid on 11 March 2004 and in London on 7 July 2005 claimed many victims and left many families in ruins.

Unfortunately, just last Friday terrorist organization ETA assassinated again. Isaias Carrasco, a former Socialist councillor, was shot when he left his home in Mondragon. I wish to express on behalf of the European Parliament our deep sadness and profound sympathy to his family and friends.

As President of the European Parliament and on my own behalf, I can say that their recollection will never be erased from our memories. Today, we will honour him and all victims with a moment of silence, in order to show, once again, our respect and our commitment to them. Always, they are and will remain present in our hearts and in our work. It is a duty for all of us.

I will never cease to repeat, there is no justification for terrorism. Therefore, we must work united in our fight on the basis of the Rule of Law and with all the force of the law."

The European Parliament then held a minute of silence.

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/019-23422-070-03-11-902-20080307IPR23294-10-03-2008-2008-false/default_en.htm

T Intercultural dialogue against radicalisation

- ▶ **Frattini promotes intercultural dialogue against radicalisation** (07/03/2008)

Justice commissioner Franco Frattini has said Europe should not fear Muslim immigration to the bloc and promoted children and education as the best ambassadors for understanding between different cultures in Europe.

"With dialogue we can eradicate abuse of religion and culture" the Italian commissioner told a conference dealing with the impact of migration on the co-existence between different cultures in Europe, held in Brussels on Wednesday (5 March).

The debate was the first of six planned gatherings on intercultural dialogue that will be organized throughout 2008, with each debate taking a specific sectoral view on intercultural dialogue, such as media, arts and heritage, the workplace, inter-religious dialogue, education and youth, migration and integration.

Mr Frattini said his institution had already put forward a package of measures to make integration of migrants in the EU run more smoothly, such as an EU integration fund.

The commissioner also explained his view on fears of a future clash between the Muslim world and the West.

"There is no ongoing clash, there is perhaps a struggle between those who believe in freedom of religion but

still understand the freedom of others, and those who interpret Islam wrongly and believe that only one religion should prevail", Mr Frattini stated, adding that tolerance and dialogue does not mean giving in to unlawful practices.

"We do not need to tolerate all foreigners. We cannot accept those who put in question the absolute value of human life, or the equality of men and women. I cannot tolerate the violation of individual rights", Frattini stated.

The commissioner also said that children were crucial to promoting fundamental values across the EU, and that education plays an important role in stopping radicalisation which leads to extremism and occasionally to terrorism.

According to a report from the Brussels-based Migration Policy Group think tank and the British Council from October last year, the bloc is not doing enough to integrate immigrants from outside Europe. In the report, EU countries rank as only "half way to best practice" for integrating immigrants into the national societies.

The report assessed immigrants' chances of participating in European societies by looking at areas such as labour market access; family reunion; long-term residence; political participation and protection from racism and discrimination.

I am not a foreigner

But members of a round-table discussion on migration and dialogue, said some of the words used by Mr. Frattini signal exclusion rather than inclusion of non-ethnic Europeans into a European context of dialogue and mutual understanding.

"I would like to use the word 'mobility' instead of 'migration', and the word 'cooperation' instead of 'dialogue'" said Bashy Quraishy, chair of the advisory council of the European Network Against Racism (ENAR).

Mr Bashy said that even if he was in favour of dialogue, previous attempts to create fruitful dialogue have resulted only in a monologue where the majority tells the minority to change.

"Minorities do not have the power to ask for a dialogue based on mutual understanding. The majority has the key to the front door, not the minority", said Mr Bashy, a Danish resident since for over 25 years.

"The commissioner referred to us as 'foreigners'. We are not foreigners, we are European", he added, and was echoed by Brussels-based but Pakistani-born journalist and moderator of the debate, Shada Islam.

"I am Pakistani and European," Ms Islam underlined.

<http://euobserver.com/879/25789/?rk=1>

T International Women's Day

- ▶ **Women as key players in dialogue and peace** (07/03/2008)

The role of women in promoting dialogue and peace was the main topic discussed on March 5, on the eve of International Women's Day, at a meeting of the EP Women's Rights Committee with members of national parliaments. **EP President Hans-Gert Pöttering called for the creation of a European representative for the protection of women's rights in international relations.**

In the view of Anna Záborská (EPP-ED, SK), chair of the Women's Rights Committee, "intercultural dialogue is essential to achieve peace and the European Union is a model in this area". "Dialogue means listening", she stressed.

A representative for women's rights in international relations

"The EU must be able to conduct a dialogue in Africa, the Middle East, beyond the Mediterranean and also in the rest of the world", said President Pöttering at the start of the conference. "The role of women in society is crucial to intercultural dialogue".

The EP President endorsed a proposal by Kathalijne Buitenweg (Greens/EFA, NL), to appoint a European representative for the protection of women's rights in international relations. This figure could report to the EU's foreign policy high representative. Parliament would be involved in the appointment and kept abreast of the representative's work.

Women in conflicts

Gertrude Mongella, President of the Panafrican Parliament, voiced concern that women had not managed to organise in favour of peace. "There can be no intercultural dialogue without peaceful co-existence", she said, referring to the many forms of violence raging throughout Africa.

"What dialogue can one have in a conflict situation?" asked Naomi Chazan (Israel), member of the International Women's Commission for a Just and Sustainable Israeli-Palestinian Peace. "Real dialogue enables a solution to be found", she emphasised, and pointed out that her organisation is working for a settlement of the conflict involving recognition of two states based on the 1967 borders.

"As long as there are controls and humiliations, violence will increase", argued Amal Khreisheh (Palestinian Territories), a member of the same organisation. "The support of the international community is crucial in the peace process and to enable women to develop. In the Palestinian Territories, without peace it will be difficult to achieve equality between women and men", she added.

In the discussion between guest speakers and national MPs, Kerstin Giese, chair of the Bundestag committee for family and women's issues, highlighted the close links between women's rights questions and intercultural dialogue. Speaking on the same topic, Swedish MP Engström Hillevi pointed to the oppression of women - such as honour crimes and female genital mutilation - in certain cultures and religions.

Respect for difference

Intercultural dialogue entails respect for difference, stressed Naomi Chazan. "We must build a culture of respect", insisted EU Education Commissioner Jan Figel, citing the example of the EU. "Cultural diversity is an asset and not a problem". Christa Prets (PES, DE), believed "This work must continue and not stop on 31 December 2008".

Erna Hennicot Schoepges (EPP-ED, LU), highlighted "the timidity of the institutions about speaking of inter-religious dialogue, which is a sign of fear and insecurity". Women, she said, had a key role to play here.

Best practice on male-female equality

The meeting was also used to swap ideas about best practice on equality between men and women in parliamentary work. Members of national parliaments described the situation in their own countries.

The aim is to reach a figure of 40% of women, said Marjet Cotman, Slovenia's labour minister, who explained that 40% of her country's MEPs were women, thanks to a quota system. Gisèle Gauthier of the French Senate welcomed the "law on parity" adopted in 2000, saying "if this law had not been passed, we would not have had the progress we see today".

According to Employment Commissioner Vladimir Spidla, "Women today suffer discrimination in the world of work. Pay levels and access to senior positions remain a problem". This view was shared by Trifon Mitev, chair of the subcommittee for gender equality at the Bulgarian National Assembly, who believed progress was still needed on the economic front. "Bulgaria's target is to have 60% of women in work by 2020".

The European Parliament is keen to set the pace on equality, said EP Vice-President Rodi Kratsa-Tsagaropoulou, who chairs the high level group for equal opportunities in the EP. However, Swedish MP Olle Thorell pointed out that was "impossible in the European Parliament for an MP who has just had a baby to have someone stand in for her, unlike the Swedish Parliament".

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/014-22671-066-03-10-902-20080303IPR22669-06-03-2008-2008-false/default_en.htm

T **International Women's Day**

► **MEPs give us their thoughts on International Women's Day - 8 March** (07/03/2008)

Last weekend saw International Women's Day - 8 March - being marked around the world. "The world perceives this day as a symbol of the political, cultural and social equality of women" said the chair of Parliament's Women's Rights and Gender Equality Committee Anna Záborská (EPP-ED). Ahead of the celebrations we asked some members of the Women's Rights Committee their views on the day, its significance in their country and how it is marked.

"Politics is still a man's kingdom"

The education gap between women and men is narrowing, men spend more time at home and women are better represented in politics, but improvements remain to be made in gender equality.

Portuguese Socialist Edite Estrela, a vice-chair of the committee said, **"in spite of the advances, there is still a long way ahead and many obstacles to overcome. Women continue to suffer all kinds of discrimination: in the family, in the labour market, in politics. Women are the last to access the labour market and the first to get unemployed. And politics is still a man's kingdom. Overall, laws are progressive, but mentalities remain retrograde."**

For Hungarian Socialist Zita Gurmai, "International Women's Day is an occasion when women on all continents, often divided by national boundaries and by ethnic, linguistic, cultural, economic and political differences, come together to celebrate". She said that they can draw on "a tradition that represents at least nine decades of struggle for equality, justice, peace and development".

Celebrations differ around the world

Around the world demonstrations, conferences, newspaper and TV programmes use the day to highlight some of the issues that women face around the world.

Spanish Green Raül Romeva i Rueda said that in Spain "the focus will be on three issues: violence against women and how to fight it, the reform of the legislation on abortion and the pay gap".

For some - especially those countries that lay behind the Iron Curtain - the day still carries unwelcome connotations of the past. Speaking of her native country, Ms Záborská said "the majority in Slovakia understand International Women's Day as a residue of Socialism, as it is very much connected to the former totalitarian regime". Today the "day is not celebrated in such a mass style as it was in the past regime, during which it was a propaganda tool," she said.

Men and Women's Day

Although Women's Day puts women's fight for equality centre stage, increasingly they are finding allies among men. Sweden's Eva-Britt Svensson (GUE/NGL) said "more and more men are starting to show support for gender issues".

In some countries men give presents to women to celebrate the day. In Hungary "men give flowers (snowdrops and carnations) to their friends, relatives, colleagues, wives and daughters. I'm sure that my husband and my two sons will think about me and make this day special with a little present. Of course, for me, their love is the most important present I can ever get," said Ms Gurmai.

Conferences discuss issues women face

To mark Women's Day, the Women's Rights Committee organised two conferences on 6 March. "The role of women in Intercultural Dialogue" and "Gender mainstreaming in parliamentary work" aim to raise international awareness of the issues women face.

The Parliament gives an annual Equality and Diversity Award to reward exceptional efforts in the field among its staff. This year there will be two awards: the Best Practice Award and the Role Model Award. The winners will be announced on 11 March, 2008.

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/public/story_page/014-22627-066-03-10-902-20080229STO22605-2008-06-03-2008/default_en.htm

T **Council of Europe**

- ▶ **Council of Europe anti-torture committee publishes report on Turkey** (06/03/2008)

The Council of Europe's committee for the prevention of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (CPT) has today published a report on its visit to Turkey in May 2007, together with the response of the Turkish Government. During the visit, the CPT delegation went to Imralı High-Security Closed Prison and examined the treatment of the establishment's sole inmate, Abdullah Öcalan.

The delegation looked into what action had been taken to implement the recommendations made after earlier CPT visits as regards the prisoner's conditions of detention, and reviewed the situation concerning access to Imralı Island for his family members and lawyers.

The state of the prisoner's health was also examined. The recent allegations of intoxication by heavy metals are the subject of an Addendum to the report.

Link report: <http://www.cpt.coe.int/en/states/tur.htm>

http://www.coe.int/t/dc/press/noteredac2008/20080306_cpt_en.asp

T **Council of Europe**

- ▶ **Dick Marty: waterboarding is a form of torture** (11/03/2008)

Dick Marty, Rapporteur of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) on secret detentions and illegal transfers of detainees in Europe, has protested against President Bush's veto of a law aimed at banning the use of waterboarding:

"Waterboarding is a mock execution, no more, no less. It ranks as torture under internationally recognised definitions. It is deplorable that President Bush has opposed both Congress and Senate by using his veto. I find it sad that the United States, long a model democracy built on the rule of law, is setting such a bad example."

According to the PACE report on secret detentions in Europe, waterboarding is among the abuses suffered by persons detained in these places, part of the High Value Detainee Programme revealed by Dick Marty.

Link PACE report on secret detentions in Europe:

<http://assembly.coe.int/Documents/WorkingDocs/Doc07/edoc11302.pdf>

<https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?>

[Ref=PR175\(2008\)&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&Site=DC&BackColorInternet=F5CA75&BackColorIntranet=F5CA75&BackColorLogged=A9BACE](https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=PR175(2008)&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&Site=DC&BackColorInternet=F5CA75&BackColorIntranet=F5CA75&BackColorLogged=A9BACE)

T **Council of Europe**

- ▶ **Speech by the Right Hon Terry Davis, Secretary General of the Council of Europe: "Human Rights in Europe now"** (10/03/2008)

Thank you very much for your invitation to speak about the current condition of human rights in Europe. I will divide my comments into two parts. Since we are in Brussels, I will start with a few remarks about the respective roles of the Council of Europe and the European Union in the field of human rights. I will then refer to some of the most topical human rights challenges which face Europe today.

On the first subject, I will start with an anecdote.

Recently I caused a storm in a teacup referring to the European Commission and Belarus in the same sentence. I do not know how they took it in Minsk, but I can tell you that my comments – at least as reported - did not go down very well here in Brussels.

Let me explain.

The remarks were made in the course of my annual speech on the state of the Council of Europe during the January session of our Parliamentary Assembly. I spoke about the state of human rights in Europe and, more specifically, about the prospects for the accession of the European Union to the European Convention on Human Rights.

What I said was that the accession of the European Union would end the paradoxical situation in which only two executive powers in Europe escape the scrutiny of the European Court of Human Rights. They are the European Commission and the Government of Belarus.

Now, I did not suggest that there were any similarities between the European Commission and the authorities in Belarus except for two facts: they are both geographically in Europe and neither can be taken before the European Court of Human Rights. That, ladies and gentlemen, is a fact - a paradoxical fact, as I said in my speech - but it caused a flurry in the tealeaves.

I should therefore like to use this opportunity to reassure my friends at the Commission that I have nothing but respect for their commitment to human rights - which is clearly not something I am ready to say about President Lukashenko.

But some of the oversensitive reactions to my comment did rub in the point I was making.

To start with, I find it odd that the mere mention of the fact that people cannot complain against the European Commission, or any other European Union institutions, before the European Court of Human Rights, is perceived as out of order.

In the past, European Union officials have told me that this is a non-issue, because the EU is already bound to respect the rights guaranteed by the European Convention on Human Rights on the basis of the Treaty of Amsterdam, and that the European Court of Justice is the one to oversee compliance.
This is of course true, but the question is whether it is enough.

With all due respect, this logic could be compared to a man who drives a car without a driving licence, but says that he is determined to respect the Highway Code, and that if he does not, a member of his family will rebuke him.

He may well be the best driver in the world, but that is beside the point. If there are rules, they must apply equally to all. And the rule for all executive powers in Europe (except "you-know-who") is that they are obliged to respect human rights and accept the scrutiny of the European Court of Human Rights.

Before I am accused of committing a new lèse majesté, I want to make it clear that in comparing the European Court of Justice with a member of the driver's family, it in no way implies any doubt about the integrity, the independence and the competence of the European Court of Justice. It merely illustrates the point that when this Court rules on cases involving human rights and the European Commission or any other EU Institution, it does so as a part of the same institutional framework in which the alleged violation of human rights has taken place.

Those reacting to my words also argued that it was politically unwise to mention that EU accession to the European Convention on Human Rights would submit EU institutions to the scrutiny of the Strasbourg court. I was told that this would cause particular difficulties in countries like the United Kingdom because it would strengthen anti-EU sentiments among the public.

Now this is an argument I really have a problem with, and I can tell you that I speak on the basis of first-hand experience. After being a candidate in 11 Parliamentary elections and 28 years as a Member of Parliament, I think that I can claim to know something about public opinion in the United Kingdom, and I can tell you that very few people in the UK would object to officials in Brussels being bound by the same rules as officials in the UK. In fact, I would even suggest using this fact as one of the arguments in the campaign for the ratification of the Lisbon treaty, not only in the United Kingdom but in all EU member states.

The fact is that there is a strong and convincing case for EU accession to the European Convention on Human Rights. The arguments, as they were identified by the Convention entrusted with the preparation of the now defunct EU Constitution, are the following:

First, the accession would strengthen the protection of European citizens who are presently denied the right to bring applications against the institutions of the European Union before the Strasbourg Court. There is no reference to Belarus here, but it makes the same point.

Second, it would avoid a situation in which there would be alternative and potentially competing and conflicting systems of human rights protection within the European Union and between the EU and the rest of Europe. Dual protection systems always undermine legal certainty. There is always a risk of different catalogues of human rights being applied by the European Court of Human Rights and the Court of Justice, each acting within its own context. The risk of divergence is not just theoretical. It has already occurred and may pose problems.

Third, it would reinforce the credibility of the European Union in the eyes of third countries if it accepted a critical review of its human rights conduct by an independent body.

Fourth, the accession would enable the European Union to play a full role in proceedings before the European Court of Human Rights if those proceedings concern EU law.

And finally, the accession would eliminate a new dividing line on the European continent. The human rights acquis of the Council of Europe and the common standards defended by the member states of the Council of Europe and of the European Union are the same. An accession is not in contradiction with the right of the EU and its member states to offer higher levels of human rights protection in certain areas. On the other hand, a dual system of rights poses a risk not only to the fundamental principle of universality of human rights but also the inherent danger of the re-emergence of a "Europe à deux vitesses" in an area - common human rights standards - where such divisions must not exist.

These arguments are from documents produced by the EU Convention and I subscribe to them fully. My introduction was not meant to leave you with an impression that the Council of Europe has a problematic or even a competitive relationship with the European Union - on the contrary. I believe that the accession of the European Union to the European Convention on Human Rights would turn a relationship which is close, good and co-operative into an even better and more effective one.

Unlike some who argue that the European Union should leave human rights issues to the Council of Europe, I believe that this is neither realistic nor desirable. The European Union has gradually taken over from its member states some very important competences in areas directly or indirectly related to human rights. That is why it not only can, but should build up its capacity to protect – but also to respect – human rights. That is why I welcome the new Fundamental Rights Agency, at which the Council of Europe is present, provided that these positive developments are coupled with accession to the European Convention on Human Rights. This should not happen at some time in a distant future, but as soon as possible. That is why I believe that preparatory talks should begin without waiting for the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty by all EU member states.

I also encourage the European Union to act, and if necessary legislate, in all areas where our respective mandates coincide – but they should do so by building on the Council of Europe acquis and the standards agreed by the 47 member states of the Council of Europe, and not by simply duplicating them. This is the logic behind opening the Council of Europe Conventions such as the Anti-Cybercrime Convention and the Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings to accession by the European Community.

The principle guiding our individual and joint efforts should be what we can do to promote human rights and not what human rights can do to promote us. And there is plenty that needs to be done.

Only a few days ago, I spoke at the High Level Segment of the UN Human Rights Council. Since the subject of my speech concerned challenges to human rights in Europe, I will now use this opportunity to sum up the message which I delivered in Geneva.

The first challenge we face is the need to protect human rights in the context of the fight against terrorism.

Ever since September 11, there have been voices, on the other side of the Atlantic, but not only there, arguing that human rights are an obstacle in the fight against terrorism.

This is not something which the Council of Europe will accept. At the Council of Europe we fight terrorists because they want to destroy everything we stand for and everything we believe in. But our activities to strengthen co-operation in law-enforcement and to help the victims of terrorism are not inconsistent with our insistence on respecting the human rights and fundamental freedoms which are protected by the European Convention on Human Rights.

If we want to defeat terrorists, we must remain faithful to our ideas and our values. People around the world must know that we are right, and that terrorists are wrong - that we are just, and that they are criminals. We cannot win a conflict of values with secret prisons, with torture, with inhuman and degrading treatment, with people being kept in legal limbo and deprived of safeguards which are the foundation of our system of democracy and justice.

These methods are dangerous because they are exactly what terrorists want. They want us to give up the most fundamental, defining features of our freedom.

Those who argue that secret detention, torture and the denial of the right to a fair trial have stopped a number of terrorist attacks, should have the moral and intellectual honesty to consider also how many future terrorists these abuses of human rights have helped to recruit.

I took note – with not too much surprise, I must say – of the recent admission by the British Foreign Secretary that so-called “rendition flights” did indeed pass through British territory. I want to give a lot of credit to the Government of the United Kingdom for coming out with their admission as soon as they were told about it by the United States of America. I also wholeheartedly support the pledge by the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Gordon Brown, who intends to put in place some essential procedures to make sure that such violations of human rights do not occur in the future. The most appropriate way to do so, of course, would be to support the proposals which I presented to the 47 Council of Europe Governments nearly two years ago.

In this context, I would also mention the issue of the United Nations and European Union blacklists. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has strongly criticised the procedures used by the United Nations Security Council and the European Union to blacklist individuals and groups suspected of having connections with terrorism. The criticism is based on the lack of procedural fairness and the violation of basic rights. Our Parliamentary Assembly called for a review of these lists in order to “preserve the credibility of the international fight against terrorism”. It also stated – clearly – that this kind of procedure is “unworthy” of international institutions like the European Union and the United Nations.

In fact, the blacklisting procedure may be incompatible with the obligation of our member states under the European Convention on Human Rights. Personally I believe that our Convention should be considered ius

cogens, and that states which are parties to the Convention must balance their obligations under the UN Charter with their obligations under the Convention.

My next point is about the abolition of the death penalty. The year 2007 marks a decade without the death penalty in the member states of the Council of Europe. It means that no one has been hanged, poisoned, decapitated, electrocuted, shot or otherwise killed by criminal justice systems during the last 10 years anywhere in Europe except in Belarus, which is not a member of the Council of Europe.

Achieving continent-wide abolition was not easy. It took courage and persistence and much persuasion. Today, it is widely accepted that the death penalty is barbaric, that it does not deter crime, that it does not help the victims of crime, and that it transforms murderers into martyrs and judicial errors into irreversible tragedies.

Today, Europe is a death penalty free zone, and it is largely due to the work of the Council of Europe. 46 European countries have ratified Protocol 6 to the European Convention on Human Rights which bans the death penalty in peacetime. Russia is the only exception. There they have a moratorium. They have abolished the death penalty in practice but not in the law so that we are still waiting for them to keep the promise they made at the time of joining the Council of Europe. However the fact remains that no one has been executed in Russia since they joined the Council of Europe 10 years ago. The majority of the rest of the Council of Europe member states have not only banned the death penalty in peacetime, but gone further by having signed and ratified Protocol 13, which prohibits the death penalty in all circumstances, in wartime as well as peace time.

But we all know that there are many people in Europe who continue to support the death penalty. Every time there is a particularly gruesome crime, or in some cases, when an election is coming - there are voices calling for the death penalty to be reinstated.

We cannot afford to ignore these voices or treat this subject as taboo. It would be both short-sighted and undemocratic. We have strong arguments against the death penalty, and we should not be shy about putting them in a public debate. We need to go out and explain to people why the death penalty is wrong, why it has been abolished, and why it should stay abolished.

That is why, in October last year, the Council of Europe established a European Day against the Death Penalty with which the European Union has now associated itself.

Another matter of great concern to me as Secretary General of the Council of Europe is the issue of unjustified restrictions on political rights and freedoms in a number of Council of Europe member states. Such restrictions interfere with rights protected by the European Convention on Human Rights, notably Article 10, which guarantees freedom of expression, Article 11, which guarantees freedom of assembly and association, and Article 14 which prohibits discrimination.

Some governments may believe that they are protecting public interest when they try to silence media which they consider to be irresponsible or keep from power a political force which they consider to be unfit to govern, but such arbitrary actions are undemocratic and contrary to the European Convention on Human Rights.

They often take place in the context of elections, and they have unfortunately led to a tangible drop in public confidence in the ballot box as the legitimate and democratic way to achieve political change. The consequence is that the political argument leaves parliament and goes to the streets, with negative and unpredictable consequences for the country concerned, its neighbours and Europe as a whole.

In the Council of Europe we often get blamed for being too soft or ineffective in the protection of human rights in Europe. I am the first to accept this criticism when it is justified, but I must tell you that much of it is off the target. The fact is that the Council of Europe does excellent and valuable work. We not only produce legally binding standards but also monitor the way our member states comply with them. We never turn a blind eye to problems, and for proof of this claim you only need to look at the reports prepared by our different monitoring bodies from the Committee for the Prevention of Torture to the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, the Parliamentary Assembly, the Human Rights Commissioner and the Court of Human Rights. The question of course is what is done when serious problems are identified.

The answer is that – in an intergovernmental organisation - much depends on the readiness of Governments to act. The fact is that as far as democracy and human rights in Europe are concerned, we face a paradox. European standards are higher than ever before – largely because of the work of the Council of Europe - but the political commitment to protect them is not always as strong as it should be. This should worry all of us. The level of democracy and human rights in Europe has not yet reached the point at which they would become irreversible, and I doubt they ever will. That is the raison d'être of the Council of Europe.

http://www.coe.int/t/dc/press/News/20080310_disc_sg_speech_en.asp

T **Council of Europe and EU**

► Quadripartite meeting, 10 March 2008 conclusions (10/03/2008)

The 26th Quadripartite meeting between the Council of Europe and the European Union was held in Brussels on 10 March 2008 at the invitation of the Slovak Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

It was attended, on the Council of Europe side, by Mr Ján Kubiš, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Slovakia, Chair of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and the Right Hon Terry Davis, Secretary General of the Council of Europe, and on the European Union side, by Mr Dimitrij Rupel, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Slovenia, President of the Council of the European Union and Mr Karel Kovanda, Deputy Director General in the External Relations Directorate General of the European Commission.

The participants expressed their satisfaction with the progress made in the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding between the two organisations. **They underlined the importance of further promoting co-operation in the field of human rights, the rule of law and pluralist democracy, which are the shared values of both organisations.**

They also noted the importance of intercultural dialogue and encouraged further cooperation in this area, inter alia, in the framework of the current Year of Intercultural Dialogue.

The development of Europe as a free and fair election zone is an objective which should mobilise the energies of the Council of Europe and the European Union. In this context, the participants discussed electoral assistance and welcomed the close relationship established between the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the European Parliament, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights in matters of election observation. Aware of the shortcomings and deficiencies identified by International Electoral Observation Missions in several recent elections, they invited the countries concerned to redress these problems.

They expressed their willingness to further expand their co-operation at the level of preelectoral assistance with a view to achieving the objective that all elections in Europe fully respect democratic norms and

standards. In this context, they welcomed the recent conclusion of the CoE-EU Joint Programme on Free and Fair Elections in the South Caucasus and Moldova (2008-2009) as a good example of co-operation on pre-electoral assistance between the two institutions. They looked forward to the full implementation of this programme and to its possible expansion to other countries.

They expressed the hope that the forthcoming parliamentary elections in Belarus would constitute a positive step towards a democratic system of government for this country.

They underlined the need to ensure a sound electoral environment, in particular, by enhancing, through pre-electoral assistance, the capacities of the media to ensure a free, independent, balanced and unbiased coverage of the pre-election campaign and the elections themselves.

They also discussed cooperation in South-East Europe and emphasised their will to intensify it. They shared the view that both the Council of Europe and the EU should continue to play an important role in supporting a peaceful, democratic and multi-ethnic environment in the whole region, striving for the full respect of the European values, including democracy, the protection of human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, and the rule of law. In this respect, they outlined the importance of developing the flow of information between the European Union and the Council of Europe as regards the situation in the region and all progress made towards European prospects.

They noted that the Council of Europe provides valuable assistance, in particular, through its legal instruments, in these areas as well as in the fields of decentralisation and effective local government, intercultural dialogue, the protection of cultural and religious heritage, education, social protection, the rule of law, the reform of the judiciary and the fight against organised crime.

The participants also welcomed the ongoing co-operation in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy of the European Union; an illustration of that cooperation was provided by the meeting organised on 5 February 2008 on co-operation with the countries of the South-Caucasus, Ukraine and Moldova. They reiterated their support to Regional Co-operation as illustrated by the initiatives undertaken by both organisations in the Black Sea area.

Finally, they concluded their meeting with a common endeavour to further their efforts for the strengthening of European values all over the continent.

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/misc/99290.pdf

T **European Fundamental Rights Agency**

- ▶ Morten Kjærsum becomes first director of European Fundamental Rights Agency
(07/03/2008)

As anticipated, on Friday 7 March in Vienna the governing body of the European Fundamental Rights Agency appointed Morten Kjaerum of Denmark as the head of the new Community agency, which became operational on 1 March 2007. "This is a motivational challenge and a great privilege to have been chosen" to occupy this position, said Mr Kjaerum of his appointment. He is currently the director of the Danish Human Rights Institute. It is anticipated that Mr Kjaerum will take up his duties on 1 June 2008. His mandate will last for five years and may be extended once by the governing body for a period not exceeding three years. (B.C.)

Agence Europe