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EU - THIRD COUNTRY MEETINGS

ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly

- Ljubljana, March, 16, 2008

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Committee on Development

- 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

EP Extraordinary Plenary Session

- March, 26, 2008 (Brussels)

CONFERENCES / EVENTS

- | **Subcommittee on Human Rights: Hearing on the rights of indigenous people**
 - **March, 31, 2008, European Parliament**

- | **5th Meeting of the European Network of Contact Points in Respect of Persons Responsible for Genocide, Crimes against Humanity and War Crimes**
 - **March, 17, 18, 2008 (the Hague)**

- | **Meeting of the Intergovernmental Group "L'Europe de l'enfance"**
 - **March, 25,26 2008 (Slovenia)**

- | **Conference: »Giving stronger voice to civil society in the EU neighbourhood – Development of civil dialogue and partnership relations between civil society, national governments and EU institutions«**
 - **April, 2, 2008 (Slovenia)**

- | **"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

- ▶ **Statement by State Secretary Janez Lenarčič on behalf of the EU Council regarding the situation in Chad (12/03/2008)**

“Dear Mr President, honourable Members of the Parliament,

As you know, the situation in Chad has become even graver in the recent weeks. In the beginning of February, Chad rebel groups arrived in the capital N'Djamena and occupied its larger section. After a couple of days, the rebels have been repelled by government forces from N'Djamena eastwards – to Chad's border with Sudan.

The attacks of rebel groups on the Chadian government early February have not only stirred up a simmering internal crisis, but also revealed its regional dimension. The rebels namely started from Darfur with essential support from the Sudanese side. Therefore, on discussing the situation in Chad, we have to take into account two inter-connected aspects, the first concerning the internal policy and the other the regional situation.

Thus, the Council, which condemned the rebel attacks on the Chadian government, appealed, on the one hand, for political dialogue between the government, opposition and the rebels, and on the other hand pointed out the urgency of establishing political dialogue between the Chadian and the Sudanese governments. We believe that both governments should be pressed to meet the obligations accepted under various agreements. The EU Council required both governments to immediately stop supporting the armed groups and supplying them, and to improve their mutual relations.

As far as the internal political situation in Chad is concerned, a political solution to this conflict is the only way to country's peace and stability. The inclusive political process indicated by the agreement between the Chadian ruling party and the parties of the legal opposition of August 2007 should be taken forward. In this respect, the Union supports the African Union's efforts to achieve a peaceful solution to the conflict.

Thus, the EU joins the appeals of the African Union and the United Nations who have both been very clear in their condemnations of the rebel attacks. We share with them the concerns related to the risks of further escalation of the conflict.

We are also worried because of the deterioration of the humanitarian situation. The increasing hostilities have namely amplified the humanitarian tragedy and added to the already huge number of refugees and displaced persons.

More than 160 people were wounded and about 1000 persons killed in the armed conflicts. Tens of thousands of refugees fled to the neighbouring Cameroun and Nigeria. As there are presently also over 250,000 refugees from the Sudanese region of Darfur in the eastern Chad, the humanitarian conditions are even graver and require the earliest possible deployment of the EUFOR Chad/CAR mission.

For the time being, the security situation following the fighting is improving and back to normal in N'Djamena and most of the country, except for the east. However, the 15-day state of emergency proclaimed on 15 February has been extended until mid-March. This is a source of concern on part of the EU, as the civil rights and media freedom have been limited in Chad.

The activities relating to the deployment of the EUFOR mission are being continued, after they were suspended. Operation Commander, General Nash, namely decided to suspend them following the rebel attacks in order to allow an assessment of the new political and security context.

The deployment was then resumed with no consequences for the overall timeframe for the operation. The Initial Operational Capability (IOC) is still planned to be achieved by mid-March.

This alarming situation demonstrated even more the relevance of the EUFOR and MINURCAT mandates. The deployment of the EUFOR Chad/CAR has underlined Union's commitment to contribute to the stabilisation of the region.

To achieve the set objectives, it requires in the first place: (i) the security provided by troops, and (ii) the willingness of the parties to dialogue and negotiate.

Thank you very much."

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/Speeches_Interviews/March/0312EP-Lenarcic-Chad.html

T **Chad**

- ▶ **Javier SOLANA, Haut Représentant de l'Union européenne pour la PESC, aux obsèques de l'Adjudant Gilles Polin, membre d'EUFOR Tchad/RCA, tué en action (12/03/2008)**

Le Haut Représentant Javier Solana a accompagné le Président de la République française et plusieurs membres du gouvernement français à une cérémonie à Bayonne, où les honneurs militaires ont été rendus à l'adjudant Gilles Polin, premier membre d'une opération européenne tué en action. Le Général Nash, commandant de l'opération a également assisté à la cérémonie.

Au nom de l'Union européenne, le HR a transmis un message de sympathie aux proches de l'adjudant Gilles Polin.

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/declarations/99378.pdf

T **Darfur**

- ▶ **European Commission: Louis Michel condemns renewed violence in Darfur as number of internally displaced reaches two and a half million** (13/03/2008)

Louis Michel, the European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid has strongly condemned the recent violence in the northern corridor of West Darfur that has forced thousands to flee their homes.

"The Darfur story is one of tragedy piled upon tragedy." said Commissioner Michel. "Every day, more lives are shattered in a vicious cycle of futile conflict. Our humanitarian aid helps to keep millions alive in this crisis zone and we are doing all we can to keep the aid flowing. But the operation is on a constant knife-edge while the fighting rages."

Commissioner Michel highlighted "the international legal duty of governments to protect their citizens" and called on the Sudanese authorities "to meet this obligation immediately." He continued: "It is imperative that all parties work together to let the UNAMID peacekeepers deploy speedily on the ground. With looming food shortages, the aid agencies must be given the space to relieve the suffering."

Around 80,000 people have been displaced since January. This has been due to renewed military operations in the northern corridor, an upsurge in banditry (mainly vehicle hijackings) across the province, inter-tribal clashes concentrated in South Darfur and overall mounting food insecurity.

After four years of conflict, the number of internally displaced people (IDPs) has reached 2.5 million. There are also 250,000 refugees from Darfur in Eastern Chad.

In Darfur, despite all the obstacles, an extraordinary relief effort has been mounted to sustain millions of people – IDPs, local villagers and nomads. But the humanitarian community faces enormous challenges in sustaining operations. The number of people in need is rising but access to them is diminishing as the environment becomes ever more hazardous.

The European Commission will step up its support for relief operations in Darfur. Since 2003, it has had a rolling programme of funding totalling €320 million, adapted to meet needs as they arise. €70 million was provided in 2007 and €85 million has been earmarked so far in 2008.

The focus will be on food aid, which already accounts for 60% of humanitarian action in the province, and on air transport, which is increasingly vital for agencies striving to reach the victims of a conflict in an area the size of France.

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/08/437&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

T **Democratic Republic of Congo**

- ▶ **Javier SOLANA, Haut Représentant de l'Union européenne pour la PESC, s'entretient avec le ministre de la défense de la République Démocratique du Congo** (11/03/2008)

Javier SOLANA, Haut Représentant de l'Union européenne pour la politique étrangère et de sécurité commune (PESC) a reçu M. Chikez Diemu, ministre congolais de la défense.

L'entretien, particulièrement utile, a permis de faire un point approfondi de la situation en RDC, et notamment du dossier, fondamental, de la réforme du secteur de sécurité.

Le Haut Représentant a, à cet égard, réitéré la disponibilité et la détermination de l'Union européenne à continuer à accompagner la RDC sur la voie des réformes de fond.

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/fr/declarations/99336.pdf

AMERICAS

I **Colombia**

- ▶ **President Pöttering calls for immediate release of hostages held in Columbia including Ingrid Betancourt** (12/03/2008)

Six years after the abduction of Ingrid Betancourt, more than 700 hostages are still being held by guerrilla organisations in Columbia. President of the European Parliament Hans-Gert PÖTTERING called for the immediate release of Ingrid Betancourt and her fellow hostages for humanitarian reasons.

Speaking on behalf of the European Parliament, President Pöttering expressed concern about the worrying state of health of many of the hostages and called for an international medical mission to be sent to Columbia immediately to address their medical needs.

The hostages, including French-Colombian Ingrid Betancourt, have been held captive by the left-wing Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrillas since February 2002.

In his speech President Pöttering also welcomed the endeavours being made by the Colombian President Alvaro URIBE to seek dialogue to try to find an agreement to release the hostages.

Marking the anniversary of the capture of the hostages, President Pöttering reiterated the European Parliament's solidarity with their families and highlighted that the eyes and thoughts of the international community and European Parliament are turned to the "human tragedy" of their situation.

The House responded with sustained applause.

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/015-23719-070-03-11-902-20080311IPR23708-10-03-2008-2008-false/default_en.htm

T **USA**

- ▶ **Minister Mate on the application of modern technologies in the surveillance of external borders** (12/03/2008)

Dragutin Mate, Slovenian Minister of the Interior and President of the Justice and Home Affairs Council, today chaired the Ministerial Conference* on the Challenges of the EU External Border Management at Brdo pri Kranju. At the conference, the ministers also discussed the third Commission Communication on the establishment of the European Border Surveillance System (EUROSUR). Minister Mate emphasised that "this is a decisive step towards the gradual introduction of a common European system for integrated border management. We discussed recommendations for

short- and medium-term objectives involving future border control technologies supported by scientific research.”

The ministers discussed the three phases that should lead to establishing a system for efficiently fighting illegal immigration and organised crime by 2013. The first phase, aimed at setting up national coordination centres, is already a reality in some Member States. The same is true as regards the application of high technology, such as satellites and unmanned aerial vehicles for border control. The aim of the third phase is to integrate all existing reporting and monitoring systems and create a common information-sharing environment, thus allowing border control authorities to utilise these various systems. Minister Mate said: “The discussion has shown that the Member States support the idea of carrying out a study regarding the key elements of EUROSUR.” The latter should include technical recommendations for national coordination centres and national centres for the surveillance of land and maritime borders, as well as systematic solutions for setting up a secured computerised communication network between the national coordination centres and the Frontex Agency. The Member States agreed that Frontex could play a crucial role in the development of EUROSUR by providing technical solutions. “Modern technology should be utilised by experienced agencies to assist them in responding adequately and in a timely manner to unauthorised external border crossings,” concluded Minister Mate.

In the last part of the conference, the ministers were joined by the Secretary of Homeland Security, Michael Chertoff, and Attorney General Michael B. Mukasey from the United States. The Secretary of Homeland Security presented the experience and views of the United States regarding border surveillance and management, as well as the related challenges they are facing. He presented the three basic elements of their border surveillance: preliminary acquisition of data from passengers intending to enter the United States, requirement to implement “safe” documents (i.e. biometric documents) and collection of biometric data on arrival in the United States. **The Attorney General Michael B. Mukasey emphasised that the operation of agencies in the United States would not be as effective without active cooperation between the European Union Member States and the United States, as the fight against terrorism and international crime is not possible without cooperation and solidarity between countries.** According to Minister Mate, the presentation by both American guests “contributed a great deal to the clarification of some unclear points, which is sure to have a positive effect on the discussions we will have tomorrow regarding the Visa Waiver Program and Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA).”

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/Press_Releases/March/0312JHA2.html

T **USA**

- ▶ **Ministers Mate and Šturm consult with U.S. representatives on Visa Waiver Program, border security, Western Balkans and mutual legal assistance agreements (14/03/2008)**

The presidents of the Justice and Home Affairs Council, Dr Lovro Šturm, Slovenian Minister of Justice, and Dragutin Mate, Slovenian Minister of the Interior, chaired the justice and home affairs ministerial Troika meeting with representatives of the United States of America today. Besides the two ministers, the EU was represented by Franco Frattini, Vice-President of the European Commission and Commissioner responsible for justice, freedom and security, and Brice Hortefeux, French Minister of Immigration, Integration, National Identity and Co-development, as a representative of the next presidency. The American delegation was led by Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff and Attorney General Michael B. Mukasey.

Minister Mate said: **“Today we hosted a very important meeting between the European Union and representatives of the United States, during which we discussed, among other topics, the issue of visa reciprocity and the reform of the U.S. Visa Waiver Program (VWP). Our goal is for all EU**

Member States to be included in this programme as soon as possible, so that all EU citizens can travel to the United States without a visa, just like U.S. citizens, who do not require a visa for any of the EU Member States. In negotiating with the United States, Member States must take into account common guidelines, for they draw the line between EU competences and national competences, which should be respected by both sides. The United States' decision to conduct bilateral negotiations with Member States, including the elements that are exclusively within the competence of the Community, was an issue of collective concern for the EU. The Commission has performed an analysis of competences, prepared a proposal for a mandate for negotiations with the United States and submitted it to the Council for adoption. According to Minister Mate, "Cooperation will be required in searching for the best solution, which will satisfy the requirements of new U.S. legislation and will be in accordance with EU law." The presidency suggested that it could engage, together with the Commission, in exploratory talks with the United States on the shape and content of the electronic system of travel authorisation (ESTA).

As for border security and migration, the conclusions of yesterday's ministerial conference on the challenges of the EU external border management were presented. Proposed measures in relation to the Frontex agency were put forth, along with the use of new technologies and the positive stance adopted towards the introduction of the entry-exit system, personal data protection, support for the European Border Surveillance System project, and a study to analyse the feasibility of an electronic system of travel authorisation. The newly begun dialogue on the conditions for fully lifting the visa regime with Serbia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania was presented.

In the area of justice, Dr Lovro Šturm presented to the American side the ratification procedure of the agreements on mutual legal assistance and extradition in the Member States. The agreements were signed on 25 June 2003, but have not yet been ratified by the United States or all EU Member States. "The Member States have indicated that the procedure for the entry into force of the agreements will be completed by the end of this year. We hope that the entry into force of these agreements will bring progress to mutual cooperation between the EU and United States in criminal matters, thus opening a new chapter of good cross-Atlantic cooperation," Minister Šturm said. The extradition agreement defines the criminal offences that can result in extradition and makes possible the temporary surrender of a person so that criminal proceedings can take place in the country to which the person is surrendered. It also enables a procedure of simplified extradition, provided the person concerned agrees. The agreement on mutual legal assistance governs the transmission of data on bank accounts and transactions, the possibility of establishing joint investigative groups and the use of modern telecommunications between the responsible bodies. It was agreed that Eurojust would organise a meeting of experts from the United States and EU Member States, with the purpose of effectively implementing the agreements and exchanging experience.

The ministers also discussed cooperation between police forces and other law enforcement agencies in the Western Balkans. In Minister Mate's words, "The exchange of information in the fight against organised crime in the Western Balkans has been a priority of both the EU and Western Balkan countries for several years. The Slovenian Presidency is convinced that the security situation in the Western Balkans affects security in the EU. For this reason the Slovenian Presidency is devoting great attention to enhancing security in that area, which is reflected in our proposal that a regional threat assessment for the Western Balkans should be drawn up to help these countries recognise common priorities in the fight against organised crime in the region." The cooperation should focus on improving data exchange and on gradual transfer of good practices from the EU to the Western Balkan region.

The ministers also discussed preventive measures against terrorist recruitment and radicalisation. They agreed that there was a need to set up preventive mechanisms to deter the development and spread of terrorism. Recruitment and radicalisation are among the basic aspects of international terrorism. The EU and United States consider terrorism as one of the priority security challenges, especially in international

cooperation. The participants also touched on the European Commission's measures to reduce the risk of distribution of chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear substances. The basic areas the European Union will focus on in the future are: prevention and protection, strengthening analytical capacities and security issues as regards biological research, improving control standards and eliminating harmful consequences.

At the close of the meeting, the French delegation will present the priorities of their Presidency of the EU Council, which starts on 1 July 2008.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/Press_Releases/March/0313JHA_EU_ZDA.html

ASIA

I Afghanistan

- ▶ **Javier SOLANA, EU High Representative for the CFSP, congratulates Kai EIDE on his appointment as Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Afghanistan (11/03/2008)**

Javier SOLANA, EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) made today the following comments on the appointment of Kai EIDE as Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Afghanistan:

"I welcome the appointment of Kai Eide as the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, Mr Eide will face a mountainous task in a place where considerable challenges remain. In the past, he has showed leadership to solve difficult problems and I am convinced he will success in his new task. The EU will closely cooperate with him."

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/declarations/99277.pdf

T Afghanistan

- ▶ **Resolution adopted at the end of this week's Strasbourg session: Death sentence on Afghan journalist Perwiz Kambakhsh (13/03/2008)**

Perwiz Kambakhsh, a journalist in Afghanistan, is under a death sentence for circulating an article on women's rights in Islam. The European Parliament, reaffirming its opposition to the death penalty in general, calls for his execution to be prevented and also for the Afghan government to improve its judicial system and comply with the Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

On 22 January 2008 a regional court in northern Afghanistan sentenced 23-year-old Mr Kambakhsh to death for circulating an article about women's rights in Islam which he had downloaded from the internet. The judges ruled that the article constituted 'blasphemy' and sentenced Mr Kambakhsh to death.

Mr Kambakhsh was denied legal representation, sentenced without a proper hearing, allegedly beaten and threatened with execution until he signed a confession.

The resolution notes that journalists in Afghanistan, especially women, are increasingly faced with

intimidation, death threats, abduction and violence, even though Afghanistan's Constitution clearly defends the right to freedom of expression.

EP's total opposition to death penalty

Parliament "reaffirms its unconditional opposition to the death penalty". It notes that the death sentence against Perwiz Kambakhsh comes despite the UN General Assembly's call for a worldwide moratorium on the death penalty and at a time when a total of 135 countries have abolished the death penalty.

The resolution condemns Mr Kambakhsh's arrest and calls for him to be released. It also calls on the Afghan authorities to prevent his execution and on President Karzai, if the court of appeal upholds the death sentence, to pardon him.

In addition, MEPs call on the President and Parliament of Afghanistan "to speed up the development of a functional penal and judicial system based on international standards" and they welcome the announcement by the EU External Relations Commissioner of immediate financial support to help Afghanistan strengthen the rule of law and reform its judiciary.

Lastly, the resolution calls on the Afghan Government "to fully respect the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to ensure that freedom of expression is fully guaranteed and upheld for all citizens in Afghanistan".

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/015-23877-070-03-11-902-20080312IPR23867-10-03-2008-2008-false/default_en.htm

T **Nepal**

► **EU deploys Election Observation Mission to Nepal** (14/03/2008)

The European Commission will deploy a 110-member EU Election Observation Mission (EOM) for the elections for a Constituent Assembly in Nepal scheduled to take place on 10 April 2008. The mission will be led by Jan Mulder, Member of the European Parliament, who will officially launch the EU EOM in Kathmandu on 18th March 2008. The mission will consist of forty long-term and over sixty short-term observers in addition to a core team of ten experts. The mission will stay in Nepal for an over-all period of ten weeks. Once elected, the Constituent Assembly will draft a new constitution and so determine Nepal's future form of Government.

Benita Ferrero-Waldner, Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy, said: "The elections for the Constituent Assembly are a cornerstone in the peace process in Nepal. The Constituent Assembly will provide the Nepalese population with a forum for further democratic reform of society. Transparent and peaceful elections are of crucial importance at this stage for Nepal. We are committed to support an inclusive democracy in Nepal, and the deployment of an EU Election Observation Mission is a clear signal of our active support and commitment to transparent elections, democratic reform and sustainable peace in Nepal."

The decision to hold elections for a Constituent Assembly is part of the Comprehensive peace agreement signed in November 2006 between the seven-party governing alliance and the Communist Party of Nepal – Maoist (CPN). The peace agreement put an end to a 10-year period of violent conflict in the country, integrating the Maoists into the Parliament and Government of Nepal.

The elections were initially foreseen for June 2007 but had to be postponed due to civilian and political unrest in the country, which has hit in particular the Terai region since early 2007. These tensions underlined the need for enhanced political inclusion in Nepal. The political agreement of 28 February 2008 between the governing parties of Nepal and the United Madhesi Democratic Front could be the starting point for a more inclusive process including peaceful elections and the consecutive democratic reforms.

The Election Observation Mission will consist of a Core Team of 10 experts including the Chief Observer to co-ordinate the assessment of the entire election process. 40 Long Term Observers (LTOs) will be deployed as of 22 March, in order to assess the campaign period, the pre-election preparations around the country and to observe voting, counting and the tabulation of results. Given the expected intensive post-electoral period, the LTOs will remain in the country until 1 May. In addition, over 60 Short-Term Observers (STOs) will be deployed in the main parts of Nepal around election day.

EU Election Observation Missions are an important instrument for building confidence in the democratic processes of a country and are deployed in line with the EU's commitment to promote democracy, human rights and respect for the rule of law. The EU has made available €2.9 million from the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) for this mission.

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/08/446&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

EUROPE (OUTSIDE OF UE) AND CIS

I **Albania**

► **EU-Albania Troika meets on the margins of the GAERC meeting** (11/03/2008)

Representatives of the EU and Albania met today on the margins of the General Affairs and External Relations Council. The EU-Albania Troika meeting focused on relations between the EU and Albania in relation to the Stabilisation and Association Process, as well as in the context of regional cooperation. The Troika also discussed political developments in the Western Balkans and the current situation in Albania.

The meeting was chaired by the Secretary-General of the Council of the European Union and High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana. The Slovenian EU Council Presidency was represented by the State Secretary at the Foreign Affairs Ministry, Matjaž Šinkovec, while Albania was represented by its Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lulzim Basha. The meeting was also attended by representatives of the European Commission and the forthcoming French EU Council Presidency.

Matjaž Šinkovec emphasised the Slovenian Presidency's particular commitment to the European perspective for all of the Western Balkans, in line with the Thessaloniki Declaration. "We attach great importance to all the political and economic developments within Albania, and within each of the other countries of the region," said the Slovenian State Secretary, stressing that only practical developments can help the Presidency, and the EU as a whole, move forward together with Albania towards making that common future a reality.

Among the areas where Albania can make substantial progress, Mr Šinkovec mentioned electoral reform, strengthening the rule of law, and reform of the judiciary. He also welcomed the Albanian Government's

commitment to combating corruption and organised crime and its efforts to ease living conditions for the average citizen by tackling the major issue of day-to-day energy shortages.

The participants at today's Troika meeting also discussed the situation in the Western Balkans region, including the political developments following Kosovo's declaration of independence. They underlined that regional cooperation is fundamental for the region as a way to speed up democratic and economic development. In this respect, the newly established Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), the successor to the Stability Pact, can be an important tool. The EU representatives encouraged Albania to become actively involved in cooperation within the RCC.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/Press_Releases/March/0311EU_ALBANIA.htm

T **Armenia**

► **EU Presidency Statement on the Situation in Armenia** (12/03/2008)

The Presidency of the EU is concerned about the situation in Armenia, and calls on the Armenian authorities to lift the State of Emergency. The Presidency is particularly concerned about reports of continuing arrests.

The Presidency welcomes the positive decision of the Armenian authorities to lift two provisions of the declaration of the State of Emergency on the activities of political parties and NGOs, and the announcement that the lifting of the restrictions on the media is being considered.

The Presidency calls again upon the Armenian authorities to release citizens detained in connection with their political activities and to refrain from further arrests of opposition leaders.

The Presidency reiterates its recommendation to conduct an independent investigation of the events of 1 March and what led to them. It welcomes the statement of the Human Rights Defender of the Republic of Armenia on the events of 1 March and calls upon the Armenian authorities to respond.

The Presidency calls on both the Armenian authorities and opposition leaders to take all necessary steps to reduce tensions, and to refrain from any action that could exacerbate the current situation.

The Presidency reiterates its call to all political parties to engage faithfully in political dialogue based on mutual understanding and trust, which is the only way to arrive at a political solution to the present situation.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/CFSP_Statements/March/0312MZZarmenia.html

T **Armenia**

► **Resolution adopted at the end of this week's Strasbourg session: Violence following the elections in Armenia** (13/03/2008)

In the wake of the presidential elections in Armenia on 19 February, a police crackdown against opposition supporters who were peacefully contesting the results left eight dead and dozens injured. A state of emergency was declared on 1 March and media freedom has been restricted. Parliament's resolution, adopted by 60 votes to 1 with 2 abstentions, deplores the loss of life, urges all parties to act responsibly and calls on the authorities to investigate the violence and take other measures.

The International Election Observation Mission stated that the elections were "administered mostly in line with OSCE and Council of Europe commitments and standards" but also identified a number of concerns, in particular concerning the media's commitment to providing impartial information.

In the resolution, Parliament "expresses its concern at recent developments in Armenia" and "calls on all parties to show openness and restraint, to tone down statements and to engage in a constructive and fruitful dialogue aimed at supporting and consolidating the country's democratic institutions".

Call for inquiry, with punishment for perpetrators of violence

It also calls "for a prompt, thorough, transparent, independent and impartial investigation of the events of 1 March" and "for all those responsible to be brought to justice and punished for misconduct and criminal acts of violence". The Council and Commission should offer EU assistance to help with the investigation.

The Armenian authorities are asked to lift the state of emergency, restore media freedom and take all measures necessary to ensure a return to normalcy. In addition, they are urged "to release citizens detained for exercising their right of peaceful assembly".

EU support for Armenia to improve democracy and rule of law

Parliament points out that the EU's Action Plan with Armenia under the European Neighbourhood Policy covers the strengthening of democratic structures and the rule of law. In this context, it urges the Commission "to focus its assistance to Armenia on the independence of the judiciary and the training of police and security forces" and calls on the Armenian authorities "to implement swiftly all the remaining recommendations made by the International Election Observation Mission".

MEPs urge the Armenian authorities "to cooperate fully with the international community on finding an agreed solution" and they express support for the EU Special Representative to the South Caucasus and the OSCE's Special Envoy.

Turning to Armenia's conflict with neighbouring Azerbaijan over the status of Nagorno-Karabakh, the resolution "deplores the recent loss of life on the 'line of control' during fighting between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces" and "calls on all sides to refrain from further violence and to return to the negotiating table".

Lastly, MEPs reiterate "the clear EU commitment to building closer ties with Armenia and the South Caucasus countries" but emphasise that "closer cooperation with the European Union must be based on real and tangible progress and reforms and a full commitment to democracy and the rule of law".

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/015-23877-070-03-11-902-20080312IPR23867-10-03-2008-2008-false/default_en.htm

T **Kosovo**

- ▶ Yves de KERMABON, Head of EULEX Kosovo, to visit Kosovo 12-15 March 2008
(12/03/2008)

Yves de KERMABON, Head of EULEX Kosovo, will visit Kosovo 12-15 March 2008. During his trip, Mr de Kermabon will meet President Fatmir SEJDIU and Prime Minister Hashim THACI along with other Kosovo officials and representatives of the Rule of Law institutions.

The visit will provide an opportunity to discuss the latest developments in Kosovo and for Mr de Kermabon to coordinate with his future counterparts.

Reminder:

On 16 February 2008 the EU Council decided to launch the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo-“EULEX Kosovo”. The Political and Security Committee decided on 7 February 2008 to appoint Yves de Kermabon as Head of the EULEX Kosovo mission.

EULEX Kosovo will only become operational after a foreseen build-up period of approximately 120 days. The EULEX mission is being built up to be ready to support the Kosovo authorities in their efforts to build a sustainable and functional Rule of Law system.

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/esdp/99350.pdf

T **Kosovo**

- ▶ **EU Presidency statement on the situation in Kosovo** (14/03/2008)

The EU Presidency strongly condemns the attacks on and the seizure of the court in Northern Mitrovica. **No one benefits from the use of violence and from the attacks on the rule of law institutions in Kosovo. We especially stress that the safety of the civilian population should remain untouched.**

The Presidency insists on the full respect of UN SCR 1244 and full respect of the UNMIK mandate throughout the territory of Kosovo. The Presidency again calls on Serbia to respect repeatedly expressed commitments to refrain from any activities or statements which might endanger the security situation.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/CFSP_Statements/March/0314MZZ_Kosovo.html

T **Russia**

- ▶ **Resolution adopted at the end of this week's Strasbourg session: Police clampdown on opposition protests in Russia** (13/03/2008)

In a resolution on Russia, MEPs condemn the use of force by the police against demonstrators protesting after the presidential elections held on 2 March, which were won by Dmitry Medvedev, and urge the Russian authorities to observe democratic values and the rule of law.

According to the resolution, democracy has been weakened in Russia through measures such as government control of the media and new restrictions on the right to organise public demonstrations. Increased pressure was put on the media, opposition groups and non-governmental organisations in the run-up to the elections.

On 3 March 2008 ‘Other Russia’, a coalition of opposition parties, organised a ‘March of Dissent’ to protest against the elections. The authorities refused to authorise the protest but ‘Other Russia’ decided to go ahead with the march. Several protesters were arrested as riot police and militias wearing helmets and carrying riot shields crushed the rally in Turgenevskaya Square in central Moscow, and opposition leaders were detained.

Use of force against demonstrators condemned

In its resolution, the European Parliament "condemns the disproportionate use of force by police and riot police and militias against the demonstrators on 3 March 2008 in Moscow, and calls on the authorities to investigate the incidents and to bring those responsible to justice".

It also "calls for the immediate release of all those demonstrators who are still detained". In addition, it deplores the "illegal" treatment of opposition candidates" and "regrets the failure to use the recent election to strengthen democracy and the rule of law in Russia".

MEPs also regret that the Russian authorities regarded the intended monitoring mission of the OSCE/ODIR as an intrusion into internal affairs. The resolution voices "strong support for the important work of these missions" and "reminds Russia of its commitments and responsibilities as a member of the OSCE and of the Council of Europe, including the right of association and the right to peaceful demonstrations".

A test for President Medvedev's commitment to the rule of law?

Parliament does welcome the stated commitment by the newly elected President of Russia to guarantee the rule of law and democracy. In this context, it calls on him to review the treatment of imprisoned public figures (among them Mihail Khodorkovsky and Platon Lebedev), "whose imprisonment has been assessed by most observers as having been politically motivated".

It also urges the Council and Member States to make Russia's full compliance with judgments of the European Court of Human Rights a key priority at all levels of dialogue with Russia.

Lastly, the EP calls on the new Russian president and government to create together with the European Union "the necessary conditions for a rapid start of the negotiations on a new Partnership and Cooperation Agreement". But it again stresses that "the rule of law, democracy and human rights must be an important part of any future agreement".

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/015-23877-070-03-11-902-20080312IPR23867-10-03-2008-2008-false/default_en.htm

T **Ukraine**

► **Minister Rupel heads EU-Ukraine Cooperation Council** (11/03/2008)

Today in Brussels, the current President of the EU General Affairs and External Relations Council, Slovenian Foreign Minister Dr Dimitrij Rupel, chaired the EU-Ukraine Cooperation Council; the Ukrainian delegation was headed by Prime Minister Julia Tymoshenko. The two delegations discussed cooperation between the European Union and Ukraine and exchanged their views on burning political issues.

The current President of the EU General Affairs and External Relations Council, Dr Dimitrij Rupel, welcomed the progress Ukraine has made in the transition towards pluralist democracy. He outlined the importance of the transition process which should be based on the principles of the rule of law and respect for human rights. Among other important factors, transparent political and economic processes and the freedom of the media were mentioned. Minister Rupel also noted that an appropriate constitutional system with an independent constitutional court should be set up and highlighted the beneficial assistance of the Venice Commission. The Slovenian Foreign Minister, Dr Rupel, stressed in particular the importance of combating corruption and ensuring the independence, impartiality and effectiveness of the judiciary; in this context he expressed concerns about occurrences incited by racism and anti-Semitism.

Minister Rupel also encouraged Ukraine to undertake reforms which would enable the ratification of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and urged the country to ratify the Convention of the Council of Europe for the Protection of Individuals with regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data. At the meeting, some specific issues were also touched upon, among them energy, nuclear safety, transport, the environment, health, the judiciary, freedom and security; the delegations later initiated talks on the negotiations concerning the new extended agreement between the European Union and Ukraine, discussed in particular, during the meeting, by the representatives of the Secretariat and the Commission.

As regards general political issues, Minister Rupel focused exhaustively on the situation in Kosovo and explained the positions of the European Council on this issue. He also gave an assessment of the recent presidential elections in Russia and the prospects for the development of cooperation between the European Union and Russia.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/Press_Releases/March/0311MZZukrajina.html

T **Ukraine**

- ▶ **Javier SOLANA, EU High Representative for the CFSP, today met Ukrainian President Viktor YUSHCHENKO (13/03/2008)**

Javier SOLANA, European Union High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), today met Viktor YUSHCHENKO, the President of Ukraine.

The meeting provided an opportunity to discuss the latest developments in Ukraine as well as EU-Ukraine relations.

Mr Solana stressed that political stability was crucial for Ukraine. In this context, he underlined the need for Ukraine's political leaders to work constructively and join efforts in order to carry out the necessary reforms. He recalled that the EU had always supported Ukraine and would continue to do so.

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/discours/99377.pdf

MAGHREB AND MIDDLE EAST

I **Middle East**

- ▶ **Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on the Middle East (14/03/2008)**

Middle East Peace Process

1. The European Council expresses its full support for the Annapolis process and its commitment to support the parties in their negotiations with a view to achieve a two-state solution. A just and sustainable solution to all aspects of the Middle East Peace Process can only be achieved through negotiation. Despite the difficulties that the process has recently experienced, the European Council welcomes the intention of the parties to resume their negotiations and looks forward to an early meeting of Quartet principals.

2. The European Council is deeply concerned about the recent violence in Gaza and southern Israel, especially the civilian casualties. It condemns in the strongest terms the terrorist attack on a seminary in

Jerusalem on 6 March and the continued rocket attacks. While recognizing Israel's legitimate right to self defence, the European Council calls for an immediate end to all acts of violence.

3. The European Council stresses the need for swift and tangible results on the ground in order to sustain negotiations. Action from both sides to implement their Roadmap obligations is vital in order to retain the confidence and support of the Israeli and Palestinian populations, the region and the wider international community. The European Council is deeply concerned about the recent Israeli announcement to extend the settlement of Givat Ze'ev. The EU reiterates that settlement building anywhere in the occupied Palestinian Territories, including East Jerusalem, is illegal under international law. Settlement activity prejudices the outcome of final status negotiations and threatens the viability of an agreed two-state solution. The European Council therefore urges Israel to take immediate action in particular on settlements and outposts. It calls on the Palestinian Authority to make further efforts to implement its obligations with regard to security, where needed in cooperation with the Israeli authorities. In this regard the EU remains ready to strengthen and extend its EUPOL COPPS mission in order to support the reinforcement and reform of the Palestinian security forces.

4. The European Council considers that the violent confrontations in and around Gaza have serious security implications. The European Council is deeply concerned by the unsustainable humanitarian situation in Gaza and calls for the controlled and sustained reopening of all crossings in and out of Gaza for both humanitarian reasons and commercial flows. While reconfirming in this context the Council Conclusions of January 2008, it extends its full support to efforts to facilitate a peaceful solution to the present crisis. This solution should provide for a lasting period of quiet. The European Council reiterates its readiness to resume its monitoring mission at Rafah according to the Access and Movement agreement of November 2005.

5. The European Council recalls its commitment at the International Donors' Conference for the Palestinian State last December in Paris to support efforts to build the future Palestinian State in accordance with the Palestinian Reform and Development Plan. For its implementation it calls for Israeli cooperation. The European Council expresses its full support to the upcoming International Conferences on Investments and economic revival in Bethlehem and in Support of Palestinian Civil Police and Rule of Law in Berlin.

Lebanon

6. The European Council continues to stand by its strong support for the Government and institutions of Lebanon in carrying out their missions in order to preserve Lebanon's stability, sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. The Council expresses concern about the ongoing political deadlock in Lebanon and deterioration of the security situation.

7. The European Council reiterates its strong support for the plan unanimously adopted by the Arab foreign ministers in seeking to broker a resolution to the political crisis and commends the continued efforts by the Arab League Secretary General, Amr Moussa. It urges the parties in Lebanon to proceed, as a first step to the immediate holding of the Presidential election prior to the Arab Summit. The success of the plan requires all actors to play a constructive role. The European Council recalls that SGHR Solana has been designated to spearhead the EU efforts with Arab countries in this respect.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/CFSP_Statements/March/0314MZZbv.html

Iran

- ▶ **Resolution adopted at the end of this week's Strasbourg session: The plight of Mehdi Kazemi** (13/03/2008)

MEPs demand that a solution be found to the situation of Mehdi Kazemi, a 19-year-old gay Iranian citizen, who faces the prospect of deportation from Europe back to Iran, where he could be tortured and even executed because of his sexual orientation.

Mehdi Kazemi requested asylum in the United Kingdom but had his application turned down. Fearing deportation, he fled to the Netherlands, where he also applied for asylum. The Dutch authorities, after examining his request, have decided to send him back to Britain because, under EU rules (the Dublin Regulation), asylum applications must be processed in the first EU country in which the applicant made an application. It is feared the UK will simply deport him to Iran.

A solution for Mehdi Kazemi...

The resolution, adopted by 46 votes to 2 with 12 abstentions, points out that the Iranian authorities "routinely detain, torture and execute persons, notably homosexuals" and that "Mehdi's partner has already been executed, while his father has threatened him with death".

It adds that "the EU and its Member States cannot apply European and national laws and procedures in a way which results in the expulsion of persons to a third country where they would risk persecution, torture and death, as this would amount to a violation of European and international human rights obligations". And they stress that the EU directive on qualifying criteria for refugee status (the Qualifications Directive) "recognises persecution for sexual orientation as a ground for granting asylum".

In this particular case, therefore, Parliament "appeals to the Member States involved to find a common solution to ensure that Mehdi Kazemi is granted asylum or protection on EU soil and not sent back to Iran".

...and for others in future

More broadly, MEPs argue that "more attention should be devoted to the proper application of EU asylum law in Member States as regards sexual orientation".

They invoke the European Convention on Human Rights, which prohibits the removal of persons to countries where there is a serious risk that they would face the death penalty, torture or other inhuman treatment, as well as the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the Geneva Convention.

Parliament also asks EU institutions and Member States to take action to prevent similar situations in the future, while acknowledging that the Commission has announced, for 2008, amendments to the Dublin Regulation and the Qualifications Directive which will address the issues raised in this resolution.

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/015-23877-070-03-11-902-20080312IPR23867-10-03-2008-2008-false/default_en.htm

T Iran

- ▶ **EU Presidency Statement on the conduct of parliamentary elections in Iran** (15/03/2008)

The Presidency closely followed the events in the run-up to the recent parliamentary elections in Iran. It expresses its deep concern that election procedures in the Islamic Republic of Iran have fallen below the international standards and that the electoral process did not allow for truly competitive elections. In this

regard it expresses its deep regret and disappointment that over a third of prospective candidates were prevented from standing in this year's parliamentary elections. These exclusions prevented the Iranian people from being able to choose freely amongst the full range of political views in their country and represent a clear violation of the international norms. As a result, the election was neither fair nor free.

The Presidency calls on the new Majlis to adhere to the rule of law based on democratic principles. It calls on Iran to honour its international obligations in this regard, including those under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Iran should make a commitment that in future elections the Iranian people will be able to choose from the full range of candidates. The Iranian people deserve a genuine democratic choice about the future of their country.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/CFSP_Statements/March/0315MZZ_Iran.html

T **Iraq**

- ▶ **EP: Meps debate on Irak ans what the EU should do about it** (12/03/2008)

The situation in Iraq and what the European Union can do for the country and its long suffering people comes under the spotlight Wednesday. The EP debate will centre on a report by Portuguese Socialist Ana Gomes. In a press conference Tuesday, she said her report lays out ways to "build a democratic Iraq that is stable, unified and will respect human rights".

In preparing her report Ms Gomes travelled to Iraq to see the difficulties on the ground for herself. She wants a new strategy "different in qualitative and quantitative terms" to help Iraq. The Portuguese MEP also stressed the need for international engagement in the country. "We have a legal and moral duty to care about Iraq becoming the federal democratic state Iraqis have in their Constitution," she told the press conference.

Ms Gomes went on to say that "it is not about giving more money, it is about helping them to spend the money properly". She added, "Iraqis are very keen to have Europeans engaged with them."

She underlined the "central" role the European Parliament could play by supporting fellow MPs in Iraq's national parliament "in strengthening the monitoring role of the executive in the legislative process".

The report was adopted with an overwhelming majority by Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee. However, it is not clear that consensus will be repeated in Plenary. The report will be voted on Thursday.

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/public/story_page/030-23388-168-06-25-903-20080307STO23295-2008-16-06-2008/default_en.htm

T **Iraq**

- ▶ **EP: Support democratic governance in Iraq, and increase EU presence on the ground, say MEPs** (13/03/2008)

The Council should become more actively engaged in assistance to Iraq and also improve the transparency of its aid to the country, says a report by Ana Gomes (PES, PT) on the EU's role in Iraq adopted with 506 votes in favour, 25 against and 26 abstentions. It calls on the Council to "step up the quantity, but especially the quality, of EU support for UN efforts to build a safe, stable, unified, prosperous and democratic Iraq."

The report urges the Council to concentrate the EU's support for democratic governance towards three goals in particular: "enhancing coordination between the Government and the Council of Representatives," "strengthening electoral procedures at the local level," and "reinforcing local democracy." It also asks it to "urge the Commission to alleviate the plight of Iraqi refugees in Jordan and Syria and in other countries in the region" and to "improve the possibilities for Iraqi refugees to find refuge in EU Member States through resettlement programmes agreed with the UNHCR (25,000 cases) or through individual asylum requests."

Speaking in the debate in Strasbourg, Baroness Emma Nicholson of Winterbourne (South East, Liberal Democrat, UK), on behalf of the ALDE Group said: "Iraq today has a true parliament and a wholly secular constitution. Iraq is one of the very few nations in this region to have a democracy – a secular democracy – despite its flaws. We therefore must do all we can to help the Iraqis strengthen the democratic process. I believe strengthening ties between our respective parliaments is one of the key ways in which we can assist. I am most honoured to be the new chairman of the delegation that the Conference of Presidents has recently created."

Caroline Lucas, (Greens/EFA, South East, UK) said: "The report before us welcomes Iraq's observer status at the WTO as a key step towards driving Iraq's integration in the international economy and it looks forward to the EU-Iraq trade and cooperation agreement. I just want to make sure that Iraq has sufficiently built up its own capacities for negotiation and evaluation. Otherwise we risk that country becoming once again prey to outside interests."

Transparency of EU funding

The European Parliament also asks the Council to "urge the Commission to ensure the transparency and efficiency of EU assistance for Iraq" by operating on the ground wherever possible, and by ensuring that "substantive EU assistance is directed towards improving public finance management and budgetary control, with the aim of ensuring that the Iraqi government is better able to disburse the substantial and increasing public funds now available to it." It also encourages the use of the "European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) in providing technical and financial assistance to civil society organisations," especially with the view to improving the rights of women, children and minorities, and fighting against torture and the death penalty.

Security questions

The report repeats a long-standing demand of the Parliament (which is also expressed in a separate resolution on the topic voted on the same day) to make "the EU Code of Conduct on Arms Exports legally binding." It also urges the Council to improve "EUFOR Althea's oversight of stockpiles in Bosnia-Herzegovina, by accelerating the destruction of stockpiles in the Balkans, and by helping the Iraqi authorities to 'mop up' surplus SALW [Small Arms and Light Weapons] through a large-scale disarmament, demobilisation and integration."

MEPs call for engagement in "a dialogue with the USA" to seek "enhanced multilateralisation of the role played by the international community in the country, by using the UN framework." They also call on the "Multi-National Force - Iraq (MNF-I) to engage with the Government of Iraq and account for the situation of the over 24 000 detainees held in MNF-I custody, so as to ensure respect for due process and their basic human rights." MEPs also demand "clear guidelines for the use of private military and security companies by EU institutions," and "urge Turkey to respect the territorial integrity of Iraq and not react to terrorist actions through military actions on Iraqi territory."

EU-Iraq relations

MEPs call on the Council to "foster the renewal of bilateral political, diplomatic, cultural and economic relations and exchanges between Member States and Iraq," for instance by enlarging the financial envelope

of the Erasmus Mundus programme for Iraq. Members also called for increasing "the size, responsibilities and resources of the Commission's delegation in Baghdad."

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/030-23870-070-03-11-903-20080312IPR23860-10-03-2008-2008-false/default_en.htm

THEMATIC :

FINANCIAL PERSPECTIVES

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

EXTERNAL RELATIONS & DEVELOPMENT-RELATED ISSUES

EU / UN REFORM

Celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the European Parliament

- ▶ **Address by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia and the President of the European Council Janez Janša at the Plenary Session of the European Parliament on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the European Parliament (12/03/2008)**

“Mr President of the European Parliament,

Mr President of the European Commission,

Distinguished Presidents and Representatives of National Parliaments,

Distinguished Members of the European Parliament,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

“Ce n’est pas sans émotion que je prends la parole...” These are the words spoken by Robert Schuman, the first President of the European Parliamentary Assembly, on 19 March 1958 when he addressed this distinguished gathering for the first time. Fifty years on, on the occasion of this important anniversary, we share the same feeling. Here, I am not addressing only 142 national parliamentarians, but as many as 785 directly elected Members of the European Parliament. Taking a look at the path travelled and at the flourishing of European democracy over the past half century can indeed fill us with pride and a feeling of gratitude to the founding fathers responsible for the European idea. It also, at the same time, confers on us the duty to contribute, as best we can, to the continuation of the European story of peace, cooperation and prosperity.

Let us look back to the year 1958 – a society faced with the aftermath of two devastating wars, a world dominated by a bipolar, two-way trial of strength between West and East, the age of the Cold War, the Cuban Revolution, the first computer chip, the nuclear tests and the launching into orbit of the first satellites. At that time, the six Member States of the European Communities brought together 168 million Europeans, healed the wounds of the war, made economic progress and, together with the Euro-Atlantic alliance, safeguarded an area of freedom and democracy. In the meantime, most of the remaining part of Europe, regrettably, existed in a totalitarian environment, stagnating or even lagging behind in terms of economy and civilisation.

An entirely different image presents itself in 2008: a multipolar world, which is not just about economic or political competition but, increasingly, also about cooperation in seeking answers to the challenges we currently face. The elimination of the borders that once divided Europe – from the Berlin Wall, the iron

curtain to internal border checks – will continue at the end of this month with the elimination of air borders within the expanded Schengen area. Today, the EU covers a surface area more than three times the size of the initial Community fifty years ago; it has three times more inhabitants, twenty-three official languages, a strengthened internal market and a common currency; its inhabitants live, on average, eight years longer. Twenty-seven Heads of State and Government, more than a third of whom were living under totalitarian regimes less than twenty years ago, will be taking decisions tomorrow around the same table. Practically all of wider Europe now also lives in freedom and democracy. This is an achievement worth embracing and celebrating.

I. European Parliament – a mirror of, and vehicle for, democratic change

The existence and the operation of the European Parliament from 1958 until the present day is a direct reflection of the progress achieved in the process of integration over the past fifty years. From fulfilling a consultative role at the beginning, you acquired initial powers in the area of the Community budget in the early 1970s and, at the end of the 1970s, the first direct elections were held. The new Treaties brought strengthened powers with regard to the adoption of legislation and the appointment of the top European political representatives. The European Commission as it is now cannot exist without your confidence.

In the same way that the Treaties of Rome brought new responsibilities to the Parliamentary Assembly in 1958, the Lisbon Treaty fifty years on signifies a major step forward for the European Parliament: the co-decision procedure will be extended to almost all European policy areas and Parliament's role will be enhanced in democratic supervision, concluding international treaties and appointing the top European representatives.

It gives me great pleasure to note that you approved the Report on the Lisbon Reform Treaty with such an overwhelming majority at the plenary session last month. I would also like to congratulate all the Member States who have already successfully completed their ratification procedures; I indeed hope that the remaining ones will soon follow suit.

II. The Lisbon Treaty as the EU's response to global challenges

If the first fifty years of the EU have been dedicated to the European agenda – to our own political and economic development and reform – the next fifty years will most certainly also bring the global agenda to the forefront of our attention. The list of subjects for tomorrow's European Council clearly testifies to this. It is perfectly clear that we shall not provide appropriate answers to the "Lisbon" challenges, energy and climate change issues and turmoil on the financial markets unless we also take global trends and global stakeholders into consideration and include them all in our activities.

This also applies to the fields of human rights and intercultural dialogue, in which you, the Members of the European Parliament, undoubtedly have a leading role. On behalf of the European Council, I would like to take this opportunity to commend you for the active role you have played in drawing attention to violations of human rights, in monitoring elections and in deploying your delegations within international institutions such as the UN Human Rights Council. Through the joint parliamentary assemblies you also play an important role which gives added value to EU policies in respect of non-EU countries and regions. Through your activities and meetings with distinguished guests in this Year of Intercultural Dialogue, you are enhancing one of the fundamental European traditions, namely that mutual respect and understanding are the very foundation of coexistence at both the European and the world level.

III. The European Union is most successful when it acts as one

The range of EU activities is increasing all the time but a single rule applies to them all: success is directly proportional to unity – unity between Member States, sectors, interest groups, generations, and between regional, national, European and world factors. It is important that the EU institutions set an example in this regard.

“Each man begins the world afresh. Only institutions grow wiser; they accumulate collective experience.”

With this thought, Jean Monnet brings us a step closer to understanding why the perception of the EU is often still at variance with the reality of the EU, and why many Europeans – despite the more than obvious achievements of the past fifty years – still have doubts about the benefits of European integration. In order to understand and appreciate freedom, peace, diversity, the elimination of borders and the benefits and prospects afforded by a united Europe, we have to be aware, once and for all, that there are also other, far less favourable alternatives.

Our joint task is therefore to promote the European collective experience. From this experience, we can draw the strength to address current challenges. Looking back must go hand in hand with thinking ahead. Had we not joined forces fifty years ago, we would probably not be living in peace and prosperity today. The same is true of the next fifty years. Unless we together seek out low-carbon and energy-saving solutions, we will not succeed in halting climate change. We will face ever more intense flooding, hurricanes, drought, new diseases, endangered ecosystems and “climate refugees”. It is essential that the results of Europe’s decisions and activities be sufficiently tangible for citizens to understand the crucial role of the EU in preserving and improving their quality of life.

Mr President,

Members of the European Parliament,

I would like to thank you for your contribution to the development of the European Union over the past half century. I know what this time represents for our generation, being born myself in the same year as the European Parliament.

I wish you every success in your work until the end of this term of office, and beyond, plenty of fresh ideas and unwavering persistence in developing European values, European democracy and a European way of life.

It is my firm belief that the next major anniversary of this home of European democracy will be an opportunity to see just how far down the road we have come and to celebrate Europe’s clearly visible progress.

Thank you for your attention.”

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/Speeches_Interviews/March/0312EP_Jansa.html

Women's rights

► Women in rural areas (12/03/2008)

Parliament adopted an own-initiative report on the situation of women in rural areas of the EU, Christa KLAß (EPP-ED, DE) for the Women's Rights committee which calls on the Member States to develop strategies aimed at curbing the out-migration of women in rural areas, especially those who are highly educated.

The European Parliament is convinced that mainstreaming gender into the rural sector is a key strategy not only for the promotion of equality between women and men but also for economic growth and sustainable rural development;

The report calls on the Commission to improve statistical data and information as regards this phenomenon and to analyse the patterns of, main reasons for and consequences of the out-migration from rural areas in the EU. The report also calls on the Member States to develop strategies aimed at curbing the out-migration of women in rural areas, especially those who are highly educated.

MEPs call on the Member States, in collaboration with local government and business, to create incentives for the participation of women in the labour force. These incentives could particularly focus on getting rid of any discrimination against women in the labour market, with the aim of addressing the problem of poverty and social exclusion in rural areas. The Committee notes that poverty is widespread in rural communities, especially in the new Member States.

Sexual violence

The report draws attention to the strong taboos surrounding sexual and/or domestic violence against women and girls in rural areas, and calls on the Member States to take appropriate measures to ensure better protection and support of victims and those at risk of becoming victims of such violence.

The report refers to the fact that women are under-represented in formal rural or regional leadership positions, despite the fact that they play an important role in the 'informal' community, where women often play an essential role in the community's social life by influencing the emergence of social capital through their involvement in informal local networks (e.g. in the framework of voluntary community work or various thematic associations).

Recognition of work

MEPs also call on the Member States to develop the legal construct of shared ownership, in order to ensure that women's rights in the agricultural sector are fully recognised, appropriate protection in the field of social security and recognition of their work.

Finally, the House calls on the relevant national, regional and local authorities to encourage the participation of women in local action groups and the development of local partnerships under the Leader axis as well as to ensure gender-balanced participation on their management boards.

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/014-23713-070-03-11-902-20080311IPR23702-10-03-2008-2008-false/default_en.htm

Women's rights

▶ **EP: Taking account of the special needs of women in prisons** (13/03/2008)

The European Parliament adopted an own-initiative report on the situation of women in prison, a minority of the prison population but a fast-growing one. The report focuses on prison conditions, the preservation of family ties and reintegration into society and the workplace.

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

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

As unskilled female workers, those women also often suffer poor labour-market integration. For instance, in the UK, only 3% of women in prison were in work prior to coming to prison and over half said they were living on state benefits.

The report was adopted by 492 votes in favour, 24 votes against and 37 abstentions.

Prison conditions

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

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

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

The European Parliament also wants special arrangements for foreign prisoners, who it says should be able to contact their consulates and have access to prison resources and programmes. The House also stresses the need to end the detention of girls aged 18 and under in adult prisons.

Preserving social and family ties

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

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

Family planning

The House calls on each Member State to facilitate access for women prisoners to prevention campaigns targeting the general public, dealing with issues such as the early detection of breast cancer and cervical cancer, and to ensure that they have the same access to national programmes concerning family planning.

MEPs call on Member States to respect fully the development of sexual orientation and the different forms of family life, provided they are in conformity with the law.

Social reintegration

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

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

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

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/014-23874-070-03-11-902-20080312IPR23864-10-03-2008-2008-false/default_en.htm

T **Women's rights**

- ▶ **EP: Empowering women: the key to development** (13/03/2008).

Parliament backed an own-initiative report on gender equality and women's empowerment in development cooperation. The report calls for measures to promote women's rights in areas such as responsible governance, employment, education, health and violence against women, arguing that these rights are essential to economic and social development.

The report, drafted by Felekna Uca (GUE/NGL, DE), is a response to a Commission communication (see link below). According to Felekna Uca, gender equality and equal access to resources for men and women are crucial to sustainable development. In Africa, for example, women make up 52% of the total population but perform 75% of agricultural work and produce and market 60-80% of the food. The report was adopted with 347 votes in favour, 136 against and 44 abstentions.

Disappointment with progress so far

The European Parliament says that, although in 1995 the Council declared the gender perspective to be a principle underpinning development policy, not enough has been done in practice. It endorses the Commission's view that funding made available for the integration of gender equality issues into development cooperation is insufficient and urges the Commission and Member States to take action, with the emphasis on amending laws, institutions and existing patriarchal patterns, increasing budgetary resources and improving social and economic conditions for women.

European envoy for Women's Rights

Parliament calls on the Council to appoint a European Envoy for Women's Rights who would strengthen the EU's commitment to the empowerment of women in foreign and development policy, and who would promote the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals by focusing on equality between men and women worldwide, on reducing maternal mortality and on fighting poverty.

Women's role in post-war societies, violence against women

Turning to specific problems, the report calls for better understanding of the role of women in post-war societies and of their contributions to post-war reconstruction. Regarding violence against women, it

acknowledges the Commission's efforts to raise awareness of the issue but urges that more attention be paid to "trafficking in human beings, torture and harmful traditional practices, with an emphasis on female genital mutilation, honour crimes and early and forced marriage". It also calls for more female personnel in institutions that directly assist victims of these practices.

Sexual issues, reproductive and health rights

The express link between women and HIV (in terms of increasing the rate of infection) spelt out in the Commission's paper is welcomed by the committee, but MEPs believe Member States should be pressed to meet the financial commitments they have given on this matter.

The report states that "empowering women by ensuring full access to sexual and reproductive health information, services and supplies puts them in a better position to negotiate safe sex and protect themselves from sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)". It backs the Commission's proposals for protecting women from STDs, including funding for developing microbicides and vaccines and measures on reproductive health and rights.

Status of women under Sharia law

Lastly, the report "deplores in the strongest possible terms the virtual chattel status of women trapped under Sharia Law, and regards this oppression as representing the diametric opposite of every principle this Report holds to be of paramount importance".

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/028-23876-070-03-11-903-20080312IPR23866-10-03-2008-2008-false/default_en.htm

T **Women's rights**

- ▶ **EP: How EU aid can help women in the developing world was discussed** (13/03/2008)

MEPs debated the European Union's overseas development assistance, specifically the experience of the countries that joined after 2004, on the final day of the Plenary. Later, they discussed women in developing countries and how aid could help them. In the afternoon the traditional human rights debates focused on Armenia and Russia.

The EU and its Overseas Development Assistance

MEPs discussed the amount of gross national income that EU countries who joined the Union since 2004 should give for development aid. A report by Lithuanian Liberal Danutė Budreikaitė sets out the current situation. The objective is that they donate 0.17 % of GNI to official development assistance (ODA) by 2010 - rising to 0.33% by 2015

Ms Budreikaitė said. "In 2004 and 2007, the 12 new States became donors through the development policy but had no experience in the field...new Member States have limited financial and human resources: they should focus their attention where they have experience." She added that they had "a great experience of dealing with their eastern neighbours". She pointed to the complementary roles of neighbourhood and development policy and suggested the creation of a new parliamentary assembly of EU and neighbouring countries (similar to the ACP-EU).

European aid Commissioner Louis Michel noted that as the EU is the world's biggest donor, it has "duty to set an example".

Women in developing countries

German MEP Feleknaš Uca's (GUE/NGL) report on women in developing countries calls for measures to promote women's rights in areas such as responsible governance, employment, education, health and violence against women.

Ms Uca said that more than 40% of women in Africa don't go to primary school, while 75% of agricultural work is done by women. She said tackling "traditional" forms of violence should be one of the main priorities while unlimited access to reproductive health is fundamental for gender equality.

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/public/story_page/008-23391-168-06-25-901-20080307STO23301-2008-16-06-2008/default_en.htm

T **EU Code of Conduct on Arms Exports**

- ▶ **Statement by State Secretary Janez Lenarčič on behalf of the EU Council regarding the EU Code of Conduct on Arms Exports (12/03/2008)**

"Dear Mr President, dear Commissioner, distinguished Members of the Parliament,

In my introduction, I would like to express my satisfaction with the traditionally good relations between the competent Working Party of the Council – Conventional Arms Exports Working Group (COARM) – and the European Parliament, i.e. its Security and Defence Sub-committee (SEDE). I am convinced that this good cooperation of the Council and the Parliament will also continue in the future. Therefore, we salute today's debate.

A few words to the subject of the EU Code of Conduct on Arms Exports. As you know, the EU Code of Conduct on Arms Exports was adopted on 8 June 1998, under the United Kingdom's Presidency of the EU Council. It brought new momentum in the area of arms trade control within the EU. The Union started to prepare annual reports on the implementation of the Code, which figure as its annual reports on the actual arms transfers. This year, the tenth annual report of the EU is to be elaborated, whereby it has to be noted that, in the course of years, these reports have become ever more informative and transparent.

Owing to this very Code, most of the EU Member States have started to make public their national reports on arms exports in the last years. In December 2003, the EU set up its own Common Military List covered by the Code, and started to coordinate its exports policy regarding some (disputable) third countries more closely. In compliance with the Code, the Member States exchange information concerning notified denials and actual arms exports.

Such dynamics has also been transferred to international organisations, particularly to those in which the EU Member States play a significant role; this especially holds true for the Wassenaar Arrangement.

Developments during 2006 and 2007 continued to strengthen the Code, in particular the expansion of the User's Guide. As you know, the Code is not a legally binding document; however, the Member States are politically responsible to respect its criteria. It was their wish in the past to upgrade the Code with a Common Position that would be legally binding and relevant for their arms exports. So far, no consent has been reached on the adoption of such a Common Position.

Slovenia would appreciate the adoption of this Common Position during its Presidency, or at least the achievement of a break-through. There is no better opportunity to make progress as on preparing the Tenth Annual Report of the EU. For the time being, there is no indication whether our wish will come true.

However, we do not feel discouraged to continue these attempts. Therefore, we will invite the Member States to communicate their positions on this issue and try to encourage them to achieve the Common Position. When all reserves are removed, Slovenia will be happy to complete the adoption procedure and report on the progress made to all stakeholders.

Allow me to say a few words on two other priority topics: the Common Position on Control of Arms Brokering and Member States' endeavours in the framework of the EU to conclude an international Arms Trade Treaty.

With regards to the arms brokering: the EU adopted the guidelines regarding the arms brokering in 2001. The EU Common Position relating to arms brokering was adopted by the Council in June 2003. The Member States undertook to transpose the elements of this Common Position to their national legislation and thus internally regulate the area of arms brokering. Currently the majority of Member States, precisely 20, have legislation in place which implements elements laid down in the Common Position in question. The remaining seven are expected to bring this procedure to an end.

The Presidency of the EU Council will monitor the progress in this area and encourage the countries that have not completed relevant national procedures to do so as soon as possible.

Allow me to add a few words about the International Arms Trade Treaty. The ATT project is one of the key projects in the field of disarmament. As you may well know, the EU Council adopted a decision in support of this international Treaty on 10 December 2007.

At the last year's session of the First Committee of the General Assembly, the composition of the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) was confirmed. The information regarding its first meeting, which took place in New York in February, is rather promising, however, we must not forget that a lot of effort will have to be invested in this process yet.

The Presidency will closely follow the work of the GGE in the other Member States as well.

Thank you very much for your attention. "

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/Speeches_Interviews/March/0312SVEZarms.html

T **Council of Europe**

- ▶ **Armenia: Commissioner Hammarberg visits Yerevan to advocate human rights protection after post-election violence** (11/03/2008)

In the aftermath of the post-election violence in Armenia, **the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Thomas Hammarberg is starting on Wednesday 12 March a three-day visit in Yerevan to meet with the highest national authorities in order to favour an effective protection of fundamental human rights.**

During his visit, the Commissioner will meet, among others, President Robert Kocharyan, Prime Minister and President-elect Serghz Sargsyan, former President and candidate Levon Ter-Petrosyan, Parliament Speaker Tigran Torosyan, the Chairman of the Constitutional Court, the Human Rights Defender Mr Armen Harutyunyan, as well as representatives of international organisations, diplomats and representatives of civil society.

Commissioner Hammarberg will also visit prisons, police stations and hospitals to meet people affected by the events.

“I am concerned about the human rights situation in Armenia and the consequences of the declaration of the state of emergency” said Mr Hammarberg. “It is urgent to restore a situation where the activities of the media, political parties and non-governmental organisations are not hindered”.

[https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=PR174\(2008\)&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&Site=DC&BackColorInternet=F5CA75&BackColorIntranet=F5CA75&BackColorLogged=A9BACE](https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=PR174(2008)&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&Site=DC&BackColorInternet=F5CA75&BackColorIntranet=F5CA75&BackColorLogged=A9BACE)

T **Council of Europe**

- ▶ **Council of Europe anti-torture Committee publishes report on Latvia** (13/03/2008)

The Council of Europe's Committee for the prevention of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (CPT) has published today the report on its ad hoc visit to Latvia in May 2004, together with the responses of the Latvian authorities. These documents have been made public at the request of the Latvian Government.

The main purpose of the visit was to review the measures taken by the Latvian authorities to implement the recommendations made by the Committee after its 2002 visit. Particular attention was paid to the treatment of persons detained by the police and conditions of detention in police establishments and prisons. The CPT's delegation also examined the regime and security measures applied to life-sentenced prisoners.

The CPT's visit report and the responses of the Latvian authorities are available on the Committee's website <http://www.cpt.coe.int>

<http://www.cpt.coe.int/documents/lva/2008-03-13-eng.htm>

T **Council of Europe**

- ▶ **Council of Europe parliamentarians to look into freedom of speech of Olympic athletes** (13/03/2008)

The Political Affairs Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) is to hold a public hearing on the freedom of speech of Olympic athletes, following reports that some European countries are proposing restrictions on political statements by athletes ahead of the forthcoming Games.

Committee Chair Göran Lindblad (Sweden, EPP/CD) said: “Freedom of speech is something we hold dear at the Council of Europe, and many athletes from our member states will be going to China. We need to know if there will be any restrictions on what they can say, and why.”

The Olympic Charter restricts demonstrations of political “propaganda” at the Games, but requiring athletes to sign an explicit undertaking not to raise politically sensitive issues is unusual.

Athletes, representatives of the IOC and the national Olympic committees concerned, as well as Chinese representatives, will be invited to the hearing, which is likely to take place during the Assembly's forthcoming session (14-18 April).

http://www.coe.int/T/DC/Press/WCD/AIIPR_en.asp#

T **Council of Europe**

- ▶ **The Council of Europe and Norway create a trust fund to support the implementation of the Convention on Human Rights** (14/03/2008)

Terry Davis, Secretary General of the Council of Europe, and Jonas Gahr Støre, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Norway, today signed an agreement for the creation of a Human Rights Fund Trust, which will support – in cooperation with the Council of Europe Development Bank - projects in Europe to ensure the application of the Convention on Human Rights. The first projects will be funded in 2008.

Norway will initially make a one million euros contribution to the fund - which is open for other states to participate. The projects will aim to ensure the application of the convention in national human rights legislation, the training of legal professionals, the dissemination of European Court of Human Rights case-law and the execution of judgments of the Court at national level.

Terry Davis declared: “The implementation of the convention on human rights requires a solid and effective legal system at national level. If this is not in place, the rights the convention protects cannot be guaranteed. This agreement is an expression of Norway’s commitment to the promotion of human rights in Europe and sets the pace for other countries to join this effort to consolidate the rights established by the convention”.

“A main priority for Norway in the Council of Europe is to contribute to the effectiveness and sustainability of the European Court of Human Rights. I hope the Trust Fund will become an important new financing mechanism for national measures to implement the European Convention of Human Rights”, said Norwegian Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre and called on other member states to contribute to the Fund and on the Council of Europe to submit good project proposals.

Some European states face obstacles or may lack the required expertise to implement the convention. The purpose of the fund is to support national efforts through specific projects to achieve the following objectives:

- that effective national remedies exist for anyone who wishes to file a complaint due to a violation of the Convention
- that procedures at national level comply with the legal procedures under the Convention to conduct effective investigation in the case of serious violations of human rights
- that effective mechanisms exist for verifying the compatibility of draft legislation and administrative practice with the Convention
- the adequate training in convention standards of law professionals
- the dissemination of the Court's case-law
- full and timely domestic execution of judgments of the Court
- adequate organisation and management of administrative and judicial public services

The agreement was signed during Terry Davis' official visit to Norway. This morning he held meetings at the Storting (Norwegian Parliament) and had an audience with His Majesty King Harald V. He also gave a lecture on the state of human rights in Europe at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI). In the afternoon he will meet the State Secretary of Justice, Ms Astri Aas-Hansen, and the Minister of Research and Higher Education, Ms Tora Aasland.

<https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1261703&Site=DC&BackColorInternet=F5CA75&BackColorIntranet=F5CA75&BackColorLogged=A9BACE>