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- April, 1, 2, 2008

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- March, 31, April, 1, 2008

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- April, 2, 3, 2008

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REGIONS:

AFRICA

I Burundi

- ▶ **Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on recent events in Burundi (18/03/2008)**

The European Union has learnt with concern and regret of the attacks that took place at the homes of several parliamentarians in Bujumbura on the evening of 8 March 2008.

It strongly condemns these attacks as it does any violation of the security of Burundi's parliamentarians and elected representatives.

It calls on the Burundian government authorities to establish the truth about the attacks without delay and to bring the perpetrators and backers to justice.

The EU is concerned at the malfunctioning of the representative institutions, in particular the National Assembly, which is too often paralysed by political conflicts far removed from the economic and social issues that the country has to face as a matter of priority.

It therefore calls on all Burundian political players to exercise restraint and engage in dialogue and consultation. The need to give precedence to Burundi's general interest and to its development and recovery, within the framework of the peace agreements and of the democratic constitution which the country has adopted, is especially prompted by the persistence of bloody clashes between the security forces and elements of the National Liberation Forces (FNL) which are continuing to cause loss of life.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/CFSP_Statements/March/0318MZZ_Burundi.html

T Congo

- ▶ **Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on recent events in Bas-Congo (17/03/2008)**

The European Union deplores the events that have taken place in Bas-Congo in the past two weeks. It is concerned in particular by the high number of victims suffered by this province for the second year running.

The acts committed by supporters of the Bundu Dia Kongo movement are unacceptable and it is legitimate for the State to ensure that its authority is respected throughout the territory. Order must be maintained by the State in compliance with the principles of the rule of law and human rights and without disproportionate use of force, in order to avoid radicalising the situation.

Against this background, the European Union encourages the immediate opening of talks between the State authorities and the political representatives of Bundu Dia Kongo. Only a genuine dialogue and the active search for a peaceful solution will make it possible to avoid a recurrence of such events.

The European Union appeals to all actors involved in the protection of the civilian population, without exception, to embark upon that without delay. To bolster the peace process in the DRC, it confirms its continuing commitment to sector reform, within the framework of the principles of good governance adopted by the Congolese Government.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/CFSP_Statements/March/0317MZZkongo.html

T **Nigeria**

▶ **Nigeria-EU Senior Officials Meeting on Political Dialogue** (17/03/2008)

Senior officials of EU and Nigeria met today in Abuja to prepare for the Ministerial Troika between both parties that will take place in Ljubljana, Slovenia, in May/June this year.

The meeting was held, in the framework of the Cotonou agreement, and in recognition of the importance that Nigeria and the EU attach to their relations, in follow up to the EU-Africa Summit in Lisbon, Portugal, in December 2007.

The officials exchanged views on the agenda of the Ministerial Troika and in this context discussed a number of issues of mutual interest, including:

- T Global issues: Those identified in the Africa-EU joint strategy, e. g., conflict management and prevention, migration, climate change, energy security and sustainability, terrorism.
- T Africa-EU issues: Africa-EU relations, follow up to AU-EU and ECOWAS-EU meetings, situation in neighbouring countries and regional integration.
- T Nigeria-EU issues: Good governance and electoral processes, the fight against corruption, security, crime and the situation in the Niger Delta.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/Press_Releases/March/0317MZZ_Africa_dialogue.html

T **Sri-Lanka**

▶ **EU Troika visit to Sri Lanka** (18 March 2008)

A delegation of senior officials from the European Union (EU) visited Sri Lanka, 16-18 March 2008, to discuss EU concerns at the current situation in the country. The EU and Sri Lanka have deep, long-standing relations, covering economic, trade, political and cultural matters. The EU is committed to maintaining these, and welcomes the opportunity provided by this visit for open and frank discussions.

The EU welcomes such steps as have been taken towards a politically sustainable devolution plan for Sri Lanka. Having taken note of the interim proposal from the APRC, the EU looks forward to an ambitious final proposal in the coming months.

Following peaceful local elections in Batticaloa district on 10 March, key issues have been identified concerning the provision of proper electoral conditions, including the disarmament of paramilitaries. The EU sees effective action on this as key to ensuring free and fair voting at the provincial elections scheduled for May.

The EU has an active, well defined policy on counter-terrorism. This underlies the EU's unequivocal condemnation of all terrorist activities, including those by the LTTE. In 2006 the EU listed the LTTE as a

terrorist organisation. Since then there have been a number of criminal prosecutions against LTTE fund raising in Europe.

The EU and Sri Lanka share binding commitments under the international conventions that they have signed, especially regarding human rights and international humanitarian law.

The EU welcomes the assurances that it has received concerning respect for human rights, which is one of the key principles underpinning all EU-Sri Lanka relations, and an essential element of the EC-Sri Lanka Cooperation Agreement. Nonetheless, the EU continues to harbour very serious concerns about continuing reports of human rights abuses. The EU notes with regret that the Independent International Group of Eminent Persons (IIGEP) has decided to terminate its work with the Presidential Commission of Inquiry because of concerns about its compliance with international standards and institutional lack of support for the work of the Commission. The EU underlines the seriousness of calls by the IIGEP and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, for the Government to deliver concrete results through considering their recommendations seriously, taking cases to court, and ensuring effective and independent human rights monitoring.

The EU remains committed to its present role as one of the Co-Chairs of the Tokyo process. As such, it continues to believe in the importance of guaranteeing access to Kilinochchi for the Norwegian facilitator and other Co-Chairs, as well as the UN and other concerned organisations. This is needed to allow the delivery of key messages to the LTTE about returning to the peace process, observing humanitarian access and human rights.

The EU welcomes the assurances that it has received concerning the Government's continuous provision of services in war affected areas. The EU remains committed to providing humanitarian assistance (the EU is Sri Lanka's largest donor in this field). It is also vitally important, however, to create a more favourable environment to allow NGOs, UN and the ICRC to work effectively, without undue criticism. These organisations are here to help with the permission of Government and their work should be recognised and facilitated by all Sri Lankans. The EU appeals for steps to be taken to minimise civilian casualties and to ensure visas and access to NGOs, UN and the ICRC so they can reach the people in need.

Sri Lanka is currently taking considerable advantage of the EU's GSP+ special incentive arrangement for sustainable development and good governance. According to the rules of this scheme, all countries wishing to continue benefiting from the GSP+ regime will have to reapply by October 2008. The legal provisions of the GSP+ scheme also spell out the linkage between trade preferences and human rights. The EU confirms that the entire process, which has not yet started, will be governed by objective criteria.

In conclusion, the EU looks forward to holding the next EC-Sri Lanka Joint Commission meeting in June 2008 to explore various aspects in greater detail.

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/er/99521.pdf

AMERICAS

I Guatemala

- ▶ **Declaration of the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on Guatemalan President's decision to veto the law on reinstatement of the death penalty (19/03/2008)**

The European Union welcomes the decision of the Guatemalan President Alvaro Colom, who on Friday, 14 March 2008, vetoed a bill that could have reinstated capital punishment by giving the president the power to commute death penalty sentences in Guatemala. **If the bill were to enter into force, it would effectively represent the ending of the de facto moratorium on the death penalty, which has been in place in Guatemala since 2000.** The European Union considers the decision of president Colom as a highly positive development.

The UN General Assembly resolution on a Moratorium on the use of the death penalty, which Guatemala supported in December 2007, explicitly calls upon Member States that have abolished the death penalty not to reintroduce it. This call clearly also refers to States with moratoria on the use of the death penalty, that they should similarly not reverse their stance by reintroducing the use of the death penalty.

The European Union expresses the expectations that Guatemalan lawmakers would not override president Colom's decision with a two-thirds supermajority.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/CFSP_Statements/March/0319MZZGuatemala.html

ASIA

China

- ▶ **Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on the detention of Mr Hu Jia and other Chinese Human Rights Defenders** (17/03/2008)

Following recent representations made to the Chinese authorities regarding the case of acknowledged human rights activist Mr Hu Jia, the European Union remains deeply concerned about his continuing detention. The EU understands that Hu Jia is accused of 'inciting subversion of state power' on the basis that he has written articles, and given interviews, in which he expresses opinions critical of the Chinese Government.

The EU believes that respect for the right to freedom of expression, together with other human rights such as that of freedom from arbitrary detention, is essential for long-term economic prosperity and social stability, as well as being justified in its own right. **The EU supports the recommendation of the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (expressed in its 2004 report on China) that laws on state security should not be used to undermine these rights.** The EU considers charges of 'subversion' resulting from the peaceful expression of opinions to undermine the right to freedom of expression enshrined in both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Constitution of the People's Republic of China.

Hence, having regard to the EU-China Dialogue on Human Rights, the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders, as well as all the national and international commitments of China to human rights and the rule of law, the EU calls on the Chinese authorities to release Hu Jia together with all other writers, journalists and others detained for reporting on or demonstrating against human rights abuses, and to refrain from further such detentions.

In relation to this, the EU welcomes the early release of journalists Yu Huafeng and Ching Cheong. Yu Huafeng, the former head of Guangzhou-based newspaper Nanfang Dushi Bao, was released on 8 February 2008 after serving four years of a twelve-year prison sentence. Ching Cheong, the Hong Kong-based chief China correspondent for The Straits Times was released on 5 February 2008 after serving three

years of a five-year prison sentence. In both cases a great number of Chinese journalists lobbied for the release of their imprisoned colleagues, giving witness to the responsiveness of China's civil society.

While appreciating these early releases, the EU reiterates its appeal to the Chinese authorities to restore the political rights of Yu Huafeng so as to enable him once again to contribute to the further development of Chinese society.

The EU wishes to emphasise that further such releases would demonstrate China's commitment to the rule of law, and its attachment to internationally recognised human rights principles as set out inter alia in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/CFSP_Statements/March/0317MZZ_Hu_Jia1.html

T **China**

- ▶ **Statement by Slovenian Presidency on the Call to Boycott the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games** (20/03/2008)

At their informal meeting in Slovenia on Monday 17 March, **the Sports Ministers of the European Union expressed their deep concern at events in Tibet, called for peace and dialogue and, in their conclusions, underlined that the Olympic Games can contribute significantly to strengthening intercultural dialogue and establishing an environment in which human rights are respected.** In the unanimously-adopted Ljubljana Declaration, the Sports Ministers, together with the Presidents of the National Olympic Committees of the EU Member States, the Western Balkan countries and Norway, emphasised the importance of the Olympic ideal and values in promoting and supporting human rights.

The modern Olympics have, indeed, often been used and sometimes misused by politicians and political regimes to promote different State, economic and political objectives. And as the very last resort, especially during the Cold War period, boycotts have been used. On the other hand, ever since ancient times, the Olympics have been an instrument for intercultural dialogue, solidarity, equity, respect, peace, and friendship.

In the circumstances and in 2008, the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, the Slovenian Presidency believes that boycotting the XXIX Olympiad is not the right answer to the current political problems. A boycott could signify actually losing an opportunity to promote human rights and could, at the same time, cause considerable harm to the population of China as a whole, to sports enthusiasts and, above all, to the athletes themselves. It is encouraging that even the Dalai Lama has spoken out against a boycott.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/Press_Releases/March/0320MSS_OI.html

T **Taiwan**

- ▶ **Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on Cross-Strait Relations** (22/03/2008)

The European Union welcomes the elections held in Taiwan on March 22 and reiterates its support for Taiwan's democratic values. The EU hopes that the arrival of the new administration in Taiwan will provide a welcome opportunity for both sides of the strait to make further progress in cross-strait

relations, to the benefit of people on each side. The EU reiterates its One China Policy and its firm support for a peaceful resolution of the Taiwan question.

The EU recalls that it does not support Taiwan's formal membership of international organisations where statehood is required. In the framework of its One China Policy, the EU will continue to support Taiwan's practical participation in specialized multilateral fora where statehood is not a requirement, especially where Taiwan's participation directly affects its people and is important to the EU and global interests. The EU looks forward to both sides taking concrete steps, including confidence building measures, to agree and implement strategies allowing Taiwan's meaningful participation in such fora.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/CFSP_Statements/March/0322MZZ_Tajvan.html

T **Tibet**

- ▶ **Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the EU on the situation in Tibet** (17/03/2008)

The EU is deeply concerned about the ongoing reports of unrest in Tibet and conveys its deepest sympathy and condolences to the families of the victims. **The EU is urgently seeking further clarification of the situation from the Chinese Government.**

The EU calls for restraint on all sides. **We urge the Chinese authorities to refrain from using force against those involved in unrest and calls on demonstrators to desist from violence.**

The EU stresses the importance it attaches to the right of freedom of expression and peaceful protest. **We call on Chinese authorities to respond to the demonstrations in accordance with internationally recognised democratic principles.**

The EU firmly supports peaceful reconciliation between Chinese authorities and the Dalai Lama and his representatives. **The EU urges the Chinese government to address the concerns of Tibetans with regard to issues of human rights.**

The EU encourages both sides to enter into a substantive and constructive dialogue with a view to reach a sustainable solution acceptable to all that would fully respect the Tibetan culture, religion and identity.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/CFSP_Statements/March/0317MZZ_Tibet.html

EUROPE (OUTSIDE OF UE) AND CIS

I **Armenia**

- ▶ **Council of Europe: Commissioner Hammarberg calls on the Armenian government to lift emergency measures, ensure media freedom and initiate an impartial investigation into recent violent acts** (18/03/2008)

“The State of Emergency should be lifted in Armenia and an independent, impartial and transparent inquiry initiated to clarify what actually happened during the confrontations in Yerevan between the police and opposition demonstrators on 1 March”, said Council of Europe Commissioner on Human Rights Thomas Hammarberg after a three-day visit to Armenia.

He held discussions with the President, the Prime Minister and President-elect, the Foreign Minister, the Minister of Justice, the Prosecutor General and the Head of Police. He also met the President of the National Assembly, representatives of political parties including those in opposition and had a separate meeting with former President and presidential candidate Ter-Petrosian.

Commissioner Hammarberg visited places of detention and interviewed persons recently arrested. Furthermore, he visited hospitals and met policemen and civilians who had been injured during the violence on 1 March. He also met with the National Human Rights Defender (ombudsman), defence lawyers, representatives of the media, non-governmental organisations as well as foreign diplomats and representatives of international and regional organizations in Yerevan.

“The censorship which was introduced with the state of emergency has contributed to rumours and anxiety among the population about what was happening, at a time when measures to rebuild trust should have been promoted. The fact that some pro-government media tended to demonise the opposition while opposition papers were out of circulation did not contribute to a constructive atmosphere”, said Thomas Hammarberg. **He suggested that all limitations on the media and freedom of expression now be lifted.**

“Seven civilians and one policeman were killed and many others were injured. There is a need to clarify what actually happened and what provoked the outbreak of violence. The two sides describe the events very differently and it is important, also in a human rights perspective, to establish the basic facts. This can only be done through a comprehensive inquiry which is independent, impartial and transparent and perceived as credible by the whole population.”

“Such an investigation should also aim at drawing lessons and giving recommendations on how similar situations should be handled in future. For instance, it seems clear that the Armenian police needs more training in acceptable riot control measures, serious mistakes were made.”

“The establishment of an inquiry of this kind will not be easy in the present polarised climate in Armenia. The international community has expressed its willingness to offer participation or other assistance to such a comprehensive investigation into the 1 March events in order to contribute experience, professionalism and credibility.”

“Demonstrators who committed violent acts should be held accountable, as should policemen who used excessive force. **However, the arrests and prosecutions should not target people for having merely been present at the demonstrations or expressed anti-government opinions. The Commissioner also calls for the release of all apprehended children under 18 years in this connection.**

It appears that some articles of the Criminal Code are interpreted broadly by the prosecutors, banning in practice all strong criticism and agitation against the government. This is not consistent with the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.”

Commissioner Hammarberg also stressed the importance of preventing any improper treatment of those arrested. There were cases after 1 March when the detainees had difficulties to contact family members and to have access to a lawyer. Also, the registration of their arrest was not done in accordance with national rules in some instances.

The Commissioner was also told about cases of ill-treatment during arrests and in a few cases during transport to the police station. He welcomes the decision of the Prosecutor General to investigate ex officio all acts of violence committed by police forces against demonstrators and passing civilians on 1 March. **The**

Commissioner underlines the absolute importance of ensuring respect for agreed safeguards against torture and ill-treatment as well as the procedural rights of the accused.

The Commissioner welcomed the statement by the President that the current human rights restrictions would be gradually reviewed and lifted. He stressed the importance of now bringing the state of emergency to an end.

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

T **Kosovo**

- ▶ **EU Presidency Statement on the latest events in Mitrovica, Kosovo** (17/03/2008)

The Presidency of the EU strongly condemns violence that erupted today in the northern part of Mitrovica. It offers its full support to the joint efforts of UNMIK Police and KFOR to restore law and order, after the Court in Mitrovica had been forcibly seized by a mob on Friday, 14 March. The Presidency reiterates the importance of all components of international presence to effectively fulfill their mandate throughout the territory of Kosovo, in line with the UNSCR 1244.

The EU Presidency strongly believes that there can be no place for violence in Kosovo and that a multi-ethnic Kosovo can only be built through co-operation of all its communities, while fully respecting the rule of law and democracy.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/CFSP_Statements/March/0317MZZ_Kosovo.html

T **Kosovo**

- ▶ **Remarks by Javier SOLANA, EU High Representative for the CFSP, on the latest developments in Kosovo** (17/03/2008)

Javier SOLANA, EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), made today the following remarks to the press during a visit to Ljubljana, Slovenia:

"I would like to express my deep concern for the violence that has been taking place in Mitrovica today and I am saddened to hear that people have been wounded.

What we now need is for everybody to act calmly. This violence leads nowhere and does not benefit anyone. I appeal to everybody who can calm the situation to do their utmost. I fully support UNMIK and KFOR's efforts to restore law and order in Mitrovica North. Their role is essential under UN Security Council Resolution 1244."

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/EN/discours/99461.pdf

T **Turkey**

- ▶ **EU Presidency Statement on the indictment filed against AKP** (17/03/2008)

The Presidency of the EU expresses its concern of the indictment filed by the Supreme Court of Appeals Chief Prosecutor against the Turkish ruling party AKP. The separation of powers between the executive and the judiciary is a fundamental principle of democratic societies that needs to be respected. **The Presidency expresses its hope that this issue will be resolved according to the highest democratic standards.**

respecting the preferences of the Turkish voters expressed at the last parliamentary elections. This issue should not distract attention from the necessary reforms related to the EU accession process.

The Presidency will closely monitor further development of this issue.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/CFSP_Statements/March/0317MZZ_AKP.html

MAGHREB AND MIDDLE EAST

I Middle East

► **Minister Rupel on a three-day Middle East tour** (18/03/2008)

Dimitrij Rupel, President of the EU General Affairs and Foreign Relations Council (GAERC) and Slovenian Foreign Minister, started his Middle East tour today by visiting Cairo. The purpose of the tour, which continues tomorrow in Palestinian territory and concludes on Thursday in Israel, is to collect information on the situation, taking into account the EU's desire to re-invigorate the Middle East Peace Process, which is also one of the topics of the informal meeting of EU Foreign Ministers at Brdo, Slovenia next week. Apart from the Middle East Peace Process, which is the main topic of the present visit, Minister Rupel has also devoted his attention to other issues relevant for the region, especially the situation in Lebanon.

In his meetings with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Minister Rupel highlighted the EU's efforts to strengthen the Israeli-Palestinian dialogue in the spirit of the Annapolis Agreement. One of the more specific topics addressed was the severe humanitarian situation in Gaza, and Minister Rupel expressed his expectation that the Rafah crossing point would be reopened as soon as possible.

The GAERC President also discussed these topics with the Secretary General of the Arab League, Amr Moussa, who informed his guest of the preparations for the Arab League Summit in Damascus. Minister Rupel and Secretary General Moussa exchanged views on the Middle East Peace Process and discussed the situation in Lebanon.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/Press_Releases/March/0318MZZ_Kairo.html

T Middle East

► **Minister Rupel in Ramallah: "Negotiations are the only solution for the Middle East"** (20/03/2008)

Today in Ramallah, Dr Dimitrij Rupel, the Slovenian Minister of Foreign Affairs and current President of the EU General Affairs and External Relations Council, met Palestinian Government representatives. At the press conference after the meeting, Dr Rupel noted that the representatives of the Palestinian Government and he had agreed that the only way to settle the Middle East peace process is through negotiation. There is also consensus on this in the European Union, which wishes to contribute to the best of its ability to reviving the peace process which was started at the Annapolis conference at the end of the last year and recently slowed down due to an increase in tensions, added the Minister.

The President of the EU Council, accompanied on the visit by Mr Marc Otte, EU Special Representative for the Middle East peace process, was received by Mr Mahmoud Abbas, the President of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), Mr Salam Fayad the Prime Minister of the Palestinian National Authority and Mr

Riyad al-Malki, the Foreign Minister of the Palestinian National Authority. At the press conference after the meeting with President Abbas, **Dr Rupel mentioned that the Palestinian National Authority representatives had drawn his attention to certain issues which, in their opinion, needed to be solved urgently: the construction of Israeli settlements in the territories of the West Bank, the removal of checkpoints from this territory and the opening of certain crossing points in the Gaza Strip, at least the Rafa crossing for the movement of people and one crossing for the movement of goods. Regarding the Middle East peace process negotiations, Dr Rupel, the President of the EU General Affairs and External Relations Council, said that he had noticed positive progress and that the parties involved had assured him that the negotiations are proceeding and that the Israeli and Palestinian sides are discussing all the issues.**

Regarding the role of the EU, Dr Rupel stressed his willingness to make every effort to contribute to the peace process; his visit to the Middle East, ending today with a visit to the Israeli authorities, is aimed at obtaining information from all the parties involved with a view to preparing for the informal meeting of EU Foreign Ministers to be held the following week in Slovenia.

In response to a press question on whether the EU was in contact with Hamas, Dr Rupel said that this organisation is not among the European Union's discussion partners; in response to a second press question on whether the EU would impose sanctions on Israel on account of its construction of settlements, the Slovenian Minister of Foreign Affairs said that the purpose of his visit, and the EU's intention in general, was to smooth the progress of negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians and that he had not discussed sanctions, which could in no way contribute to this, nor had his partners in discussions proposed them.

Dr Rupel laid a wreath at the mausoleum of the former Palestinian president, Yasser Arafat, and before his departure from the Palestinian territories also visited the Qalandia refugee camp where he spoke with Karen Abu Zayd, Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/Press_Releases/March/0320MZZ_Ramala_Rupel.html

THEMATIC :

FINANCIAL PERSPECTIVES

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EXTERNAL RELATIONS & DEVELOPMENT-RELATED ISSUES

ACP-EU Meeting

- ▶ **ACP-EU assembly focuses on economic partnership agreements** (17/03/2008)

Negotiations on economic partnership agreements - and fears that negotiating separate deals with individual states or groups could threaten the regional integration of African, Caribbean and Pacific states - are at the heart of debate at the 15th session of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly which opened on Monday in Ljubljana.

The ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly (JPA), which brings together 78 MEPs and 78 parliamentarians from the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) states, is meeting in Ljubljana (Slovenia) from 17 to 20 March. Co-Presidents Glenys Kinnock (European Parliament) and Wilkie Rasmussen (Cook Islands) were the key speakers in the opening session on Monday.

EPA process "mired by conflict and contention"

"Conflict and contention has mired the whole EPA process", commented Glenys Kinnock on progress in negotiating the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs). "With the exception of the Caribbean, the agreements were scaled back, and WTO-compatible interim deals were made, mainly on trade in goods, and signed in haste. In fact, fewer than a third of ACP countries agreed interim EPAs by the December 2007 deadline", she said.

Ms Kinnock stressed that "regionalism is a key component of a progressive development strategy and yet the Commission's policy of concluding separate deals with individual states, groups or countries, has splintered ACP regions".

Wilkie Rasmussen said at the press conference that some ACP countries are "unsure" about the EPA negotiating process, and feel that it might have implications for the flow of European development funding. He described the difficulties of negotiating EPAs with the Commission, which he felt was "insensitive" to cultural sensitivities.

EP President Hans-Gert Pöttering said in a video message that "ACP-EU relations are not simply a treaty between states and the Community; they also constitute a union between peoples. (...) You are the living embodiment of dialogue between cultures; and in this year of intercultural dialogue, I invite you to play your full role."

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/028-24359-075-03-11-903-20080317IPR24346-15-03-2008-2008-false/default_en.htm

ACP-EU Meeting

- ▶ Economic Partnership Agreements could threaten ACP regional integration, warns EU-ACP Assembly
ACP-EU assembly focuses on economic partnership agreements
(20/03/2008)

Concern that the Economic Partnership Agreements which the EU is negotiating separately with individual ACP states or groups could threaten their regional integration, and post-electoral violence in Kenya, dominated the 15th ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly in Ljubljana (Slovenia) from 17 to 20 March.

The ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly (JPA) brings together 78 MEPs and 78 parliamentarians from the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP).

EPAs and regional integration

The JPA called on the EU and ACP countries to ensure that Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) are consistent with, and contribute to, the strengthening of ACP regional integration initiatives.

Many ACP countries fear that the current trends of the EPA negotiations and the adoption of agreements by sub-regions may undermine regional integration efforts. The JPA stressed that any agreements adopted by sub-regions must be open to other members of their respective regional organisations. Countries benefiting from the WTO preference system for least advanced countries need not sign new agreements.

The situation in Kenya

The ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly called for an urgent and thorough investigation of the violence triggered by the contested re-election of outgoing President Mwai Kibak in December 2007, and also of offences under the Electoral Offences Act, so as to restore trust in democracy and enable displaced people to go home. The JPA deeply regrets the death of Melitus Were and David Kimutai Too, two newly-elected Members of Parliament.

Chad

A motion for a resolution on developments in Chad was rejected because it failed to win sufficient backing from the ACP side.

Reports put to a vote

The Assembly voted three reports on:

- T *Social and environmental consequences of structural adjustment programmes*, by Gay Mitchell (EPP-ED, IE) and Alma Oumarou (Niger), which says that the practice of subjecting World Bank and IMF lending to economic policy conditions has had disastrous social and environmental consequences for ACP countries, and should be replaced by a country-specific lending policy that focuses on reducing poverty.
- T *Experiences from the European regional integration process relevant to ACP countries*, by Filip Kaczmarek (EPP-ED, PL) and Mr De Sousa (Angola), which calls on ACP countries to agree to exercise sovereignty jointly in areas where they have long-term common interests and cross-border problems, and advocates regional undertakings for joint exploration, regulation and control of natural resources.
- T *Food security issues in ACP countries and the role of ACP-EU co-operation*, by Alain Hutchinson (PES, BE) and Mohamed Ali (Ethiopia), which says that better managing water supplies, empowering women to manage food production, and banning the use of food plants in bio-fuels would all help to reduce food insecurity.

JPA mourns the death of Dr Chosani Njobvu

The JPA held a minute's silence to pay tribute to Zambian MP and Head of Delegation Dr Chosani Njobvu, who died in Ljubljana on Wednesday 19 March.

Coming meetings

The JPA's first regional meeting with parliamentarians from southern Africa will be held in Windhoek (Namibia) from 28 to 30 April 2008. A delegation of 15 MEPs will take part in the work. The ACP-EU JPA's next meeting takes place in Port Moresby (Papua New Guinea) from 22 to 28 November 2008.

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/028-24361-075-03-11-903-20080317IPR24360-15-03-2008-2008-false/default_en.htm

EU / UN REFORM

The Lisbon Treaty

- ▶ **Slovenian Presidency welcomes ratification of the Lisbon Treaty in Bulgaria** (21/03/2008)

Slovenian Presidency welcomes ratification of the Lisbon Treaty by Bulgaria's Parliament. We are pleased that Bulgaria has next to Hungary, Slovenia, Malta, Romania and France taken a step to the entry into force of the Treaty which is fundamental for the common European future.

Without any doubt the European Union will become more effective, transparent and democratic with the Lisbon Treaty. The Treaty is an important instrument which will bring Europe a new impetus and enable it to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Positive changes will not apply only to the European Institutions but also to the citizens of the European Union who will participate in positive changes and novelties, directly as well as indirectly by a better functioning of the Institutions.

Every ratification is an important part of a mosaic, which needs to be built completely. Only then the Treaty will enter into force on 1 January 2009 as it is envisaged.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/Press_Releases/March/0321MZZbulgaria.html

MISCELLANEOUS

International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination- 21 March 2008

- ▶ **Council of Europe: Joint statement on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination – 21 March 2008** (18/03/2008)

Today we commemorate the tragic events of 1960 in Sharpeville, which led to the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (*). **On this symbolic day, we - the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the Council of Europe's European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) and the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) – stand united in calling on political parties to combat racism. In the words of Nelson Mandela, we call on political leaders to build “a society of which all humanity will be proud”.**

Our organisations jointly condemn all discourse that spreads ideas of superiority on grounds of race, colour, language, religion, nationality, or national or ethnic origin. Racist discourse is opposed to the basic equality of all people.

Public perception of different minorities, cultures and religions as well as attitudes towards issues such as immigration, integration and the fight against racism are to a great extent influenced by political discourse. By speaking out against racist acts and incidents, political representatives can play a positive role in the promotion of mutual respect and understanding in society, and can have a significant impact in defusing tensions.

Racist political discourse contributes to dehumanising individuals, denigrating certain ethnic, religious or cultural groups, perpetuating stereotypes, and creating a climate in which racist violence may flourish. Racist, anti-Semitic and xenophobic political discourse is no longer the sole preserve of extremist political parties, but is to be found in the overall political environment in many states. Such developments may lead to the legitimisation and trivialisation of this type of language. Concern over the increasing use of racist discourse in politics has been expressed in numerous reports, statements and documents adopted by the Council of Europe, the European Parliament and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

Based on the existing standards and commitments of our organisations and, in light of the Charter of European Political Parties for a Non-Racist Society (), which could serve as a blueprint for other similar initiatives, we call upon all political leaders for continued leadership in the fight against intolerance and discrimination.** We:

- Call on political leaders to defend basic human rights and democratic principles and to reject all forms of racist violence, incitement to racial hatred and harassment and any form of racial discrimination;
- Call on political parties to deal responsibly with sensitive issues related to race, ethnic and national origin and religion;
- Encourage political parties to adopt concrete policies against all forms of racism and xenophobia in their party programmes;
- Encourage political parties to strive for the fair representation of racial, ethnic, national and religious minorities within and at all levels of their party system;
- Urge political representatives to act responsibly and refrain from providing simplistic explanations with racist, anti-Semitic and xenophobic connotations to complex social, political and economic problems or phenomena;
- Recommend political parties to work closer with civil society to combat racism and xenophobia and form partnerships in order to reach this goal.

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

T **International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination- 21 March 2008**

- ▶ **Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on 21 March 2008 (21/03/2008)**

Almost 50 years after the “Sharpeville massacre” committed on 21 March 1960, the message of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination is as pertinent as ever. Racism, xenophobia, and discrimination are still a problem and worldwide action against them remains the joint responsibility of the international community.

The EU strongly condemns all forms of intolerance, racism, and racial and other discrimination. Based on the principle that all human beings are born free and are equal in dignity and rights, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights explicitly prohibits discrimination based on any grounds, including sex, race or colour, origin, religion or belief, personal opinion, or sexual orientation.

On this occasion the EU would like to call attention to its unwavering commitment to combating all forms of intolerance, racism, and racial and other discrimination, which is firmly based on the international human rights standards that underpin the fight against racism. The EU once again calls on all states that have not yet signed, ratified, and/or implemented the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination, which is the core international legal instrument in this respect, to do so.

In order to combat racism, xenophobia, and discrimination worldwide, the EU cooperates closely with all relevant international actors and in all relevant international forums, especially the United Nations, the Council of Europe, the OSCE, and the High Commissioner for Human Rights and relevant civil society organisations.

The Council of Europe, which is engaged in combating racism at the European level, has established the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), whose tasks include the adoption of political recommendations for the governments of the member states. Protocol 12 to the European Convention on Human Rights prohibits all forms of discrimination resulting from acts of sovereign states. The European Court of Human Rights monitors compliance with these stipulations. Since 2006, an Additional Protocol to the Convention on Cybercrime has helped curb the spread of racism and xenophobia through computer systems.

In this context, the EU remains firmly committed to implementing the goals and objectives defined by the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance in Durban/South Africa in 2001. The EU believes that the follow-up process to Durban provides an opportunity to renew these commitments and therefore must focus on strengthening the implementation of the commitments made in Durban.

Combating racism and xenophobia remains a global challenge that requires an equally global response. The EU urges all states to take effective action at the national, regional, and international levels to put an end to racism, xenophobia, discrimination and other forms of intolerance and confirms its willingness to work together with every country to oppose racism, xenophobia, discrimination, and other related forms of intolerance, irrespective of the place of occurrence.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/CFSP_Statements/March/0321MZZ_rasizem.html