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### **EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT MEETINGS**

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#### **Committee on Foreign Affairs**

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- March, 31, April 1, 2008

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- April, 7, 8, 2008

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### **CONFERENCES / EVENTS**

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- March, 31, 2008, European Parliament

#### **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)

**Roundtable Colombia: Human Rights Defenders: the "collateral damage"**

- April, 1, 2008, 14-15h, European Parliament , Room ASP 1G2

I **The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) invites 5 human rights defenders from the Gulf region and the FIDH vice-president from Malaysia**

- April 3, 10h, 2008, 15 rue de la Linière, 1060 Bruxelles

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

- April, 7-11 , 2008 (Brussels)

T **World Health Day**

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I **International Roma Day**

- April, 8, 2008

I **Conference on Roma Education**

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T **Conference PCDI - "Quo Vadis EU Democracy", "EU Democracy Building: Building on the Experience of Active Civil Societies"**

- April, 14, 14-18h, 15, 9-12.30, 2008, European Parliament, Room P7C050

**REGIONS:**

**AFRICA**

**Cameroon**

- ▶ **Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on the situation in Cameroon (27/03/2008)**

The European Union is watching closely the discussion concerning the revision of the Constitution, while noting that any changes to the Constitution have to be decided by the people and the institutions of Cameroon.

The European Union recalls that the Constitution adopted in 1996 was the outcome of political dialogue and the democratic expression of the will of the people. It emphasises the importance of the proposals for constitutional revision being subjected to a broad, free and open debate that involves all elements of Cameroonian society.

In this context, the European Union remains convinced that the possibility of a changeover of power, the freedom of the press and the guaranteeing of public freedoms are fundamental to the consolidation of democracy, and draws attention to the urgent need to improve the electoral system and the standard of voter turnout, these being guarantors of the stability that the country needs.

The European Union condemns the violence that occurred at the end of February and the attempts at ethnic manipulation that followed. It reiterates its support for Cameroon's economic and social development, with a particular orientation towards the weakest and most disadvantaged sections of the population.

[http://www.eu2008.si/en/News\\_and\\_Documents/CFSP\\_Statements/March/0327MZZcameroon.html](http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/CFSP_Statements/March/0327MZZcameroon.html)

**Sudan**

- ▶ **Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on the Anniversary of the referral of the situation in Darfur/Sudan to the ICC (31/03/2008)**

On 31 March 2005 the United Nations Security Council referred the situation in Darfur to the International Criminal Court. Under the terms of Resolution 1593 (2005) the Security Council stated that the "Government of Sudan and all other parties to the conflict in Darfur shall cooperate fully and provide any necessary assistance to the Court and the prosecutor."

On 27 April 2007 the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for Ahmed Muhammad Haroun, current minister for humanitarian affairs and for former Janjaweed militia leader Ali Muhammad Ali Abd-Al-Rahman, also known as "Ali Kosheib" in connection with alleged crimes against humanity and war crimes in Darfur.

The EU expresses its profound dismay with the Government of Sudan's continued failure to comply with its obligations under UNSC Resolution 1593 including its refusal to arrest and surrender these men to the ICC for prosecution, much less allow the ICC to question them.

**The EU reiterates that the International Criminal Court is an essential means of promoting respect for international humanitarian law and human rights, thus contributing to freedom, security, justice and the rule of law as well as contributing to the preservation of peace and the strengthening of international security.** The fundamental principle contained in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court is that the most serious crimes of concern to the international community as a whole must not go unpunished. Putting an end to impunity for the perpetrators of these crimes contributes to the prevention of such crimes.

The EU once again calls on the Government of Sudan to cooperate unconditionally with the International Criminal Court and to surrender the two individuals for whom it issued arrest warrants.

In the event of continued non-compliance with the terms of UNSC Resolution 1593, the EU will support appropriate further measures against those who bear responsibility for Sudan's failure to cooperate with the ICC.

[http://www.eu2008.si/en/News\\_and\\_Documents/CFSP\\_Statements/March/0331MZZsudan.html](http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/CFSP_Statements/March/0331MZZsudan.html)

## AMERICAS

## ASIA

### I **Bhutan**

- ▶ **EU Presidency Statement on the National Assembly Elections in Bhutan** (25/03/2008)

The Presidency of the European Union welcomes the National Assembly Elections held in Bhutan on 24 March. The elections are an important step in Bhutans transition to democracy.

The Presidency is pleased that participation in the elections was very high and that the elections largely met international standards.

The EU looks forward to working with the new government and to further strengthening our bilateral political and economic relations.

[http://www.eu2008.si/en/News\\_and\\_Documents/CFSP\\_Statements/March/0325MZZ\\_Butan.html](http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/CFSP_Statements/March/0325MZZ_Butan.html)

### T **China**

- ▶ **Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on the detention of Mr Hu Jia and other Chinese Human Rights Defenders** (28/03/2008)

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.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressData/en/cfsp/99470.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/cfsp/99470.pdf)

## T **Pakistan**

- ▶ **EU Presidency statement on the appointment of the new Prime Minister of Pakistan**  
(25/03/2008)

The Presidency of the EU welcomes the appointment of Yusuf Raza Gilani as the new Prime Minister of Pakistan. The appointment of the Prime Minister is an important step in the development of democracy, stability and security in Pakistan.

The Presidency also welcomes the release of judges detained under the recent Emergency Rule. This marks a positive move towards the restoration of rule of law in Pakistan.

The Presidency wishes to take this opportunity to reiterate the EU's continued commitment to helping the Pakistani people building a peaceful, democratic and prosperous country.

[http://www.eu2008.si/en/News\\_and\\_Documents/CFSP\\_Statements/March/0325MZZ\\_Pakistan.html](http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/CFSP_Statements/March/0325MZZ_Pakistan.html)



## Tibet/China

- ▶ MEPs debated the situation in Tibet (26/03/2008)

MEPs debated the situation in Tibet with some MEPs calling for a possible boycott of at least the opening ceremony of the forthcoming Olympic Games to be held in China this summer while others said that a boycott would be futile. Many MEPs called for freedom for Tibet and underlined the human rights abuses in China and called for maximum restraint.

### Situation in Tibet - European Parliament President Hans-Gert Pöttering

In an introductory statement, European Parliament Hans-Gert Pöttering told the House "the events in Lhasa, the capital of Tibet, and in other Chinese cities since 10 March this year are deeply disturbing". He added "We condemn all forms of violence and the disproportionate use of military and police. We condemn the deaths of people who were acting peacefully".

Mr Pöttering went on "We express our solidarity with the Dalai Lama", saying we cannot allow him to be linked to terrorism or demonised. He called on the Beijing authorities "to negotiate with the Dalai Lama and, while respecting the territorial integrity of China, to reach an understanding that respects and guarantees the cultural and religious identity of the Tibetan people".

The Dalai Lama has accepted an invitation to address the EP in December as part of the Year of Intercultural Dialogue. However, in view of the current situation, said the EP President to applause from the House, "I am sure you will agree he is welcome to come to the European Parliament at any time".

Turning to EU-China relations and the Olympic Games, President Pöttering declared "Dialogue and cooperation between the European Union and China are in our mutual interest. China is a great nation, with which we want to cooperate in partnership."

He stressed that "We want the Olympic Games to be a success". "But this will require respect for the cultural and religious identity of the Tibetan people and free and fair reporting before and after the games. It is therefore to be condemned that journalists and correspondents have been expelled from Tibet".

Mr Pöttering then said that while he himself was due to attend the opening ceremony of the games in August, "Every responsible politician must ask the question, whether he can take part in the opening ceremony if the Chinese leadership does not seek dialogue and compromise".

"We wish to contribute to an outcome whereby the world's athletes can meet in fair and free competitions in Beijing. But our values and our self-respect will not allow us to surrender our principles. We in the European Parliament have a special responsibility in this regard."

### Council

On behalf of the Council, State Secretary for European Affairs Janez Lenarčič said first of all listed the meetings and talks that have taken place between EU representatives and the Chinese authorities since the violence erupted in Tibet. He then called for both sides to show restraint and try to "establish a constructive dialogue. The Council hoped China would allow independent media to re-enter Tibet soon.

According to the minister, a recent meeting of EU sports ministers voted against a boycott of the Olympic Games, believing instead that the games can help promote human rights.

He concluded by telling MEPs that the Slovenian foreign minister has asked his Chinese counterpart to engage in dialogue with the Dalai Lama and to release all peaceful protestors.

### **Commission**

Benita Ferrero-Waldner European Commissioner for External Relations said that the debate was timely as EU foreign Ministers were due to discuss this soon. The Commission, she said, was "deeply concerned about the unrest and the violence, violence is never justifiable". Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner called on the Chinese authorities to exercise maximum restraint and not to use force. She also called for independent media access in Tibet and welcomed the announcement from the Chinese of an upcoming media visit on 26-28 March which would include international correspondents. The Commissioner called for substantial dialogue between the Chinese and the Tibetans.

**The International Community had always respected the territorial integrity of China. Human rights are a matter of international concern and not solely internal matter, the Commissioner said. People had the right to demonstrate peacefully.**

The Olympic Games, the Commissioner said, are not a political event. She called for the event to be carried out in respect of the Olympic spirit which included the freedom of speech and freedom of the media.

### **Political group speakers**

For the EPP-ED József SZÁJER (HU) spoke of the Olympic Games as 'a symbol of peace and understanding' and stated that 'we demand a peaceful dialogue on the reconciliation and autonomy of Tibet.' He welcomed the statement of President Pötering, pointing out that 'we should use all our means to press the unwilling Chinese authorities to stop violence and respect human and minority rights.' He posed the question: 'how can athletes from the whole world come together and compete in joy and harmony, while at the same time, the State that is hosting the games is killing its own citizens?' Mr Szájer concluded by stating that 'this is not the time for us to boycott the Olympic Games', in particular with just 5 months to go. He did however point out that 'we should be quite unequivocal about the demands that we put forward.'

Pasqualina NAPOLETANO (IT) for the PES began by stating that 'I hope it's going to be useful to raise the voice of the European Parliament' in this respect. She emphasised that the request of the Dalai Lama for an independent commission to go to Tibet should be acted upon to 'shed light' on events there and that a negotiated solution should be found which would respect the existing UN resolutions. With regard to the Dalai Lama in particular, Ms Napoletano pointed out that 'the political role of the Dalai Lama cannot be substituted' and that he is the 'guarantor of balance.' She said that 'if the Chinese really want peace, they must accept [his] role.'

In conclusion, Ms Napoletano stated that the isolation of China will not help the Tibetan cause or human rights in general. She called on the Council to 'shoulder [its] responsibility ..[..]. we do not need a gesture', she said, we need a coherent policy.

Marco PANNELLA (IT) for the ALDE group reminded his colleagues of the Europe which existed 70 years ago - the 'cowardly, anti-liberal Europe' of fatherlands which said they 'weren't going to die for Danzig.' Mr Pannella asked his colleagues to read Spinelli again and to compare that manifesto with the words of the Dalai Lama. He pointed out that 'we in Europe are being cowardly ... we're losing the sand through our fingers.' Speaking of recent statements by Javier Solana, Mr Pannella asked that the EU should act according to 'the realism of the Dalai Lama' - that we 'should not look at things in apocalyptic terms' but should rather adopt a more pragmatic approach.

Cristiana MUSCARDINI (IT) for the UEN group by saying that due to the imminence of the Olympic Games, 'we all entertained hopes that China's development was not just that of an economic and trade power.' She pointed out that China did speak of giving rise to 'a harmonious world'. The reality, Ms Muscardini reminded her colleagues, is very different. The Chinese 'refuse to have a constructive dialogue with the Tibetans.' Ms Muscardini spoke of the necessity to review trade agreements with China in this context and concluded by stating that the Olympic Games can only take place if commitments in the realm of human rights are made.

Daniel COHN-BENDIT (DE), speaking for the Greens/EFA group, said that for the last ten years European leaders had played a role in the "Olympics of indifference", allowing human rights to be trampled on. He recalled the 1936 Olympic Games which were a political act and said that the Beijing Games, being under a dictatorship, would also be a political act. He said the EU "must all together refuse to attend the opening ceremony of the Games".

"40 years ago we had people raising their fists in the air because they were trying to put an end to discrimination against blacks in the US," he said, "In Beijing, we don't want athletes with blood on their feet" He said he hoped that through ordinary citizens' protest, Tiananmen Square could become the square of freedom. "We insist as Greens that anyone going to Beijing should create chaos by making their point and letting the Chinese know we are aware of what is going on."

Vittorio AGNOLETTI (IT) (GUE/NGL) said that defence of human rights in China does not start or finish with the Olympics. If in international relations, governments had to put respect for human rights first, not only would they have been against China having the Olympic Games, but trade agreements with China would have human rights clauses in them. "As it is," he said, "24 million people in China are employed by western companies, so we are in bed with them and tolerating it for the sake of global trade".

Patrick LOUIS (FR), speaking for the Ind/Dem group was critical of Bernard Kouchner (French Foreign Minister) for constantly referring to 'our Chinese friends' and failing to acknowledge what is actually happening. "Since the Hang dynasty started, the Chinese have always thought they are superior to everyone else in the world, and the Communists are maintaining that". "European leaders will be guilty if they fail to recognise what is happening in Tibet", he said.

Bruno GOLLNISCH (FR) (Non-attached) said that 113 years ago the French Socialist Jean Jaurès had said that capitalism contains within it the seeds of war, as clouds foresee a tempest. "For 60 years," he said, "China has been lording it over Tibet and a lot of European intelligentsia have been taken in", including the left-wing protesters of the 1960s and 70s: None of them stuck up for oppressed Asians, he said.

[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress\\_page/004-24808-086-03-13-901-20080326IPR24807-26-03-2008-2008-true/default\\_en.htm](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/004-24808-086-03-13-901-20080326IPR24807-26-03-2008-2008-true/default_en.htm)

## T **Tibet/China**

- ▶ **Tibetan parliamentary speaker says EU should press China to defuse crisis (27/03/2008)**

Immediately after the plenary debate on Tibet at the European Parliament, the Speaker of the Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile, Karma Chopel, had an opportunity to discuss with Members of the Foreign Affairs Committee the current crisis in his country, the broad objectives of Tibetans for the future and what stance the EU should adopt. He called for EU backing for a series of requests for action by the Chinese government.

Introducing the meeting, committee chair Jacek Saryusz-Wolski (EPP-ED, PL) said that although the plenary debate had exposed differing views regarding a boycott of the Olympic Games, it had shown "how deeply we are concerned". What was needed now was "not a gesture but a policy".

Mr Chopel set out the position of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile (TGE). To defuse the situation it has asked the Chinese government to "stop the repression, release political prisoners, allow independent medical teams to treat the injured demonstrators and allow an independent investigating team into Tibet" to ascertain the causes of the troubles (since China has blamed the exiled Tibetans for "instigating" the crisis whereas the real cause, according to Mr Chopel, is Chinese repression). He urged the EU to press China to act on these demands.

### **Autonomy within China?**

Turning to the TGE's broad objectives, he described its core goal of the "Middle Way Approach", demanding not independence but a large degree of autonomy within China, and argued that "the ongoing crisis in Tibet makes it necessary for China to accept this solution".

On the general question of sanctions, Mr Chopel emphasised the TGE's view that "China should not be marginalised". It was thus against a boycott of the Olympic Games and against economic sanctions, its broad line being "the more China is involved in the world, the more it will have to respect international norms".

While Members were broadly supportive, some, including committee vice-chairs Michael Gahler (EPP-ED, DE) and Ioan Mircea Pascu (PES, RO), stressed the need to hear the official Chinese view of the crisis, an idea warmly endorsed by Mr Chopel himself, who said "you can then judge for yourselves". He also welcomed a suggestion that the Dalai Lama be invited to the European Parliament in the near future.

Marco Cappato (ALDE, IT) criticised EU foreign policy representative Javier Solana for not awaiting the EP's position before taking his own stance. A more severe note came from Vittorio Agnoletto (GUE/NGL, IT), who asked "why not include a human rights clause in trade agreements with China?", saying "until then, it's just words and we're acting in the service of the multinationals".

### **China and the Olympics**

**Winding up the meeting, Mr Saryusz-Wolski pointedly quoted Parliament's resolution of July 2001 on China's bid to host the Olympic Games, in which the EP "invites the International Olympic Committee to establish guidelines to include respect for human rights and democratic principles to be applied as a general rule to host countries of Olympic Games" and "regrets that [China] clearly fails to uphold universal human, civil and political rights, including freedom of religion; believes therefore that this negative record and the repression in Tibet, in Uighuristan and South Mongolia, make it inappropriate to award the 2008 Olympic Games to Beijing".**

Among next steps, he first pointed to the forthcoming EP resolution on Tibet to be adopted at the plenary session on 10 April in Brussels. He backed the idea of inviting the Dalai Lama and Chinese representatives to speak to the EP. But finally he underlined the key "dilemma" already identified by EP President Pöttering: "should we go to the games or not?"

[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress\\_page/030-24800-086-03-13-903-20080325IPR24799-26-03-2008-2008-false/default\\_en.htm](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/030-24800-086-03-13-903-20080325IPR24799-26-03-2008-2008-false/default_en.htm)

## **Tibet/China**

### ► **Gymnich: Ministers discussed the situation in Tibet (29/03/2008)**

The 27 ministers of Foreign Affairs of the EU at the Informal meeting (Gymnich) at Brdo have together with the European Commission discussed the situation in Tibet.

They reiterated their strong concern over the events in the autonomous Chinese region of Tibet. The EU condemns all violence and pays its respects to the victims.

It calls for an end to the violence and asks that arrested persons be treated in conformity with international standards.

It wishes to uphold the transparency of information and hence free access by the press to Tibet.

The EU notes the Dalai Lama's recent public commitment to non-violence and to the autonomy not independence of Tibet. It calls for substantive and constructive dialogue which addresses core issues like preservation of the Tibetan language, culture, religion and traditions.

**The European Union will continue to pay close attention to the human rights situation in China.**

[http://www.eu2008.si/en/News\\_and\\_Documents/Press\\_Releases/March/0329Gymnich\\_presspoint\\_Tibet.html](http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/Press_Releases/March/0329Gymnich_presspoint_Tibet.html)

## T **Tibet/China**

### ► **China attacks EU position on Tibet crackdown (31/03/2008)**

China is "strongly dissatisfied" with the European Union following a discussion at a EU foreign ministers meeting over the weekend about the ongoing crackdown on Tibetan protesters by Chinese authorities.

"The Tibet issue is completely China's internal affairs. No foreign countries or international organizations have the right to interfere in it," the country's state news agency, Xinhua, quoted China's foreign ministry spokesperson Jiang Yu as saying.

The bloc's 27 foreign ministers, meeting in Brdo, Slovenia, issued a statement on Saturday (29 March) reiterating their "strong concern over the events in the autonomous Chinese region of Tibet."

The ministers criticised violence from both the Chinese authorities and protesters: "The EU condemns all violence and pays its respects to the victims.

"It calls for an end to the violence and asks that arrested persons be treated in conformity with international standards."

The EU ministers also called on China to open "substantive and constructive dialogue which addresses core issues such as the preservation of the Tibetan language, culture, religion and traditions," and requested that free press access by the press to Tibet be upheld.

Although Czech President Vaclav Klaus and Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk have in recent days announced they will not be attending the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympic Games in protest at the crackdown, there was no mention of the Olympics in the foreign ministers' statement.

Despite the measured tones from the ministers, China sharply attacked Europe's stance.

"We strongly hope the EU and its member states to make a clear distinction between right and wrong, explicitly condemn the violent crimes of beating, smashing, looting and burning and all those offenders, and avoiding taking double standards," the spokesperson said.

The Chinese news agency further quotes Ms Jiang as saying: "The EU should not rub salt into the wounds of the innocent victims of the Lhasa riots on 14 March and send a wrong signal to the international community and the Dalai clique and encourage the Tibetan secessionists in their violent crimes."

The spokesperson did however say that China is willing to "continue contacts" with the Dalai Lama so long as he abandons "advocating Tibet independence", and his actions "aimed at splitting the motherland, especially activities to fan and mastermind violent crimes in Tibet and other regions and to sabotage the upcoming Beijing Olympic Games.

Although the common statement from foreign ministers made no mention of the Olympic games, outside the meeting, differences amongst the various member states on the issue were more apparent.

The EU's foreign policy chief, Javier Solana, was insistent that there was no call for a boycott of either the games or their opening ceremony. "I don't think we will have a boycott on our agenda," he said, according to Reuters.

"We are separating the issue of human rights dialogue, inter-cultural dialogue and so on from events like Olympic Games and participation in those," said Slovenian foreign minister Dimitrij Rupel, whose country currently holds the rotating EU presidency.

UK foreign minister David Miliband, whose country is to host the next Olympics, said to reporters: "We are fully engaged in supporting the Olympics. We want to see it as a success, and I think it's right that the prime minister represents us."

Sweden's foreign minister, Carl Bildt, agreed with his British counterpart, saying a full boycott of the games would not be effective.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel and the country's foreign minister, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, will not be attending the opening ceremonies, but both have stressed this is in keeping with German protocol.

However, French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner hinted at a disagreement around the table. "The German position and the British position are not the same," he said.

French President Nicolas Sarkozy last week mooted a boycott of the opening ceremonies.

"No one was for the boycott, and as for a boycott of the opening ceremonies," said Mr Kouchner, according to French daily Liberation, "nobody wanted to talk about it."

"We didn't mention the games because they seem indispensable to us for the moment," he added, "but we're staying attentive to how the situation evolves."

<http://euobserver.com/9/25890/?rk=1>

## EUROPE (OUTSIDE OF UE ) AND CIS

### Belarus

#### ► Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on Belarus (28/03/2008)

The Presidency, on behalf of the Member States of the European Union, expresses strong disappointment at the arrest of a large number of participants, especially young people, and condemns the use of violence in dispersing peaceful demonstrators on the occasion of the Freedom Day in Minsk and other Belarusian cities on the 25 March. The European Union, recalling that the main demonstration in Minsk had been authorized by the Minsk City Council and proceeded peacefully, calls upon Belarus to release those arrested without delay and to refrain from further prosecuting them.

The European Union has repeatedly indicated its willingness to develop constructive relations with Belarus. It has taken positive note of the recent release of all but one internationally recognised political prisoner in Belarus. The Union reiterates its expectation that Mr Aliaksandr Kazulin, the last remaining political prisoner, will be released unconditionally and without delay. This would enable the European Union to start engaging progressively with Belarus.

In order to improve relations with the European Union, the Belarusian authorities should refrain from further arrests and stop persecuting the representatives of Belarusian civil society. In this context, the events of the 25 March and the nationwide round-up of local journalists connected to foreign media, which started on 27 March, are particularly worrisome. As is the recent treatment of the US Ambassador to Minsk and many of her staff who have been obliged to leave Belarus at very short notice. The European Union hopes that Belarus will now take prompt and concrete steps to enable a resumption of positive dynamics in relations between the European Union and Belarus.

[http://www.eu2008.si/en/News\\_and\\_Documents/CFSP\\_Statements/March/0328MZZ\\_Belorusija.html](http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/CFSP_Statements/March/0328MZZ_Belorusija.html)

## MAGHREB AND MIDDLE EAST

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**Netherlands**

- ▶ **EU Presidency statement on the release of the film “Fitna” (28/03/2008)**

The Presidency of the European Union fully supports the statement of the Dutch Government concerning the on-line release of the film “Fitna” by Mr. Wilders.

The European Union and its Member States apply the principle of the freedom of speech which is part of our values and traditions. However, it should be exercised in a spirit of respect for religious and other beliefs and convictions. Mutual tolerance and respect are universal values we should uphold. We believe that acts, such as the above mentioned film, serve no other purpose than inflaming hatred.

It is not through the violence but through an open dialogue of opinions under the protection of the freedom of expression that mutual understanding can be deepened and mutual respect can be built.

In the European year of intercultural dialogue the EU and its member states are actively promoting dialogue, mutual understanding and respect through a number of existing mechanisms and new initiatives.

[http://www.eu2008.si/en/News\\_and\\_Documents/CFSP\\_Statements/March/0328MZZ\\_Fitna.html](http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/CFSP_Statements/March/0328MZZ_Fitna.html)