

SUMMARY

REGIONS:

AFRICA

I **Democratic Republic Congo**

- ▶ EP: MEPS see devastating effect of rape in DR Congo (2/04/2008)

T **Zimbabwe**

- ▶ Foreign Ministers of France, Italy, Netherlands, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and the United Kingdom at an informal meeting in Paris on March 31st 2008 (31/03/2008)
- ▶ EU Presidency Declaration on behalf of the European Union on Zimbabwe (4/04/2008)

AMERICAS

ASIA

I **Bangladesh**

- ▶ Javier SOLANA, EU High Representative for the CFSP, today met Iftekhar Ahmed CHOWDHURY, Adviser for Foreign Affairs (Foreign Minister) of Bangladesh (4/04/2008)

T **Burma / Myanmar**

- ▶ More pressure needed on Burma (3/04/2008)

EUROPE (OUTSIDE OF UE) AND CIS

I **Montenegro**

- ▶ Javier SOLANA, EU High Representative for the CFSP, today met Milo DJUKANOVIC, Prime Minister of Montenegro (1/04/2008)

T **Serbia**

- ▶ Javier SOLANA, EU High Representative for the CFSP, today met Oliver DULIC, Speaker of the Serbian Parliament (2/04/2008)

T **Turkey**

- ▶ Court annuls decision to put PKK on EU terror list (3/04/2008)

| **Afghanistan**

- ▶ The EC in Afghanistan: Ongoing Commitment and Future Priorities (3/04/2008)

THEMATIC :

FINANCIAL PERSPECTIVES

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

EXTERNAL RELATIONS & DEVELOPMENT-RELATED ISSUES

EU / UN REFORM

I The Lisbon Treaty / Poland

- ▶ Slovenian Presidency welcomes the adoption of the ratification bill on the Lisbon Treaty by Poland's Parliament (2/04/2008)

MISCELLANEOUS

I Cyprus

- ▶ Statement on the opening of the Ledra Street crossing (3/04/2008)

T Poland

- ▶ Poland's closed centres open to MEPs (3/04/2008)

T Greece

- ▶ Greece under fire over refugee treatment (3/04/2008)

I EP: EU's Human rights report 2007

- ▶ MEPs review progress on human rights in the world in 2007 (2/04/2008)

T 4 April 2008: International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action

- ▶ Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on the occasion of the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action (4/04/2008)

T Child poverty

- ▶ Hearing told of high levels of child poverty in Europe (4/04/2008)

Women in armed conflicts

- ▶ Presentation of the ECDPM study “Enhancing the EU Response to Women and Armed Conflict with Particular Reference to Development Policy“ (4/04/2008)

T **Council of Europe**

- ▶ Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Thomas Hammarberg, and the European Union start a training programme for national human rights structures (3/04/2008)

T **Council of Europe: Czech Republic**

- ▶ Council of Europe anti-torture Committee visits the Czech Republic (4/04/2008)

IMPORTANT COMING MEETINGS

EU - THIRD COUNTRY MEETINGS

I EU-Croatia Stabilisation and Association Council

- April, 28, 2008 (Luxembourg)

T EU-Egypt Association Council

- April, 28, 2008 (Luxembourg)

T EU-Japan Summit

- April, 23, 2008 (Japan)

T EU Troika-OSCE

- April, 28, 2008 (Luxembourg)

T EU Troika- Russian Federation

- April, 29, 2008 (Luxembourg)

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT MEETINGS

I Committee on Development

- May, 5, 6, 2008

I Committee on Foreign Affairs

- April, 8, 16, 21, 2008
- May, 6, 2008

I Subcommittee on Human Rights

- April, 7, 14, 2008

I Subcommittee on security and defence

- April 14, 2008

I Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and home affairs

- April, 7, 8, 2008

I Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality

➤ April, 14, 2008

I **Committee on budgetary control**

➤ May, 5, 6, 2008

CONFERENCES / EVENTS

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

➤ April, 7-11, 2008 (Brussels)

T **World Health Day**

➤ April, 7, 2008

I **International Roma Day**

➤ April, 8, 2008

I **Conference on Roma Education**

➤ April, 9, 2008 (Slovakia)

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

I **Public hearing on the situation of Muslim Women**

➤ April, 17, 2008, 9.30-12.30, European Parliament, Room PHS 1A002

I **Partners in Peacebuilding: NGO and EU collaboration in the thematic area of children affected by armed conflict**

➤ April, 17, 18, 2008 (Jable)

REGIONS:

AFRICA

Democratic Republic Congo

- ▶ **EP: MEPS see devastating effect of rape in DR Congo (2/04/2008)**

A recent peace agreement may have given the long suffering people of the Democratic Republic of Congo some cause for hope. Since 1998 the country has been devastated by war, invasion and disease. Over 5 million people have died. One of the most brutal weapons of war has been the rape of women. In January a parliamentary resolution condemned the use of rape and on Tuesday a group of MEPs returned from a fact finding mission to DRC. We asked its head Jürgen Schröder (EPP-ED) what they had seen.

According to the "DRC Humanitarian Action Plan 2008" more than 30,000 rape cases were reported in DR Congo last year. It is probably only a fraction of the total number. Why has rape become so widespread?

Jürgen Schröder: Rape was obviously a weapon during warfare but since the conclusion of the peace agreements (in January 2008), the situation has changed. It is no longer a weapon of warfare; it has become a weapon of ordinary criminality done unfortunately by rebels, by members of the regular Congolese army and even civilians.

One of the factors is the general role of females in the society. Unfortunately the role of females is subordinated to the role of males. The whole country is not well-governed. And in those parts where we were in North Kivu and South Kivu, there is bad governance or absence of governance, chaos dominates. Males of this society have lost their dignity and now use their "male weapons" to also destroy the dignity of those who are weaker - namely the females and children. It is an expression of the chaotic and desolate situation of the whole society.

What consequences does rape have for victims and their families?

JS: The consequences are disastrous. On the one hand women and girls, even small children down to three years are rejected in general by their husbands, by their families, by their villages, because according to the standard of morality or ethics the reputation of the family is affected. On the other hand they suffer physical pain. The perpetrators know that they do not affect only the dignity of the woman but that they also destroy the structure of the society.

In its Resolution Parliament called for the allocation of funds to help the victims. What else can Parliament and the wider European Union do?

JS: I am convinced that this issue of human rights violations in the form of rape must be seen in the context of violation of human rights. There is an absence of a judiciary - which means chaos and impunity. People who do these things rarely see trial. We should go on working to find means whereby a judicial system can be established.

The other thing is that we help women of that country, not only to be free from those human rights violations but to be able to play the leading role of the society. This is what we have drawn as one of the major conclusions. That we should make up projects that are meant to help women in DRC to play a leading role in the society.

The human beings who are the most active in renewing the society are women. I have visited Indonesia and Afghanistan. If you look into the eyes of the female members of the Parliament, you have a feeling that you can talk to them and they understand you. If you look into the eyes of men, you see nothing - I am sorry that I am being so frank. Males in such societies are taught in childhood what to do to be a boy, that the boys are superior to the girls. They are victims of their education whereas women are always being told that they are the lowest level of the society - they have nothing to lose.

We support the peace process and the pacification in this part of the world. Also we can help improve the situation by improving relations with Rwanda and China who are both key players.

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/public/story_page/015-25225-168-06-25-902-20080331STO25211-2008-16-06-2008/default_en.htm

T **Zimbabwe**

- ▶ **Foreign Ministers of France, Italy, Netherlands, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and the United Kingdom at an informal meeting in Paris on March 31st 2008** (31/03/2008)
- 1. We, Foreign Ministers of France, Italy, Netherlands, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and the United Kingdom held an informal meeting in Paris on March 31st 2008.
- 2. We addressed with particular concern the situation in Zimbabwe after the general elections held on March 29th 2008.
- 3. We commend the Zimbabweans who turned out to vote despite the difficult circumstances.
- 4. We call on the Zimbabwean Electoral Commission to swiftly announce all official election results, especially the results of the presidential election.
- 5. The future of the Zimbabwean people depends on the credibility and the transparency of the electoral process. We note with interest and admiration the reports from Zimbabwean civil society groups of specific results from polling stations around the country.
- 6. **We look forward to working with democratically elected Zimbabwean authorities, who will be expected to improve Human rights and the rule of law for the good of the Zimbabwean people.**

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/Press_Releases/March/0331MZZ_Paris.html

T **Zimbabwe**

- ▶ **EU Presidency Declaration on behalf of the European Union on Zimbabwe** (4/04/2008)

The European Union is following the elections in Zimbabwe closely. It welcomes the determination of the Zimbabwean people to exercise their fundamental democratic right to vote in the elections on 29 March. It further welcomes that the polling day itself proceeded without violence and in an orderly manner. It encourages all concerned to maintain this constructive approach.

The European Union welcomes the fact that the results of the parliamentary elections have now been released and calls on the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission to ensure that the results of the Presidential election are issued without further delay.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/CFSP_Statements/April/0404MZZ_Zimbabwe.html

AMERICAS

ASIA

Bangladesh

- ▶ Javier SOLANA, EU High Representative for the CFSP, today met Iftekhar Ahmed CHOWDHURY, Adviser for Foreign Affairs (Foreign Minister) of Bangladesh (4/04/2008)

Javier SOLANA, European Union High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), today met Iftekhar Ahmed CHOWDHURY, Adviser for Foreign Affairs (Foreign Minister) in the Caretaker Government of Bangladesh.

The meeting provided an opportunity to discuss the current situation in Bangladesh and in the region, EU-Bangladesh relations and climate change. The High Representative expressed the EU's hope that Bangladesh will continue the implementation of priority political reforms and commended the Government for the progress achieved so far. **In this context Mr SOLANA underlined the importance of holding free and fair parliamentary elections by the end of the year.**

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/declarations/99749.pdf

Burma / Myanmar

- ▶ More pressure needed on Burma (3/04/2008)

More pressure should be put on the Burmese generals' regime through better targeted sanctions, said MEPs at a joint hearing of the Development Committee and the Human Rights Subcommittee on Wednesday. They added that the EU must raise the question of Burma in its trade negotiations with ASEAN.

Thijs Berman (PES, NL), who chaired the hearing, noted that since the "saffron revolution" of autumn 2007 "no-one speaks any more about Burma, even though the situation remains dreadful, human rights are still flouted and there are said to be 1800 political prisoners. How can the international community and the EU exert more influence, and by what means?", he asked.

Better targeted sanctions

Despite the sanctions imposed on Burma and some of its leaders (freezing of bank assets), the EU envisages providing €32 million (between 2007 and 2010 through the Development Cooperation Instrument) for health and education in the country.

According to Frijthof Schmidt (Greens/EFA, DE), "sanctions - which anyway have a limited effect - should be extended to the bank sector for Burmese leaders who conduct their financial business in Singapore, a country which does not support sanctions on Burma".

Glenys Kinnock (PES, UK) argued that there must be "a positive alternative to sanctions" and that we must "stop pouring money into this country without getting something in return".

On the strategy to be adopted by the EU, José Ribeiro e Castro (EPP-ED, PT) thought a mix was needed

between "strong measures" and "soft measures". Mr Berman suggested an international embargo on arms - which come mainly from China - and a ban on Burma's exports of precious stones.

Negotiations with ASEAN

MEPs argued that the question of Burma should be raised during talks on a free trade agreement and a partnership and cooperation agreement with members of the Association for South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN). China and India should also put pressure on the regime in Naypyidaw (the new capital of the country since November 2005).

The EP International Trade Committee is due to adopt on 8 April a report by Glyn Ford (PES, UK) on trade and economic relations with ASEAN. It is expected to argue in favour of signing a free trade agreement provided **that the agreement meets certain conditions on sustainable development, anti-counterfeiting measures and human rights**. However, the draft report contends that, owing to the current situation in Burma, this country should not be included in the agreement.

Call to release Aung San Suu Kyi

Referring to Burma's referendum in May on a new constitution, Mr Ribeiro e Castro told the hearing "we must lay down conditions for this referendum, including a call for the release of political prisoners and Aung San Suu Kyi" the leader of the National League for Democracy, the main opposition party, who was awarded the EP's Sakharov Prize in 1990.

"Should international observers be sent to the referendum?" asked Mr Schmidt, who also thought it was risky for the EU to endorse an election that might meet international standards but would in fact prevent the opposition from standing, as had happened in Iran.

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/028-25653-092-04-14-903-20080403IPR25651-01-04-2008-2008-false/default_en.htm

EUROPE (OUTSIDE OF UE) AND CIS

Montenegro

- ▶ **Javier SOLANA, EU High Representative for the CFSP, today met Milo DJUKANOVIC, Prime Minister of Montenegro (1/04/2008)**

Javier SOLANA, European Union High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), today held a working lunch with Milo DJUKANOVIC, Prime Minister of Montenegro.

Mr SOLANA and Prime Minister DJUKANOVIC discussed the latest developments in Montenegro, EU-Montenegro relations and regional cooperation.

The High Representative made the following remarks to the press after the meeting:

"The relationship between Montenegro and the EU is very good. The SAA was signed already, in January the interim agreement has begun to be implemented and that is very important. We hope that the reforms that are still needed will be done in the rhythm they have been done in the past. So I would like to say that we are very pleased about how things are going and we hope very much they continue like that. On the regional aspect, Montenegro has an important role to play and we hope that it will continue to do so. I have no doubt that this will be the case."

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/EN/discours/99692.pdf

Serbia

- ▶ **Javier SOLANA, EU High Representative for the CFSP, today met Oliver DULIC, Speaker of the Serbian Parliament (2/04/2008)**

Javier SOLANA, European Union High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), today met Oliver DULIC, Speaker of the Serbian Parliament.

The meeting provided an opportunity to discuss the latest developments in Serbia, EU-Serbia relations and regional cooperation. **The High Representative conveyed the European Union's strong support for Serbia's continued progress towards the EU.** Mr SOLANA underlined the European Union's commitment to work closely with Serbia to obtain tangible results to the benefit of the people of Serbia, as well as the importance that Serbia continued doing its part and accelerate the pace of the necessary reforms. **Mr SOLANA said that the EU wants to proceed with Serbia in partnership to support increased stability and prosperity in the whole of the Western Balkans region.**

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/EN/declarations/99712.pdf

T Turkey

- ▶ **Court annuls decision to put PKK on EU terror list (3/04/2008)**

An EU court has annulled a decision by EU member states to put the Kurdish rebel group PKK on the bloc's terror list.

The court of first instance, the EU's second highest court, said putting the group on the list and freezing its assets was illegal because the decision had not been properly justified.

The PKK started an armed struggle to set up a Kurdish state in south-eastern Turkey in 1984. Turkey says it is responsible for around 40,000 deaths since this date. The US also considers the PKK to be a terrorist group.

The court has struck similar blows to the standing of the EU terror list in the past. In July last year it overturned a decision by member states to freeze the assets of Philippine rebel leader Jose Maria Sison and the Al-Aqsa foundation, based in the Netherlands.

It found that the EU had breached the rights of both parties by not telling them why their assets had been frozen.

In December 2006, the court found that member states had failed to give sufficient reasons for including exiled Iranian opposition group, the People's Mujahideen of Iran (PMOI) on the list.

The EU's terror list has also come up for criticism from other quarters. The Council of Europe, the continent's human rights watchdog, recently said that the procedures used by both the European Union and the United Nations to include individuals or organisations on the list was "completely arbitrary."

According to a report made by the organisation, once on the list "it is almost impossible" to get off - the PMOI group remains on the list.

The EU has blacklisted around 50 people or groups including the radical Palestinian group Hamas and the Basque separatists, ETA. The list was established in the aftermath of the 2001 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington.

<http://euobserver.com/9/25917>

MAGHREB AND MIDDLE EAST

| **Afghanistan**

- ▶ **The EC in Afghanistan: Ongoing Commitment and Future Priorities** (3/04/2008)

http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/afghanistan/intro/index.htm

THEMATIC :

FINANCIAL PERSPECTIVES

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

EXTERNAL RELATIONS & DEVELOPMENT-RELATED ISSUES

EU / UN REFORM

The Lisbon Treaty / Poland

- ▶ **Slovenian Presidency welcomes the adoption of the ratification bill on the Lisbon Treaty by Poland's Parliament (2/04/2008)**

Slovenian Presidency welcomes the yes-vote on the Lisbon Treaty by Poland's Parliament being a big step to Poland's ratification of the Treaty. Yesterday's approval of the ratification bill by Sejm followed today's approval by Senat. After the signature of the bill by the President Poland will join those Member States - Hungary, Slovenia, Malta, Romania, France and Bulgaria, which have already ratified the Lisbon Treaty.

The Treaty was signed on 13 December 2007, and will enter into force when it has been ratified by all 27 member states. Ratification of the Treaty is the priority of the European Union. The Presidency is monitoring the ratification processes throughout the Member States, and estimates that the treaty is enjoying support as the ratification procedures has already started in the majority of the Member States.

The Lisbon Treaty represents significant progress in the Union's functioning, it is an important instrument, which will enhance democracy and the effectiveness of the EU, as well as strengthen its cohesion. At the same time, the Treaty will enable the European Union to become much more effective externally.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/Press_Releases/April/0402MZZ_ratifikacija_Poljska.html

MISCELLANEOUS

Cyprus

- ▶ **Statement on the opening of the Ledra Street crossing (3/04/2008)**

The Presidency of the EU welcomes the opening of Ledra street today. This is a practical and symbolic measure, bringing the two communities closer together and contributing to the building of mutual trust.

The Presidency will continue to encourage the President of the Republic of Cyprus Demetris Christofias and the Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat in their hard work towards reaching a fair and lasting

comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem within the UN framework in line with the principles on which the EU is founded.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/Press_Releases/April/0403MZZ_Ledra.html

T **Greece**

► **Greece under fire over refugee treatment** (3/04/2008)

Greece is facing growing pressure over the way it treats asylum seekers arriving to its territory, with a group of 63 refugee-assisting organizations urging all EU capitals to immediately suspend transfers of applicants to the Mediterranean country.

On Thursday (3 April), the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) issued open letters to EU governments as well as the European Commission, calling for the red light until Greece fully complies with EU and international law.

The letter cites "the unacceptable conditions for asylum claimants in Greece, the obstacles to accessing a fair determination procedure and the risk of other serious human rights violations" as reasons for the move. The country has been under the spotlight over possible breaches of asylum seekers' rights for quite some time.

On 7 February, Norway - a signatory to the Dublin agreements, a set of criteria designed to establish which EU state is responsible for examining an asylum claim - became the first country to suspend the return of asylum seekers to Greece.

Germany has stopped transferring separated children back to Greece, while the European Commission decided in January to challenge Athens' refugee practices at the EU's top court.

The commission criticism centres around the fact that unauthorised departure of an asylum seeker from Greece leads to a withdrawal of their asylum application and discontinuation of the asylum procedure.

According to refugee-assisting organizations, the approval rate of asylum seekers' applications in Greece is also alarmingly low. In 2007, out of a total of 20,692 claims considered, only 140 asylum seekers were granted refugee status and 23 were granted humanitarian status.

Wider problem

However, Mr Vandvik believes that the current problems in Greece are "only a symptom of fundamental and far-reaching flaws inherent in the Dublin system".

Under the rules, responsibility over an asylum seeker usually lies with the member state that played the greatest part in the applicant's entry into or residence on EU territory.

"After ten years in operation, the Dublin system still fails to achieve its aims," the ECRE's head said, underlining that "responsibility is assigned but not carried out".

The European Commission is set to further harmonize the rules on how asylum seekers should be treated in all 27 member states, with concrete proposals expected later this year.

Brussels believes that a change is necessary to reduce secondary movements of applicants within the bloc, known in EU jargon as asylum shopping and refugees in orbit.

The ECRE, for its part, has tabled four key recommendations - to suspend transfers to states that cannot guarantee fair examination of asylum claims; to better ensure the reunification of family

members; to improve solidarity between states; and to introduce a special procedure for cases involving children and other vulnerable groups.

"The EU can surely find a better system than the current one which bounces vulnerable refugees around Europe like ping pong balls, with devastating consequences for those unlucky enough to land in countries which lack proper asylum systems," Mr Vandvik concluded.

<http://euobserver.com/9/25910>

T **Poland**

► **Poland's closed centres open to MEPs** (3/04/2008)

A delegation of members of the European Parliament's Civil Liberties Committee is in Poland from 1 to 4 April, where it is visiting two closed centres for immigrants and asylum seekers. **MEPs believe that, while more should be done to ensure detainees have acceptable living conditions and get legal aid, Poland rates well compared to other EU states.**

MEPs visited the centres in Lesznawola et Biala Podlaska as part of a series of visits to closed centres for immigrants and asylum seekers in different EU countries.

"Poland rates well"

Following the visits to the centres, Patrick Gaubert (EPP-ED, FR), head of the delegation, said "the authorities' willingness to cooperate and reply to all our questions, even technical and ethical ones, reassured us". However, he pointed to a number of weaknesses in the management of the centres, such as the difficulty for asylum seekers to access legal aid and the fact that immigrants classified as being under a "tolerated stay" regime receive no financial aid or access to integration programmes. Moreover, the detention period, which can be up to twelve months, is too long, said the MEP.

Rapporteur Wolfgang Kreissl-Dörfler (PES, DE) said that "for the first time during such a visit, a television crew has been allowed inside a camp". He added "we are satisfied with what we have seen and heard this morning, compared to other countries. As far as living conditions for detainees are concerned, Poland rates well", he said.

Another positive point, according to Mr Kreissl-Dörfler, is that the Polish authorities are examining case-by-case the situation of the many refugees who claim to be from Chechnya, so as not to expel them if they are likely to be in danger on their return to the Caucasus.

Tough conditions at Lesznawola

The centre at Lesznawola, visited on Tuesday 1 April, is regarded by local NGOs as particularly tough. "Conditions are really bad, they're six to a room", said Martine Roure (PES, FR), who nevertheless added that she "had seen worse" on visits to other countries. She also pointed to efforts by the Polish authorities to improve the conditions of detainees by transferring them to newer centres such as the one at Biala Podlaska opened in 2008.

According to the Polish state secretary for migration and asylum, Piotr Stachańczyk, a total of 250 people are in this closed centre (all awaiting deportation, since the courts have rejected their asylum applications), as against 5468 in open centres where they can enter and leave freely.

The aim of these EP missions is to check whether Community standards are being applied in the Member States. MEPs also had a meeting with Frontex officials on Thursday 3 April.

Having visited detention centres in Italy, Spain, France, Malta, Greece, Belgium, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and now Poland, MEPs will go to Denmark on 10 April and Cyprus in May.

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/008-25366-092-04-14-901-0080331IPR25365-01-04-2008-2008-false/default_en.htm

T **EU Human rights report 2007**

► **MEPs review progress on human rights in the world in 2007 (2/04/2008)**

The Foreign Affairs Committee adopted on Wednesday the draft EP annual report on human rights in the world in 2007. The report looks at a range of human rights issues as well as highlighting the situation in countries of particular concern such as China, Iran and Russia. It also evaluates the EU's efforts to promote human rights through its policies.

The report, drafted by **Marco Cappato** (ALDE, IT), is in part a response to the annual report on human rights published by the Council and Commission last October.

Death penalty, women's rights and children's rights

The death penalty is one of the general topics examined. The adoption in 2007 of a UN resolution calling for a global moratorium on the use of the death penalty is seen as a huge step forward. However, MEPs still want to see "the eradication of capital punishment in Europe" and ultimately its universal abolition.

Women's rights is another key issue, which the committee says should be raised in all EU human rights dialogues, with the aim of combating "discrimination and violence against women and girls, including, most prominently, gender-selected abortion, all forms of harmful traditional or customary practices, for example female genital mutilation and early or forced marriage".

Among other areas covered are children's rights (including the special problem of children and armed conflict), torture, the protection of human rights defenders and the rights of minorities and the disabled.

China, Iran and Russia

Several countries are singled out for special attention. The committee "expresses its disquiet at the serious human rights violations in China and stresses that, despite promises made by the regime with a view to the forthcoming Olympic Games, the situation on the ground regarding human rights has not improved". Moreover, it says that China "still carries out the greatest number of executions worldwide". (Parliament is due to vote on a separate resolution on the situation in Tibet on 10 April.)

MEPs are "deeply concerned that respect for fundamental rights in Iran, especially freedom of expression and assembly, continued to deteriorate in 2007". Iran is condemned for its "increasing use of capital punishment" and the arrest of thousands of men and women for "immoral behaviour", and is urged to resume the human rights dialogue interrupted in 2007.

In Russia, the situation in Chechnya is highlighted, together with the persecution of journalists, human rights defenders and political prisoners (including Mikhail Khodorkovsky) and Russia's unwillingness to admit election observers. There is disappointment at the "lack of results from the European Union-Russia consultations on human rights".

Among other countries highlighted are Sudan (Darfur), Uzbekistan, Burma and Pakistan.

Human rights work of the UN, the European Union ...

Turning to the work of international actors, the new UN Human Rights Council is seen as having "potential" but the committee regrets that during the last year it "has not improved the United Nations' human rights record".

The German and Portuguese EU presidencies are congratulated on their achievements in 2007, such as progress towards finalising EU guidelines on the rights of the child. However, the committee says "the European Union is still far from conducting a coherent and hard-hitting policy to uphold and promote human rights around the world". Moreover, assessing the human rights impact of its policies is not easy, partly owing to a lack of data. The committee calls for "quantifiable indices and benchmarks" to measure their effectiveness. More broadly, Mr Cappato's report argues that the promotion of "non-violence" as a guiding principle should be "a priority objective in EU human rights and democracy policy".

All EU states that have failed to sign certain international human rights conventions are pressed to do so, including the Czech Republic as "the only remaining EU Member State not to have ratified the Rome Statute" on the International Criminal Court. Romania is urged to rescind its Bilateral Immunity Agreement with the USA on the ICC.

... and the European Parliament

Lastly, human rights play a prominent role in the work of the European Parliament itself. A high-profile example last year was the report of the EP temporary committee on the alleged use of European countries by the CIA for "rendition flights". Another is the holding of regular "urgency" debates and resolutions on human rights. The report calls on the Council to attend these debates and for the resolutions be translated into the languages spoken in the target areas. Finally, it calls for the EP to be involved in the EU's human rights dialogues and consultations with partner countries.

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/015-25551-092-04-14-90220080402IPR25550-01-04-2008-2008-false/default_en.htm

T 4 April 2008: International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action

- ▶ Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on the occasion of the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action (4/04/2008)

On the occasion of the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action proclaimed by the United Nations the European Union welcomes the significant progress made in the fight against the suffering caused by anti-personnel mines.

The European Union, nonetheless, expresses its deep concern about the tremendous humanitarian and development challenges still posed by anti-personnel mines and unexploded ordnance. These devices continue to kill people and constitute an obstacle to the return of refugees and other displaced persons, humanitarian aid operations, reconstruction and economic development, as well as the restoration of normal social conditions, and have serious and lasting social and economic effects on the populations of mine-affected countries.

The European Union is aware of the potential of mine action as a peace and confidence-building measure in post-conflict situations among parties concerned. The European Union urges that where appropriate, all relevant multilateral, regional and national programmes and bodies should include, in addition to specialised mine action programmes, mine action activities in their humanitarian, rehabilitation, reconstruction, and

development assistance activities, bearing in mind the need to ensure national and local ownership, sustainability and capacity-building.

Over the last ten years, the European Union and its Member States have consistently provided major political, financial and scientific support to mine action worldwide, totalling nearly EUR 1.5 billion and constituting almost a half of the world's financial assistance to mine action in this period. The European Union has been integrating mine action into long-term socioeconomic development programmes with a view to improving its response to national priorities and enhancing local ownership. The Union's overall goal is a world free of anti-personnel mines without any new anti-personnel mine victims and where better care is provided for the victims of these weapons. This is an ambitious target, but it can be achieved if all states demonstrate the necessary determination and unite their efforts towards this end.

The European Union appeals to countries which have not yet acceded to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, which embodies both humanitarian and disarmament objectives, to do so as soon as possible, and join in the efforts to permanently eliminate anti-personnel landmines. The EU also calls upon countries which have not yet ratified the CCW or its relevant protocols to do so as soon as possible.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/CFSP_Statements/April/0404MZZ_antimines.html

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/Press_Releases/April/0404MZZ_ECDPM_Pipan.html

T **Child poverty**

► **Hearing told of high levels of child poverty in Europe** (4/04/2008)

One of the most depressing aspects of the relative affluence of Europe is the millions of people who still live in poverty. In a hearing recently held by the European Parliament the issue of child poverty across the EU was debated by MEPs. It was organised to canvass opinion ahead of a report on the matter being drafted by Gabriele Zimmer of the leftist GUE/NGL group for the Employment and Social Committee. During the hearing Mrs Zimmer told those gathered that 19 million children are affected.

These alarming figures do not include children of immigrants and asylum seekers. Thomas Mann of the centre right EPP-ED group told the hearing that such children "are more affected by poverty and social exclusion". **He called for the prevention and abolition of child poverty to be a "priority" for European countries.**

The 2 April hearing in Brussels brought together MEPs and child poverty experts. One of the main points stressed was the importance of proper employment for parents. British Labour Member Stephen Hughes identified "irregular work for parents" as a crucial issue.

The hearing was told that the burden falls particularly hard on single parents. Irish Member Proinsias de Rossa of the Socialist PSE group highlighted the fact that single parents were often young themselves and it was vital for their future prospects and those of their children that they had continued access to education: "Why should they lose social support if they go into education?" he asked.

Elizabeth Lynne ALDE told the hearing that "many of the causes of social exclusion are common to all Member States and some countries are leading the way in tackling these, so surely we ought to be learning from each other. There needs to be more exchange of best practice between European partners and this is not something that should be left to NGOs."

Which policies can alleviate poverty?

In the search for policies that can work and alleviate child poverty those present heard from Hugh Frazer of Ireland's National University. He told those present that "countries with universal child policies (for example educational allowances and social allowances to all children alike irrespective of family background) seemed to have less poverty than those which targeted their policies to certain social group".

However, he called the problem of child poverty "multi-faceted" and said that a combination of universal and targeted policies could also pay off.

Unquestionably the level of child poverty in Europe is too high and should be a priority for policy makers: that was the position of the OECD's Dominic Richardson who is an expert on child welfare. He called for more financial incentives to get parents into work and support for parents who cannot work - such as childcare, social assistance and training for parents.

Parliament's Employment Committee is currently working on proposals to make 2010 the European Year for combating child poverty and social exclusion and MEPs will be voting on a report on the issue on 29 May.

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/public/story_page/047-25411-091-03-14-908-20080401STO25410-2008-31-03-2008/default_en.htm

T **Women in armed conflicts**

- ▶ **Presentation of the ECDPM study "Enhancing the EU Response to Women and Armed Conflict with Particular Reference to Development Policy"** (4/04/2008)

In their endeavours to promote discussion on how to advance EU work in this area, the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the EU has organised today at the Permanent Representation of the Republic of Slovenia to the European Union in **Brussels the presentation of the ECDPM study entitled "Enhancing the EU Response to Women and Armed Conflict with Particular Reference to Development Policy"**. **The study has been prepared for the Slovenian Presidency in close cooperation with Austrian and German partners.**

In her introduction to the presentation, Ms Anita Pipan, Director General for Policy Planning and Multilateral Political Relations at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia, emphasized that the European Union had achieved significant results in this area and established itself as a visible player in the global international community. The Slovenian Presidency wishes to make a step forward, since there are many opportunities to enhance coordination, complementarity and coherence of development policies, aimed at creating a comprehensive framework for an effective use of development programmes and instruments in this field. By enhancing its response to the issue of women and armed conflict, the EU will strengthen its contribution towards the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals. She stressed that the study offered substantial and useful proposals and recommendations for an effective EU response to the issue of women and armed conflict.

Andrew Sherriff presented the study together with proposals for enhancing the EU's approach. He noted the need to further improve the general understanding of the women and armed conflict issues and the EU's responses to them, in particular the need for further implementation of UN SC Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, and for overcoming structural obstacles.

The invited panellists from the Trio Presidencies (Slovenia, Portugal, Germany), the Commission, and the NGOs each outlined their own points of view but agreed that further efforts were necessary to improve the EU response to the issue of women and armed conflict through development cooperation policy and mechanisms on the basis of gender equality and women's empowerment approach. They stressed the importance of EU strategic approach to this issue to overcome the marginalization and fragmentation of women and armed conflict issues, which are featured in almost all contexts, at the level of both the EU and partner countries. The mainstreaming of the issue of women and armed conflict within regional approaches or development sectors such as health, education, security sector reform, and justice should be strengthened as well. Challenges also lie in the implementation of the EU commitments, particularly those at the level of partner countries and at the regional level.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/Press_Releases/April/0404MZZ_ECDPM_Pipan.html

T **Council of Europe**

- ▶ **Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Thomas Hammarberg, and the European Union start a training programme for national human rights structures**
(3/04/2008)

Human rights protection could often be better ensured at national level while it is becoming increasingly difficult for the international control bodies to deal with it in a timely manner. Improvement may come from more effective domestic action and better interaction between international and national mechanisms. In order to promote this process, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Thomas Hammarberg, and the European Union (EU) today launched a two-year programme aimed at setting up an active network of independent non-judicial bodies in Council of Europe member states, with a special focus on non-EU countries.

This Joint Programme, or “Peer-to-Peer Project”, aims to empower national human rights structures (i.e. ombudsmen and national institutions) to help prevent and find solutions to human rights violations more effectively. Through a series of training programmes, peer review activities and exchanges of good practices, specialised staff members belonging to national structures will strengthen their own human rights competences and increase their awareness of the possibilities for co-operation with international mechanisms.

“In addition to the courts, national non-judicial structures are key actors for the protection and promotion of human rights and the rule of law. Their effectiveness is of paramount importance for the implementation of human rights standards.” said Commissioner Hammarberg. “They benefit significantly from the exchange of experiences with their colleagues in other countries, and from sharing information about how international human rights norms can be best applied.”

The programme also foresees the possibility of providing technical assistance to establish new independent and effective human rights structures at the domestic level. “Realisation of human rights is a question of political will.” continued the Commissioner. “It is not enough just to endorse European and international norms: these standards must also be translated into a practical reality at all levels. Authorities should promote and protect the existence of non-judicial mechanisms for independent monitoring.”

The Commissioner for Human Rights has a long-standing tradition of co-operation and information sharing with national structures. The “Peer-to-Peer Project” has been designed to better respond to the human rights priorities identified both by national structures and the Commissioner. The funding for the project

amounts to 900,000 euros to be provided on an equal basis by the European Union and the Council of Europe.

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

T **Council of Europe: Czech Republic**

► **Council of Europe anti-torture Committee visits the Czech Republic (4/04/2008)**

A delegation of the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) carried out a visit to the Czech Republic from 25 March to 2 April 2008.

One of the main objectives of the visit was to examine the application of the measure of surgical castration to persons sentenced to "protective treatment".

The delegation also paid a follow-up visit to Section E of Valdice Prison, which accommodates persons sentenced to life imprisonment as well as "troublesome" or "dangerous" high security prisoners. The aim of the visit was to review the treatment and conditions of detention of these prisoners, in the light of the recommendations made by the CPT after its previous visit to the Czech Republic in 2006.

In the course of the visit, the CPT's delegation met Dzamila STEHLIKOVA, Minister for Human Rights, Marek ŠNAJDR, First Deputy Minister of Health, Markéta HELLEROVÁ, Deputy Minister of Health, and Martin MOULIS, Deputy Minister of Justice. The delegation also met with leading sexologists in the Czech Republic, and with members of the Commissions responsible for the approval of applications for surgical castration.

At the end of the visit the delegation presented its preliminary conclusions to the Czech authorities.

The delegation visited the following places:

Establishments under the authority of the Ministry of Justice

-Kuřim and Valdice Prisons

Establishments under the authority of the Ministry of Health

- Bohnice Psychiatric Hospital

- Havlíčkův Brod Psychiatric Hospital

<http://www.cpt.coe.int/documents/cze/2008-04-04-eng.htm>