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- May, 6, 27-28-29, 2008

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- May, 26-27, 2008

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- May, 5, 26-27, 2008

| **Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and home affairs**

- May, 5-6, 28-29, 2008

| **Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality**

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REGIONS:

AFRICA

Zimbabwe

- ▶ Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on Zimbabwe (16/04/2008)

The European Union is following the situation in Zimbabwe closely and welcomes the holding of the Extraordinary SADC Summit to discuss Zimbabwe, hosted by President Mwanawasa of Zambia in his capacity of Chair of SADC. It shares SADC's concern about the situation and welcomes its efforts to find a regional solution.

The European Union supports the Summit's call for the expeditious release of the Presidential election results, in accordance with the due process of law. It reiterates its concern at the prolonged and unexplained delay in releasing the Presidential results which is undermining the credibility of the process.

The European Union expresses its deep concern about the current deteriorating situation in the field of human rights and the increasing reports of violent incidents. The European Union reiterates the importance of respect for democratic principles and for the elections to be a credible reflection of the free and democratic will of the Zimbabwean people.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/CFSP_Statements/April/0416MZZ_Zimbabwe.html

AMERICAS

Haiti

- ▶ Declaration of the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on situation in Haiti (18/04/2008)

The EU expresses its concern about the violent upheavals in Haiti and especially deplores the loss of lives and damages incurred. The EU calls on all parties to restrain from violence and to engage in constructive dialogue in order to overcome the current crisis.

The EU strongly supports the continued presence of MINUSTAH without any reduction of its forces. Current events show that the presence of MINUSTAH is crucial to secure public security and the rule of law.

The EU, in close cooperation with other donors and the international community at large, will continue to support the Haitian authorities in their endeavours to meet the pressing demands of the Haitian people and to ensure the political and social stabilisation of the country.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/CFSP_Statements/April/0418MZZ_Haiti.html

Paraguay

- ▶ Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on the presidential elections in Paraguay (18/04/2008)

Voters in Paraguay are being called upon to elect a new Parliament and their new Head of State on 20 April 2008. This, like every election, is a key time to consolidate democracy. The EU trusts that the candidates running for Parliament and for the Presidency of the Republic and the political forces that support them will help ensure that the electoral process takes place peacefully and with due regard for the rules of democracy.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/CFSP_Statements/April/0418MZZ_Paragvaj.html

ASIA

China

- ▶ Minister Dimitrij Rupel received a Special Envoy of the Prime Minister of the People's Republic of China Guan Chengyuan (18/04/2008)

Dimitrij Rupel, President of the EU General Affairs and External Relations Council and Slovenian Foreign Minister, in Ljubljana received Ambassador Guan Chengyuan, Special Envoy of the Prime Minister of the People's Republic of China, who apprised him of the letter sent by the Chinese Prime Minister to the President of the Council of the European Union, Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Janša. **The letter contains the position of the Government of the People's Republic of China on the latest developments in Tibet and developments in EU Member States related to Tibet.**

In his reply, Minister Rupel pointed out that the EU Presidency had already adopted a position on these developments. He expressed his firm belief that it was in the interest of the EU as well as China that both sides find some common ground with regard to the Tibetan issue.

The Slovenian Foreign Minister assured Special Envoy Guan that Slovenia and the EU supported China's efforts towards promoting stability as well as further economic and social development in the country and the region. **"We strongly believe that the best way towards these aims is through the processes of democratization and respect for human rights,"** stated Minister Rupel. Slovenia and the EU understand the urgency of restoring stability in China, but at the same time believe that the Chinese authorities could take more positive steps to address the situation in Tibet, he emphasised later. The international community still lacks information on the events in Tibet and news from international NGOs state that many people are unaccounted for and that the Chinese authorities are implementing a number of harsh measures, especially numerous arrests, in order to ensure stability in the province. "The EU is concerned upon receiving such information. A positive step would be to allow free access to Tibet and to enable full transparency," underlined Minister Rupel. **He was of the opinion that substantive and open dialogue with the Dalai Lama could form part of the solution.** He also said that the Slovenian Presidency did not intend to invite the Dalai Lama to the Council meeting in Brussels; however, contacts with him on other levels were not excluded. The European Union also hopes that the Chinese Government will find a way to influence the provincial authorities to create a spirit of peace and cooperation.

Concerning some views on the Olympic Games, Minister Rupel said that Slovenia opposed a boycott, since the Olympic Games are the greatest sports event in the world and it would be wrong to link them to political developments.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/Press_Releases/April/0418MZZ_Kitajska_Tibet.html

T **Nepal**

- ▶ **Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on the Constituent Assembly elections in Nepal** (15/04/2008)

The European Union warmly welcomes the fact that the Constituent Assembly elections on the 10th of April were held in a largely peaceful and orderly manner. We congratulate the people of Nepal and the electoral commission. They have shown, after ten years of internal disturbances and war, their commitment to democracy and their determination to build a new future. The 10th of April 2008 is a historic day for Nepal.

This has been Nepal's most observed election. The European Union, its member states, Norway and Switzerland, played a significant role in participating in the observation process, at the request of the Nepalese government.

The European Union calls upon the political parties of Nepal to respect the will of the people and the results. It is important to fulfil the mandate given to them through the Constituent Assembly elections.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/CFSP_Statements/April/0415MZZ_Nepal_elections.html

T **Pakistan**

- ▶ **EU Presidency statement on the positive developments in Pakistan concerning key international human rights instruments** (18/04/2008)

The Presidency of the EU welcomes Pakistan's ratification of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the signing of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment on 17 April 2008.

The EU has long been seeking the universal ratification of these core instruments of international human rights law and the steps taken by Pakistan ratifying the ICESCR and signing the ICCPR and the Convention Against Torture represent a positive development.

Becoming a State Party to these legally binding international instruments of human rights law, Pakistan has willingly assumed the obligations contained in them.

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

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/CFSP_Statements/April/0418MZZ_Pakistan.html

Bosnia and Herzegovina

- ▶ **Javier SOLANA, EU High Representative for the CFSP, welcomes the adoption of the police reform laws (16/04/2008)**

Javier SOLANA, EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), issued a statement today welcoming the adoption by the Parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina of the police reform legislation:

"I warmly welcome the final adoption today of the laws on police reform by the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina. I would like to congratulate the parliamentarians on their courage and responsibility in taking this decisive step.

This agreement on the first phase of police reform is a fundamental step for BiH. It paves the way for the signing of the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) with BiH. I hope that it can be signed soon, on the basis of a positive assessment of all the remaining elements. I encourage all political forces in BiH to engage vigorously in the implementation of the remaining priorities of the reform agenda."

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/declarations/99930.pdf

T **Georgia**

- ▶ **Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the EU on Georgia (18/04/2008)**

The EU is seriously concerned about recent developments in the Georgian conflict areas, particularly regarding the latest decision of the Russian Federation, announced by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 16 April 2008, to establish official ties with institutions of the de facto authorities in South Ossetia and Abkhazia without the consent of the Government of Georgia.

The EU reiterates its firm commitment to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognised borders as reaffirmed in the UNSC resolution 1808 of 15 April 2008. The decision of the Russian Federation jeopardises the implementation of these principles. The EU calls on the Russian Federation not to implement its decision.

Furthermore the EU considers that this decision risks further increasing tensions and undermines the international peace efforts where the Russian Federation participates too.

The EU continues to support international efforts towards a peaceful settlement of the Abkhazian and South Ossetian conflicts, in particular those of the United Nations, supported by the UNSG's Group of Friends, as well as the Russian Federation in its capacity as facilitator, regarding Abkhazia; and of the OSCE regarding South Ossetia.

The EU urges all parties involved to refrain from any actions that could lead towards the escalation of the situation in the region. The EU welcomes the fact that the Georgian President put forward a new initiative for the peaceful resolution of the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia, and hopes that it will contribute to a constructive dialogue on the issue. The EU stands ready to contribute to these efforts.

In this regard, the efforts of the European Union Special Representative and the European Commission in implementing the package of EU confidence building measures in support of conflict resolution in Georgia will continue. The EU will keep the implementation of the confidence building measures and the situation in Georgia under review.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/CFSP_Statements/April/0418MZZ_Gruzija.html

□ **Russia**

▶ **Presidency press statement on EU/Russian Federation human rights consultations**
(17/04/2008)

The European Union and the Russian federation today held the seventh round of human rights consultations. The human rights consultations between the EU and the Russian Federation took place for the first time in March 2005.

Today's meeting was conducted in a frank manner with constructive engagement in the area of children's rights.

At the consultations the EU raised a number of concerns related to specific human rights and fundamental freedoms in the Russian Federation. Issues covered freedom of media, expression and assembly, especially in the light of the recent parliamentary and presidential elections, functioning of the civil society, the rights of persons belonging to minorities and combating racism and xenophobia and the rights of children. Both sides also discussed human rights in the Northern Caucasus. The EU also provided answers on Russia's concerns about certain human rights issues in the EU.

During the working lunch both sides discussed cooperation concerning human rights within different international organizations, including United Nations human rights fora. Considering the co-operation within the Council of Europe, the discussions dealt with the implementations of the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, particularly on the North Caucasus. The co-operation within the OSCE was also discussed.

The EU deems it important to include the civil society in its meetings on human rights with third countries. The EU meets representatives of civil society at the margins of every round of consultations. This time the EU met civil society the day before the consultations.

The next regular human rights consultations are planned to take place under the French EU Presidency.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/Press_Releases/April/0417MZZ-EU-Rusija.html

MAGHREB AND MIDDLE EAST

□ **Iraq**

▶ **Javier SOLANA, EU High Representative for the CFSP, met Nouri Al-MALIKI, Prime Minister of Iraq** (16/04/2008)

Javier SOLANA, European Union High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), had a working lunch today with Nouri Al-MALIKI, Prime Minister of Iraq. Mr Maliki was accompanied by the Foreign Minister, Hoshyar Zebari, and the Minister for Oil, Dr. Hussain Al-Shahristani.

The High Representative and the Prime Minister had a very fruitful exchange of views on the latest developments in Iraq and the region. Mr Maliki underlined that national reconciliation was moving forward. Mr Solana and Mr Maliki agreed to continue to strengthen relations in all fields, in particular, reconstruction, energy and support to refugees.

In addition to the considerable progress achieved in reconciliation, Mr Solana underlined the importance of adopting the electoral law and the hydrocarbon law.

Prime Minister Maliki was grateful to the EU for the support provided to improve security in the country and in particular for the work accomplished by the EU Integrated Rule of Law Mission for Iraq (EUJUST LEX). To date, some 1 450 judges, investigating magistrates, judicial investigators and senior police and penitentiary officials have participated in more than 60 training courses given in 18 EU Member States. Both Mr Solana and Mr Maliki recalled that neighbouring countries had an important role in contributing to the stability of Iraq and the whole region. They also said that the upcoming meetings in Kuwait and Stockholm would be important for the future of Iraq.

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/declarations/99929.pdf

T **Iraq**

► **Iraq PM tells MEPs he sees tangible progress compared to the past** (16/04/2008)

"I cannot pretend that Iraq is a stable country, but relative to a year and a half ago, we have seen significant progress," said Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki in a joint meeting of the EP's Foreign Affairs Committee and its Delegation for Relations with Iraq. **MEPs questioned Mr Maliki on the law banning parties with links to armed militias from upcoming provincial elections, on the security situation in the country, and on the status of the roughly 4 million Iraqi refugees.**

Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Jacek Saryusz-Wolski (EPP-ED, PL) welcomed the Prime Minister on his first visit to the European Parliament, and asked about the forthcoming provincial elections in October. Iraq Delegation Chair Emma Nicholson (ALDE, UK) noted the increased attention Parliament is paying to Iraq, including via the report adopted on 13 March and the newly created Iraq Delegation. She announced plans to visit Iraq at the end of the month with some members of the Delegation.

"Militias will not interfere" with provincial elections

On the question of the provincial elections, Mr Maliki said his government will "ensure that militias will not interfere." He noted that "Iraqis are tired of militias and terrorist actions," adding that "refusing the presence of militias at the elections is agreed upon by all parties." Libor Roucek (PES, CZ) asked under what conditions internally displaced people (IDPs) and refugees can vote. Mr Maliki replied that IDPs will be able to vote, but that the technicalities for enabling this have yet to be addressed.

Sudden withdrawal of coalition forces "would lead to confusion"

Tobias Pflüger (GUE/NGL, DE) asked whether the Prime Minister was in agreement with US General David Petraeus that a withdrawal of coalition forces was not advisable at present. EP rapporteur on Iraq Ana Gomes (PES, PT) also asked about the Iraqi perspective on troop withdrawals. Mr Maliki replied that a sudden withdrawal of coalition troops would "lead to confusion," and that an "organised withdrawal is foreseen."

Iraq "not a playground for regional power games"

Janusz Onyszkiewicz (ALDE, PL) asked about Iraq's relations with its neighbours, especially Turkey and Iran, and several MEPs raised the question of outside interference in Iraq's affairs. Mr Maliki replied that "Iraq refuses to be a playground for regional power games," and added that he had told neighbouring countries that "we want them to stop their territory from being a training place for terrorists."

Refugees' competences needed at home

Cem Özdemir (Greens/EFA, DE) asked about the approximately 4 million Iraqi refugees and IDPs, asking what plans for resettlement had been made. Inger Segelström (PES, SV) also inquired whether Iraq planned first to facilitate the return of refugees from its neighbours and then from EU countries. Mr Maliki thanked all countries hosting refugees from Iraq, and noted that "we have provided money to help Iraqis abroad, but we have to bring them back." "We need their competences to return to the country," he said.

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/030-26461-107-04-16-903-20080414IPR26460-16-04-2008-2008-false/default_en.htm

T **Israel / Gaza Strip**

- ▶ **EU Presidency statement on the latest escalation of violence in Gaza and southern Israel** (17/04/2008)

The Presidency of the European Union expresses its deep concern over the latest escalation of violence in Gaza and southern Israel on 16 April, which resulted once again in many civilian victims, among them Palestinian children. The Presidency expresses its sincere condolences to the families of victims.

The Presidency strongly condemns the terrorist attack at the Nahal Oz fuel terminal on 9 April which claimed two civilian lives, and calls on both sides to show restraint and end all violence. Cessation of violence is one of the key elements in achieving the Annapolis commitments.

The Presidency reiterates the need for a peaceful and comprehensive resolution to the situation in Gaza, including an end to rocket attacks and all other acts of violence, and a controlled opening of the crossings to meet the humanitarian needs of the civilian population. We have stated too many times that both Israelis and Palestinians deserve to live in peace and security. Actions that undermine the peace process should be stopped immediately.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/CFSP_Statements/April/0417MZZ_Gaza-Israael.html

T **Qatar**

- ▶ **Qatar: "A true partner for the promotion of democracy and dialogue in the Middle East", says EP President Pöttering** (15/04/2008)

The President of the European Parliament, Hans-Gert Pöttering, ended an official visit to Qatar on Monday. During his visit, he met the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani, and the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sheikh Hamad Bin Jassim Bin Jabr Al-Thani. He also met the Speaker of the Majlis Esh-Shoura of Qatar (Advisory Council), Mohamed bin Mubarak.

The subjects discussed with the Qatari interlocutors included the EU's relationship with Qatar and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), energy cooperation, the Middle East peace process, Iran and regional stability, as well as issues of religion and tolerance in the context of intercultural dialogue.

The role of the Gulf States in the Euro-Mediterranean partnership was also discussed. President Pöttering proposed, in his capacity as President of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (EMPA), that the next Bureau of EMPA discusses the possibility of including two parliamentarians from GCC countries as observers to the Assembly.

During his visit to Qatar President Pöttering also delivered **the key-note speech at the opening ceremony**

of the 8th Doha Forum, which dealt with international peace and dialogue, democracy and human rights promotion, free trade and development, economic and social reforms.

In his speech the President emphasized the necessary link between democracy and parliamentarism and alluded to the example of the European Parliament and its evolution over time towards a fully-fledged legislative body. “When I was elected for the first time in 1979, the European Parliament had no legislative power at all; with the Lisbon Treaty, it will be on an equal footing with the Council of Ministers as a true co-legislator in all areas”. President Pötering commended Qatar for having chosen democracy as a means to protect human rights and to achieve the participation of the people, a choice which represents a model for others in the region.

“Dialogue is a question of mutual understanding and respect of our differences, the only pre-condition being that all preserve the dignity of the human being, based on the respect of human rights and good governance”, President Pötering said to the 8th Doha Forum.

During 2008, the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, President Pötering and the European Parliament aim to achieve closer cooperation between cultures, especially by promoting dialogue with the Arab and Islamic countries, in an effort to improve mutual understanding. This visit to Qatar is the first visit of President Pötering to a GCC country.

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/030-26496-105-04-16-903-20080414IPR26493-14-04-2008-2008-false/default_en.htm

THEMATIC :

FINANCIAL PERSPECTIVES

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

Counter-terrorism/ Protection of fundamental rights and freedoms

- ▶ **Justice and Home Affairs Council adopts measures to combat terrorism more effectively**
(18/04/2008)

At today's meeting of the Justice and Home Affairs Council in Luxembourg chaired by Dr Lovro Šturm, the **EU Ministers of Justice reached consensus on the text of the proposal to amend the 2002 Council Framework Decision on combating terrorism. The proposal will introduce new criminal offences into EU law: public incitement to commit terrorist acts, recruiting for terrorism and training for terrorism.** This will make the fight against global terrorism within the area of freedom, security and justice more efficient.

This proposal also entails harmonisation with the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism at EU level. "I am certain that the proposal introduces an appropriate balance between the criminalisation of these acts and the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms," stressed Dr Lovro Šturm, the President of the Justice and Home Affairs Council, in the discussion. In addition, this framework decision will enable Europol and Eurojust to conduct investigations more efficiently.

The Council President, Dr Šturm, also presented to the Ministers the Slovenian Presidency's draft report on the key aspects of the Common Frame of Reference. The Ministers approved the report and confirmed it as the Council position on the essential aspects of the future Common Frame of Reference.

The Common Framework of Reference is one of the priorities set in the Hague Programme of 2004. The objective of the Common Framework of Reference is to improve the consistency of European contract law and achieve better lawmaking. The current year is an important one for the project, with the network of researchers presenting an academic draft of the Common Frame of Reference early this year.

The Council position adopted today concerns the purpose, contents, scope and legal effect of the future Common Frame of Reference. The position does not specify in advance the work and discussions in the Council concerning the Common Frame of Reference, but lays down initial and therefore important guidelines for future work on the project.

The Ministers made progress as regards the proposed Decision on the strengthening of Eurojust. Consensus was reached regarding the package of Articles determining the structure of Eurojust, competences of national members, provisions concerning the rules of procedure of the College and the status of personnel. Work on this proposal will continue at the June session of the Council.

The Ministers furthermore discussed the initiative on the adoption of a Framework Council Decision on the enforcement of decisions rendered in absentia. The objective of the initiative is to strengthen the level of rights in the field of judicial cooperation in criminal matters in cases when the judgment against a defendant is pronounced in his or her absence. At the same time, the Framework Decision will contribute to the application of the principle of mutual recognition of judgments. The Framework Decision stresses the right to

a fair trial and the right to be present at the trial pursuant to Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights. The proposal will enable Europol and Eurojust to conduct investigations more efficiently.

The Ministers had a constructive discussion and the majority supported the text of the proposal. Some Member States still have to examine the effects of the documents on practice and on national legislation. These issues require further work in the weeks leading up to the June Council meeting.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/Press_Releases/April/0418MP_Svet_JHA.html

EXTERNAL RELATIONS & DEVELOPMENT-RELATED ISSUES

EU / ACP

► **EU/ACP: Mandelson rules out renegotiation of partnership accords** (18/04/2008)

Any renegotiation of the economic partnership agreements (EPAs) already initialled with the countries of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific (ACP) would be a disaster, Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson told members of the EP International Trade Committee on Thursday. **MEPs asked about progress in the negotiations, the impact of the EPAs on the development and regional integration of the ACP and the role of the European Parliament in the negotiations.**

Referring to recurrent criticisms of the EPAs, Mr Mandelson ruled out "any suggestion of renegotiating the agreements already initialled". The Commissioner was speaking during an information session on the agreements organised by the Trade Committee at which negotiators from the ACP countries were also present. Any renegotiation would constitute "a new threat of legal uncertainty to the agreements but would also be a disaster for the ACP countries", according to Mr Mandelson, who restated his goal of concluding "full EPAs with comprehensive regional coverage" in the six geographical regions.

These accords are being negotiated by the Commission with the aim of updating the partnership between the EU and the 79 ACP states and bringing it into line with WTO rules.

Defence against food price rises

Mr Mandelson stated that the EPAs, which encourage and develop regional markets and aid for trade, would make it easier to cope with current price shocks.

"The only pro-development option is to develop more dynamic markets with investment in food production capacities", he added in reply to a question by Corien Wortmann-Kool (EPP-ED, NL).

Only one full EPA signed

The only full EPA so far - which has been signed by the Caribbean - can be seen as an example, argued Federico Cuello Camillo, ambassador of the Dominican Republic and chief negotiator for services and investment. "Market access on the basis of the Cotonou agreement was not enough", he explained. With the full EPA, the Caribbean has obtained immediate access without quotas to the European market. The EU on its side benefits from "asymmetric access to the Caribbean markets which will be liberalised over the longer term", said the ambassador.

Among the six geographical regions negotiating with the Commission, CARIFORUM, the Caribbean regional organisation, is the only one to have signed, on 16 December 2007, a "full" economic partnership agreement dealing with trade in goods, liberalisation of services such as tourism, agriculture, fisheries and investment.

Erika Mann (PES, DE) and Zbigniew Zaleski (EPP-ED, PL) asked about the discrepancy between the

enthusiasm of the Caribbean region for these accords and the attitude of other regions. Aamadou Koné, the Côte d'Ivoire minister in charge of African integration, pointed to the crises in Liberia, Sierra Leone and his own country as part of the answer.

In west Africa, only Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana have initialled an interim agreement. Nigeria has rejected the similar EPA it was offered. The other 13 states in the region, who are among the least developed countries (LDCs), have not signed an interim agreement either, but they already have privileged access to the European market under the arrangement "Everything but Arms".

Mr Koné also announced that a global accord for the west African region is due to be signed on 30 June 2009.

EPAs: instruments for development and regional integration?

Helmut Markov (GUE/NGL, DE), chair of the EP Trade Committee, believed the market access strategy was not sufficiently geared to development and respect for social and environmental standards.

"A narrow agreement, limited to trade in goods, does not meet all the requirements for development", answered the Commissioner. "Investment and technology transfers, which the ACP countries do not receive, will only come by opening the market in services".

There was also a discussion of the geographical breakdown chosen by the Commission for its negotiating strategy (Caribbean, Pacific, west Africa, southern Africa, east Africa and central Africa), which does not necessarily match existing regional structures among the ACP states.

Mr Koné mentioned the ties between the countries of the West African Monetary Union (WAMU), which applies a common external tariff but does not include all the west African states in the group defined by the Commission. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) groups together all the states in an EPA but does not have a common external tariff.

Parliament's role

The European Parliament will have a key role to play in the ratification and monitoring of the agreements, said Mr Mandelson. "All the agreements, whether full or interim, will be presented to Parliament under the assent procedure", he confirmed, adding that the text of the EPA with the Caribbean should be submitted to MEPs in "late June, early July" this year.

The accord with the Caribbean provides for the creation of a joint parliamentary committee, something called for in a report by Robert Sturdy (EPP-ED, UK) on the EPAs, which was adopted by Parliament in March 2007.

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/026-26533-108-04-16-903-20080414IPR26532-17-04-2008-2008-false/default_en.htm

EU / UN REFORM

MISCELLANEOUS

Javier Solana / Irene Kahn, Secretary-General of Amnesty International

- ▶ Javier SOLANA, EU High Representative for the CFSP, met Irene KHAN, Secretary-General of Amnesty International (15/04/2008)

Javier SOLANA, European Union High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), met Irene KHAN, Secretary-General of Amnesty International, today.

At the meeting, Mr SOLANA and Mrs KHAN discussed a range of human rights questions of mutual concern to Amnesty International and the European Union, including the situation in the Western Balkans, in particular Croatia and Kosovo, Central Asia, Tibet and the Middle East.

Mrs KHAN offered Amnesty International's support in making the EU's human rights tools, including human rights clauses in agreements, more effective. She drew attention to the need to mainstream human rights into all political dialogue with third countries.

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/declarations/99908.pdf

T **Women's rights**

- ▶ **Discrimination against Muslim women and its causes** (17/04/2008)

Religion is not the source of human rights abuses, and it is patriarchal culture, not the Koran, that leads to discrimination against Muslim women, concluded a Women's Rights Committee hearing on 17 April.

"Religion, culture and politics should not be mixed up", as this risks leading to misunderstandings, said Committee Chair Anna Zaborska (EPP-ED, SK) at the start of the hearing, stressing that the European Parliament can offer an open, objective dialogue between cultures.

Koran misinterpreted

"Over the centuries, patriarchal culture has created around religious texts a tight, interrelated web of biased interpretations that reduce the status of the Muslim woman to that of a subordinate", said Professor Azizah Y. al-Hibri (University of Richmond, USA). She, and other speakers, noted that the Koran treats men and women as equal, and specifically recognizes a host of rights later denied to women in some Muslim societies.

Judaism and Christianity have also had patriarchal views, noted Baroness (Emma) Nicholson of Winterbourne (ALDE, UK).

"How come tradition and culture are so far from religion?" asked Edit Bauer (EPP-ED, SK), pointing out that secular countries also have problems, for example in relation to inheritance and property.

Integration in host countries

Luisa Morgantini (GUE/NGL, IT), warned of the problems caused by alienation of immigrants in host countries, and stressed the need to improve economic conditions, as did Marie Panayotopoulos-Cassiotou (EPP-ED, EL). "Ignorance leads to fear, and creates more prejudice", noted Ana Maria Gomes (PES, PT).

Several speakers stressed that Islam does not condone violence, domestic or otherwise. Honour crime is not accepted, killing is punished, and neither do Islamic countries condone female genital mutilation, they said.

Legal and substantive equality

Formal legal equality between women and men is undermined by a lack of substantive equality, said Dr Shaheen Sardar Ali (University of Warwick), a former chair of the National Commission on the Status of Women of Pakistan. Important steps towards substantive equality include ensuring equal access to education for girls and boys, and to health facilities for women and men, she added.

"What touches women's lives is the governance of communities", said Dr Ali, describing her experiences in the North West Frontier province of Pakistan, where, she said, the "interface and interaction of multiple norms had a negative impact on equality norms between women and men".

Summing up the hearing, Anna Zaborska said **"the situation of Muslim women must be assessed with reference to all the circumstances of their lives, not only in the light of a few isolated elements. Simply condemning the Koran does not solve the problems to which women are exposed, and one-size-fits-all solutions must also be avoided"**.

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/014-26469-105-04-16-902-20080414IPR26467-14-04-2008-2008-false/default_en.htm

T **Council of Europe/ Armenia**

- ▶ **PACE urges reforms and an open dialogue between political forces to allow Armenia to move forward** (17/04/2008)

In order to move forward, **Armenia should urgently undertake reforms of the political system and of the electoral process, guarantee the independence of the judiciary, the public media and freedom of assembly, and stop the harassment of opposition media outlets, arbitrary arrests and politically motivated detentions**, the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) said today.

According to the resolution adopted, "the only way to allow the country to move forward with the above-mentioned urgently-needed reforms is the initiation of an open and constructive dialogue between political forces", the parliamentarians said.

Following the proposals of the PACE rapporteurs on Armenia (Georges Colombier, France, EPP/CD, and John Prescott, United Kingdom, SOC), the parliamentarians listed a number of conditions for such a dialogue to start, notably the immediate opening of an independent inquiry into the events of 1 March (which resulted in 10 people killed and 200 injured), the urgent release of the persons detained on seemingly artificial and politically motivated charges and the revocation of the amendments recently adopted by the National Assembly to the Law on conducting meetings, assemblies, rallies and demonstrations, with immediate effect.

Unless these conditions are met and an open dialogue on the reforms mentioned is seriously engaged, "the credibility of Armenia as a member of the Council of Europe is put into doubt", the parliamentarians said.

"The Assembly should therefore consider the possibility of suspending the voting rights of the Armenian delegation to the Assembly at the opening of its June 2008 part-session, if no considerable progress has been made on these requirements by then", the resolution concludes.

T **Council of Europe / Belarus**

- ▶ **Statement on the media situation in Belarus by Andrew McIntosh (United Kingdom, SOC), PACE rapporteur on media freedom** (17/04/2008)

"In view of recent police brutality against journalists reporting about a peaceful demonstration in Minsk on 25 March 2008 and the subsequent harassment of many journalists by security forces of Belarus, I call on the authorities in the Republic of Belarus to return seized material to the journalists, launch investigations into such abuse, and train law enforcement authorities in

respecting the fundamental right to freedom of expression of everybody in Belarus including especially journalists.

I support the constructive criticism by the Belarusian Association of Journalists of the new draft law on information before the National Assembly of Belarus at present. Members of the National Assembly are invited to discuss media legislation with the Sub-Committee on the Media.

Freedom of expression of political opinions and freedom of information is a vital element of any democratic society. This is particularly important with regard to the parliamentary elections in Belarus in autumn 2008. **State propaganda, absence of media freedom and repression of freedom of opinion cannot be tolerated in a democracy.** As emphasised by the Council of Europe since 1997 and debated by the Assembly on 15 April, respect of freedom of expression must be a necessary requirement for any change in the relations of the Belarusian government with the Assembly, in addition to ensuring the independence of the courts, granting parliamentary powers to a democratically elected National Assembly and abolishing the death penalty in Belarus."

T **Council of Europe / Cyprus**

► **Council of Europe anti-torture committee publishes report on Cyprus (15/04/2008)**

The Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) has today published a report on its fourth visit to Cyprus in December 2004, together with the response of the Cypriot authorities. The documents have been made public at the request of the Cypriot Government.

The report reviews the situation of people detained by the police, including immigration detainees. The information gathered during the visit indicated that physical ill-treatment by the police remained a problem in Cyprus. The CPT made a series of recommendations designed to address that issue.

Despite efforts being made to upgrade conditions of detention in police facilities, certain deficiencies were observed in visited establishments and were the subject of recommendations. The CPT also expressed serious concern about the practice of holding people, in particular immigration detainees, for prolonged periods in police detention facilities.

Having re-examined the situation at Nicosia Central Prisons, the CPT made a number of recommendations concerning prison overcrowding, material conditions, regime activities offered to prisoners, medical screening of prisoners and the treatment of mentally ill prisoners, among other issues.

The report also covers the situation at Athalassa Psychiatric Hospital, where it was noted that living conditions for patients had improved since the CPT's previous visit in 2000. A number of recommendations were made aimed at diversifying therapeutic programmes and increasing the number of medical and other qualified treatment staff.

For the first time in Cyprus, the CPT also visited two places accommodating children in the care of the authorities. The situation in these establishments was found to be generally satisfactory.

In their responses, the Cypriot authorities provided information on measures taken to address concerns raised in the CPT report, including the adoption in 2005 of the Law on the Rights of Arrested and Detained Persons, as well as the refurbishment of police cells and certain sections of Nicosia Central Prisons.

http://www.coe.int/t/dc/av/allreleases_en.asp

Council of Europe / China

- ▶ Olympics have put spotlight on lack of human rights in China, say PACE parliamentarians at hearing (17/04/2008)

“China does not have a public relations problem, it has a human rights problem,” said Göran Lindblad (Sweden, EPP/CD), Chair of the Political Affairs Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), opening a hearing today on the political situation in China on the eve of the Olympic Games. **“The Olympics have put the spotlight on China, but not in the way the Chinese government thought they would,”** he added. **“They have put the spotlight on China’s lack of human rights and democracy.”**

The hearing was addressed by a representative of the Dalai Lama, Jampal Chosang, and Chinese human rights defender Yang Jianli, a survivor of the Tiananmen massacre who spent five years in jail in China, as well as representatives of Amnesty International and Reporters Without Borders. The Vice-Consul of the Chinese Consulate in Strasbourg attended the hearing to observe the proceedings but did not take part.

Mr Yang called on the international community to seize the “window of opportunity” presented by the Olympics to pressure the Chinese authorities into improving the democratic and human rights situation in the country. He said that any world leaders attending the opening ceremony should set conditions on their participation.

Mr Chosang pointed out that the Dalai Lama and Tibetans generally looked forward to solving the Tibetan problem through non-violence and negotiation with the Chinese authorities. He added that since 1988 when he introduced the “Middle Way” policy, the Dalai Lama had never asked for independence for Tibet, only autonomy within China, and had supported the holding of the Olympic Games in China.

Corinna-Barbara Francis, from the East Asia Desk of Amnesty International, said there had been a deterioration of human rights in many areas, despite promises of improvements made in 2001 when China was bidding for the Olympic Games.

Olivier Basille, for Reporters Without Borders, said China continued to be “the biggest prison in the world” for journalists, many of whom were imprisoned, while official information was carefully controlled, international broadcasts jammed and the internet heavily policed.

http://www.coe.int/t/dc/av/allreleases_en.asp