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- ♦ **Informal Meeting of the Working Party on Human Rights (COHOM)**
 - June, 27, 2008 (Brdo)
- ♦ **Journée Internationale de soutien aux victimes de la Torture : Projection-débat organisée par l'OMCT-Europe, « Restitutions extraordinaires, quel impact sur la protection de vos droits fondamentaux ? »**
 - June, 26, 2008 - Espace Sanghor, 366 Chaussée de Wavre, 1040 Etterbeek

REGIONS

AFRICA

• **ACP Countries**

▶ **ACP-EC Council of Ministers; Addis Ababa, 13 June 2008** (18/06/2008)

The joint ACP-EC Council, which took place in Addis Ababa on 12-13 June 2008, is the highest level meeting between the ACP states and the EU and is foreseen by the Cotonou Agreement, the most far-reaching partnership agreement of its kind in the world.

The meeting provided the occasion for a full political discussion on issues of major concerns such as the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), the question of food prices and food security as well as the question of financing for development and aid effectiveness. The ACP states and the EU agreed a joint statement on the three issues in the form of a resolution.

On EPAs:

- The resolution underlines the importance of regional integration and the smooth integration of ACP states into the world economy.
- The Council noted the progress achieved in the CARIFORUM in agreeing a full EPA as well as the considerable work that needs to be done in other regions and reiterated the commitment to make every effort to ensure that all regions conclude WTO compatible full EPAs, with due regard for ACP circumstances.
- The parties recognised the need for a flexible and pragmatic approach when moving from interim agreements towards regional EPAs and encouraged the initiative for regional Aid for Trade packages building on the regional programming of the 10th EDF.
- The resolution also noted the link between EPAs, regional integration and the second major issue on the agenda: food security.

On food prices and food security:

- The Council expressed concern for the challenges posed by rising food and energy prices, as well as climate change.
- The resolution noted that ACP governments are committed to strengthening sustainable regional and national agricultural policies and that the EU will provide financial and other support to these ACP national and regional policies, especially through an enhanced focus on agriculture in the 10th EDF.

On aid effectiveness and financing for development:

- The Council is convinced that all MDGs can still be attained provided that concerted action be taken immediately and in a sustained way until 2015 and acknowledged that achieving all MDGs is a shared responsibility between donors and partners.
- ACP states and the EU are determined to join their efforts to influence the outcome of the upcoming international conferences in Accra, New York and Doha.

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/misc/101282.pdf

- ♦ **The Great Lakes Region**

- ▶ **Council Conclusions on the Great Lakes Region** (16/06/2008)

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

1. The Council welcomes the progress made in the African Great Lakes Region, where the EU is actively engaged, including in the framework of the implementation structures of the different Peace Processes, together with international and African partners, in particular the UN and the AU. The Council underlines the importance of a regional approach in order to provide a comprehensive response to the interlinked problems of the region. **The Council also stresses the importance of implementing commitments to normalise diplomatic relations made by the governments of DRC, Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda at their regional meeting in September 2007.**

2. The Council launches an appeal to reinforce relations between the countries of the region through existing structures and to create a stronger regional cooperation, including on economic aspects and with a focus on reducing the wide-spread cross-border criminal activities. The Council calls upon countries in the region to cooperate fully with the Committee established pursuant to UNSCR 1533 in carrying out its mandate.

3. **The Council reiterates the EU's commitment to support efforts by the DRC to provide peace, security, reconstruction and development for its citizens, in full respect of human rights, good governance and the rule of law, in line with the principles enshrined in the Cotonou Agreement and in the EU-Africa Strategy.**

As regards the situation in Eastern DRC, the Council welcomes the approach taken by the government of DRC and Rwanda and all the groups involved in concluding the important recent accords on peace in eastern DRC. The Council underlines that the Nairobi Communiqué of 9 November 2007 and the results of the Goma Conference (Kivus Conference for Peace, Security and Development) of 23 January 2008 provide an opportunity for a political solution of the crisis in the Kivus. It is now essential that all parties equally and fully implement the commitments, ensuring substantial progress on both tracks, preventing the peace processes underway in the region becoming stalled. The Council stresses the need to refrain from providing support to armed movements in the DRC or the region. The EU underlines the importance of the implementation structures and programmes, in particular the Amani programme and the Technical Joint Committee for Peace and Security.

4. The Council condemns the recent attack by FDLR at the Kinyandoni camp against internally displaced people. **The Council stresses the need to accelerate the disarmament, demobilization, repatriation/resettlement and reintegration (DDR/RR) process and the need for all armed groups to constructively engage in the process launched in Nairobi and Goma.**

The Council takes note of the conference on FDLR disarmament, demobilisation, repatriation and relocation that took place in Kisangani on May 26. The EU welcomes this initiative as a step to make further progress in the Nairobi peace process. In this context, the EU calls on all signatories of the Nairobi communiqué to take their responsibilities in making sure all conditions are in place to allow for this process to advance.

5. The Council welcomes UNSCR 1804 and 1807. In accordance with their provisions, EU Member States will take all appropriate measures to prevent the provision by their nationals or from their territories of any support for the FDLR or ex-FAR/Interahamwe and other armed groups in the DRC. **The Council stresses the need to bring an immediate end to the suffering of the population, in**

particular women and children and to put an end to all forms of sexual violence. The Council condemns the ongoing violations of human rights and international humanitarian and criminal law, in particular in the Eastern DRC and calls on the Government of DRC to ensure that those committing these violations are held responsible. The EU will continue its support for the reform of the justice sector and the fight against impunity. The Council reiterates its full support for the International Criminal Court's (ICC) activities in the region.

6. The EU continues to contribute to the process of Security Sector reform, including through its two ESDP missions in the DRC (EUSEC RD Congo and EUPOL RD Congo) and the Commission's activities. **A sustainable reform of the entire Security Sector, with due emphasis on the rule of law, accountability and respect for human rights, coordinated with civil society and other relevant stakeholders and with support from the international community, will greatly help to end the climate of impunity and provide the security that DRC citizens deserve.** The Council welcomes the organisation of the SSR meeting in Kinshasa on 25-26 February 2008 and encourages the government of the DRC and international partners to further enhance their commitment to this process.

7. The EU deplores the decision by the DRC government to close two Belgian consulates in Bukavu and Lubumbashi, as they provided an important and useful EU diplomatic and consular presence in the East of the country.

8. Regarding the peace process in **Burundi**, the Council congratulates the Government of Burundi, the Regional Initiative and the South African facilitation for the progress achieved. The Council welcomes the return of the PALIPEHUTU-FNL leadership to the country. The EU will remain committed to supporting the peace process, in particular through the participation of the EU in the Political Directorate. **The Council encourages the parties to remain actively committed to the peace process and calls upon the PALIPEHUTU-FNL and the Government of Burundi to refrain from the use of armed force, to implement the ceasefire agreement and to work towards a comprehensive peace agreement. The EU strongly encourages the institutions in Burundi to resume their work and engage in a constructive way, in order to improve the living conditions of the Burundian population.**

9. Regarding the peace process in **Uganda**, the EU welcomes the facilitation efforts of the Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for LRA-affected areas, Joaquim Chissano, and of the vice-President of South Sudan, Riek Machar, and encourages them to continue. The Council strongly deplores the fact that the LRA has not honoured its previously declared commitment to sign the Final Peace Agreement. **The EU condemns the recent abductions and demands that these and other serious breaches of international humanitarian and criminal law by the LRA come to an end. All abducted persons should immediately and unconditionally be released.** The EU compliments the Government of Uganda on having constructively carried out the peace negotiations in Juba with the LRA. **The Council encourages the Government of Uganda to honour the implementation of all applicable provisions of the agreements, in particular the Comprehensive Solutions and Accountability and Reconciliation, in order to stabilize the situation, ensure durable peace, respect international law and achieve full respect for human rights in Northern Uganda. The Council welcomes the new High Court division to deal with serious war crimes, on the understanding, however, that its functioning will be in line with the provisions of the Rome Statute, establishing the ICC. The Council reiterates that the EU will remain committed to supporting the peace process and fully upholding international law in full compliance with the mandate of the ICC.**

10. As regards **Rwanda**, the Council has noted the preparations made for the parliamentary elections to be held next September. The Council emphasises the importance of these elections for the country and states the EU's readiness to support them, inter alia, by sending an EU electoral observation mission to Rwanda.

The EU reiterates its full support for the activities of the International Criminal Tribunal on Rwanda (ICTR).

11. The Council has noted MONUC's special report on the *Bas Congo* events of February and March 2008. It regrets that the police used force in an excessive and/or unwarranted manner, including arbitrary executions. It requests the Congolese government to take urgent action to implement the recommendations of the report.

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/gena/101232.pdf

- ♦ **Somalia**

- ▶ **Council Conclusions on Somalia** (16/06/2008)

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

1. The Council recalls its conclusions of 26 May 2008 and reaffirms its commitment to a comprehensive approach for a lasting settlement of the Somali crisis, covering its political, security and humanitarian aspects.

2. The Council welcomes the agreement reached on 9 June 2008 by the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia and the Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia, at the Inter-Somali talks that resumed in Djibouti early this month, with the facilitation of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General Ould-Abdallah and the support of the EU and other international partners. **The Council reiterates the urgent need to keep up the momentum of an inclusive dialogue for a sustained political solution to the dire situation in Somalia.**

3. The Council welcomes the unanimous adoption of UN Security Council resolution 1816 of 2 June 2008 on acts of piracy and armed robbery off the coast of Somalia

4. The Council requests the Council General Secretariat and the Commission to study possible options on implementing all commitments contained in its conclusions of 26 May, as well as on how to best contribute to the implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1816 of 2 June."

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/gena/101228.pdf

- ♦ **Somalia**

- ▶ **MEPs: Human Rights in Somalia** (19/06/2008)

Routine killing of civilians in Somalia

In a resolution on Somalia, MEPs look at the prolonged civil war and its implications for the peace and reconciliation process in the country, as well as for the security and stability of the Horn of Africa as a

Since February 2007, some 856,970 Somalis have fled fighting in Mogadishu, while 2.6 million Somalis - about 35 per cent of the population - are in need of humanitarian assistance.

The EP resolution calls for a halt to the fighting and the widespread atrocities committed by all parties to the conflict, with the loss of life of many civilians, and it demands investigations into all

human rights violations. It urges all sides to ensure unhindered humanitarian access and assistance to affected populations and to ensure the safety of local and international humanitarian workers.

The peace deal reached between the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia (TFG) and the Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia (ARS) is welcomed, but MEPs stress the need for "a genuine reconciliation process".

They also call on the Somali Transitional Government, in collaboration with the UN and the African Union, "to use all available means to prevent, deter and suppress piracy and armed robbery committed from the Somali coast against vessels, especially those carrying humanitarian aid".

Key role for the international community

The role of the outside world will be crucial in bringing peace to this region. **The EP urges that neighbouring Kenya be pressed to play a constructive role. As to the European Union, MEPs call for "all donors, and the EU in particular, to increase the provision of humanitarian assistance" and for the Commission "to ensure that EU aid is not being misappropriated".**

The UN Security Council is asked "to strengthen the UN arms embargo on Somalia" and "to ensure that the embargo is fully respected by states in the region" as well as "to investigate and impose targeted sanctions on all individuals accused of committing war crimes and crimes against humanity in Somalia, including possible referral to the ICC".

The resolution backs the UN Security Council resolution, adopted on 15 May 2008, calling for the possible deployment of a 28,500-strong UN peacekeeping force but it urges **that peacekeepers "be mandated to protect civilians, including women, children and internally displaced persons, and include a strong human rights component, with the capacity to monitor, investigate and report human rights violations".**

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/015-32143-168-06-25-902-20080618IPR32142-16-06-2008-2008-false/default_en.htm

♦ **Sudan**

▶ **Council Conclusions on Sudan** (16/06/2008)

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

1. The Council expresses its deep concern over the deterioration of the security situation in Sudan seriously jeopardising the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and a peaceful settlement of the conflict in Darfur. **The Council calls on all parties to abide by their commitments to a political process and obligations by international law, notably with regard to the protection of civilians, humanitarian workers and peacekeepers, and re-commit themselves to a viable political solution of all outstanding problems.**

2. While deploring the recent military confrontation in Abyei between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), the Council welcomes the Road Map on Abyei agreed on 8 June 2008 by the National Congress Party (NCP) and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM). The Council hopes that this agreement will provide the basis for resolving the dispute and finding a lasting solution to the implementation of the Abyei Protocol. It urges the parties to fully respect the provisions of this new agreement, particularly the security arrangements including an effective Joint

Integrated Unit (JIU), so that the population can voluntarily return to their former homesteads. **The Council calls on both parties to grant unhindered access to UNMIS and to humanitarian organisations, including facilitating an independent investigation into the recent events in the entire Abyei area.** Increased UNMIS presence in Abyei is required to effectively fulfil its mandate. All efforts should be made to prevent a recurrence of incidents that may undermine the effective implementation of the CPA. **The EU stands ready to assist in meeting the humanitarian needs of the people displaced from Abyei and the recovery of Abyei town to allow for a return in safety and dignity. The Council supports the efforts by the Assessment and Evaluation Commission (AEC), in its crucial role of monitoring the CPA implementation, to pay particular attention to the alarming situation in Abyei.**

3. The Council recognises the CPA and the interim national constitution as the basis for a democratic transformation, peace and stability in the whole of Sudan, and for making unity attractive. **The Council welcomes the progress on the census and calls on all parties throughout Sudan to constructively engage in the preparations for the elections scheduled for 2009, in particular the approval of the electoral law.** The Council urges the National Congress Party (NCP) and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) to improve their cooperation in good faith and to fully assume their obligations according to the CPA. A successful implementation of CPA will create a conducive climate for a negotiated settlement of the Darfur conflict and would have a stabilising effect on the whole region.

4. The EU reiterates its strong condemnation, together with the UN and AU, of the attack by the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) on the Government of Sudan (GoS) in Omdurman in early May, as well as recent bombing of and attacks on civilians in Darfur perpetrated by Government forces and their militias. **The Council calls on the parties to commit to immediate cease-fire and underlines the urgency of reactivating the political process in Darfur under the UN/AU facilitation and strongly urges rebel movements to enter into negotiations with a common approach.** The Council recognises the significant contribution to confidence and peace-building in Darfur that can be played by the Darfur-Darfur Dialogue and Consultation (DDDC). The Council reiterates the need for an inclusive peace process and urges all parties to provide access and free movement for this grass root dialogue and consultation to take place.

5. **The Council emphasises the need to accelerate the UNAMID deployment and for it to be equipped to fulfil the mandate given to it by UNSC Resolution 1769 (2007), including the protection of civilians.** The Council condemns the recent attacks on UNAMID. The Council once again calls on the GoS to fully implement its responsibilities under the Status of Force Agreement (SOFA), particularly in regard to UNAMID's freedom of movement, and make all technical and administrative efforts to facilitate swift deployment of UNAMID troops and police selected by the UN and AU. UN member states capable of providing logistical and other military equipment necessary for the effectiveness of UNAMID, according to the Enhanced Deployment Plan, are invited to do so.

6. The Council remains concerned by the **continued violence against civilians, peacekeepers and humanitarian personnel, as well as the evidence of continued high levels of gender violence and sexual crimes. Perpetrators of such crimes and violations of human rights and international humanitarian law cannot go unpunished. The Council recalls the importance of UNSC Resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security.**

7. The Council also reiterates its readiness to take further measures, notably in the UN framework, against any party failing to engage constructively in the peace process in Darfur, against any party that impedes the establishment of an effective UNAMID force and against any party that undermines peace and security in Darfur and the region by committing acts of violence and especially against any party that obstructs humanitarian access to those in need.

8. The Council reiterates its support for the International Criminal Court (ICC). It deeply deplores the continued failure of the GoS to cooperate with the ICC and underlines that the GoS has an obligation, and the capacity, to cooperate. Any arrest warrant issued by the ICC should be respected. The individuals Ahmad Harun and Ali Kushayb should be surrendered to the ICC and the **GoS should demonstrate its commitment to end impunity for the planners and perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity. The Council stands ready to consider measures against individuals responsible for not-cooperating with the ICC, should the obligation under the UNSC Resolution 1593 on cooperation with the ICC continue to be disregarded.** The Council calls upon all parties to use their constructive leverage to ensure that the GoS fully cooperates with the ICC and pursue effective investigations and prosecution of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Darfur and ultimately ratify the Statute of the ICC.

9. The Council appreciates the 7th report of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) presented to the UN Security Council on 5 June 2008. It is particularly concerned by the Prosecutor's report that the decisions to commit, to deny and to disguise such crimes are being taken at the highest level.

10. The Council is concerned about the regional ramifications of the crisis in Sudan. In view of diffusion of the ongoing tensions between Sudan and Chad the Council urges both countries to adhere to the 13 March 2008 Dakar Agreement and to fully cooperate with the Contact Group, of which the EU is an observer. The Council welcomes the ongoing diplomatic efforts carried out by the AU and calls on the regional partners to maximise their leverage on all parties to attain a lasting stability for the region.

11. The Council recalls that EUFOR Tchad/RCA is a key contributor, together with the UN mission in Chad (MINURCAT) and the UN/AU mission in Darfur (UNAMID), to bringing security to the region and, by consequence, contributes to the efforts to consolidate peace and reconciliation in the region, including an improvement of the humanitarian situation."

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/gena/101221.pdf

- ♦ **Zimbabwe**

- ▶ EU Presidency statement on Zimbabwe (22/06/2008)

Following the situation in Zimbabwe closely, the Presidency of the European Union took note of the decision by Morgan Tsvangirai to withdraw from the second round of the presidential elections. The Presidency deeply deplores the circumstances that led to this decision.

For the resolution of the current crisis as well as for the future of Zimbabwe it is of crucial importance that Zimbabweans have the possibility to exercise their fundamental democratic right to vote and freely express their political will. **The Presidency reiterates deep concern about the systematic campaign of state-sponsored violence and intimidation that has been spiralling throughout the whole electoral process and undermined the credibility of this process.**

The Presidency underlines its concern about the possible effects of the Zimbabwe crisis on the stability of the region and calls on African countries and organizations, especially African Union and Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) to engage with new determination in order to help resolving the current crisis.

AMERICAS

♦ Cuba

▶ **EU Lifts Restrictions on Cuba** (20/06/2008)

The European Union will lift the already suspended 2003 measures on Cuba as a means to facilitate political dialogue with this country. This was agreed by the EU foreign ministers at a dinner organised on Thursday evening in Brussels on the margins of the European Council meeting and headed by the President of the General Affairs and External Relations Council, Foreign Minister of Slovenia Dr Dimitrij Rupel. The Council will formally confirm the decision at its next session, expected to be held next week. The issue was already on the agenda at the session of the EU General Affairs and External Relations Council on Monday in Luxembourg, but the ministers postponed it, especially due to a long discussion on the effects of the Lisbon Treaty referendum results in Ireland.

In the draft Conclusion agreed by the ministers, the Council acknowledged the changes undertaken so far by the Cuban Government and supported continuous liberalisation. **In any event the Council called upon the Cuban Government to effectively improve the human rights situation by, among other activities, unconditionally releasing all political prisoners, including those who were detained and sentenced in 2003. It also called on the Cuban Government to facilitate access of international humanitarian organisations to Cuban prisons, stressing that this is a key priority in determining EU policy on Cuba. The Council further called upon Cuba to make real the international covenants on human rights to which it acceded.**

The European Union confirms the position of 1986 to pursue dialogue with the Cuban authorities as well as with representatives of civil society and the democratic opposition in order to promote human rights and progress towards a pluralist democracy. The EU will offer all sectors of society practical support towards peaceful change. **The EU Council also reiterated its call on the Cuban authorities to grant freedom of information and expression, including access to the Internet.**

In addition, the European Union ministers wrote that the EU reinforces the right of Cuban citizens to decide independently about their future and remains ready to contribute positively to the future development of all sectors of Cuban society.

Since June 2007, preliminary discussions on the possibility of launching political dialogue have already been held. This dialogue will have to include the whole range of areas of cooperation, including politics, human rights, economy, science and culture, and will have to take place on a reciprocal, unconditional, non-discriminatory and results-oriented basis. Within the framework of this dialogue, the EU will outline its views on democracy, universal human rights and fundamental freedoms to the Cuban Government. **During high-level visits, human rights issues will always be addressed; when appropriate, meetings with the democratic opposition will be part of high-level visits.**

On this basis the ministers agreed to lift the measures against Cuba. In any case, relations with Cuba will be reviewed annually; in June 2009 the effectiveness of the political dialogue process will be reviewed as well. If the ministers agree that proper dialogue has been established, it will continue.

ASIA

♦ **Burma/Myanmar**

- ▶ **MEPs: Human Rights in Burma** (19/06/2008)

Burmese junta condemned

Parliament's resolution on Burma deplores the continuing oppression by the junta, the renewed house arrest of Aung San Suu Kyi, the government's actions following the recent cyclone and the ineffectiveness of EU sanctions on Burma.

The resolution condemns "the decision by the Burmese authorities to extend the house arrest of Aung San Suu Kyi" and the detention of the group of political activists demanding her release, and expresses shock at the calls in official newspapers for the public flogging of Aung San Suu Kyi.

In the wake of "reports that the Burmese army murdered political prisoners in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis", Parliament "calls for a judicial investigation under UN auspices" into these claims. It also "deplores the ongoing imprisonment by the Burmese authorities of victims of Cyclone Nargis who attempt to seek aid from international aid organisations in Burma". The government is urged to allow international humanitarian workers and supplies unhindered access to the areas affected by the cyclone and "to stop official interference in the delivery of aid and to cooperate fully with humanitarian organisations".

Call on government and ASEAN states to promote democratic change

The holding by the junta of the referendum on the constitution only days after the cyclone is criticised and its results dismissed as "lacking credibility". MEPs call on the authorities "to lift all restrictions on peaceful political activities in the country and to move towards an inclusive process of national reconciliation and restoration of democracy, the rule of law and full respect for human rights".

Given the evidence of continuing violations of human rights in the country, the resolution "urges the Burmese authorities to enter into close dialogue with the UN Special Rapporteur and to accept his request to visit Burma". It also calls on ASEAN countries "to put serious pressure on the Burmese authorities to bring about democratic change".

Tougher EU sanctions needed

Lastly, Parliament believes that the EU's targeted sanctions against the Burmese junta are still having a limited effect on the regime, thus falling short of the objectives sought. It therefore reiterates its call on the Council "to take further steps and effectively hamper access by the junta to the EU's financial system" and "calls on the Council and the Member States to monitor closely, and ensure the effective application of, the targeted sanctions".

♦ **Albania**

- ▶ **Council of Europe: Commissioner Hammarberg presents human-rights report (18/06/2008)**

The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Thomas Hammarberg, today presented a report on the human rights situation in Albania. **In the document, the Commissioner underlined the positive steps undertaken by the Albanian authorities to improve the protection of human rights, but expressed some concerns on structural problems which still affect the country. In particular, he made a number of recommendations on the functioning of the judiciary, police behaviour, conditions of detention, minority rights, protection against discrimination, rights of disabled persons, children's and women's rights, trafficking in human beings and freedom of expression.**

The Commissioner observed that shortcomings in legislation and implementation, as well as widespread perceptions of corruption, continue to jeopardise the effective functioning of the judicial system. **Moreover, he expressed concerned about cases of police misbehaviour and the lack of effective investigations into allegations of ill-treatment. The Commissioner also highlighted "unacceptable human and material conditions" in places of detention and recommended the adoption of effective measures to overcome this situation.**

Commissioner Hammarberg noted that, although Albania has made some impressive efforts in the protection of the rights of minorities, **"some structural problems still exist and the situation of Roma minority deserves more attention."** Furthermore, he stated that the existing prevention, protection and prosecution mechanisms concerning various forms of discrimination remain weak and recommended adopting, as a matter of priority, a comprehensive anti-discrimination law in line with international standards.

On children's rights, the Commissioner stated that persistent physical and economic obstacles exist, hindering access to education for vulnerable groups, particularly Roma and persons with disabilities. "There is a need to ensure that all children complete a full cycle of compulsory primary education, and that vulnerable groups be integrated into mainstream schooling as far as possible." The Commissioner also noted that further improvements are needed in relation to the detention of minors, children involved in forced labour and violence against children at home and in institutions.

Discrimination and violence against women was also addressed as an underreported problem in the country. **"Violence, particularly domestic violence, and victims' needs are not addressed effectively,"** said the Commissioner, stressing the need to increase women's representation in Parliament and in other decision-making bodies.

Moreover, while commending the efforts undertaken in recent years to tackle trafficking in human beings, Commissioner Hammarberg underlined the need to adopt more comprehensive measures, including assistance to victims and public awareness activities, particularly in the poorest regions of the country.

Finally, the Commissioner also recommended more serious efforts to protect lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons from routine episodes of intolerance, physical and psychological violence, and called on the national authorities to decriminalise defamation and ensure real media freedom so as to effectively fulfil their duty as a public watchdog.

The report is based on the findings of an official visit to Albania in October 2007 and is available, together with the government's response, on the Commissioner's website (http://www.coe.int/t/commissioner/default_en.asp).

[https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=PR451\(2008\)&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&Site=DC&BackColorInternet=F5CA75&BackColorIntranet=F5CA75&BackColorLogged=A9BACE](https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=PR451(2008)&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&Site=DC&BackColorInternet=F5CA75&BackColorIntranet=F5CA75&BackColorLogged=A9BACE)

- ♦ **Armenia**

- ▶ **Javier SOLANA, EU High Representative for the CFSP, met Edward NALBANDIAN Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia (18/06/2008)**

Javier SOLANA, European Union High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), had a meeting today with Mr Edward NALBANDIAN, the Foreign Minister of Armenia.

Mr Solana and Mr Nalbandian had a very useful, in-depth discussion in which they reviewed the situation in Armenia, in particular the latest developments regarding the settlement of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, following the meeting between the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan on 7 June 2008 in St Petersburg.

Mr Solana underlined the European Union's readiness and determination to accompany Armenia on the path of reform. Following the events that occurred in March, Mr Solana stressed the importance of the Council of Europe's recommendations and of a European solution to the political crisis. Mr Solana also pointed to the European Union's support for the efforts of the OSCE Minsk Group and emphasised that a solution could only be achieved through peaceful negotiation.

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/declarations/101296.pdf

- ♦ **Croatia**

- ▶ **6th meeting of the Accession Conference at ministerial level with Croatia (17/06/2008)**

The sixth meeting of the Accession Conference with Croatia at Ministerial level was held today in Luxembourg, following the start of accession negotiations on 3 October 2005. The European Union delegation was headed by Dimitrij Rupel, Slovenia's Foreign Minister and current President of the Council. The Croatian delegation was led by Gordan Jandroković, Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration. **The Conference opened negotiations on two new chapters: Chapter 2 - Freedom of Movement for Workers and Chapter 19 - Social Policy and Employment.**

On the basis of the negotiating positions of Croatia for the two chapters, the Union has closely examined Croatia's general state of preparedness in the two areas. Taking into account Croatia's present state of preparations - and on the understanding that Croatia will continue to make progress in the alignment with and implementation of the acquis - the EU underlined the main issues regarding the closing benchmarks to be met by Croatia, namely:

Chapter 2 - Freedom of Movement for Workers

– Croatia demonstrates that adequate administrative structures and enforcement capacity will be in place to implement correctly the acquis on freedom of movement for workers, particularly in the field of co-ordination

of social security systems, by the time of accession. The EU and Croatia also considered proposals for transitional arrangements concerning freedom of movement of workers.

– Furthermore, the European Union underlined that it would devote particular attention to monitoring all specific issues mentioned in its common position, **with a view to ensuring Croatia's administrative capacity and its capacity to abolish any discriminatory measures towards EU migrant workers.**

Chapter 19 - Social Policy and Employment

– Croatia amends the Labour Act and the Occupational Safety and Health Act in order to align its legislation in the fields of labour law and health and safety at work with the *acquis*.

– **Croatia adopts an anti-discrimination act** and a new Gender Equality Act in order to align its legislation in the fields of anti-discrimination and equal opportunities with the *acquis*.

In both areas, Croatia should demonstrate a satisfactory track record of progress in setting up adequate administrative structures and enforcement capacity. It should also demonstrate that all appropriate administrative structures will be in place in good time to enable it to implement correctly the *acquis* in these fields by the time of accession. The Union will closely monitor Croatia's progress in these two chapters throughout the negotiations. Since the start of the negotiations, twenty chapters have been opened, of which two have been provisionally closed.

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/gena/101247.pdf

♦ **Georgia**

- ▶ **Javier SOLANA, EU High Representative for the CFSP, today met Mikheil SAAKASHVILI, President of Georgia** (19/06/2008)

Javier SOLANA, EU High Representative for the CFSP, met Mikheil SAAKASHVILI, President of Georgia. Javier SOLANA, European Union High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), had a meeting today with Mikheil SAAKASHVILI, the President of Georgia.

The meeting provided an opportunity to discuss the latest developments in Georgia and in the Caucasus region generally, since EU HR SOLANA's last trip to the region which place on 6 June 2008. Mr. SOLANA underlined the importance on maintaining the direct dialogue between Tbilisi and Sukhumi.

President SAAKASHVILI discussed his meeting with the Russian authorities in particular with President MEDVEDEV. Mr. SOLANA reiterated the willingness of the EU to enhance its engagement in order to help to broker a resolution to the current situation. He underlined the attachment that the European Union holds to the territorial integrity Georgia.

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/EN/declarations/101334.pdf

♦ **Kosovo**

- ▶ **Javier SOLANA, EU High Representative for the CFSP, on UN reconfiguration of the civilian presence in Kosovo** (21/06/2008)

Javier SOLANA, EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) made today the following remarks after the United Nations Security Council session on the reconfiguration of the UN mission in Kosovo (UNMIK):

"I welcome the report by the United Nations Secretary General (UNSG), Ban Ki-moon, on UNMIK and his intention to reconfigure the international civilian presence in Kosovo. The UNSG has our full support. The UN has made commendable work in Kosovo since 1999 but due to changed circumstances the international presence now has to be adjusted.

Let me also reiterate the EU's commitment to play a leading role in Kosovo, in particular in the area of rule of law. Reconfiguration of the civilian presence will allow for the EULEX mission, in the framework of the UNSC 1244, to intensify its deployment and to move towards assuming its operational functions.

I want to underline that stability in Kosovo as well as of the whole Balkan region is essential and remains a high priority for the European Union."

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/EN/declarations/101371.pdf

♦ **Russia**

- ▶ **Human Rights and Russian actions in Georgia worry MEPs otherwise supportive of Partnership and Cooperation Agreement** (19/06/2008)

The deteriorating human rights conditions in Russia and Moscow's actions in Abkhazia and South Ossetia were the top worries of MEPs discussing the upcoming EU-Russia summit. **A resolution, adopted with 488 votes in favour, 34 against and 30 abstentions, stresses these concerns, while expressing the House's satisfaction that the negotiations on a new Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) can now begin.**

The Parliament expresses "its satisfaction that it has finally been possible to overcome the obstacles to reaching an agreement on the mandate for negotiations with the Russian Federation on a new Partnership Agreement." The start of negotiations had been held up by a Polish veto related to a Russian ban on meat exports, and more recently by Lithuania, which was concerned about Russian energy policy and its actions in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Frozen conflicts, frosty US relations

The resolution repeats Lithuanian worries, voicing the Parliament's **"serious concern over Russia's decision to establish enhanced links with the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and reiterates its full support for the territorial integrity of Georgia."** The House also asks the Council to raise the issue of **"the shooting-down of a Georgian drone by a Russian aircraft, as well as the recent substantial increase in the number of Russian troops in Abkhazia,"** during the upcoming summit.

In an indirect allusion to the question of US plans to establish an anti-missile shield in Europe, the House also "appeals to the Governments of Russia and the United States to intensify the discussions on defence and security issues directly or indirectly involving the European Union Member States," and urges them "to refrain from any steps and decisions which might be considered a threat to peace and stability on the European continent."

Human rights and rule of law within Russia

MEPs express their "deep concern over the increasingly frequent attacks on ethnic, racial and religious minorities in Russia," as well as about "the deteriorating situation of human rights defenders and difficulties faced by NGOs active in the promotion of human rights and in environmental protection and ecological issues with regard to their registration and in carrying out

their activities." They are also "deeply concerned about the newly amended legislation on extremism, which could have an effect on the free flow of information and could lead the Russian authorities to further restrict the right to free expression of independent journalists and political opponents."

With special regard to foreign companies and their possibilities for doing business in Russia, the Parliament "is concerned about the lack of predictability in the application of rules by authorities" there. On energy policy, the House repeats that "the principles of interdependence and transparency should be the basis" of EU-Russia cooperation, and stresses--in this area, as all others--"the importance of unity among the EU Member States in their relations with Russia."

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/030-32140-168-06-25-903-20080618IPR32138-16-06-2008-2008-false/default_en.htm

- ♦ **Turkey**

- ▶ 5th meeting of the Accession Conference at ministerial level with Turkey
(17/06/2008)

The fifth meeting of the Accession Conference with Turkey at ministerial level was held today in Luxembourg, following the start of accession negotiations on 3 October 2005. The European Union delegation was headed by Dimitrij Rupel, Slovenian Foreign Minister and current President of the Council. The Turkish delegation was led by Ali Babacan, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Chief Negotiator.

The Conference opened negotiations on two further new chapters (both with closing benchmarks), namely: Chapter 6 - Company law and Chapter 7 - Intellectual property law, thus advancing further the negotiating process.

For both chapters, and on the basis of negotiating positions, the Union has closely examined Turkey's general state of preparedness in these areas. Taking into account Turkey's present state of preparations, and in line with the Council conclusions on 11 December 2006 - as well as on the understanding that Turkey will continue to make progress in the alignment with and implementation of the *acquis* - the EU underlined main issues regarding the closing benchmarks to be met by Turkey, namely that Turkey has to fulfil its obligation of full non-discriminatory implementation of the Additional Protocol to the Association Agreement.

In more general terms, the EU also underlined that it would devote particular attention to monitoring all specific issues mentioned in its common positions with a view to ensuring Turkey's administrative capacity, its capacity to enforce the *acquis* and its capacity to complete legal alignment in all the areas under both chapters.

The Union will monitor closely Turkey's progress in these two chapters throughout the negotiations. Since the start of the negotiations, eight chapters have been opened, of which one has been provisionally closed.

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/gena/101248.pdf

- ♦ **Ukraine**

- ▶ Javier SOLANA, EU High Representative for the CFSP, today met Yulia TYMOSHENKO, Prime Minister of Ukraine (19/06/2008)

Javier SOLANA, European Union High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), had a meeting today with Yulia TYMOSHENKO, the Prime Minister of Ukraine.

Mr Solana and Mrs Tymoshenko discussed the latest developments in Ukraine and EU-Ukraine Relations.

Addressing the press in company of Mrs Tymoshenko after the meeting, the High Representative said: "We had a very good meeting. Bilateral relations continue moving in the right direction. After the summer, we will have a very important summit that we will have to prepare well."

Mr Solana also welcomed the positive economic environment in Ukraine but voiced some concern on the political situation: "Let me say that as far as the economy is concerned, Ukraine is moving fairly well: good growth results, inflation is beginning to be kept under control, which is very important, but we still have some concerns on the political situation. **We would like very much to see the political situation stabilized and parliamentary life stabilized.**" The Ukrainian Prime Minister said that as head of the Government she would do her best to move in that direction.

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/EN/discours/101329.pdf

♦ **The Western Balkans**

▶ **Council Conclusions on the Western Balkans** (16/06/2008)

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The European Union remains firmly committed to the European perspective for the Western Balkans and encourages the countries of the region to meet the necessary conditions.

FYROM

The Council took note of the parliamentary elections in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia on 1 June 2008. **It condemned the violent incidents and regretted other serious shortcomings, as identified by the OSCE/ODIHR. The Council noted the measures taken by the authorities following 1 June including the organisation of re-runs on 15 June in all places where serious irregularities occurred. It called upon the authorities to investigate all reported incidents and take appropriate action in line with the recommendations from the OSCE/ODIHR.** In this context it welcomed the commitment of the authorities to address these issues without delay. The Council expects the new Parliament and Government to be established soon and to achieve sustainable progress in reforms. **It called on all political parties to promote and participate in a constructive and inclusive dialogue and to implement the priorities identified in the Accession Partnership.**

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

The Council welcomed the signature of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement and of the Interim Agreement with Bosnia and Herzegovina as an important step on the country's path towards the EU. It looked forward to intensifying cooperation with Bosnia and Herzegovina through the comprehensive framework offered by these Agreements and the other mechanisms of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

The Council highlighted the importance of Bosnia and Herzegovina establishing a sustained and effective track record in implementing these Agreements. The Council encouraged all the political forces of BiH to unite their efforts to pursue with strong determination its reform agenda including the priorities set out in the European Partnership.

ROADMAPS FOR VISA LIBERALISATION

The Council welcomed the presentation of the roadmaps for Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, in order to gradually advance towards visa liberalisation and as a clear sign of the political commitment of the EU for the visa free travel for the citizens of the Western Balkans. It called on these countries to focus now on the full implementation of the requirements contained in the roadmaps. The Council and the Commission will closely monitor the process."

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/gena/101225.pdf

- ♦ **The Western Balkans**

- ▶ **European Council upholds 'European perspective' for Western Balkans**
(20/06/2008)

At its meeting in Brussels today, the European Council confirmed its full support for the prospect of a future in Europe – the 'European perspective' – for the countries of the Western Balkans, to whom the EU leaders issued recommendations on drawing closer to the European Union.

"The Slovenian Presidency has endeavoured throughout to bolster the European perspective for the Western Balkan countries, this being a prerequisite for peace and stability in the region. So I am pleased that, today, we have confirmed some important achievements towards making the prospect of the region's future in Europe a reality," stressed the current European Council President, Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Janša.

The European Council confirmed that the stabilisation and accession process provides the framework enabling the Western Balkans to move closer to the European Union. "Considerable progress has been made in the region in the past six months, and this is something of which we, as the Presidency, are especially proud. **The European perspective for the Western Balkans is beyond doubt, now that the network of Stabilisation and Association Agreements has been completed with the signature of agreements with Bosnia and Herzegovina and with Serbia,**" declared the Prime Minister.

"Today, we also confirmed measures to facilitate relations between people, with the start, for instance, of dialogue on liberalisation of the visa regime with Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina," reported Mr Janša.

He went on to add that, in recent months, important initiatives had been launched in a range of fields which would help the region's countries improve their transport and energy infrastructure, intensify scientific cooperation, and give their students opportunities to study in the EU. The agreement on combining funding instruments within a uniform framework was also confirmed. This should enable more transparent and efficient financial assistance to the region, he said.

Today, the EU leaders also assessed that, by the end of this year, **the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia could proceed further along its path to EU accession, subject to fulfilling the conditions set by the European Council in 2005, the Copenhagen criteria and the key priorities laid down in the Accession Partnership in February 2008.** The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia was granted candidate status as early as 2005, its next step is therefore to start accession negotiations with the EU.

The European Council welcomed the recent progress made in various respects by the countries of the region while also highlighting certain aspects which still needed to be reformed.

On Kosovo, the European Council again underlined that the EU would play a lead role in ensuring stability in Kosovo, through, among other things, the EULEX mission and the work of the EU's special envoy to Kosovo. "We particularly welcomed the report by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on the reconfiguration of the international civil presence in Kosovo. Now, EULEX can play a lead role in ensuring stability in Kosovo. Preparations are also under way for a donor conference to boost Kosovo's economic development," added Mr Janša.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/Press_Releases/June/0620EC_WBalkan.html

MAGHREB AND MIDDLE EAST

♦ **Gaza Strip**

- ▶ **EU Presidency statement on Gaza ceasefire** (18/06/2008)

The Presidency of the EU welcomes the announcement of the agreed cessation of violence in the Gaza Strip and its surroundings. It commends the Government of Egypt for successful mediation efforts, and urges all the parties concerned to abide by the agreed cessation of violence.

The Presidency also welcomes the Israeli intention to progressively cease its restrictions on Gaza and reopen the crossings in and out of Gaza for both humanitarian reasons and commercial flows. The EU has repeatedly asserted its readiness to resume the border assistance mission at the Rafah crossing point as soon as conditions allow. The Presidency reiterates its call for the release of abducted Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit and supports the efforts to this end.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/CFSP_Statements/June/0618.html

♦ **Gaza Strip**

- ▶ **Statement by Javier SOLANA, EU High Representative for the CFSP on the truce in and around Gaza** (19/06/2008)

Javier SOLANA, EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), made the following statement to reporters this morning on the truce in Gaza:

"The truce that came into effect this morning is a very welcome development. I hope it will provide momentum for the peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians. I should also like to congratulate Egypt on its successful role in mediating the agreement on the truce which I urge the parties to respect in full. The main objective now is that the truce holds. I reiterate our readiness to resume our monitoring mission at the Rafah border crossing point."

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/declarations/101323.pdf

♦ **Iran**

- ▶ **Human Rights in Iran** (19/06/2008)

Executions of juveniles in Iran

The use of the death penalty in Iran, particularly for minors, is condemned in yet another EP resolution on the deteriorating human rights situation in that country. EU states are urged not to deport to Iran any people whose lives could be in danger there.

According to the resolution, "Iran and a few other countries still execute minors, but Iran is known to have executed more juvenile offenders than any other country in the world, and according to reports more than 100 individuals are on death row in Iran for crimes allegedly committed when under the age of 18".

The EP "strongly condemns the death sentences and executions in Iran, in particular those imposed or carried out on juvenile offenders and minors". Indeed, it stresses that "juvenile death sentences are in direct contravention of the Islamic Republic of Iran's international obligations and commitments".

Turning to individual cases, Parliament condemns the execution of Mohammad Hassanzadeh, who was under the age of 18 when executed, and urges the authorities to halt the executions of Mr Behnoud Shojaee, Mr Mohammad Fedaei, Mr Saeed Jazee, Mr Behnam Zaare and all other juvenile offenders sentenced to death.

The members of the newly elected Majlis are called upon "speedily to pass the pending reform of the Iranian penal code, with the aim, notably, of abolishing stoning and executions of child offenders, to move towards a moratorium on the death penalty and to bring Iranian legislation into line with international human rights obligations". The resolution also "calls for the decriminalisation of same-sex relations in Iran".

Lastly, Member States are urged "to suspend the expulsion to Iran of persons who are threatened with execution or torture".

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/015-32143-168-06-25-902-20080618IPR32142-16-06-2008-2008-false/default_en.htm

- ♦ **Israel**

- ▶ **Minister Rupel heads the EU-Israel Association Council** (16/06/2008)

The current President of the EU General Affairs and External Relations Council, Slovenian Foreign Minister Dr Dimitrij Rupel, today chaired the EU-Israel Association Council. The Israeli delegation was headed by Tzipi Livni, the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The meeting focused on assessing relations between the European Union and Israel. The Association Council, the central body in the bilateral relations, regularly examines the relations and formulates proposals for strengthening cooperation.

In this context, Minister Rupel pointed out that Israel is an important partner for the European Union and, likewise, the European Union is an important partner for Israel. "There are numerous historic, cultural and economic ties between us. Therefore, the developments in these regions are of common concern to us; to this end, we must maintain lasting dialogue and highly developed cooperation," said the Slovenian Foreign Minister. **This cooperation is based on the European Neighbourhood Policy Action Plan**, aimed at bringing the neighbouring countries closer to the European Union and offering them stronger economic interdependence and closer political cooperation to build upon a mutual commitment to important

common values. "We hope that this policy will enable us to contribute to greater stability, security and welfare, both in the European Union and in neighbouring countries," said Minister Rupel.

Dialogue and cooperation must be based on common values such as supporting efforts to find a solution to the Middle East conflict, to bolster the fight against terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, to promote human rights, to improve dialogue between cultures and religions, and to cooperate in the fight against anti-Semitism, racism and xenophobia. Dr Rupel pointed out the satisfaction of the EU with the initiation of dialogue on human rights issues concerning both parties.

Some time ago, Israel proposed upgrading relations with the EU and Minister Rupel said that the request was welcomed by all Member States. Thus, the EU foreign affairs ministers expressed the political will to intensify relations and agreed to develop them gradually and as part of the European Union Neighbourhood Policy. "There are obvious reasons for which strengthened political cooperation between the EU and Israel should be understood as a cooperation which contributes to resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict," Minister Rupel pointed out. The specific proposals include the readiness to strengthen political dialogue between the EU and Israel and to exchange views on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly in New York.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/Press_Releases/June/0616GAERC_Izrael.html

THEMATIC

FINANCIAL PERSPECTIVES

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

EXTERNAL RELATIONS & DEVELOPMENT-RELATED ISSUES

EU / UN REFORM

♦ **UK/ Lisbon Treaty**

- ▶ **The Slovenian Presidency welcomes the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty in the House of Lords of the UK Parliament** (18/06/2008)

The Slovenian Presidency welcomes the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty in the House of Lords of the UK Parliament. Another endorsement of the Treaty proves that it is still a living document. Every ratification counts as an important step towards the ultimate goal, i.e. the enforcement of the Lisbon Treaty.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/Press_Releases/June/0618MZZ_Lizbonska_UK.html

- ♦ **Lisbon Treaty**

- ▶ **European Council to analyse further and return to Lisbon Treaty in October; meanwhile, ratification continues** (20/06/2008)

The European Council held extensive discussions yesterday and today on the outcome of the Irish referendum rejecting the Lisbon Treaty and the implications of this for the European Union. Mr Janez Janša, the Slovenian Prime Minister and President of the European Council, today assessed the debate as very constructive, "I sensed a very positive mood and a high level of solidarity. I am sure my colleagues felt the same."

"The Irish Prime Minister, Taoiseach Brian Cowen, gave an initial assessment of the reasons underlying the unfavourable referendum result in Ireland. After thorough debate, we agreed that more time was needed to analyse the situation," reported Mr Janša. **The Council thus agreed to Ireland's suggestion to return to the issue at the European Council meeting of 15 October 2008 in order to consider the way forward.**

The European leaders also pointed out, however, that the purpose of the Lisbon Treaty is to help the enlarged European Union act more effectively and that the process of ratification is continuing in the Member States that have not yet ratified the Treaty. They also took note of the fact that the Czech Republic cannot complete the ratification process until its Constitutional Court delivers an affirmative opinion to the effect that the Lisbon Treaty is concordant with the Czech constitution.

"I am convinced that our agreement gives a positive impetus to work towards a definitive solution," commented Mr Janša. He warned, nonetheless, that there was no time to delay. "The world is changing, and we cannot afford to be left behind. We have to improve institutional capacity and upgrade the democratic life of the European Union but we also have to enhance economic and social security," he concluded.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/Press_Releases/June/0620EC_LisbonTreaty.html

MISCELLANEOUS

- ♦ **Fight against terrorism and human rights**

- ▶ **Slovenian EU Presidency advocates respect for human rights in fight against terrorism** (16/06/2008)

In the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership seminar, the Slovenian EU Presidency underlined that international law – both human rights and humanitarian law – must be respected in the fight against terrorism.

More than one hundred participants are attending the EuroMed Seminar on the Respect of Human Rights and International Standards in the Field of Counter-Terrorism held on 16 and 17 June in Prague. They include renowned international experts, such as Riina Kionka, Personal Representative of the SG/HR on human rights, Gilles de Kerchove, EU Counterterrorism Coordinator, and Martin Scheinin, UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights while countering terrorism.

On behalf of the Slovenian Presidency, an address was given by Ms Anita Pipan, Director General of the Directorate for Policy Planning and Multilateral Political Relations at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who also led the plenary session. **She emphasised that the respect for international law alone is the guarantee for an effective fight against terrorism: successful anti-terrorist measures and the respect for human rights should not contradict but rather complement and consolidate one another.**

The seminar organised by the European Commission and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic under the auspices of the Slovenian EU Presidency is the third event during the Presidency focusing on the debate on combating terrorism among EuroMed partners.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/Press_Releases/June/0616MZZ_Euromed.html

- ♦ **The Return Directive**

- ▶ **Minister Mate: By adopting the Return Directive we have achieved one of the key objectives of the Slovenian Presidency (18/06/2008)**

At today's session, Members of the European Parliament adopted the proposal for the Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on common standards and procedures in Member States for returning illegally staying third-country nationals (the Return Directive).

After being discussed at yesterday's session, which was also attended by Slovenian Interior Minister and President of the Home Affairs Council Dragutin Mate, the proposal for the Directive was adopted at first reading by the Parliament today. Minister Mate emphasised: "By adopting the directive, we have achieved one of the key objectives of the Slovenian EU Presidency in the field of Justice and Home Affairs. **This is the first instrument that will govern, based on common standards at EU level, the legislation applicable to the return of illegally staying third-country nationals and their rights. In most countries, significant progress will be made as regards the duration of temporary custody, which will be shorter.**"

Following difficult negotiations in the Council working bodies, where the Member States had been seeking a compromise since 2005, and after three political dialogues with the European Parliament and the Commission, the Slovenian Presidency in late May received sufficient backing by the Member States at the level of the Permanent Representatives Committee to formulate a proposal for the Return Directive. The Parliament approved the text of the proposal, except the article concerning free legal assistance, which it proposed harmonising with the provisions of the Asylum Procedures Directive. After additional bilateral negotiations with the Member States and an additional political dialogue with the European Parliament on 4 June 2008, the harmonised text of the proposal was approved on the following day by the Justice and Home Affairs Council, which sent it again to the European Parliament. Minister Mate stated that the negotiations in the Council had been extremely difficult, given that the previous presidencies had been seeking for two years to find a common position in the Council that could form the basis for negotiations with the Parliament, although with very limited success.

With this Directive, return will no longer be left to national legislation but will be regulated at European level, which represents great progress. The Directive regulates the basic rights of people in return procedure, offering everyone the possibility of voluntary return, while placing special emphasis on vulnerable groups, determining that in view of the possibilities, persons in return procedure should be guaranteed the right to family unity, basic medical care and access to education in the case of minors.

Minister Mate concluded by saying that with the adoption of the Directive, we have successfully met the challenge offered by the European Council in December, which had been to adopt an act guaranteeing the necessary rights and assurances to persons in return procedure, while at the same time enabling smooth implementation of such procedures.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/Press_Releases/June/0618MNZ_Mate.html

- **Prisoners of conscience**

- ▶ **Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on the Declaration on Prisoners of Conscience of 17 June 2008** (20/06/2008)

The 27 Member States of the European Union, together with 37 countries from all parts of the world, have co-sponsored a Declaration on Prisoners of Conscience, which was circulated to all United Nations Member States on 17 June 2008.

This Declaration avails of the opportunity presented by 60th anniversary year of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to reaffirm the right of everyone to freedom of opinion and expression, the right of everyone to freedom of peaceful assembly and association and the right of everyone to freedom of thought, conscience and religion

The European Union, together with the other co-sponsors of this Declaration, commit themselves to work for the freedom of prisoners of conscience and to make their release a priority in our relations with other states.

The European Union deeply regrets that there remain many examples of governments employing imprisonment as a strategy for dealing with their political opposition or with human rights defenders. In numerous instances prisoners of conscience are detained, often in very poor conditions, for long periods of time to prevent them from speaking to or assembling with others.

The European Union calls upon all Member States of the United Nations to join in working to ensure the release of all prisoners of conscience.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/CFSP_Statements/June/0620MZZprisoners.html

- **Migrants in Italy**

- ▶ **Council of Europe: Migrants are not criminals, reminds Commissioner Hammarberg concluding the visit to Italy** (23/06/2008)

Commissioner Hammarberg concluded on Friday 20 a two-day visit to Rome where he met the Minister of Interior, Roberto Maroni, to discuss the policies of the new government on migration and Roma people.

"Criminalising migrants will have negative effects and put stigma on innocent people", said the Commissioner after the meeting with Minister Maroni. Mr. Hammarberg also expressed his concerns about the climate of anti-Ziganism. **"It is important that politicians guarantee fundamental rights to Roma people and discourage any tendency of discrimination and scapegoating",** he said.

Speaking at the World Refugee Day event organised by UNHCR, the Commissioner further stressed the importance of reception policies based on international human rights standards. "Governments have the right to control their borders, but they should protect, not punish, people fleeing their countries" he said. "Migrants must be welcomed in Europe and their diversity promoted, not discriminated."

During the visit, Commissioner Hammarberg met Roma and Sinti representatives and went to Casilino 900, a Roma settlement in the Italian capital. He also held meetings with the President of the National Association of Magistrates, the Head of the European Commission Representation to Italy, as well as representatives of international organizations and civil society.

A report will be published in the coming weeks, containing the Commissioner's main observations and his recommendations to the Italian Government.

http://www.coe.int/t/commissioner/News/2008/080623italy_en.asp