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REGIONS:

AFRICA

Somalia

- ▶ **Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the EU on the violence against media in Somalia (27/09/2007)**

The European Union expresses its deep concern on the situation of the freedom of the media and on the increasing threats faced by journalists in Somalia.

Since January 2007, seven journalists have been murdered, while others have been intimidated and forced to leave the country.

Last week's events – the attack perpetrated against Radio Shabelle and the forced interruption of its broadcast – have illustrated that the right to freedom of expression in Somalia faces serious threats, which the European Union condemns. Freedom of expression and opinion is a fundamental human right enshrined in the Universal Declaration and should be a crucial factor for genuine reconciliation and consolidation of peace in Somalia.

The European Union urges the Somali authorities to investigate the crimes committed against journalists and to uphold the necessary conditions to allow the media to do its work.

http://www.eu2007.pt/UE/vEN/Noticias_Documentos/Declaracoes_PESC/20070927declaracaosomalia.htm

Chad and the Central African Republic

- ▶ **EP sets out conditions for its support to the ESDP mission in Chad and Central African Republic (27/09/2007)**

The European Parliament gave its approval to a planned European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) mission to Chad and the Central African Republic (CAR), but listed several conditions which needed to be met for this operation to enjoy parliamentary support. The mission, which is meant to address the insecurity in the two countries resulting from the crisis in the neighbouring Darfur region of Sudan, could possibly be deployed by early November.

In a resolution adopted by (453 votes in favour 104 against and 15 abstentions), the House "gives its approval for the launch of an ESDP operation in the eastern part of Chad and the northern part of CAR, which will last for one year, but makes its final approval conditional on the fulfilment of the following points:"

EUFOR must:

- have a diverse composition
- not get involved in fights between government authorities and rebel groups
- not get involved in the tasks performed by NGOs in the region
- have a robust mandate, according to Chapter 7 of the UN Charter
- have the necessary number of troops and must be equipped appropriately

-have a clear exit strategy, which foresees its replacement by a UN, AU, or hybrid force-establish effective coordination with UNAMID (the joint UN and African Union (AU) hybrid operation in Darfur)
-have as its mission to create a secure environment for: the work of the UN police force, the return of internally displaced persons, the delivery of humanitarian aid, the free movement of humanitarian staff and the continuation of political dialogue

Background

The Council decided on 23 July of this year to set up an ESDP operation to eastern Chad and northern CAR. The operation would aim to stabilise the region, which has experienced a large influx of displaced persons from the neighbouring Darfur region of Sudan. The operation could involve up to 4000 troops, supporting the UN mission MINURCAT (French for: UN mission in the Central African Republic and Chad). Both the EU mission and MINURCAT have already received a one-year mandate from the UN Security Council this Tuesday, based on Chapter 7 of the UN Charter (which allows the use of force). The Council is set to approve a joint action on Friday of this week, allowing for a deployment by mid- to late-October. France, with a substantial presence in Chad already, is expected to provide the bulk of the troops for the operation.

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/030-10652-267-09-39-903-20070823IPR09795-24-09-2007-2007-false/default_en.htm

Darfur

- ▶ **Javier Solana strongly condemns the attack perpetrated yesterday on the African Mission in Sudan (AMI) in Haskanita in Darfur** (30/09/2007)

Javier SOLANA, EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), strongly condemned yesterday's attack on the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS). The attack was carried out by as yet unidentified militias and led, according to preliminary reports, one AMIS personnel killed and many more wounded or missing.

"I strongly condemn the attack on the AMIS peacekeeping forces in Haskanita in Darfur and fully support the statement made earlier today by the Chairman of the Ceasefire Commission, General Martin Luther Agwai, in this regard. The attack is unjustifiable and constitutes a grave violation of the ceasefire agreement. It comes at a particularly sensitive moment shortly before the launch of renewed peace talks on Darfur and the transition from AMIS to the AU/UN hybrid operation, UNAMID. I urge all parties to act responsibly, to desist from acts of violence and to respect the ceasefire and focus on the upcoming peace talks".

In a press statement by the Africa Union, the chairman of the Ceasefire Commission, General Martin Luther Agwai, condemned the attack on behalf of the Ceasefire Commission. The EU holds the position of Vice-Chair of the Ceasefire Commission.

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/cms3_applications/applications/solana/index.asp?lang=EN&cmsid=358

AMERICAS

Jamaica

- ▶ **Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the EU on recent elections in Jamaica**
(26/09/2007)

The European Union congratulates Mr. Bruce Golding on his appointment as Prime Minister of Jamaica following the recent democratic parliamentary elections.

At the same time, the EU thanks the outgoing government of Mrs Portia Simpson-Miller for its close co-operation and looks forward to continuing to work closely with the new Jamaican government in its efforts to achieve social and economic progress for the good of its citizens and the country as a whole.

http://www.eu2007.pt/UE/vEN/Noticias_Documentos/Declaracoes_PESC/20070926statementjamaica.htm

ASIA

Maldives

- ▶ **Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the EU on developments in the Maldives**
(27/09/2007)

The European Union fully supports a process of democratic reform in the Maldives. The reform agenda promoted by the government since 2004 has produced a number of necessary steps towards a modern democratic system. With various challenges still to overcome, it must now stay on track.

The EU takes note of the referendum held on 18 August 2007 to determine the preferred system of government in the Maldives. The EU welcomes the reports of international observers, which suggest that the result of the referendum offers a fair reflection of public opinion on this question.

It is important that efforts now continue to accelerate implementation of the reform process, and that preparations continue for the general elections planned for 2008. These should be free, fair and inclusive, so that the people of the Maldives may have a chance to choose a leader for the future. In this respect, the completion of the Constitutional reform by 30 November 2007 is essential. The EU urges all concerned parties to actively work on this process.

The EU welcomes the constructive role played by the Commonwealth Secretariat through its practical support to the democratic reform process in the Maldives.

The EU will continue to follow developments in the Maldives over the coming months.

http://www.eu2007.pt/UE/vEN/Noticias_Documentos/Declaracoes_PESC/20070927declaracaomaldivas.htm

Burma/Myanmar

- ▶ **Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the EU on Burma/Myanmar**(25/09/2007)

The EU expresses its solidarity with the people of Myanmar (Burma), and its admiration for the courageous monks, nuns and other citizens who are exercising their rights of peaceful demonstration. **It urges the**

authorities in Myanmar to respect those rights, and above all not to use violence against people who are committed to non-violence.

This is a new opportunity to tackle the wider problems of Myanmar. We call on all concerned in Myanmar to go forward in a genuine process of reconciliation and negotiation which brings together all the people of Myanmar.

http://www.eu2007.pt/UE/vEN/Noticias_Documentos/Declaracoes_PESC/20070925declaracaopesc.htm

- ▶ **Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the EU on the evolution of the situation in Burma/Myanmar(25/09/2007)**

The EU is very concerned by the latest reports from inside Burma/Myanmar which suggest that the authorities are moving military forces to city centres.

We reiterate our call on the authorities in Burma/Myanmar not to use violence against people who are committed to non-violence, and to pursue genuine reconciliation and negotiation .

We also call on all those with influence over the military government to bring that influence to bear to ensure that the authorities respond in a non-violent manner.

The EU further underlines to the authorities in Naypyidaw that it will reinforce and strengthen the existing sanctions regime, should they resort to using violence against the unarmed and peaceful demonstrators.

http://www.eu2007.pt/UE/vEN/Noticias_Documentos/Declaracoes_PESC/20070925PESCII.htm

- ▶ **EU-US Statement on Burma/Myanmar(26/09/2007)**

The European Union and the United States express their solidarity with the people of Burma/Myanmar. We are deeply troubled by reports that security forces have fired on and attacked peaceful demonstrators and arrested many Buddhist monks and others. We condemn all violence against peaceful demonstrators and remind the country's leaders of their personal responsibility for their actions.

We call on the authorities to stop violence and to open a process of dialogue with pro democracy leaders including Aung San Suu Kyi and representatives of ethnic minorities. We urge China, India, ASEAN and others in the region to use their influence in support of the people of Burma/Myanmar.

We urge the country's authorities to receive an early visit by the UN Secretary General's envoy Ibrahim Gambari. We call on the Security Council to discuss this situation urgently and consider further steps including sanctions.

http://www.eu2007.pt/UE/vEN/Noticias_Documentos/20070926Eustatement.htm

- ▶ **EP resolution on Burma/Myanmar(28/09/2007)**

The European Parliament has added its voice to the protests mounting worldwide against the Burmese security forces' violent repression of anti-government demonstrations. **In a resolution adopted by 563 votes to 3 with 4 abstentions, MEPs backed the demonstrators, condemned the brutal reaction of**

the authorities and called for the international community to prepare "targeted economic sanctions" against the regime should it fail to respond.

With fresh news arriving by the hour of the deaths, injuries and arrests of monks and ordinary civilians in Burma as they protest against the military government, the European Parliament approved a brief but far-reaching list of demands, some directed at the Burmese government but others aimed at the international community, including China, which many MEPs believe has failed to do enough in the past.

Burmese regime condemned

The resolution adopted today "applauds the courageous action of the Burmese monks and tens of thousands of other peaceful demonstrators in confronting the anti-democratic and repressive regime in Burma and utterly condemns the brutal response by the Burmese authorities". The EP "expresses its horror at the killing of peaceful protestors, insists that the Security Forces return to barracks and calls for recognition of the legitimacy of the demands" being made as well as for the release of arrested demonstrators and other political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi.

MEPs also decry the regime's "current illegitimate constitutional process" and call instead for "a fully representative fully representative National Convention".

China and Russia urged to back a UN statement on the regime

With a visiting parliamentary delegation from China looking on from the gallery of the Chamber, Parliament chose to send a pointed message regarding their government's role in the situation. *The resolution calls on China - and also Russia - to fully support a UN Security Council statement condemning the regime's use of brutal force.*

Parliament also calls on the Security Council itself "to empower the UN Secretary-General to take action in order to facilitate national reconciliation and a transition to democracy in Burma, and for the UN General Assembly to take appropriate action".

EU to take lead in pushing for targeted economic sanctions

In a key demand, MEPs press "the EU Council as a matter of urgency, to liaise with the United States, ASEAN and other members of the international community in order to prepare a co-ordinated series of additional measures, including targeted economic sanctions, that might be taken against the Burmese regime if it resorts to violence and does not respond to the call for a return to democracy".

Lastly, the resolution asks the European Commission to provide funding via the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights "to actively support the pro-democracy movement and NGOs that works for the restitution of good governance in Burma".

Parliament has sought to draw attention to the situation in Burma in numerous resolutions over the years, including one earlier this month. EU measures currently in place include a travel ban on Burma's leaders, an arms embargo and a ban on military cooperation - but no economic sanctions. The EU and the USA yesterday issued a joint declaration, which, among other things, calls on the Security Council to "consider further steps including sanctions".

Debate

In Wednesday's debate prior to the vote, Mr Lobo **Antunes**, Council President-in-Office, said Burma was "at a crossroads". The EU's 27 Member States had issued a declaration urging the Burmese government to respect the right to peaceful demonstration, while foreign policy high representative Javier Solana had called on the government to exercise restraint. The EU had also threatened tougher sanctions.

Commissioner Louis Michel said the international community must try to persuade the government to promote national reconciliation and that in particular China, India, Japan, South Korea and ASEAN must be convinced to play their part. The imminent visit to the country of the UN Special Envoy would be very important. If the Burmese regime was willing to set out a roadmap leading to dialogue and elections, it could count on the EU's support.

Among the EP political group speakers, Geoffrey **Van Orden** (UK) for the EPP-ED said "the EU prides itself on its attention to human rights and yet seems incapable of acting effectively against tyrannical regimes", but now "it is high time we stopped wringing our hands and got serious". Nevertheless, the key to change lay with Burma's neighbours, notably China. Mr Van Orden had spoken to the leader of a Chinese delegation at the EP today who, while stressing China's policy of non-interference in other countries' internal policies, did say that China would "urge flexibility" on the Burmese regime. Mr Van Orden added that the EU must adopt tougher sanctions - and stick to them. He also criticised Total Oil for "helping to prop up the military junta". Lastly, he said it was a pity the Council and the Commission had not listened to Parliament more closely on this issue in the past.

Barbara **Weiler** (DE) voiced the indignation of the Socialist group about the events in Burma and said the UN Security Council must take steps to tackle the situation, particularly by urging China to use its influence. It was no longer an option for the regime "to batten down the hatches". She called on Burma to press ahead with its long-awaited constitution and hold democratic elections.

Annemie **Neyts-Uyttebroeck** (ALDE, NL), on behalf of her group, said that the EU must protest, "not just with words but with deeds", though like other speakers she stressed the key role of Burma's neighbouring countries. The oppression in the country was not just political - there was poverty too, despite its rich natural resources. The regime must understand that Aung San Suu Kyi was not alone and should free her now, along with the people taken prisoner today.

For the UEN group, Brian **Crowley** (IE) wondered if people had to be "gunned down in the streets and it to appear on television cameras before the international community will respond". He added "We can no longer remain silent" and said "let us act to condemn the violence against peaceful protest but let us also ensure that we can give support to those protesters".

Raul **Romeva** (ES), for the Greens/EFA group, said Burma was facing a situation of no-return and that the demonstrators had sent a clear message to the junta and the world. He added his voice to the calls to free members of the opposition, including Aung San Suu Kyi.

Bastiaan **Belder** (IND-DEM, NL) told the House that, after decades of misrule, Burma had degenerated almost into a province of China, and that China bore a heavy burden of responsibility for the situation.

Luca **Romagnoli**, a non-aligned Member, who said the Burmese regime was based on drug-smuggling, drew particular attention to the plight of the country's Karen minority.

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/015-10743-267-09-39-902-20070926IPR10742-24-09-2007-2007-true/default_en.htm

Kosovo

► **Statement on Kosovo by Contact Group Ministers (27/09/2007)**

Contact Group Ministers, together with the UN Secretary General, EU High Representative, the European Union Presidency, European Commissioner for Enlargement and the NATO Secretary-General met in New York on 27 September to discuss the Kosovo Status Process. They heard a report from the EU/Russia/US Troika. A representative of UNOSEK was also present.

Ministers reiterated that an early resolution of Kosovo's status is crucial to the stability and security of the Western Balkans and Europe as a whole. Ministers reaffirmed their resolve to seek a negotiated settlement endorsed by the UN Security Council. Ministers expressed their appreciation for the continued efforts by UNMIK and KFOR to contribute towards a multi-ethnic, peaceful and democratic Kosovo. They endorsed fully the UN Secretary General's assessment that the status quo is not sustainable. It has damaging consequences for Kosovo's political, social and economic development and for the underlying stability of the region. A solution therefore has to be found without delay.

When they met in New York in September 2006, Contact Group Ministers encouraged the UN Special Envoy to prepare a comprehensive proposal for a status settlement. The proposal, submitted after 14 months of negotiations, has been accepted by Pristina and rejected by Belgrade.

As a further effort to achieve a negotiated settlement, the Contact Group established a Troika whose task would be to facilitate a period of further discussion between the parties. The Troika process will be concluded by the Contact Group report to the UN Secretary General by 10 December.

Ministers expressed full support for the Troika process and welcomed the quick pace of activity and the constructive atmosphere of the first rounds of talks. Ministers reiterated their view that the Contact Group's Guiding Principles of November 2005 should continue to set the framework for the status process, which is based on UNSCR 1244.

The next step in the Troika process will involve direct talks between the parties in New York on 28 September. Contact Group Ministers welcomed this move to face-to-face discussions. Ministers urged both sides to approach the remaining negotiations with creativity, boldness, and in a spirit of compromise. Furthermore, any settlement needs to be acceptable to the people of Kosovo, ensure standards implementation with regard to Kosovo's multi-ethnic character, and promote the future stability of the region. Ministers underlined that any future status settlement should focus on developing the special nature of the relations between the two sides, especially in their historical, economic, cultural and human dimensions.

<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/showPage.ASP?lang=en>

► **Statement Troika Meeting with Belgrade and Pristina (28/09/2007)**

The U.S./EU/Russia negotiating Troika met in New York City on September 28 with leaders of Kosovo and Serbia to discuss Kosovo's future status. The Belgrade delegation was led by President Boris Tadic and Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica. The Pristina delegation was led by President Fatmir Sejdu and Prime Minister Agim Ceku.

The Troika initially facilitated two hours of direct dialogue between the parties. This was the third face-to-face meeting of leaders since the Kosovo future status process began in 2005 and the first such meeting held under Troika auspices. After the direct dialogue, the Troika met separately with each side to explore further the parties' positions.

The atmosphere of these meetings was cooperative. Belgrade presented its vision of substantial autonomy for Kosovo within Serbia's borders. Pristina presented its vision of friendship and cooperation between two independent states and full implementation of the minority rights protections recommended by UN Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaar. The Troika encouraged the parties to present their proposals in a way that would appeal to the other side.

The parties agreed on the "New York declaration" reaffirming their willingness to engage seriously and refrain from making statements that could undermine the security situation in Kosovo.

The Troika will next meet with the parties in Brussels on October 14. The Contact Group will report back to the UN Secretary General about the Troika's efforts by 10 December. The Troika reaffirmed its commitment to use the remaining time to explore every avenue of possible compromise between the parties in order to reach negotiated agreement.

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/cms3_applications/applications/solana/index.asp?lang=EN&cmsid=358

Ukraine

► **EP Elections observation mission to Ukraine** (27/09/2007)

On Sunday, the Ukraine, one of the European Union's most important neighbours, goes to the polls and a delegation from the European Parliament will be there to observe whether or not the elections are up to international standards.

The three main parties are led by President Viktor Yushchenko, Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich and Yulia Tymoshenko, former prime minister and an ally of the President during the 2004 "Orange Revolution". The President and Prime Minister agreed to hold early parliamentary elections in May after a mounting political crisis.

EP to observe elections

A delegation of 14 MEPs heads to the Ukraine on Thursday to observe the elections. Kostiantyn Yeliseiev, the deputy head of the Ukraine Mission to the EU, who participated in preparations for the visit said, "Ukrainian society and politicians listen very attentively to what the EP is saying (and would be) grateful if EP delegation would not only observe but also articulate a message and give advice."

Recent political developments

In 2004 Ukraine underwent the "**Orange Revolution**", when large-scale popular protests broke out after the presidential elections, which were officially won by Viktor Yanukovich, who was backed by the outgoing president. The result of the unrest was a re-run of the presidential election sweeping Mr Yushchenko to victory in early 2005. Yulia Tymoshenko, his close ally became prime minister. However their alliance soon fell apart and the President sacked the Tymoshenko government in September 2005.

In March 2006 Mr Yanukovich's party won the new parliamentary elections and he eventually took office in August. He has since built a majority in the Parliament. Amid concerns that an increased majority would allow Mr Yanukovich to reject presidential vetoes, make changes to the constitution, and impeach the president, President Yushchenko dissolved parliament on 2 April and called early elections. Initially

Parliament rejected his authority do so, but eventually the President and Prime Minister agreed to hold elections on 30 September.

EU focus on Ukraine

After the EU-Ukraine Summit in September, EU leaders said that Ukraine's move towards strengthening democracy, the rule of law and the respect of human rights will reinforce political and economic links between the two. If elections are free and fair, it's the best evidence of the country's ability to accomplish the goal, they said.

In a July resolution, the Parliament called for the adoption of political reforms, a fight against corruption and a reform of the civil service. It has closely followed political developments in Ukraine. It was among those denouncing irregularities in the 2004 election and a Parliament delegation was in Independence Square in Kiev, which was at the epicentre of the Orange Revolution. It subsequently sent an observation team to monitor the re-run election. The EP was among the first of President Yushchenko's foreign trips.

An important neighbour

Ukraine, a former constituent republic of the Soviet Union, became an independent country in 1991 and is one of the EU's most significant immediate neighbours. It has a population of about 47 million and covers a geographical area of 603,700 km² - about 10% greater than metropolitan France. The country borders four EU Member States: Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania. Its capital is Kiev.

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/public/story_page/030-10571-273-09-39-903-20070921STO10555-2007-30-09-2007/default_en.htm

MAGHREB AND MIDDLE EAST

Syria

- ▶ **EU Presidency Statement concerning the travel ban on Mr Riad Seif** (27/09/2007).

The EU's Presidency is deeply concerned about the situation of Mr Riyad Seif, former Member of Parliament and prisoner of conscience, who is banned by the Syrian authorities from travelling abroad.

Mr Seif faces a serious health condition and is in need of urgent medical care.

The Presidency urges the Syrian authorities to allow Mr Seif to receive suitable medical treatment in a country of his choice, in accordance with international law

http://www.eu2007.pt/UE/vEN/Noticias_Documentos/Declaracoes_PESC/20070927PESCRIAD.htm

Gaza Strip

- ▶ **EP : Conference of presidents dismayed by humanitarian condition in the Gaza Strip** (27/09/2007).

The Conference of Presidents today deplored the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. A delegation of Development Committee MEPs just back from Gaza voiced its shock at the conditions of the civilian population there. As a result, the Conference of Presidents decided to add a debate to the agenda of the next mini-plenary in Brussels, so that the Parliament can express its view on this matter in a resolution, after statements by the Council and Commission.

The Development Committee delegation report to the Conference of Presidents explained the deteriorating humanitarian conditions on the ground in the Gaza Strip. The Conference was informed about serious declines in health indicators, such as increased rates of malnutrition and chronic diseases. It was also briefed on the difficulties caused by the closure of border crossings, which have severely interrupted economic activity and the free movement of goods, as well as hampering international humanitarian organisations in their work. In addition, basic services such as sewage disposal, rubbish collection and clean water are completely disrupted or under heavy strain

Taking note of the delegation's shock at the state of the civilian population in the Gaza Strip, the Conference of Presidents decided to respond to this urgent matter by scheduling a debate with Commission and Council, to be followed by the adoption of a resolution. This debate will take place during the next plenary session of Parliament, to be held in Brussels on 10-11 October. The resolution will aim at making recommendations to Council and Commission as to the strategy and next steps in implementing EU policy towards this humanitarian emergency.

The Chairpersons of the political groups also expressed the view that, in the meantime, immediate action is needed by the Commission and the Council in order to alleviate the suffering of the population in Gaza.

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/025-10887-270-09-39-903-20070927IPR10886-27-09-2007-2007-false/default_en.htm

THEMATIC :

FINANCIAL PERSPECTIVES

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illegal renditions

- ▶ **EP discussion in the plenary** (27/09/2007)

Secret detentions, unlawful inter-state transfers and supposed illegal CIA operations involving EU member states were back on the agenda Wednesday. **Most MEPs criticized the lack of co-operation from the EU Council of Ministers.** Italian Socialist Claudio Fava said, "We have asked the Council to put pressure on governments to give information. We're not satisfied! Public opinion is worried: the silence of the EU Council and the governments are a lost occasion for Europe". However, Jas Gawronski (IT, EPP-ED) recalled his group didn't support Fava's report and said evidence was insufficient. "Let's stop arguing about this subject on which nothing new has been discovered, let's leave the investigations to magistrates and let's concentrate on political proposals."

Franco Frattini said the Commission will present a report on the efficiency of anti-terrorist measures. He said he is still expecting answers from the Polish and Romanian governments about their investigations. A representative for the Council of Ministers underlined that the EU doesn't have competences on secret services surveillance, and that national investigations are ongoing. In the fight against terrorism, "our strongest weapons are our values and principles," he said.

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/public/story_page/008-10569-267-09-39-901-20070921STO10553-2007-24-09-2007/default_en.htm

EU economic partnership agreements

- ▶ **EU criticised over economic partnership agreements** (28/09/2007)

Anti-poverty campaigners demonstrated in more than 40 countries yesterday to protest at the European Union's insistence on sealing new free trade pacts with the world's poorest countries this year.

Peter Mandelson, the EU trade commissioner, warned yesterday that 77 of the world's poorest countries in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific would face "less generous tariff rates" in trade with the EU unless they completed negotiations on new "economic partnership agreements" (EPAs) with Brussels by the year's end.

The World Trade Organisation (WTO) has set the deadline for the talks, which opened five years ago to liberalise trade between the EU and the world's poorest regions and phase in the abolition of tariffs. Many

developing countries fear the agreements will expose their economies to a ruinous invasion by European goods, services and business. Brussels argues that the pacts will create a more benign climate for badly needed European investment.

According to campaigners protesting yesterday, senior EU officials have been threatening to cut aid to Africa if there is no breakthrough. Luis Morago, head of Oxfam International in Brussels, said: "Threats to withhold aid and increase tariffs on exports have not helped but simply piled on the pressure in an entirely unjust way. If EPAs are signed because of a WTO deadline, rather than because they are good for development, they will fail."

World Bank and trade union officials are also urging Mr Mandelson to secure WTO blessing for extending the talks. Bibiane Mbaye, of ActionAid, said Brussels was using "strong-arm politics" to bully African countries into signing up. Campaigners say the pacts would see "the dumping of cheap agricultural products" at the cost of local producers.

In an attempt to rebut the critics, Mr Mandelson and the EU aid commissioner, Louis Michel, released an open letter yesterday, arguing that the new pacts were long overdue: "The negotiations are forcing us to face up to difficult issues ... No one believes the status quo is working."

[The Guardian](#)