

Dear reader,

The newsletter at hand gives you an overview of developments related to human rights and democratisation in the Brussels environment.

I hereby invite you to contact me for suggestions and ideas. I am looking forward to your feedback.

Sincerely yours,  
Christiane

## European Parliament

### Parliamentarians and Chastel concerned about human rights situation in Congo

During the European Parliament's plenary session, on September 22, the parliamentarians debated four motions for resolution - tabled by the political groups [EDD](#), [S&D](#), [Greens/ALE](#), [ALDE](#) – on the human rights situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Olivier Chastel, speaking on behalf of High Representative Catherine Ashton, expressed the EU's concern related to this topic. The Secretary of State for European Affairs highlighted that “*the issue of sexual violence is particularly alarming in this area*”. Therefore, he concluded that the “*European Union [...] will remain particularly committed to cooperating in the areas of justice, the police, the army and human rights and to providing assistance to victims*”.

One day after the debate the Council adopted a [decision](#) extending the EU police mission undertaken in the framework of the security sector reform until September 2011.

The debate can be followed via online-stream [here](#); MEPs will vote on the resolution on human rights in the DRC during the Brussels October session.

### Sakharov prize nominations out

Nine nominations for the 2010 Sakharov Prize for freedom of thought have been tabled by EP political groups or groups of over 40 MEPs. The nominees are the 'Access' movement, Haytham Al-Maleh, Israeli NGO 'Breaking the Silence', Guillermo Fariñas, Aminatou Haidar, Dawit Isaak, Birtukan Mideksa, Father Thadeus (Nguyễn Văn Ly) and the Christian mission 'Open Doors'.

On 5 October 2010 the nominations will be discussed at a joint meeting of the Foreign Affairs and Development committees and the Human Rights Subcommittee, and adopted the following week. The overall winner will be decided by the EP Conference of Presidents on 21 October in Strasbourg, and invited to attend the award ceremony on December 15. Read more about the candidates [here](#).

### Plenary session: Other issues of relevance

During the EP's plenary, Herman van Rompuy, President of the European Council, briefed the parliamentarians on the outcome of the European Council meeting of 16 September. The text can be found [here](#). He also briefly touched upon the expulsion of Roma in France; the topic parliamentarians showed most interest in.

MEPs further voted on a report on 'Poverty reduction and job creation in developing countries: the way forward' by rapporteur Eleni Theocharous. The adopted text can be found [here](#).

## European Commission

### The EU at the poverty summit: 1 billion Euros for MDGs lacking behind; 1 million Euros for culture

During a speech on the occasion of the High-Level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals, Commission President José Manuel Barroso promised additional means for the fight against poverty: “*The EU is ready to offer to the most committed and needy countries an MDG initiative amounting to €1 billion to make progress on those goals we are furthest from achieving.*” According to Barroso, “*it mocks our technical progress when men, women and children [...] are unable to*

*exercise the most basic of their human rights."*

The Commission further decided to provide a 1-million-Euro facility to support culture in developing countries. *"Culture is a key factor to ensure a sustainable, human and economic development,"* Andris Pielbags, the EU's Development Commissioner, noted. The agreement on the facility has been signed together with UNESCO. It shall allow governments of developing countries to take advantage of experts' knowledge in developing effective and sustainable cultural policies. More can be read [here](#) and [here](#).

### **European Commission adopts new strategy on gender equality**

On September 21, the European Commission adopted a five-year strategy, translating the principles set out in the European Commission's Women's Charter (see [here](#)) into specific measures. The document sets five priority areas for action: the economy and labour market; equal pay; equality in senior positions; tackling gender violence; and promoting equality beyond the EU. On this occasion, Viviane Reding, European Commissioner for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship, also took a stand on the question of quotas: *"Europe should make better use of women's talents. I have not been an advocate of quotas for women in senior business posts in the past, but given the lack of progress in this area, we might in the future have to consider taking initiatives at the European level."* The strategy is accompanied by background statistics on women and employment and a Eurobarometer survey on domestic violence against women. More information is available [here](#) and [here](#).

## **Civil Society**

### **Commission should keep the pressure on Greece regarding asylum reform, HRW says**

In a letter of September 20, Human Rights Watch criticised Greece for, again, pushing back a promised presidential decree introducing emergency reforms to the country's asylum system.

The reason for the postponing is a recent government reshuffle. The decree would have addressed the backlog of more than 45,000 cases and reinstated a *"flawed appeals procedure"* for rejected asylum seekers. *"The postponement of long-awaited, interim fixes means that Greece is not even back to square one in the process of repairing an asylum system in need of a complete overhaul,"* said Bill Frelick, refugee program director of HRW.

In light of the new delays, the European Commission should send a reasoned opinion to Greece identifying concrete areas for improvement. The Commission already sent two formal letters to hold Greece accountable for its violation of EU law in the framework of 'infringement proceedings.' Greece faces a double burden due to its location and the EU's Dublin II regulation, under which the country of first entry is generally responsible for examining refugee claims.

HRW also urges the UN refugee agency *"to step in now and take over processing asylum claims."*

More can be read [here](#).

## Upcoming

### European Parliament

- September 27: Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) meeting (Topics: International protection and asylum files, Terrorist Finance Tracking Programme)
- September 28: LIBE meeting (Topics: Proposal for a new Common European Asylum System; Public Hearing on combating sexual abuse, sexual exploitation of children and child pornography; Public Hearing on "How poverty affects women in the EU")
- September 28-30: ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly (Meeting of the Bureau and meetings of the Standing Committees)
- September 29: LIBE joint meeting with Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (Topic: Situation of Roma people in Europe (discussion with Commissioners Viviane Reding, Cecilia Malmström and Laszlo Andor)
- September 30: Subcommittee on Human Rights meeting (Topics: Human rights in Burma/Myanmar in view of the parliamentary election on 7 November; annual report on Human Rights in the World 2009)
- September 30: Committee on Constitutional Affairs meeting (Discussion of the Electoral Act and the Citizens' Initiative with representatives from national parliaments)

### European Commission

- September 27: Development Commissioner Piebalgs attends "Partnership Africa: New horizons for EU-and inter-African cooperation"

### Council of the European Union

- 28 September: EU-South Africa summit

### Other

- Secretary General of Amnesty International, Mr. Salil Shetty, meets with representatives of the Belgian Presidency, Development Commissioner Piebalgs, and President of Parliament Buzek.

For further information:

Christiane Schwausch

E: [brussels-feed@eiuc.org](mailto:brussels-feed@eiuc.org)

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Monastery of San Nicolò - Riviera San Nicolò 26 - I-30126 Venice Lido (Italy)