Human rights in the European Union. Annual Report, June 1998 to June 1999

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The committee adopted the report by Bertel HAARDER (ELDR, DK) on human rights in the European Union. The committee pointed out that, under the Treaty, human rights included economic and social rights, and it called for all these, including the right to adequate social protection, housing, adequate health care and proper education, to be incorporated into the new EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, which it believed should be legally binding. The report deplored the fact that yet again eleven out of fifteen EU Member States were listed in Amnesty International's 1999 report because of human rights abuses of varying degrees of gravity. The committee mentioned some countries by name, such as Greece, which was urged to recognise the right of conscientious objection to military service, and Italy, which was urged to limit its pre-trial detention periods. In the field of civil and political rights, the committee asked Member States to extend to all non-EU citizens resident for more than five years the right to vote and stand in municipal and European elections. As in other years, the committee condemned the cruel and degrading treatment of detainees and prisoners by law enforcement officials and prison staff and noted that certain EU Member States had been singled out by the United Nations and the Council of Europe because of such practices. The report noted that the plight of asylum seekers was all too often unacceptable - access to lawful asylum procedures was frequently barred, intolerable detention conditions were widespread and brutal treatment of deportees was not uncommon, sometimes resulting in death. The committee wanted to see strict application of the Geneva Convention and recognition of the existence of persecution on grounds of gender. It urged the Council to come up with a single asylum procedure and a single status for anyone granted asylum within the EU. The committee reiterated the need to provide a proper legal basis and sufficient financial resources for the European Fund for Refugees. Other recommendations made in the report included the promotion of literacy among both children and adults as a means of combating social exclusion, extra-territorial jurisdiction for cases of sexual abuse of children, incorporation of the rights of children into the new Charter of Fundamental Rights and legal recognition in all Member States of extramarital cohabitation, irrespective of gender. One-parent families, unmarried couples and same-sex couples should enjoy the same rights as those of traditional couples and families and any discriminatory age of consent for homosexual relations should be repealed in all Member States. The report also urged that the prohibition on human cloning be maintained. The committee reviewed the human rights situation in the applicant countries and welcomed the progress made by some countries, in particular Slovakia as far as the rights of its Hungarian minority were concerned. It deplored, however, the extremely unsatisfactory level of respect for human and minority rights in Turkey, the continuing inadequate care in Romania for over 100 000 orphans, the social and economic discrimination against the Roma people in many applicant countries and the lack of adequate legislation in the Czech Republic against sexual abuse and violence against children, which had turned it into a transit country for child prostitution according to a Save the Children report.