Report on fundamental rights in 2002 in the European Union

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Fodé SYLLA (EUL/NGL, F) on fundamental rights in the EU in 2002. The report focused on conditions of arrest and detention, protection of personal data, the right of asylum and media concentration. It argued that the situation in 2002 gave cause for concern in many respects and even seemed to have deteriorated in some ways. Terrorism - MEPs condemned all forms of terrorism and pointed out that policies on the prevention and punishment of terrorism must seek to maintain the rule of law. They favoured the adoption of "a European compensation instrument" for the victims of terrorism. Prisons - The committee noted that the situation of prisoners deteriorated in certain Member States in 2002, mainly as a result of overcrowding in prisons. It stressed that minimum standards should be guaranteed for the health and living conditions of prisoners, and that detention procedures should be examined to ensure that human rights were not violated. Drug addicts in prisons should have access to medical treatment and the necessary substitution therapies without discrimination. Trafficking in human beings - The committee called for the establishment of a European database focusing on disappeared persons who are believed to be victims of human trafficking. It called for more effective judicial protection of victims through the adoption of the directive on short-term residence permits for victims of trafficking who cooperate with the authorities. Data protection - The report expressed concern at the agreements being negotiated involving the forwarding of personal data between the EU and USA. There was particular concern at the US requirement for airlines to provide access to passenger data on transatlantic flights. MEPs wanted this to be suspended until the level of data protection guaranteed by Community law was ensured. Media concentration - The committee pointed out that no legislative solution had been found to the problem of media concentration in the EU. It deplored the situation in Italy, where media power was concentrated in the hands of the Prime Minister. It called on the Commission to guarantee that public and private media provide citizens with accurate information, avoiding discrimination and guaranteeing access to a variety of groups and opinions. Asylum - MEPs condemned the delays in adopting the basic instruments of a common asylum and immigration policy. They called on the Member States to keep detention of asylum-seekers to a minimum and restrict it solely to exceptional cases that meet UNHCR guidelines. The committee also urged the Council to adopt the draft directive providing for secondary protection for people not covered by the Geneva Convention but unable to return to their country of origin. It voiced concern at the large number of people who lost their lives in 2002 whilst seeking refuge in the EU and condemned the serious situation faced by unaccompanied minors seeking asylum. It argued that people should not be extradited to countries where they might face the death penalty or torture. Discrimination - The committee called on the Member States to guarantee that all children on their territory will be guaranteed access to education regardless of their family·s administrative situation. Similarly, any person living on their territory should be granted access to health care. In addition, Member States should relax their naturalisation procedures, ensuring that residents of foreign origin can obtain citizenship if they so wish. MEPs also wanted the Member States to abolish all forms of discrimination against homosexuals, in particular as regards the right to marry and adopt children. Furthermore, non-marital couples should be able to benefit from the rules on freedom of movement within the EU. Other concerns raised in the report included transparency and the right of access to documents, equality between men and women and the rights of the elderly and people with disabilities.