2003 annual report on the situation of fundamental rights in the European Union

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The committee adopted its annual report on fundamental rights in the EU (2003), drafted by Alima BOUMEDIENE-THIERY (Greens/EFA, F). The committee voiced concern at misconduct by the police and other law enforcement officers, and urged Member States to enforce safeguards for prisoners more effectively. It also called for holding centres for asylum seekers which meet human rights standards. MEPs called on all the Member States to make trafficking in human beings a crime. They noted that each year some half a million women from Central and Eastern Europe were brought into the EU to be sold into prostitution. The sexual abuse of children in sex tourism was also condemned and the Commission was urged to determine in which countries sex tourism constitutes a crime. The Member States were also asked to ensure that legislation on the protection of workers was properly applied, in particular with a view to combating child labour, domestic slavery and the exploitation of migrant workers. On the question of data protection, the committee believed the obligation on airlines to give the US authorities access to personal data of passengers on transatlantic flights was incompatible with Community law and that these measures should therefore be suspended. It called on the Commission to take all necessary measures to put an end to the present illegal situation by enforcing Community and national privacy laws. MEPs criticised the fact that no legislative solution had been found to the problem of media concentration and reiterated their concern about the ongoing concentration of the media in Italy in the hands of the Prime Minister. They wanted Member States to be required to preserve media pluralism by amending the directive on the pursuit of television broadcasting activities. The committee noted with dismay that the Member States had been unable to adopt directives on asylum procedures and refugee status. It deplored the decision to introduce Community legislation on the organisation of shared flights for the expulsion of third-country nationals. And it pointed out that collective expulsion was allowed only if the decision on such expulsion was based on a fair, individual and objective assessment. MEPs were keen for the Member States to pursue a coherent anti-discrimination policy. They called on the Council to adopt the proposed framework decision on combating racism and to make the fight against racism and xenophobia a priority on the EU agenda. And they were concerned that the increase in racism had in some cases led to the adoption of restrictive policies in the field of asylum and immigration. MEPs stressed the need to set up an administrative unit responsible for fundamental rights to serve Parliament's Citizens' Rights Committee in order to monitor the human rights situation in Europe. They wanted the Commission to draw up a Green Paper on the future of EU human rights policy and they issued a call for the EU to appoint a Commissioner responsible for fundamental rights in the Union. Lastly, the committee voiced concern about the rights of people with disabilities, discrimination based on sexual orientation and fair access to justice.