The rights of prisoners in the European Union

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Maurizio TURCO (IND, I) on the rights of prisoners in the European Union. Quoting statistics compiled by the Council of Europe in 2002 which painted an alarming picture of overcrowding in prisons, an excessive increase in the prison population, a rise in the number of foreign nationals being held, high numbers of remand prisoners and numerous cases of death and suicide, the report addressed a formal recommendation to the Council to take a joint standpoint on matters relating to prisoners. In particular, it called for a binding European Prisons Charter covering all the Council of Europe's Member States, which would guarantee basic rights for all detainees in those countries. Such rights would include: access to a lawyer and to healthcare, protection from violence by fellow prisoners, decent prison conditions (with regard to accommodation, cleanliness, ventilation, light, food, etc.), rehabilitation and reintegration into society and the workforce, the separation of different categories of detainees (i.e. juveniles, remand prisoners and convicted criminals), specific measures for vulnerable groups, special protection for imprisoned juveniles and women, special arrangements for pregnant women and the mothers of young children, visiting rights, the greatest possible use of open or semi-open prisons and alternatives to imprisonment, such as community service, information to prisoners about their rights, in a language which they understand, and training for prison staff and law enforcement officers. The Member States were also urged to earmark "appropriate resources" for the restructuring and modernisation of prisons and to create a specific EU budget heading for these and other projects involving prisoners' rights.