



50th birthday statement to sidestep constitution

A statement marking the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome will avoid setting any deadline for ratifying the EU's constitution.

The Berlin Declaration – to be issued by the Union's heads of state and government on 25 March – will be a short document, focusing on the EU's history, values, particular characteristics and commitments. Jargon will be avoided, according to Germany's EU presidency.

"There was complete agreement that the declaration should be addressed to the citizens of Europe and as such should be understandable," said Chancellor Angela Merkel, during last weekend's EU summit in Brussels (8-9 March). "It should not use the traditional language of the European Union and should not use technical terms." Although German diplomats had broached the idea of including a deadline for salvaging the constitution following its rejection by French and Dutch voters, this has proved unpalatable for the governments in Paris and The Hague.

Sources: www.europa.eu
www.euobserver.com

Energy plan for Africa on table

Germany has promised to use its presidencies of the EU and G8 to promote a "sustainable energy policy" in Africa.

Heidmarie Wieczorek-Zeul, the development minister in the Berlin government, said that improved access to energy in Africa is a prerequisite for achieving the UN's Millennium Development Goals of dramatically reducing extreme poverty by 2015. Energy and trade issues figure prominently on the agenda for this week's meeting of EU development ministers in Bonn (12-13 March). Speaking ahead of that meeting, Wieczorek-Zeul committed herself to setting up an "energy partnership" between the EU and Africa.

With roughly 70% of Africans depending on traditional biomass as their source of energy, the German presidency has argued that they must be aided to satisfy their energy needs to encourage economic growth. Renewable energy should be promoted as much as possible, according to the presidency, to avoid an adverse effect on climate and reduce reliance on oil.

This week's discussions follow the Brussels summit agreement that 20% of the Union's energy will come from renewable sources by 2020. Although several EU leaders described the accord as "historic", Ernest-Antoine Seillière from the industrial lobby group Business Europe said no-one had the "foggiest idea" how the target will be reached.

Sources: www.eu2007.de
www.ft.com

Dispute over how to fund peace-keeping in Darfur

The European Commission is at loggerheads with most EU governments about how peace-keeping in Darfur should be funded.

Last week (5 March), the EU's foreign ministers agreed to divert €45 million from the European Development Fund (EDF) to the African Union's mission in the Sudanese province.

Although they did not block the move, the Commission, Ireland, Sweden and Luxembourg raised concerns about whether it was correct to use development aid money for security purposes, according to the newspaper *European Voice*. The question of how to fund the operation is likely to prove contentious in the coming months. Because the Khartoum government is hindering efforts by the UN to take charge of peace-keeping in Darfur, the African Union's costs have increased exponentially. Because money from the EU's foreign policy budget is scarce, the idea of taking another €100 million from the EDF is under consideration.

Meanwhile, Human Rights Watch has condemned the EU for failing to impose sanctions on Sudanese leaders in protest at the continuing atrocities in Darfur. "Sudanese officials are getting away with murder in Darfur but continue to face no significant consequences for their actions," said Lotte Leicht, the organisation's director for EU advocacy. "EU leaders should place senior Sudanese officials under immediate travel bans and asset freezes."

Sources: www.europeanvoice.com
www.eu2007.de
www.hrw.org

Michel under fire over corporate adviser

Louis Michel, the European commissioner for development, has come under fire over revelations that he is being advised by a senior Belgian industrialist.

Etienne Davignon, a director of the Franco-Belgian utility Suez, is tasked with providing Michel guidance on the role of the private sector in development, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa.

"Is it appropriate for a director of a company with an interest in issues such as water privatisation to be advising the development commissioner?" asked Erik Wesselius from Corporate Europe Observatory, which monitors the influence that private sector lobbyists wield over the EU institutions.

A vice-president of the Commission in 1981-85, Davignon has more than 11,000 shares in Suez. He also holds or has held senior positions with the hotel group Accor, the bank Fortis, the chemical firm Solvay and car giant Fiat.

He is one of four advisers to Michel. The others are the Bangladeshi Nobel laureate and Grameen Bank founder Muhammad Yunus, former Commission official-turned-anti-corruption-campaigner Dieter Frisch and Malian politician Ousmane Sy.

The list of advisers was published by Siim Kallas, the anti-fraud commissioner.

Sources: www.ft.com
www.corporateeurope.org

Mandelson keeps mum on Indian drugs case

The European Commission has refused to ask the Swiss pharmaceutical giant Novartis to drop its case against an Indian law allowing the manufacture of affordable medicines.

Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson said that while the EU executive is following the case before the Madras High Court with interest, it would not emulate the European Parliament by requesting that Novartis halt its litigation. Mandelson said that the Commission's principle is not to intervene in such court cases. Novartis has written recently to all MEPs asking them not to sign a declaration against the case. The company argued that its case concerns the patentability of its cancer treatment Glivec and not the wider issue of access to cheap medicines. But Médecins Sans Frontières has expressed concern that the case could lead India to introduce a patent system for medicines similar to that found in wealthy countries. This would require that each small modification to a medicine is covered by several

patents, thus making it far more difficult for India to produce cheap generic drugs for developing countries.

More than half of all medicines used for treating AIDS in developing countries are manufactured in India.

Sources: www.msf.org
www.europarl.europa.eu

New project aims to put spotlight on gender

To mark International Women's Day (8 March), the European Commission and the UN launched a new project on ensuring that greater heed is paid to gender issues in development aid activities.

Reviews of progress made since the 1995 plan of action approved at the world conference on women in Beijing have found that international commitments to gender equality have not been matched by financial support at either domestic government level or through official development assistance.

To help remedy this situation, the new project is to make recommendations on ensuring that gender equality and the rights of women are fully incorporated into aid programmes supported by the European Commission and in the activities of aid recipients. This will be in line with the 2005 Paris declaration on aid effectiveness, which calls for a better coordination of donor activities and an increase in aid to achieve the UN's Millennium Development Goals.

Titled, the 'EC/UN Partnership for Gender Equality in Development and Peace', the project will place particular emphasis on women in conflict and post-conflict situations.

The project will begin with consultations in 12 focus countries. Participants will include representatives of national governments, the UN, the European Commission, and women's and other non-governmental organisations. It is hoped that these discussions will lead to agreements on strengthening the gender equality components of national budgets and development plans.

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