

Wednesday, 14 January 2009 - Strasbourg

Situation in the Horn of Africa (debate)

Ana Maria Gomes, on behalf of the PSE Group. - (PT) The Council and the Commission must draw their conclusions from the fact that, in this Parliament's view, the governments of the countries of the Horn of Africa are not acting in accordance with their obligations under the terms of Article 9 of the Cotonou Agreement. Human rights, democracy and good governance are empty words. That is perfectly obvious to anyone who does not keep their eyes closed.

In Ethiopia, for example, which is the headquarters of the African Union, the people are oppressed under the cover of rhetoric that sounds good to donors, but which is no less crude and shameless.

I will describe two recent episodes ...

On 29 August, Ms Birtukan Midekssa, the leader of a party with a parliamentary seat, was again arrested and sentenced to life imprisonment for refusing to publicly state that she had requested the pardon that the Meles Zenawi Government used to release her in 2007, along with many other political leaders of the opposition held since the elections of 2005.

Second: the approval by the Ethiopian Parliament of the so-called NGO Act, which, in practice, criminalises all the work of independent NGOs.

There is no transition to democracy in Ethiopia, Commissioner, and I would be grateful if you would tell this to your colleague Louis Michel.

In Eritrea, the wrath of the government against anyone who tries to exercise the most basic human rights is even more shameless.

As for Somalia, which is currently the most serious situation in the whole Horn of Africa, the international community, including the European Union, has a criminal lack of interest in the fate of the people in a country where there has been no law and order for decades and where Ethiopian troops were able to occupy the land and commit crimes with impunity and where pirates and terrorist groups thrive.

The EU naval mission will not resolve anything if the European Union, the United States, the UN and the African Union continue to ignore the causes of the piracy, which are rooted and must be fought on land and not at sea.

The region will not have stability or progress without resolution of the tragic conflicts that continue to devastate Sudan, especially in the South and in Darfur, and where the rhetoric of the international community, the European Union included, needs to be translated into decisive action to protect the civilian populations who are being attacked and to end the impunity of the criminals.

In this regard, the possible confirmation of the prosecution of President Omar Bashir by the International Criminal Court will be a test of the credibility and effectiveness of both the European Union and the African Union.