

This newsletter presents monthly highlights of EPF's and our member parliamentary groups' work and gives an overview of legislative and Parliamentary initiatives on sexual and reproductive health and rights and international development in Europe and around the world on the part of the global community of Parliamentarians committed to the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD).

Enjoy the reading!

### Contents

|      |   |          |
|------|---|----------|
| I.   | EPF Activities February 2009                        | 1        |
| II.  | Parliamentary Leadership                            | 2        |
| III. | APPG Affairs  | 3        |
|      | <b>EPF – EU News Supplement: EP Election Update</b> | <b>5</b> |
| IV.  | EPF Visibility                                      | 7        |
| V.   | EPF Activities – Outlook 2009                       | 8        |

## I. EPF Activities February 2009

### 1. EPF Executive Committee discusses 2009 priorities

On 23 February, EPF held its first Executive Committee Meeting for 2009. After a recap on EPF activities, highlights and achievements in 2008 and a feedback by Executive Committee Members of their work and current developments at national level, the meeting placed a strong focus on upcoming strategic priorities as well as the EPF work plan and upcoming activities for this year. Discussions centred around ICPD at 15, ODA levels and how to secure financial support for population assistance and family planning including basic reproductive health especially in light of the economic downturn as well as parliamentary involvement in the new aid modalities (i.e. budget support, new financing mechanisms etc.). A large part of the afternoon was devoted to the anticipated changes in the political landscape in Europe and its repercussions on the European elections that will take place in June this year. The composition of the new college of EU Commissioners, recent findings in MEP voting behaviour on European Parliament resolutions on the issues of maternal mortality and fundamental rights as well as the implications of the Treaty of Lisbon which enhances the role of national parliaments were discussed in particular.

### 2. EPF holds first telephone conference with its member APPG Secretariats

To be able to regularly inform our APPG Member Secretariats about EPF's activities, initiatives and work plan, the forum has conducted its first interactive telephone conference with a number of Secretariat representatives. The main purpose of the conference call has been to inform Secretariats about a range of upcoming EPF activities such as study tours to Burkina Faso, Cameroon and Zambia and conferences such as a conference on population and climate change in Oslo, a parliamentary delegation to the UN Commission on Population and Development to New York and the G8 Parliamentarians' Meeting in Rome. This direct discussion enabled participants to pose questions, it helped to map out the availability of parliamentarians for EPF activities in our member APPGs, increased transparency on current activities and developments at national level and helped to strategise about future parliamentary initiatives. Building on this successful start, participants agreed to hold these calls on a regular basis.

## II. Parliamentary Leadership

### 1. Hon. Antje Blumenthal, MP protects women and girls with disabilities against violence

Women and girls with disabilities are in much higher danger of becoming victims of violence or sexual abuse than other persons. Assaults and violations often take place in their social settings – at home, in facilities for the handicapped or even on their way to sheltered workshops. “We have to assume that up to 80% of the women and girls with disabilities become victims of physical or mental violence,” says Hon. Antje Blumenthal, MP and EPF Executive Committee Member. “They have a right to life and physical integrity!”



This is why Antje Blumenthal calls for target-group-specific information on sexuality and sex education. “We want to empower women and girls with disabilities to defend themselves against sexual violence and report on assaults. Especially mentally handicapped persons lack the ability to move up against such assaults.” In addition, suitable campaigns, projects and other measures are proposed to sensitise the public for this topic. Especially people in charge of the care of persons with disabilities are to be trained to detect signals for sexual assaults and violations against their wards. A guideline or handbook might help them to support the affected women and girls with disabilities.

### 2. Hon. Hilde Vautmans, MP submits resolutions on international women’s rights.



On 5 February, Hon. Hilde Vautmans, MP and EPF Executive Committee Member discussed two resolutions in the Belgian Parliament targeting international women’s rights. The first resolution concerned awareness raising about “breast-ironing” in Africa. A pubescent girl’s breasts are flattened, usually by the girl’s mother, in an attempt to make her less sexually attractive to men. This practice is believed to help prevent rape and early marriage. Grinding stones, pestles, belts, heated objects and breast bands are used to press or beat down the forming breasts. Breast ironing leaves physical and psychological damage and the resolution asks next for awareness raising also for the Belgium government to financially support projects in Cameroon dealing with this issues and encourage more projects to be developed.

The second Resolution concerns women killings in Central-America and Mexico. Yearly, thousands of women get murdered, because the perpetrator is afraid that the victim will press charges of rape or violent abuse. The position of women in these societies make them an easy target for this type of crimes. The resolution asks the Belgian government through bilateral contacts to support Mexico and Central-America in tackling the issue and to offer support in the research area and the protection of human rights defenders.

### 3. Hon. María Rosa Fortuny, MP speaks out on the fight against Malaria

Following the EPF study tour to Tanzania on Malaria in November 2008, Hon. María Rosa Fortuny, MP submitted a parliamentary question to inquire about the contributions of the parliament of Catalonia to combat malaria in order to pave the way to further parliamentary initiatives currently underway.

During the Study Tour to Tanzania, the EPF Delegation was able to visit Artemisia store sites as well as out growers, led by the African Artemisia Ltd. The company is contracting small scale farmers to grow the Artemisia plant. Their first attempt to grow and export Artemisia went bankrupt in 1998. The project was re-launched in 2004, when it was decided to promote the harvest in Tanzania and to build a transformation

plant in Kenya. The company extracts artemisinin, the active compound, out of dried leaves, which is finally sold to Novartis, the chemical consortium that produces the pills to treat malaria. At the end of 2008, the output of artemisinin was far below expectations and African Artemisia Ltd. nearly went bankrupt. María Rosa Fortuny regretted the lack of support to local entrepreneurs and viable projects and decided to have an interview with Novartis in Barcelona to study possible ways of supporting Artemisia farmers. Novartis welcomed the initiative and committed to study possible actions to support Artemisia farmers in Arusha.



As a result of her participation in the EPF study tour to Tanzania, María Rosa Fortuny has turned into an outspoken advocate on the fight against malaria, as she has shown during an extensive interview in TV3, the Catalanian public TV. She spoke about her experiences during the EPF study tour and the necessity to fight diseases such as malaria that affect the most vulnerable people in developing countries.

#### 4. Senator Alain Destexhe holds Belgian government accountable for development aid commitments

Following the Global Fund to fight HIV/Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM) Partnership Forum, 4-6 December 2008 in Dakar, Senegal, Belgian Senator Alain Destexhe wrote to Development Cooperation Minister Charles Michel on 16 January 2009 to request that the Belgian government honours its 2008-2010 funding commitment to the Global Fund which was made at the Berlin Replenishment Conference in September 2007. Remaining at that time to be confirmed by the government, Belgium pledged 54 million Euros for the three year exercise of the Fund. In 2008, Belgian contribution effectively disbursed to the GFATM amounted to 12.4 million Euros, instead of the promised 15 million. August 2008 announcements highlighted the significant reduction of governmental pledges from 18 to 12.8 million Euros for 2009 and from 21 to 13.5 million Euros for 2010.



In a written response, which was received on Thursday 19 February 2009, Minister Michel explains that the 2009 contribution should be increased although in line with existing budgetary margins. Moreover, as the share of bilateral cooperation had recently decreased within Belgian development aid, increased funding to priority partnership countries will be prior to any review of the national contribution to the GFATM.

Nevertheless, Minister Michel concluded in ensuring that even within the framework of bilateral aid, health would remain a sector of utmost importance for the Belgian government and will continue to receive due attention.

### III. APPG Affairs

#### 1. French APPG organised Hearing on "Women and Development cooperation" in the French National Assembly

On 7 January 2009, Hon. Marie-Jo Zimmermann, MP Chair of the Delegation for Women's Rights and Gender Equality of the French National Assembly organised a hearing with M. Alain Joyandet, Secretary of State in charge of development cooperation regarding 'the tools in place in order to empower women in developing countries'. MP Zimmermann recalled that the Delegation's mandate does not only exclusively focus on women's health and rights at national level but also at the international one, emphasising the particular needs of women in developing countries. The Secretary of State recalled commitment of France to mainstream gender issues in the development cooperation policies, particularly in Africa. To this extent he nominated Hon. Chantal Bourragué, MP to closely follow-up on this, with the key task of analysing the Government's commitments and formulating suggestions to improve gender mainstreaming in development cooperation policies. Hon. Danielle Bousquet, MP member of the Delegation for Women's Rights and Gender Equality and EPF's Executive Committee member raised concern about the achievement of MDG5 and highlighted the need for the France to increase support and programming for improving maternal health in developing countries.

#### 2. French MPs question their government on reproductive health and financial commitments

On the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, Hon. Marie-Jo Zimmermann, MP, Chair of the Delegation for Women's Rights and Gender Equality of the French National Assembly -French EPF's APPG member- asked an oral question to Ms Rama Yade, French Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Human Rights regarding women victims of domestic violence and how France is contributing to this fight.



The French Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Human Rights emphasised that the fight for the elimination of violence against women is among her key priorities, stressing that it exists in Europe as well as in developing countries. She recalled that in 2006, France provided a substantial financial contribution of 2 million Euros to various United Nations' Funds fighting against female genital mutilations.

Hon. Danielle Bousquet, MP, Member of the Delegation for Women's Rights and Gender Equality and EPF Executive Committee member asked an oral question to M. Alain Joyandet, Secretary of State in charge of development cooperation during the debate on the 2009 Draft Budget Law. Recalling the French Government's commitment to allocate 10 million EUR to health for Sub-Saharan Africa and the need to focus on strategic MDGs, such as MDG5 in order to fight poverty, MP Danielle Bousquet asked how much France is going to allocate for the implementation of the strategic roadmap for women's health and rights entered into force in December 2007, and what are the key measures to be taken in order to overcome SRHR challenges.



The Secretary of State answered highlighting that even if ODA is among the key priorities of the French development agenda, he nevertheless regrets that 0.47 ODA targets will not be reached for 2009. He added that France is giving a high priority to health and most particularly reproductive health, emphasising that 77 million euros had been allocated for following-up 900 000 pregnancies in Africa.

For more information, please contact Silvia Theodoridis at [silvia@iepfpd.org](mailto:silvia@iepfpd.org)

## EPF – EU News Supplement Election Update

To keep our members and readers up to date, EPF will issue a regular news supplement on the upcoming elections to the European Parliament to be held in all EU Member States from 4-7 June 2009.

The supplement features amongst others reports about the latest developments, initiatives and facts with regard to the pre-election period and intends to provide views and background information in the run-up to this event.

Enjoy the reading

### 1. New campaign launched to boost youth turnout in EU elections

The campaign, co-organised by the European Movement and backed by the liaison office Bruxelles-Europe, aims to better inform young people aged 18 to 23 about the European Union and increase interest amongst this age group to participate in the European elections.

The move comes amid fears that voter turnout in the EU-wide poll could fall to an all-time low. As part of the campaign, 10,000 calendars will be distributed to schools in Belgium aimed at encouraging youngsters to observe a 100-day countdown to the elections, which starts on 27 February. They include cartoons, questions about the EU, such as the meaning of the EU flag, and short items by teenagers expressing their opinion on the EU.

The initiative was launched in Brussels on 25 February by Hon. Anne van Lancker, MEP and EPF President. "There is an urgent need to increase enthusiasm among young people in these elections. Even though Belgium is one of four EU member states where voting is obligatory, we find that at each European election there is a lack of knowledge about the EU and parliament, particularly among youngsters. That means that even though they may be voting they are often ill-informed about what they are voting about. That is what this campaign aims to address. We want to mobilise the country's youth to get involved in these elections." She added, "This is really important because if we don't do something proactive we are going to lose this young generation when it comes to their interest in EU affairs."

Source: The Parliament.com



### 2. Two thirds of German voters do not know that European elections will be held this year

Four months prior to the European elections, 69 per cent of German voters do not know that a new European Parliament will be elected this year. This is the result of a representative poll conducted by the well-known German Bertelsmann Foundation. Only 9 per cent of those polled could name June as being the month in which the elections will be held. Mainly younger citizens up to 39 years were unaware about the date. However, despite this ignorance, 43 per cent of those polled claimed they would be voting on 7 June. 24 per cent categorically denied participation in the vote. While voter turnout could fall to an all-time low, many of the respondents demanded increased participation at European Union level. Three out of four citizens call for

European-wide public referenda and almost as many respondents (69 per cent) are in favour of directly electing a future president of the European Union.

### 3. EU Commissioner to stand for President in Lithuania

EU financial programming and budget commissioner Dalia Grybauskaite has announced her candidacy for the upcoming Lithuanian presidential elections. Grybauskaite is expected to stand down from her current post in the middle of April. The first round of presidential elections will be held on 17 May with a second round – if required – on 7 June.

A former finance minister in Lithuania, Grybauskaite has been a commissioner in José Manuel Barroso's executive since 2004. It is believed that responsibility for her portfolio will be given to another commissioner, at least on a temporary basis. Grybauskaite will be standing as an independent candidate rather than a representative of a political party. Grybauskaite stands a strong chance of winning the race since, according to recent opinion polls, she is the Baltic state's most trusted politician.



Source: The Parliament.com

## IV. EPF Visibility

EPF's participation to the Annual Meeting of the HIV/AIDS Network of the Parliamentary Assembly for "la Francophonie"



On the 23-24 February 2009, EPF was invited to speak at the annual meeting of the HIV/AIDS Networks of the Parliamentary Assembly for "la Francophonie" (PAF) hosted by its Malian Section. The HIV/AIDS Network of the PAF gathered around 40 European and African Parliamentarians as well as UNAIDS representatives in order to exchange points of view and best practices in the fight against HIV/AIDS. The main themes of this year's annual conference were 'affective and sexual education among young girls and boys' as well as 'the difficulties related to the shortage of skilled health care and medical personnel and the brain drain challenges'. During these two days meeting Parliamentarians were able to present their countries' achievements and remaining

challenges in the fight against HIV/AIDS and brainstorm about the best ways to overcome difficulties. There were key discussions on HIV/AIDS awareness-raising among young people and the challenges related to sexual education which still remains "tabou" in most of African countries. Sensitive issues included the issue of "men having sex with men" leading to a lively debate on the existing repressive laws condemning homosexuality in numerous African countries, as well as the difficulties related to sex workers' access to prevention and treatment.

EPF was invited to speak and share its expertise with Parliamentarians members of the APF. Ms Silvia Theodoridis, EPF advocacy officer, presented the work EPF is carrying out in order to engage and mobilise European Parliamentarians in health related-issues and the implementation of the Cairo Plan of Action focusing particularly on women's health and rights, including sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), HIV/AIDS and Malaria. Highlighting the existing linkages between these issues, as well as the remaining challenges, EPF's presentation provided strategies for the future emphasising the need to mainstream policies in order to reaching successful results and meeting the MDGs. Finally, Parliamentarians adopted a Resolution highlighting a possible enhanced collaboration between APF and EPF in the future.



For more information, please contact Silvia Theodoridis at [silvia@iepfpd.org](mailto:silvia@iepfpd.org)

### V. EPF Activities – Outlook 2009:

1. Parliamentary Conference on Climate Change and Population, 23-24 March, Oslo, Norway  
Organised in co-operation with the Norwegian Association for SRHR (NSRR) and held in the context of Countdown 2015, the conference brings together 40 Participants, including Member of Parliament throughout Europe to raise awareness and discuss the linkage between SRHR and Climate change, to give an overview of current research and exchange information on best practices
2. Study Tour to Cameroon on Malaria and EU Development Policy, 28 March – 4 April  
In August 2007, EPF organised a study tour to Cameroon aiming at raising awareness amongst Parliamentarians and Young Decision Makers about malaria burden and the needs to tackle the disease in Cameroon. This Parliamentary follow-up week-long tour will aim at assessing progress and remaining challenges in the fight against malaria in Cameroon.
3. Parliamentary Delegation to the 42<sup>nd</sup> Session of the UN Commission on Population and Development, 29 March – 3 April, New York, USA  
This delegation will take part in the framework of EPF's Parliamentary Taskforce dedicated to the UN and which focuses on supporting Parliamentary involvement in UN decision-making and ensure that a Parliamentary perspective supporting SRHR is heard in relevant UN settings. Next to the official CPD session, EPF will arrange a number of briefing meetings with UNFPA and UNDP representatives, the EC Delegation and NGOs.
4. Parliamentary Study Tour to Burkina Faso on Reproductive Health Supplies, 6-10 April, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso  
This study tour for French-speaking MPs is co-organised with Equilibres & Populations in the context of Countdown 2015. The study tour looks at the unmet SRHR needs of the Burkinabé population and places a special emphasis on the availability and access to reproductive health supplies.
5. Study Tour to Zambia on Reproductive Health Supplies, 16-23 May, Lusaka, Zambia  
This study tour is organised in collaboration with RFSU under the Countdown 2015 project. It will raise awareness and educate MPs on the unmet SRHR needs of the Zambian population and places a special emphasis on the availability of and access to reproductive health supplies.
6. G8 Parliamentary Meeting on Reproductive and Global Health, 22-23 June, Rome Italy  
This year's G8 Parliamentary Meeting will focus on the "Strategic Investment in times of crisis. The rewards of making women's health a priority".
7. Fourth International Parliamentarians Conference on the Implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action Conference, 27-28 October, Cairo, Egypt  
The conference will be combined with EPF Executive Committee and Council meetings, and is preceded by a High-level Conference on MDG 5: Maternal Mortality hosted by the Dutch Minister for Development, H.E. Bert Koenders on 26 October 2009.

### The EPF Secretariat

The EPF secretariat is based in Brussels and is responsible for implementing all EPF activities. EPF maintains a website with information about its activities and a monthly News Update on the activities of Parliamentarians, SRHR and development policy and related items. It can be found at [www.iepfpd.org](http://www.iepfpd.org).

As of 1 September, the EPF Secretariat staff is composed as follows (in alphabetical order):

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### EPF's Mission

The European Parliamentary Forum on Population and Development believes Parliamentarians have the opportunity and the responsibility to promote sexual and reproductive health and rights and gender equality, which are core elements of human dignity and are central to human development.

### About EPF

The European Parliamentary Forum on Population and Development is a Brussels-based Parliamentary network that serves as a platform for cooperation and coordination for the 25 all-party groups in Parliaments throughout Europe that focus on improving sexual and reproductive health and rights at home and abroad through national and regional health and foreign aid budgets.

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#### EPF is a member of:

- The European Alliance against Malaria
- Countdown 2015 Europe
- The Reproductive Health Initiative for Youth in the South Caucasus (RHIYC)
- The Steering Committee of the International Parliamentarians' Conference of the Implementation of the IPCI Programme of Action (IPCI/ICPD)

#### EPF

- is an Associate Member of EuroNGOs
- has Special Consultative Status with the United Nation's Economic and Social Council
- has Participatory Status with the Council of Europe