

Press Release

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## Civil Society Essential Actors in Monitoring Removals from Europe

### Hearing underlines human rights concerns regarding future EU return measures

One week after the adoption of the EU Directive on "common standards and procedures for the return of illegally staying third country nationals" by the European Parliament, civil society organisations reiterated their concerns and highlighted the importance of independent monitoring of removal operations.

EP rapporteur Manfred Weber (EPP Germany) hosted the meeting with churches and NGO representatives to present a conference report on "Monitoring forced returns/deportations in Europe" in the European Parliament. The representative of the European Commission, Mr Martin Schieffer, underlined that one third of the EU Member States had some monitoring experience already.

Mr Weber recalled the difficulties and the achievements in reaching the compromise agreement on the directive. He emphasised the need to maintain dialogue in spite of different positions in this sensitive field. Mr Weber had originally proposed to institute an EP ombudsman on return. MEP Hennicot-Schoepges (EPP Luxembourg) underlined the serious difficulties and flaws in the directive which motivated her to vote against the directive, particularly regarding the extensive powers extended to administrations and the entry ban.

Examples of monitoring removals were shared by Sabine Kalinock for the deportation monitoring at the Rhein-Main airport Frankfurt/Main, Germany and Nadine Conrardy for the Red Cross Luxembourg. For the German monitoring, crucial issues are e.g. insufficient or outdated health certificates. Bernd Mesovic of Pro Asyl, Germany, underlined that monitoring ought not to be used as a fig-leaf for inhuman deportation procedures in which families are separated and serious health conditions ignored.

Patricia Coelho of ECRE pointed to the difficulties that asylum seekers faced as the recognition of refugees and the asylum procedures throughout the EU are still rather diverse. While the negative decisions and expulsion orders are recognised throughout the EU, the recognition and status of persons in need of protection are not. The distinction between voluntary, mandatory and forced return would need to be kept. She pointed to the need for the European Return Fund to support measures to facilitate voluntary return and measures to improve mandatory return and reduce physical enforcement measures.

Katrin Hatzinger of the Protestant Church in Germany EKD concluded the meeting by expressing the hope that the models of independent monitoring would be used as best practice models when EU Member States implement their obligation for effective monitoring.

The report on the European Conference Monitoring forced returns/deportations in Europe, 24/25 September 2007 is available at <http://www.ccme.be/secretary/NEWS/Doc-European%20Conference.pdf>.

**Contact:** CCME, 174 rue Joseph II, B 1000 Brussels, T. +32 2 234 68 00, e-mail: [info@ccme.be](mailto:info@ccme.be)