



EUROPEAN UNION
Delegation of the European Union to the Council of Europe

Weekly Media Report of developments related to the Council of Europe

5 - 11 March 2016

The Weekly Media Report gives an overview of recent news in international media. Please note that the Report does not constitute a formal communication, does not represent the official position of the Delegation and does not commit the European Union in any way.

Ce rapport donne un aperçu de nouvelles récentes dans les médias internationaux. Ce rapport n'est pas une communication formelle, ne représente pas la position officielle de la Délégation et n'engage en aucun cas l'Union Européenne.

Poland / Venice Commission

[The rule of law is under assault in Poland](#)

11/03/2016 – The Guardian / UK

The Venice Commission, an expert advisory body of the 47-member Council of Europe, will on Friday agree its verdict on Poland's proposed changes to the country's constitutional court.

The usually cautious body looks set to be scathing in its analysis. A leaked draft concludes: "Not only is the rule of law in danger, but so are democracy and human rights."

In a situation where the government has rushed legislation through parliament and sworn in new judges in the middle of the night, in defiance of the constitutional court's own rulings, it seems hard to disagree. For Kaczyński, however, the expert opinion – which the government itself requested – is "legally absurd".



[Polish constitutional crisis deepens as judges reject court reform](#)

10/03/2016 – Reuters / International

Poland's top court ruled on Wednesday that the government's overhaul of the court was illegal, deepening a constitutional crisis that has stirred concerns about democracy and the rule of law in the EU's largest eastern member.

The ruling right-wing Law and Justice party (PiS) has enacted a law increasing the number of judges at the constitutional court required to make rulings and changing the order in which cases are heard. It has also rejected court appointments made by the previous government. The timing of the verdict is politically sensitive. The Council of Europe, a human rights body, is due to issue an opinion this week on Poland's legal changes. A leaked draft of the opinion said the reform of the constitutional court threatened the rule of law in Poland.

Nadiya Savchenko's trial / PACE

[Ukrainian pilot on hunger strike attacks 'farce' of Russian trial](#)

09/03/2016 – The Guardian / UK

Every defendant in Russian trials gets a “last word” – a final statement to the court before the judge retires to consider the verdict.

Ukrainian military pilot Nadiya Savchenko accompanied her statement on Wednesday by jumping on to the bench and giving the judge the middle finger, before singing the Ukrainian national anthem. The hearing came five days after Savchenko began a hunger strike that she has pledged to continue unless she is returned to Ukraine.

Savchenko has become a national hero in much of Ukraine, where she was made an MP in elections last year and appointed to the parliamentary assembly of the Council of Europe, but the international outcry has so far had little effect on Russian authorities. A group of Ukrainian MPs attempting to travel to the court for Wednesday's hearing was detained for questioning at a Moscow airport and they missed their connecting flight to Rostov.

[Savchenko trial: Ukraine pilot ends hunger strike](#)

09/03/2016 – BBC / UK

Ukrainian officer Nadiya Savchenko, who is on trial in Russia over the killing of two journalists, has ended a hunger strike that she began last Friday. She is consuming liquid nutrients, called Nutrison, and drinking water.

She had vowed to refuse food and drink pending the verdict. An aide said she changed her mind after a plea by Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko. Ms Savchenko is accused of directing mortar fire that killed the journalists in Ukraine in 2014, a claim she denies.

An aide to Ms Savchenko, speaking to the BBC's Sarah Rainsford outside the prison in Novocheerkassk, southern Russia, said she ended the hunger strike and drank two litres of



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water on Thursday. But one of her lawyers, Mark Feygin, said he was misled about a letter that he handed to Ms Savchenko, which it turned out was not from President Poroshenko.

Secretary General's Opinion Piece / Migration Crisis

[EU leaders should avoid reactionary solutions to refugee crisis](#)

07/03/2016 – Euractiv / International

As the refugee crisis continues, Europe's governments want to ensure that their asylum rules are perceived as fair and not open to abuse. This is understandable. Indeed, it is in everyone's interests for citizens to have confidence in their country's immigration system. This is essential for social cohesion, too.

The danger, however, is that – with government's feeling increasing pressure to “do something” – measured responses give way to kneejerk reactions. Across the continent steps to tighten domestic asylum rules are now coming thick and fast. New powers for police to confiscate refugees' assets at the border, for example. Rules that will make it harder for refugees to reunite with their families. Reforms to make it easier for governments to expel them in the future. There will be more to come.

Istanbul Convention

[EU plans to ratify convention to combat violence against women](#)

06/03/2016 – Brussels Times / Belgium

The Istanbul Convention is the most comprehensive international treaty on combatting violence against women and domestic violence. The Convention was presented in 2011 and entered into force in August 2014.

Věra Jourová, Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality, announced on March 4: "Our proposal sends a clear message: victims of violence against women must be better protected across Europe. One in three women in the EU has experienced physical or sexual violence, or both. More than half of all women have experienced sexual harassment after the age of 15.



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Secretary General/ SPACE

[Overcrowding a major problem in European prisons: Council of Europe.](#)

08/03/2016 – New Europe / International

Overcrowding remains a major problem in European prisons. Despite a slow decrease in overcrowding, Europe's prisons remained close to its maximum capacity in 2014, holding over 1.6 million people in total.

The UK has the highest prison population in the European Union, a Council of Europe report published today (8 March) reveals. There were a total of 95,248 people behind bars in this country. Of the 50 prison administrations examined in the study, only Russia and Turkey had more inmates, with 671,027 and 151,451 respectively

The annual report is based on information by prison administrations in the 47 members of the Council of Europe.

Council of Europe Secretary General Thorbjørn Jagland said: "Overcrowding creates enormous obstacles to rehabilitating offenders and thus to better protecting society from crime. It can also breach human rights. I welcome the progress achieved in reducing prison overcrowding. States still affected should do more to eradicate it, including applying alternative measures to imprisonment".

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