

# EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

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*Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs*

Brussels, 6 July 2006

**Report from the LIBE Committee Delegation  
on the Visit to Tenerife and Fuerteventura (ES)  
Rapporteur: Ms Jean LAMBERT**

## **1. Report on the visit**

A delegation of eight MEPs (see attached list) went to two of the Canary Islands, Tenerife and Fuerteventura, in Spain, from 7 to 10 June 2006, where they were joined by four Spanish MEPs who were already there (see the same list).

The purpose of the visit was to gather information and ascertain directly the situation regarding the reception of asylum seekers and migrants on the islands, to verify the conditions of the centres, as well as to exchange views with representatives of civil society and to talk with government authorities.

The visit to the Canary Islands followed similar trips to Lampedusa, Ceuta and Melilla, Paris and Malta and occurred at a particularly difficult period for the Canary Islands, due to the mass influx of migrants coming from the African coasts.

A few days after the visit, on 13 June, the First Vice President of the Spanish Government, Mrs. Maria Teresa FERNANDEZ DE LA VEGA, came to Strasbourg to meet the LIBE Committee and to discuss a follow-up of the LIBE mission to the Canary Islands.

The visit by the delegation was focused on 3 different centres, two in Tenerife (Centre "Acuartelamiento de las Raíces" in La Laguna -near Los Rodeos airport-, and the Centre "Hoya Fría") and one at Fuerteventura (Centre "Matorral" Carretera General del Sur- former prison camp of Valenzuela).

Further, the delegation met with the President of the Canary Islands' Government, Mr Adan MARTIN MENIS, with the government's delegate in Tenerife, Mr. Jose` SEGURA CLAVELL, as well as with several officials/local authorities from both Tenerife and Fuerteventura.

The delegation also met with a series of representatives of various organisations:

- Red Cross
- CEAR (Spanish Commission for helping refugees)
- Caritas
- Red Acoge
- Medicos del Mundo
- Movimiento por la Paz el Desarme y la Libertad (Movement for Peace, Disarmament and Freedom).

The delegation also visited the operational headquarters of the SIVE (Information and External Surveillance System) in Fuerteventura and took part in a simulation of a migrants rescue, operated by the Red Cross.

The delegation held two press conferences. The visit received wide media coverage, with articles on the front page of several Canaries newspapers.

## **2. Meeting with the Spanish authorities**

The delegation had a meeting with the delegate of the Madrid Government in Tenerife, Mr. Jose` SEGURA CLAVELL.

Mr SEGURA explained that normally people leave from Senegal, some 830 km away from the Canaries Islands. The Spanish authorities have the responsibility to monitor one million square km of sea from the Canaries down to the African coasts. From 1996, boats were leaving from Senegal, Morocco and Mauritania to Fuerteventura. Now, after coordinated action to restrict departures from Morocco, the new situation sees boats coming mainly from Senegal, so the final destination tends to be Tenerife rather than Fuerteventura.

In Fuerteventura the delegation met the President of the Canaries Government, Mr Adán MARTIN MENIS and the President of the Island Government of Fuerteventura, Mr. Mario CABRERA GONZALEZ. Mr Cabrera said that over the last 12 years more than 35.000 migrants have transited by Fuerteventura. The main issues of discussion were the situation of minors, who are under the competences of the Islands' Government. Since 2000, migrants are coming with children as well. The problem of minors is a European problem according to the Spanish authorities and a broader solution has to be found.

Mr MARTIN stressed the importance of co-development and summarised the different cooperation projects financed by the Canaries Government: more than 60 projects with Morocco, Mauritania, Senegal, Capo Verde for more than 8 million Euros.

Mr MARTIN mentioned also the Commission Communication on "a stronger partnership for the outermost regions"<sup>1</sup>, stressing the importance of the wider neighbourhood' action plan, which for the moment has too narrow a budget (around 6-8 million euros for 6 years). He also drew attention to the forthcoming meeting in Rabat on 10-11 July and the UN Immigration Forum in November 2006.

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<sup>1</sup> Com (2004) 343 of 26.05.2004

M. MARTIN also expressed his wish to come to the Parliament for a joint meeting with DEVE and LIBE Committee.

### **3. Meeting with NGOs**

The majority of NGOs present complained about the difficulties they faced in entering the centres. Not all NGOs have access to the centres; conditions regarding access differ from centre to centre, and are not apparently justified (for example CEAR can enter the centres in Gran Canaria, only this week in Fuerteventura and not at all in Tenerife, even if it receives authorisation from the Spanish Government).

The representative of "Medicos del mundo" complained about the fact that the migrants who are seriously sick are simply released and Medicos del mundo is the only organisation allowed to help them. The authorities had told us that the seriously ill are transferred to hospital. He also said the migrants were not asked for their formal consent to authorise blood samples.

Some other NGOs regretted the lack of specialised lawyers in the field of asylum.

The Red Cross is accomplishing important work in helping with the initial rescue activities and the initial reception. They have some paid staff but a number of volunteers and it is becoming more difficult to recruit them.

### **4. Visit to the administrative centres**

An individual's retention in a centre is decided upon by an investigating judge, at the request of the governmental authority, within 72 hours. The stay at a centre may in no case last longer than 40 days, after which the detainee must be returned or released and sent by plane to mainland Spain.

Minors are not detained, unless a judge so authorises following a report to this effect by the Attorney General's Department and unless their parents or guardians in the same centre state their desire to remain together. They are generally kept in special accommodation with Spanish children. We were told that integration becomes difficult if there are too many migrant children.

At the moment in Tenerife there are 400 minors housed in three different centres with accommodation capacity for only 200. They are managed by the Red Cross and paid for by the local authorities. In 2005, Tenerife's island government spent 6 million Euros on migrant minors (every minor costs about 30.000 Euro per year).

The majority of the people present in the three centres came from Senegal and by boat. The delegation noticed that the majority of people in the centres were economic migrants rather than asylum seekers, so while the various EU Asylum Directives have some relevance they are not the major issue. According to the authorities only 15% of the last 9.000 arrivals come from countries at war, such as Sierra Leone or Ivory Coast.

According to the local authorities interviewed by the delegation, it is very difficult for the migrants to find a job and to integrate into the Canaries society. This is especially the case for people coming from sub-Saharan countries. The delegation has been told by the Lady mayor of La Laguna, that the majority of African women may turn to prostitution as their opportunities for integration are fewer than those of migrant women arriving from South

America as they can find work in the hotels or other tourist outlets. The delegation did not quite understand this statement, considering that after 40 days all irregular migrants are supposed to leave Canarias and they are repatriated or sent to mainland.

#### ***A. The "Las Raices" Centre***

##### ***Conditions in the centre***

Las Raices is a temporary camp, opened on 15 March 2006, to meet the increased number of people arriving at Tenerife. It is composed of several tents. It is said to be the biggest camp in Europe. It is for men only. The camp is placed in a military zone, and controlled by the army. Inside the camp, the police and not the army is responsible for the functioning of the camp. It is not a CETI, as in Ceuta and Melilla where the migrants could freely go out of the camp. It is a closed camp and journalists are not allowed in.

At the time of the visit, 1339 people were present in the centre. There are currently 16 persons to every tent; they are provided with triple bunk beds. We were told currently the bottom two are used for sleeping and the upper one for their possessions. Chemical WCs are available outside. The Red Cross has access to the camp.

A catering service is provided for the three meals of the day and an external agency is responsible for cleaning the camp and there are regular sanitary inspections, but it was not clear who was responsible for that.

The camp is situated on a mountain side 800 meters above the sea, causing low temperatures during spring (down to 5-8 degrees) making it very cold for those staying there. According to the authorities, the average of the stay in this camp is 15/20 days. There is the possibility for the migrants to see a doctor every day.

In the centres, the delegation spoke to officials and police authorities in charge of the running of the centres, and to officials from the military authorities that have provided the local authorities with the facilities. The delegation also had the chance to speak to nurses/medical staffs that are in charge of checking on the health of the migrants and providing them with immediate health care.

Once the migrants arrive in the camp they have a medical check-up and the medical staff proceeds with taking blood samples from everybody. Accordingly to the doctor of the centre, no-one has yet refused a blood-test. According to the personnel interviewed by the delegation, the migrants are generally in good health. There were only 15 cases of HIV amongst 3000 persons checked. The main disease is hepatitis B, endemic in Sub-Saharan countries.

##### ***Information from migrants themselves***

The delegation was able to interview a number of people. The migrants seemed satisfied by the living conditions in the centre and the conditions of their reception: they confirmed they had been interviewed and interpretation provided. The only complaints concerned the quantity of food: some of the migrants said that the food was not enough. Most of those the delegation spoke to complained that they had been deprived from all their belongings on arrival (most clothes confiscated because of the risk of carrying diseases), and were wearing the same clothes for up to more than three weeks. The migrants complained also for the lack of

telephone facilities and TV.

Some MEPs heard complaints about only one guard and from just a few inmates. The inmates in general told the delegation they were well treated.

Many of the migrants the delegation spoke to seemingly have no concept of asylum and are very clear they have come to work. Some said they were told to come without papers. The delegation asked the migrants about their expectations, the path of their travel, what they had left behind (wives, children and family members), why they had come etc.

All migrants said they come to the Canary Islands by little wooden boats, "*cayucos*", carrying about 80/90 people. All of them said they had "contributed" to the cost of the boat and that the trip was "self-organised" by groups of people. Their contribution could be up to 150,000 CFA. All migrants deny that traffickers helped them. They say they have in Senegal a great fishing tradition and that the *cayucos* follow fishing boats. The average length of the trip is 15 days from what we were told.

The migrants said they want to reach Spain for a better life; they may already have relatives or friends living in Spain. They do not want to come back to their countries of origin: they got into debt in order to afford the trip to Europe, and said they "prefer dying instead of coming back". It is clear that many families sell everything they have in order to invest in sending one or two family members to European countries.

## ***B. The Hoya Fria Centre***

### ***Conditions in the centre***

Hoya Fria is a closed centre (CIE), not a CETI, so there is no option for those in the camps to leave. It has a capacity of 248 people, but at the time of our visit 300 people were present, of which 3 women and 4 minors with their families. There are two different sections in the centre: one bigger for men and another one, smaller, for women and children. The centre is well organised. There are some facilities, as a TV room, a telephone, a room where migrants can meet their relatives and lawyers from outside once a day (lawyers are usually appointed by the Courts), a medical cabinet, facilities to buy cigarettes, food and drinks, telephone cards. The doors of the dormitory are closed during the night, but the cells remain open.

### ***Information from migrants themselves***

Hoya Fria is the centre where we had the least contact with the inmates. They were watching TV or queuing to use the telephones and the delegation did not want to interfere too much with their activities. Some members of the delegation spoke to a Brazilian girl who came to the Canary Islands from Madrid for a few days to go to the beach. Her passport expired and she has now been in the centre for 32 days. She knows already that she will be sent back to San Paulo in Brazil.

## ***C. "El Matorral" Centre***

### ***Conditions in the centre***

El Matorral Centre in Fuerteventura is the biggest in Spain with a capacity of 1080 and it is a modern centre. It replaced the former airport centre. At the time of the visit 977 people were

present, the majority coming from Sub-Saharan countries. We were told that a second centre might be needed. The centre looks like a real prison, even if the migrants have the possibility to move freely inside the centre.

### ***Information from migrants themselves***

The migrants showed some members of the delegation documents that prove that they are informed about their rights, in French and Spanish, including on the possibility to ask for asylum.

They confirm that before arriving at the centre they went to the tribunal, with lawyers and interpreters.

The migrants told the delegation they knew the dangers of coming to the Canaries by boat, but were *"prepared to make the sacrifice of leaving their families because they have nothing at home."*

Here, as well as in Las Raices, the migrants expressed frustration over a lack of food, and the fact that the facilities are very run-down. The majority complained about the fact that there were no televisions. (This provoked the delegation members to donate money to provide the centres (here and in Las Raices) with six televisions, in order for the migrants to at least follow the news/World Cup).

## **5. Conclusions**

1. The Canary Islands have a real problem of mass influxes of migrants. Nevertheless it seemed that the Spanish authorities have the situation, at the point of arrival, under control, even if the constant arrivals during summertime put enormous pressure on them.

2. The overall impression is that the centres are correctly run and clean, and that they meet the most basic needs of those held there. The Spanish authorities cope adequately with a very difficult situation.

The police were proud to tell the delegation that they felt there was no racism towards the migrants in the Canaries Islands. The delegation was told that there was some press and political protests against the migrants. However, it was also clear that the majority of politicians, authorities and population have humanitarian approach. There is a determination to reduce the number of lives lost in crossing - some estimates believe that up to 50 % of those attempting the crossing die.

3. If appears that numbers are likely to be high for the foreseeable future, "Las Raices" should close and better more permanent facilities be provided. At Tenerife, with a growing number of arrivals, the camps seemed strained in terms of the number of people held there, but there were no examples of people who had been held long term, and it seems that most people are sent to the mainland of Spain after 40 days, and as foreseen in Spanish law only held for another 40 days before receiving an expulsion order. Whether the order is executed and people do return to their country of origin is not clear.

4. At the camp on Fuerteventura that in the past experienced large number of arrivals the camp seemed more run down, but there were fewer people held there, and the overall impression of this camp as well, is that the standards of treatment are relatively good.

5. The delegation considers that the situation of minors is a real emergency of the Canary

Islands. These are the financial responsibility of the local authority, which has agreed to care for 250 of them until they are 18 – at which age they will be expected to return. This is a considerable expense to the Canarias authorities. The delegation considers there is a need for the EU to provide expert advice and support for minors across the EU. There may be a need for further research to how to correctly identify minors. Psychological support was mentioned as being particularly important.

6. The delegation appreciates the efforts made by the Spanish Government to monitor the sea and African coast, to help in identifying boats/ rafts and to pick up more people. The next step would be to prevent the boats setting off and to stop the profitable enterprise of traffickers (although few of those we spoke to were willing to say they had paid a smuggler, rather which they had *contributed to the cost of the boat*).

7. The delegation is aware of the technical problem of returns as there are so few flights to Senegal and that sending back a full charter plane proved a very bad public relations act. Countries of origin do not always cooperate on return.

8. The delegation is also fully aware of the problems that, after the 40 day period of retention, foreigners are either expelled from the country or released and left to find their own way home following the issuing of an expulsion order on the mainland. This leads to the illegal presence of large numbers of third country nationals on Spanish territory.

9. The delegation expresses some concerns about the effectiveness of the legal support that migrants receive. The delegation understood that, especially in Fuerteventura there is only a small number of lawyers available for the migrants and these lawyers are not trained in the field of asylum and immigration.

10. The delegation would like to receive from the Spanish Government the following clarifications and answers:

- It is possible for the migrants to access legal advice not only at their arrival, but also later, during their stay in the centres? Can the legal services on the Islands really cope with all these demands?
- How are those who do not arrive from Africa processed?
- The delegation was told that it was more difficult for African women to integrate than for the women coming from Latin America and therefore some are involved in prostitution to support themselves. What more could be done for the fairly small number of African women arriving?
- There is a clear difficulty expressed by the Spanish authorities as regards the identification of minors. The technique used in Spain is the bone examination, which throws up problems of reliability. Do the Spanish authorities have the intention of finding a better way of determining this?
- Will it be possible to grant to NGOs access to the centres in a clearer way that would consistently apply to all the centres on the Islands?
- Will it be possible to improve the access to telephones for those who have no money and have not been able to contact their family?
- The delegation has been told by the migrants that they cannot keep the few possessions or money they bring. Would it be possible to clarify what the process is for dealing with such possessions?



ANNEX

Brussels, 6 of June 2006

**First Draft Programme/FINAL  
Visit to Canary Islands**

**Wednesday 7 June**

11.00 h: Bus leaving from the EP to the airport  
12.30 h: Flight from Brussels to Madrid (Flight IB 3203)  
14.50 h: Arrival in Madrid  
16.55 h: Flight from Madrid to Tenerife Nord (Flight IB 958)  
18.40 h: Arrival in Tenerife Nord

Free dinner

Night in Tenerife Puerto de la Cruz - Hotel Botanico:

Hotel Botánico  
Avda. Richard J. Yeoward, 1  
38400 Puerto de la Cruz  
00 34 922 38 14 00

**Thursday 8 June**

07.30 h: Departure from the Hotel

9.30 h: Visit of the Centre "Acuartelamiento de las Raíces" en La Laguna (near of the Los Rodeos airport). Eventually, if the programme permits, visit to the Centre "Hoya Fría" (to be confirmed). Meeting with the Government representative in Tenerife, Sr. D. José Segura Clavell who will accompany the delegation to the Centres.

12.30 h: Meeting with the NGOs (Cruz Roja, Comisión Española de Ayuda al Refugiado (CEAR), Caritas, La Red Acoge, Médicos del Mundo y Movimiento por la Paz el Desarme y la Libertad (MPLD))

Subdelegación del Gobierno en Tenerife  
Calle Méndez Núñez, 9  
Santa Cruz de Tenerife  
00 34 922 999 120/1/2

14.30 h: Lunch given by the Canarias Government

Sede de la Presidencia del Gobierno de Canarias  
Bajo la presidencia del Consejero de Presidencia y Justicia, Sr. D. José Miguel Ruano León  
Avda. José Manuel Guimerá, 1  
Santa Cruz de Tenerife

00 34 922 47 73 42

15.30 h: Meeting with Canarias Government

Consejero de Presidencia  
Sede de la Presidencia del Gobierno de Canarias  
Avda. José Manuel Guimerá, 1  
Santa Cruz de Tenerife  
00 34 922 47 73 42

17.15 h: Press conference (Sede de la Presidencia del Gobierno de Canarias - Sala de prensa de la Presidencia del Gobierno de Canarias).

19.00 h: Flight from Tenerife to Fuerteventura

19.50 h: Arrival at Fuerteventura

Night in Fuerteventura - Hotel Kempinski.

Hotel Kempinski  
Avda. Grandes Playas  
35660 Corralejo la Oliva  
00 34 928 53 64 44

### **Friday 9 June**

9.00 h Departure from the Hotel Kempinski

9.30 h : Visit of the Centre "Matorral"  
Carretera General del Sur, km. 5  
(Antiguo campamento de Valenzuela)  
Puerto del Rosario  
Fuerteventura

11.30 h: Visit of SIVE (Servicio de información y vigilancia exterior)

12:30 h: Dispositivo de atención de emergencia (simulation by the Red Cross Services)  
Plaza de la Paz  
Puerto del Rosario

14.00 h: Lunch given by the delegation with Sr. Presidente del Cabildo y Alcaldes de la isla.  
Restaurante La Era  
Casillas de Angel  
Puerto del Rosario

16.00h: Meeting with the Cabildo Insular de Fuerteventura, Sr. D. Mario Cabrera González  
(Local Government)

Calle Primero de Mayo, 39  
35600 Puerto del Rosario  
Fuerteventura  
00 34 928 86 23 00.

17.00 h: Press conference at the Cabildo Insular de Fuerteventura

20.20 h: Flight from Fuerteventura to Tenerife

21.10 h: Arrival in Tenerife North

22.00 h: Official dinner given at the Hotel Botanico given by Canarias Government: el  
Presidente del Gobierno de Canarias, Sr. D. Adán Martín Menis

Night in Tenerife - Hotel Botanico.

Hotel Botánico  
Avda. Richard J. Yeoward, 1  
38400 Puerto de la Cruz  
00 34 922 38 14 00

### **Saturday 10 June**

11.25 h: Flights from Tenerife Nord to Madrid (Flight IB 967)

15.00 h: Arrival in Madrid

16.20 h: Flight from Madrid to Brussels (Flight IB 3202)

18.35 h: Arrival in Brussels.

Contact numbers for organisational details:

**Cristina Castagnoli**

[cristina.castagnoli@europarl.europa.eu](mailto:cristina.castagnoli@europarl.europa.eu)

**Fernando Carbajo Ferrero**

Head of the EP Information Office in Spain

[fcarbajo@europarl.europa.eu](mailto:fcarbajo@europarl.europa.eu)

## **PARTICIPANTS:**

### **Official delegation LIBE**

- 1) Patrick GAUBERT (PPE) France, Vice -President LIBE,  
Head of Delegation
- 2) Ioannis VARVITSIOTIS (PPE) Greece
- 3) Martine ROURE (PSE) France
- 4) Wolfgang KREISSL-DORFLER (PSE) Allemagne
- 5) Jeanine HENNIS-PLASSCHAERT (ADLE) Pays-Bas
- 6) Jean LAMBERT (VERTS) Royaume-Uni
- 7) Giusto CATANIA (GUE) Italie
- 8) Johannes BLOKLAND (IND/DEM) Pays-Bas

### **Membres LIBE présents sur place (hors quota)**

- 1) Agustin DIAZ DE MERA (PPE) Espagne
- 2) Fernando FERNANDEZ MARTIN (PPE) Espagne
- 3) Antonio MASIP HIDALGO (PSE) Espagne
- 3) Manuel MEDINAORTEGA (PSE) Espagne

### **LIBE political advisors**

- 1) Mercedes ALVARGONZALES (PPE)
- 2) Fabrizia PANZETTI (PSE)
- 3) Ottavio MARZOCCHI (ALDE)
- 4) Christine SIDENIUS (Greens)
- 5) Chiara TAMBURINI (GUE)
- 6) Jan Harm BOITEN (IND/DEM)

### **LIBE Secretariat**

- 1) Cristina CASTAGNOLI
- 2) Lena VESTBERG

### **EP Office in Madrid**

- 1) Fernando CARBAJO
- 2) Damián CASTANO

## **Interpretors**

Covering ES - FR - EN - IT

- 1) Françoise JOOSTENS**
- 2) Marie-Claude LAURENT**
- 3) Laura McMILLAN**
- 4) Vladimir NAVARRO JEVTOVIC**
- 5) Enrique QUIJANO**
- 6) Olive RAYNER**
- 7) Livia RIBOLDI**
- 8) Annalisa VENTURI**

## **List of NGOs**

- 1) CROIX ROUGE**
- 2) CEAR**
- 3) CARITAS**
- 4) RED ACOGE**
- 5) MEDICOS DEL MUNDO**
- 6) MOVIMIENTO POR LA PAZ, DESARME Y LA LIBERTAD**