



Subject: Invitation to an “Open Access” meeting at the European Parliament – 24 april 2013

As part of the “Open Access Now” campaign¹, organised by Migreurop and European Alternatives, we invite you to take part in a meeting on Wednesday, 24 April 2012, at the European Parliament in Brussels, from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m.

For the last ten years, detention of migrants and asylum seekers in the European Union (EU) has increased dramatically. Between 2000 and 2012, the number of immigration detention centres identified by Migreurop² in Europe and at its borders grew from 324 to 473. In 2012, 570,660 foreigners were deprived of their freedom for the purpose of “migration management” on EU territory.

Yet, this is a little-known fact by civil society and the media, in spite of access to information being an inalienable right of European citizens under European legislation, which should be defended by all European institutions.

NGOs' access to these centres also remains an issue: although it is guaranteed by the ‘*acquis communautaire*’, numerous obstacles exist in practice.

The aim of “Open Access Now” is to promote unconditional access to immigration detention centres for both civil society and journalists. This access, which would increase transparency, is necessary, first, because European citizens have the right to know the consequences of the policies implemented in their name and, second, in order for them to monitor whether detainees’ rights are being observed and to prevent abuses and violations.

Towards this end, political representatives (both national and European) have an essential part to play, particularly in terms of promoting positive legislative developments in the field of migrant rights.

Field visits by political representatives and by civil society are essential.

The first series of visits was organised between 26 March and 7 April 2012 in different countries around Europe and at its borders, in order to test the possibility of civil society (particularly NGOs and the media) to access detention centres in Europe and beyond.³ National and European MPs, as well as journalists and NGOs, took part in these visits. Their experience highlighted the extreme reluctance on the part of the authorities to reveal what is happening in immigration detention centres. In most cases, journalists have been refused access, either tacitly, without a valid explanation, or with explanations based on flimsy grounds.

In 2013, the campaign will have two different phases. On the one hand, requests to access immigration detention centres will be submitted to the authorities by members of civil society organisations and journalists throughout the year. On the other hand, as a continuation of the first operation and to complement it, a campaign of parliamentary visits will be organised for a defined period.

¹ <http://www.openaccessnow.eu/fr/texte-de-campagne/>

² www.migreurop.org/article2216.html

³ <http://www.openaccessnow.eu/fr/news/2012/cp-fr-le-droit-a-linformation-de-la-societe-civile-et-de-la-presse-dans-les-camps-detrangers-bafoue/>
<http://www.openaccessnow.eu/fr/news/2012/cp-fr-de-it-es-ro-bg-cro-open-access-cp-conjoint-campagne-de-visites-2012-des-entraves-au-droit-de-savoir/>
<http://www.openaccessnow.eu/fr/news/2012/cp-fr-campagne-de-visites-2012-n-entrez-pas-violation-des-droits/>

The parliamentary visits will take place from late April to mid June. There will be an event at the European Parliament on 24 April 2013 to officially launch the campaign, which will announce the initiative and give details about its proceedings.

The report on the evaluation of the "Return Directive" is scheduled for December 2013, yet the European legislative framework governing the detention of migrants is becoming firmer. In this context, we believe that, as representatives of European citizens, your oversight of detention centres, where rights are commonly abused, is essential. There are three main reasons for visiting a detention centre: first and foremost, to assert your right as a political representative to see detention centres and watch over them when many of us cannot do so; secondly, to promote the right to access detention centres and ensure the rights of detained migrants are observed; and finally, to raise awareness of both the European politicians and of the general public about immigration detention. This is why we invite you to join this initiative by attending our meeting on 24 April and to consider undertaking a visit as part of the campaign. The meeting will be followed by a press conference featuring several participants, which you are also invited to attend.

Many thanks in advance for your interest in our initiative.

Please do not hesitate to contact us by email at laure.blondel@anafe.org and capodanno@migreurop.org or by phone on 0033 1 43 67 27 52 and 0033 1 53 27 87 81 if you have any questions.

With our best regards,

Olivier Clochard
President - Migreurop

Ségolène Pruvot
Co- director - Alternative Européennes

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