



Manifesto on Human Rights for the new European Parliament, 2009

Human rights obligations are enshrined in the treaty basis of the EU. The EU has created a number of instruments to protect and fulfil human rights at home and abroad. Building on this, the new European Parliament should push the EU to do much more to ensure that it delivers effectively on its human rights commitment. The impact of EU human rights tools is not currently measured, and they sometimes appear to be viewed by the EU institutions as an end in themselves, rather than as a means to promote change. In addition, internal and external mechanisms are often not consistent and coherent with each other. Action on the following three areas is needed, and the European Parliament elections in 2009 are the ideal opportunity for change.

1. Consistency

Absolute respect for all human rights set out in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights within the EU member states is crucial in itself, but also impacts on credibility externally.

Good news: EU is seen as a standard bearer on human rights around the world.

Bad news: On closer inspection, there are clear discrepancies between actual EU performance on human rights at home, and best practice. For example, key aspects of the current asylum acquis, such as the Asylum Procedures Directive, are not completely in line with international law standards.

Moving forward: The EU should fully respect international human rights standards in all its activities. Key first steps should include a proper response to EU member states' complicity in the CIA programme of extraordinary renditions, and other unlawful practices carried out in the name of the war on terror.

There is an urgent need for the EU to live up to its human rights commitments, both at home and in its external policy, and ensure the ratification and implementation of relevant treaties.

Good news: EU member states are bound by UDHR and are party to a wide range of European and International human rights standards. In particular, the EC has signed up to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in addition to member states doing so individually.

Bad news: Signature is one thing, but a wide range of commitments under these treaties remain un-implemented. Not all member states have signed, ratified and implemented the Optional Protocol of the Convention against Torture, and not all the member states have ratified and implemented the Rome Statute of the ICC.

Moving forward: Under the new Lisbon Treaty the EU can and should sign up to more human rights treaties as a Union. Following signature, member states should hold each other to account for implementation of pursuant commitments, unless national legislation is better. First steps for Union signature could be the European Convention on Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

EU institutions continue to allow human rights to be sidelined by other issues such as trade, energy, security and migration. In addition, human rights are not currently integrated into the full range of policies, including development.

Good news: The important role of human rights has been recognised in a number of policies, including the European Security Strategy and the Enlargement Process.

Bad news: Security concerns have taken priority over human rights protection, for example in the immigration debate. Prioritisation of human rights in external policy remains the exception, not the rule. Pertinent examples where human rights are not central to the relationship include Russia, Central Asia, China and the USA.

Moving forward: Human rights must be placed at the core of all decisions and the new European Parliament, including in its links with national parliaments, should mobilise political will to achieve this. Given the advancing understanding in the development community of the inextricable links between human rights and development, this would be a good place to start. The new European Parliament should also press for the EU to review the collective human rights impact of all its policies on individual countries.

EU institutional structures continue to keep human rights separate from linked issues such as trade.

Good news: There are units responsible for human rights in the three main institutions, although there is a long way to go in improving their influence.

Bad news: There is insufficient responsibility in the institutions for human rights *within* the EU, notably at Council level. In external policy, little progress has been made in realising the commitments made to human rights mainstreaming in 2006.

Moving forward: The new European Parliament should call for the EU to use the institutional restructuring accompanying ratification of the new Lisbon Treaty, to develop new mechanisms for dealing with human rights in internal policy. The restructuring process should also improve the influence of human rights mechanisms in external relations.

2. EU on the world stage

The EU is punching below its weight on human rights in international fora, for example at the UN and with the African Union.

Good news: The EU has shown that where there is strong political will, and adequate resources, it can operate effectively in international fora, such as on the death penalty resolution at the UN in December 2007, and in support of the UN Special Representative on Violence against Children.

Bad news: The political will to do this is too often lacking. One of many examples is the failure to take effective action at EU level or in a UN context on the crisis in the Darfur region, despite conflict having raged there for more than five years.

Moving forward: The EU should build better cross-regional partnerships, and use collective and multilateral approaches in its diplomacy at the UN and elsewhere. The European Parliament should use its external contacts to support this.

There is a need to reach a strategic and engaging “Consensus on Democracy” to guide the application of EU democratisation techniques inside and outside the Union

Good news: The EU is increasing its support for participatory consultation processes internally, and pushing for similar actions led by external delegations.

Bad news: There is no strategic approach towards democracy assistance and no coordination among member states. The European Initiative on Democracy and Human Rights does not currently allow consultation and evaluation of governance – currently only done at inter-governmental level - to be done by other actors.

Moving forward: The new European Parliament should call for the EU to analyse, in more depth, the techniques it has developed to support democracy, and to adjust relevant instruments to make them more effective. It should also call on member states to enhance collaboration and consistency in their actions in support of democracy.

Human rights need to be integrated in the EU's approaches on conflict prevention and peacebuilding

Good news: The EU is becoming an ever more active global actor in this area, including establishing human rights interlocutors in European Commission delegations in conflict-affected countries.

Bad news: There is a lack of coordination between long-term peacebuilding and short-term crisis management. There is lack of qualified personnel, including human rights advisers, especially in external missions. Conflict prevention and peacebuilding have been left out of most of the EU's financial instruments for external action, including the European Initiative on Democracy and Human Rights.

Moving forward: Human rights advisers should be included in all external missions. More flexible funding should allow for human rights actions in conflict-affected situations, and conflict prevention should be in all EU financial instruments.

3. EU in action

The EU must be accountable to its citizens. Genuine possibilities for civil society to input into policy making are currently limited.

Good news: Rules for consultation exist, and there is strong will among civil society to participate. The existence of viable channels for input will make citizens feel more involved in the EU and start to bring real meaning to participatory democracy.

Bad news: There is real lack of information for citizens on how to input into EU policy making, and inconsistency in the way that consultations are conducted. There is often also a lack of visible results when civil society does offer input. This all contributes to apathy regarding the EU among citizens.

Moving forward: The introduction of the Lisbon Treaty offers a real opportunity for greater engagement with citizens. An increased role for the European Parliament, and through them the involvement of national parliaments, should be properly managed to bring greater citizen participation in the EU.

The EU needs to allocate appropriate financial and human resources to implement its commitments on human rights.

Good news: The European Parliament was valuable in ensuring adoption of financial instruments for external actions. Restructuring for the Lisbon Treaty provides a springboard for the European Parliament to push for more human and capital resources- devoted to human rights in delegations and member state capitals.

Bad news: Currently the EU spends very little specifically on promotion and protection of human rights. For example, the EIDHR is very small at €125m per year and even where appropriate funds exist elsewhere, these are not used in a coherent way.

Moving forward: There is a need for a longer-term approach on funding and greater transparency on how it is spent. The new European Parliament should play a strong role in monitoring and tracking expenditure of the EC budget. The new European Parliament should also monitor the development of the new External Action Service to ensure that it integrates human rights into EU external policy, and that staff size and quality resources are sufficient. This monitoring could include confirmation hearings for all major external relations positions.

In order to properly carry out its role in this field, we consider it essential that a specific human rights body be maintained and strengthened in the new European Parliament.