The EU and Vietnam hold dialogue on human rights

The EU and Vietnam held on 25 October 2012 in Brussels the second round of their annual enhanced Dialogue on Human Rights. In the spirit of the recently-signed EU-Vietnam Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), the Dialogue was upgraded in January 2012 from a local meeting led by EU Heads of Missions in Vietnam to a capitals-based meeting held alternately in Hanoi and in Brussels.

The EU delegation was led by Mrs. Véronique Arnault, Director for Human Rights and Democracy in the European External Action Services (EEAS). The Vietnamese delegation was led by Mr. Hoang Chi Trung, Director General of the International Organisations Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Both delegations included a broad range of experts from various services, agencies and ministries.

The Dialogue allowed the two sides to exchange views on a wide range of issues. The Dialogue was conducted in a frank and open atmosphere. It provided an opportunity to express concerns about the implementation of international standards in Vietnam and in the EU. It also allowed for a constructive exchange of experience about how to translate such standards into domestic practice. The Dialogue was complemented by a number of side-meetings and visits, including with the European Parliament and Belgian Centre pour l’Egalité des Chances et la Lutte contre le Racisme.

The two sides reviewed recent developments in human rights. The EU raised freedom of expression and the media, including the Internet, and expressed concern about the situation of a number of internet bloggers and human rights defenders. It encouraged Vietnam to consider the free-flow of ideas as providing huge benefits to meet the challenges that come with a modernising society. The EU also raised the exercise of freedom of religion and belief as well as the situation of ethnic minorities. It encouraged Vietnam to receive the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief.
There were extensive discussions on constitutional, legal and judicial reforms under preparation in Vietnam, which the EU, together with some of its Member States, has supported through its technical assistance. The EU encouraged Vietnam to reduce the scope of implementation of the death penalty as a first step towards a moratorium. It offered to share experience that would help Vietnam to move towards ratification of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) and Convention against Torture (CAT). Vietnam provided an update on its recent reform of the administrative detention system. It stressed its commitment to fight corruption more efficiently, which should help the country to remain attractive for foreign investment.

The two sides discussed cooperation in international fora, both on thematic and country-specific issues. Vietnam reiterated its wish to join the UN Human Rights Council for the term 2014-2016. The EU welcomed Vietnam’s willingness to engage further with UN Special Rapporteurs and Working Groups and to invite some of them to visit the country. The EU welcomed Vietnam’s commitment to ratify three ILO Conventions.

Vietnam shared its views on the work of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) and on the future ASEAN Human Rights Declaration currently under preparation.

The EU also raised a number of individual cases of concern, including access to these people.