

25 June 2012

EU adopts Strategic Framework on Human Rights and Democracy

The Foreign Affairs Council adopted today a Strategic Framework on Human Rights and Democracy with an Action Plan for putting it into practice. This is the first time that the European Union has had a unified Strategic Framework for this vital policy area, with such a wide-ranging plan of action for its implementation.

"Human rights are one of my top priorities and a silver thread that runs through everything that we do in external relations. With this comprehensive package we want to enhance the effectiveness and visibility of EU human rights policy. In order to help put the Framework and the Action Plan into practice, I have also proposed the appointment of an EU Special Representative on Human Rights and I look forward to a swift appointment," said Catherine Ashton, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission, upon adoption of the package.

The Framework sets out principles, objectives and priorities, all designed to improve the effectiveness and consistency of EU policy as a whole in the next ten years. They provide an agreed basis for a truly collective effort, involving EU Member States as well as the EU Institutions. The Strategic Framework also anchors a commitment to genuine partnership with civil society. The Framework is also designed to be as readable as possible, so as to be accessible to all citizens.

The key messages of the Strategic Framework are:

- Human rights throughout EU policy
- Promoting universality of human rights
- Pursuing coherent objectives
- Human rights in all EU external policies
- Implementing EU priorities on human rights
- Working with bilateral partners
- Working through multilateral institutions
- The EU working together

The Strategic Framework builds on the joint Communication entitled 'Human rights and democracy at the heart of EU external action – towards a more effective approach'. This was adopted by the European Commission on 12 December 2011 following a proposal by Catherine Ashton. It was in turn the result of a lengthy process of consultations, dating back to the informal meeting of the EU foreign ministers (Gymnich) at Cordoba in March 2010.

The EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy brings together 97 actions under 36 headings, prepared on the basis of consultations by the European External Action Service, involving the European Commission and EU Member States, which are jointly responsible for implementation. Informal consultations have also been held with MEPs and NGOs. The Action Plan covers the period until 31 December 2014.



The European Union is made up of 27 Member States who have decided to gradually link together their know-how, resources and destinies. Together, during a period of enlargement of 50 years, they have built a zone of stability, democracy and sustainable development whilst maintaining cultural diversity, tolerance and individual freedoms. The European Union is committed to sharing its achievements and its values with countries and peoples beyond its borders.

One of the commitments of the Action Plan is that the EU should present its performance in meeting its objectives in its annual report on human rights and democracy in the world. This should give an opportunity to all stakeholders in EU policy, including civil society, to assess the impact of EU action and contribute to defining future priorities.

Background

Adoption of the EU Strategic Framework on Human Rights and Democracy represents a watershed in EU policymaking. The EU has a long catalogue of statements on human rights and democracy, but these have tended to focus on particular issues or countries. Over time, the EU has also developed a range of 'guidelines' and other policy guidance, but it is the first time that a unified strategic document has been adopted. It shows the EU delivering on the promise of the Lisbon Treaty, which introduced the following commitment:

"The Union's action on the international scene shall be guided by the principles which have inspired its own creation, development and enlargement, and which it seeks to advance in the wider world: democracy, the rule of law, the universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for human dignity, the principles of equality and solidarity, and respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter and international law."

In order to contribute to implementation of the Strategic Framework and the Action Plan, the High Representative has proposed the appointment of an EU Special Representative on Human Rights. The aim of this is to enhance the effectiveness and visibility of EU human rights policy. For reasons of continuity, an initial appointment of 2 years has been proposed.

The EUSR should have a broad, flexible mandate, giving the ability to adapt to circumstances, and should also work closely with the EEAS, which will provide full support.

More information is available at http://eeas.europa.eu/human_rights/index_en.htm

Recent speeches:

[Statement on EU annual report on human rights and democracy](#)

[Statement on Salafranca Report – EUSR on human rights](#)

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