

EU Strategic Framework on Human Rights and Democracy

I Human rights throughout EU policy

1 The European Union is founded on a shared determination to promote peace and stability and to build a world founded on respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law. These principles underpin all aspects of the internal and external policies of the European Union.

2 Human rights are universally applicable legal norms. Democracy is a universal aspiration. Throughout the world, women and men demand to live lives of liberty, dignity and security in open and democratic societies underpinned by human rights and the rule of law. Sustainable peace, development and prosperity are possible only when grounded upon respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

3 Yet respect for human rights and democracy cannot be taken for granted. Their universal nature is questioned on grounds of cultural differences. Modern information and communications technologies, while facilitating the free exchange of information between individuals, have also massively increased the coercive power of authoritarian states.

4 The EU is aware of these challenges and determined to strengthen its efforts to ensure that human rights are realised for all. The EU will continue to throw its full weight behind advocates of liberty, democracy and human rights throughout the world.

II Promoting the universality of human rights

5 The EU reaffirms its commitment to the promotion and protection of all human rights, whether civil and political, or economic, social and cultural. The EU calls on all States to implement the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to ratify and implement the key international human rights treaties, including core labour rights conventions, as well as regional human rights instruments. The EU will speak out against any attempt to undermine respect for universality of human rights.

6 The Joint Communication of the European Commission and EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy *'Human Rights and democracy at the heart of EU external action – Towards a more effective approach'*, which takes stock of the impact of policy to date and proposes areas for further action, is a welcome contribution towards the development of an EU human rights strategy to promote these goals through its external action.

III Pursuing coherent objectives

7 Article 21 of the Treaty on European Union has reaffirmed the EU's determination to promote human rights and democracy through all its external actions. The entry into legal force of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, and the prospect of the EU's acceptance of the jurisdiction of the European Court of Human Rights through its accession to the European Convention on Human Rights, underline the EU's commitment to human rights in all spheres. Within their own frontiers, the EU and its Member States are committed to be exemplary in ensuring respect for human rights. Outside their frontiers, promoting and speaking out on human rights and democracy is a joint responsibility of the EU and its Member States.

8 The EU seeks to prevent violations of human rights throughout the world and, where violations occur, to ensure that victims have access to justice and redress and that those responsible are held to account. To this end, the EU will step up its efforts to promote human rights, democracy and the rule of law across all aspects of external action. It will strengthen its capability and mechanisms for early warning and prevention of crises liable to entail human rights violations. It will deepen its cooperation with partner countries, international organisations and civil society, and build new partnerships to adapt to changing circumstances. The EU will strengthen its work with partners worldwide to support democracy, notably the development of genuine and credible electoral processes and representative and transparent democratic institutions at the service of the citizen.

IV Human rights in all EU external policies

9 The EU will promote human rights in all areas of its external action without exception. In particular, it will integrate the promotion of human rights into trade, investment, technology and telecommunications, Internet, energy, environmental, corporate social

responsibility and development policy as well as into Common Security and Defence Policy and the external dimensions of employment and social policy and the area of freedom, security and justice, including counter-terrorism policy. In the area of development cooperation, a human rights based approach will be used to ensure that the EU strengthens its efforts to assist partner countries in implementing their international human rights obligations.

V Implementing EU priorities on human rights

10 The EU will continue to promote freedom of expression, opinion, assembly and association, both on-line and offline; democracy cannot exist without these rights. It will promote freedom of religion or belief and to fight discrimination in all its forms through combating discrimination on grounds of race, ethnicity, age, gender or sexual orientation and advocating for the rights of children, persons belonging to minorities, indigenous peoples, refugees, migrants and persons with disabilities. The EU will continue to campaign for the rights and empowerment of women in all contexts through fighting discriminatory legislation, gender-based violence and marginalisation. The EU will intensify its efforts to promote economic, social and cultural rights; the EU will strengthen its efforts to ensure universal and non-discriminatory access to basic services, with a particular focus on poor and vulnerable groups. The EU will encourage and contribute to implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

11 The death penalty and torture constitute serious violations of human rights and human dignity. Encouraged by the growing momentum towards abolition of the death penalty worldwide, the EU will continue its long-standing campaign against the death penalty. The EU will continue to campaign vigorously against torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

12 The fair and impartial administration of justice is essential to safeguard human rights. The EU will step up its efforts to promote the right to a fair trial and equality before the law. The EU will continue to promote observance of international humanitarian law; it will fight vigorously against impunity for serious crimes of concern to the international community, including sexual violence committed in connection with armed conflict, not least through its commitment to the International Criminal Court.

13 Courageous individuals fighting for human rights worldwide frequently find themselves the target of oppression and coercion; the EU will intensify its political and financial support for human rights defenders and step up its efforts against all forms of reprisals. A vigorous and independent civil society is essential to the functioning of democracy and the implementation of human rights; effective engagement with civil society is a cornerstone of a successful human rights policy. The EU places great value on its regular dialogue with civil society both inside and outside the EU and is profoundly concerned at attempts in some countries to restrict the independence of civil society. As a leading donor to civil society, the EU will continue supporting human rights defenders under the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights and make funding operations more flexible and more accessible.

VI Working with bilateral partners

14 The EU will place human rights at the centre of its relations with all third countries, including its strategic partners. While firmly based on universal norms, the EU's policy on human rights will be carefully designed for the circumstances of each country, not least through the development of country human rights strategies. The EU will always seek constructive engagement with third countries; in this light, the EU will continue to deepen its human rights dialogues and consultations with partner countries and will aim to ensure that these dialogues lead to results. The EU will raise human rights issues vigorously in all appropriate forms of bilateral political dialogue, including at the highest level. In addition, the EU will work with partner countries to identify areas where EU geographic funding instruments can be used to support projects which bolster human rights, including support for human rights education and training. However, when faced with violations of human rights, the EU will make use of the full range of instruments at its disposal, including sanctions or condemnation. The EU will step up its effort to make best use of the human rights clause in political framework agreements with third countries. In the European Neighbourhood Policy countries, the EU has firmly committed itself to supporting a comprehensive agenda of locally-led political reform, with democracy and human rights at its centre, including through the policy of "more for more". Human rights will remain at the heart of the EU's enlargement policy.

VII Working through multilateral institutions

15 The EU remains committed to a strong multilateral human rights system which can monitor impartially implementation of human rights norms and call all States to account. The EU will resist strenuously any attempts to call into question the universal application of human rights and will continue to speak out in the United Nations General Assembly, the UN Human Rights Council and the International Labour Organisation against human rights violations. The independence and effectiveness of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as of the treaty monitoring bodies and UN Special Procedures, is essential. The EU underlines the leading role of the UN Human Rights Council in addressing urgent cases of human rights violations and will contribute vigorously to the effective functioning of the Council; the EU stands ready to cooperate with countries from all regions to this end. The EU calls on all members of the Human Rights Council to uphold the highest standards of human rights and to live up to their pledges made before election. Welcoming the establishment of Universal Periodic Review (UPR), the EU and its Member States are committed to raising UPR recommendations which have been accepted, as well as recommendations of treaty monitoring bodies and UN Special Procedures, in bilateral relations with all third countries; the Member States are equally determined to ensure implementation of such recommendations within their own frontiers. In forthcoming UPR rounds, the EU will pay close attention to the degree of implementation by third countries of UPR commitments which they have accepted and will endeavour to provide support for their implementation.

16 The EU will continue its engagement with the invaluable human rights work of the Council of Europe and the OSCE. It will work in partnership with regional and other organisations such as the African Union, ASEAN, SAARC, the Organisation of American States, the Arab League, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and the Pacific Islands Forum with a view to encouraging the consolidation of regional human rights mechanisms.

VIII The EU working together

17 The European Parliament's democratic mandate gives it particular authority and expertise in the field of human rights. The Parliament already plays a leading role in the promotion of human rights, in particular through its resolutions. While respecting their

distinct institutional roles, it is important that the European Parliament, the Council, the Member States, the European Commission and the EEAS commit themselves to working together ever more closely to realise their common goal of improving respect for human rights.
