

The new EU human rights policy: A determination to marry human rights objectives with the EU's economic weight

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FIDH welcomes the adoption, today, by the EU's Foreign Affairs Council, of the EU strategic framework for human rights and democracy and the EU action plan for human rights and democracy, which outlines the determination of the European Union to better integrate Human Rights in all areas of its external policies and to develop an action-oriented strategy to that end.

This package creates high expectations and should, among other things, strengthen the coherence and consistency of the EU's voice and interaction with third countries in the field of human rights, potentially conditioning trade facilities with human rights improvements.

FIDH welcomes the package, which includes substantial recommendations it had addressed to the EU and calls for its determined application. Significant achievements and challenges include the following:

- **A strengthened EU voice on human rights:** FIDH welcomes the appointment of an EU Special Representative for Human Rights, who should contribute to enhancing the European Union's, presence and visibility in protecting and promoting human rights in the world. The EUSR will also work on improving the coherence of the EU action on human rights and the integration of human rights in all EU external policy areas. For FIDH, a major challenge for the EUSR will be to align the 27 member States with the EU's voice on human rights. In succeeding, she/he will consequently carry significant weight on the international scene.
- **A more efficient, effective and coherent policy:** The new package provides for the existing EU human rights policy instruments (the "toolbox" of bilateral dialogues, guidelines, sanctions, human rights clauses, impact assessments, etc.) to be used in a strategic fashion and developed against measurable indicators and benchmarks of progress in the field of human rights, linked to human rights strategies for each country. This is a clear evolution from the existing policies, which were too often an end in themselves rather than integrated in a strategic approach to achieve change locally (i.e. dialogue for the purpose of dialogue). While FIDH welcomes this long awaited benchmarked and strategic vision, the challenge will lie in its effective implementation and use towards the most effective policy mix to achieve change locally.
- **A policy with (potentially) significantly more leverage.** The package provides for the integration of human rights in all of the EU's policies and actions which may influence or impact on third countries, such as its cooperation on counter-terrorism, on business, migration, development aid and trade. Bridging human rights within these policy areas will be essential to ensure coherence of the EU's voice on human rights. In addition, linking progress in the field of human rights with trade facilities and development aid has proven, when applied in the past, to be an extremely effective policy. While welcoming the strengthening of these policy bridges, FIDH underlines that this determination will have to be put into practice, for each trade agreement, and in response to all human rights situations to which the EU will be called upon for action. Because of the EU's economic weight, this commitment paves the way for the EU to endorse a leading role at the international level in the field of human rights.

These challenges also call for genuine consultation processes with civil society, to develop a methodology to implement the action plan and assess its results.

Background

- FIDH's contribution to the EU's human rights strategy (<http://www.fidh.org/FIDH-Contribution-to-the-Informal>)
- FIDH's letters to the EU on its foreign policy towards the Gulf Cooperation Council (<http://www.fidh.org/EU-must-put-human-rights-at-the>) and towards Colombia (<http://www.fidh.org/The-European-Parliament>)
- FIDH evaluation of the EU's human rights dialogues with China (<http://www.fidh.org/Joint-assessment-of-the-EU-China>) and with Russia (<http://www.fidh.org/FIDH-evaluation-of-EU-Russia-human>)