Human rights in the world: Union's activities from 1997 to June 1999. Memorandum and annual report

1999/2002(INI) - 01/10/1999 - Non-legislative basic document

PURPOSE : the presentation of the first EU annual report on Human Rights (part of which is devoted to human rights in the world). CONTENT : the Council submitted the draft EU annual report on human rights to the European Parliament. The report was made up of two different parts : the first deals with human rights in the Union (see INI/1999/2001), the second, with the evolution of human rights in the world. This report takes the place of the traditional memorandum on the Union's activities in the domain of human rights prepared up to now each year by the Council for the European Parliament to inform it of EU action on human rights in the world over the past year. In presenting this report, the Union would like to contribute to a better understanding of the motives and institutional structures and policy instruments of the Union. The report explains who the actors in the Union's human rights policies are, and looks at their goals, methods and activities. Unlike the Union's Memorandum on human rights, this report does not look into each region of the world in particular in order to discover violations on human rights and the Union's actions in order to contribute to reducing them. Rather, the report analyses the instruments at the Union's disposal in order to act and their practical application from 1 June 1998 to 30 June 1999. Essentially, the European Union's international action for the promotion and protection of human rights is based on a mix of instruments, whether they relate to the Common Foreign and Security Policy or to development cooperation. With the entry into force of the Treaty of Amsterdam on 01/05/1999, the Treaty's main aim is to make the external policies of the Union more coherent, effective and visible in promoting peace, prosperity and stability in the world. Provisions to that end include strengthening the role of the European Council which has been reinforced with the designation of a High Representative, Mr. Javier Solana for the CFSP. A Policy Planning and Early Warning Unit will also be created in the Council Secretariat in order to reinforce the EU's international presence, visibility and effectiveness, including in the field of human rights. Among the EU's main instruments in this field are the common strategies (a new instrument created since the Amsterdam Treaty which seeks to strengthen the coherence of the Union's action at international level), the joint positions (which define the Union's approach on a particular subject), and joint actions (which address specific situations and imply immediate reaction, in the form of humanitarian aid). The EU's first common strategy concerned Russia in June 1999. The common positions in 1998 to 1999 have rather concerned the irresponsible and criminal attitudes of several foreign authorities with, for example, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in the lead, followed by several leaders from African countries. Through a joint action, the EU notably supported the democratic process in Nigeria and the Palestinian Authority. In addition, other instruments have also been mobilised, such asdeclarations or even political dialogue with 48 countries or regional groupings at all levels of power (Heads of State and government or experts). A specific dialogue has also been implemented during this period on human rights with China. Even if tangible advances cannot be obtained with this country, the Union has institutionalised the debate via a Troika made up of Union Ambassadors who are working on the democratisation process in China. Important work on the difficult situation in Tibet was initiated with the competent authorities. Furthermore, there are also specific and horizontal actions on a given policy. This is the case, in particular, for the abolition of the death penalty. The European Union has clearly expressed its position on the subject and has urged several governments to take steps towards its abolition or at least that it it should no longer be applied. The so-called human rights clause introduced in the 1990s in most of the bilateral trade and cooperation agreements with third countries allows the Union to maintain the pressure for the respect for human rights in the countries with which it is associated. This clause does not transform the basic nature of the agreements which are otherwise concerned with matters not directly related to the promotion of human rights. It simply constitutes a mutual reaffirmation of commonly shared values and principles, a precondition for economic and other cooperation under the agreements, and

expressively allows for and regulates suspension in cases of non-compliance with these values. Other initiatives also deserve mention: for example, a regional and cooperation partnership initiative. In the spring of 1999, against the background of the Kosovo conflict, the Union took the initiative to launch the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe which was adopted on 10 June 1999 by a Conference in Cologne, Germany. The Pact aims at supporting countries in S.E. Europe in their efforts to foster peace, democracy, respect for human rights and economic prosperity. Another EU initiative in the region is the process on Stability and Good Neighbourliness in SE Europe (known as the "Royaumont Process"), launched in 1995. It aims at developing democracy and civil society in the countries of the region and at promoting transborder contacts between the different components of civil society. In addition, the Union supports several other initiatives, such as electoral assistance (observation of the elections in particular) or ad hoc surveillance missions (e.g. : the Middle East, in the Balkans, and in Indonesia). Lastly, the Union supports financially a series of activities by the world in the framework of the European Initiative for Democracy and the protection of Human Rights (chapter B7-70) through projects set up by NGOs. The Union's common voice may also be heard within the competent international institutions on human rights : the United Nations, the OSCE, and the Council of Europe where more and more joint initiatives are carried out.