European Union and the external dimension of human rights policy: from Rome to Maastricht beyond

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Yannis ROUBATIS (PES, Gr), whose report on the external dimension of human rights policy was adopted at a meeting of the Committee, had a message for the other institutions: "Human rights", he said, "is an integral component of the foreign policy of the European Union. It is about time everyone in the Commission and Council realised that and acted accordingly." According to the report, it is essential to ensure that the CFSP is effective and enjoys high visibility. Effectiveness would be ensured by the Early Warning and Policy Planning Unit provided for under the Amsterdam Treaty. This unit must work closely with the Conflict Prevention Network and create, at EU level, a surveillance network whose task would be to monitor human rights in the world. As regards visibility, this will require the appointment of a CFSP High Representative, who should report regularly to Parliament on human rights and submit to it a detailed annual written report on the subject. The Commission should in future give one of its vice-presidents responsibility for external relations and also make one of its members responsible for human rights policy. Then, in the words of the report, the EU will be able to "move from a manifesto of good intentions to a policy which implements these high objectives". MEPs believe that respect for human rights depends not only on political and civil factors but also on economic, social and cultural factors: they are all interdependent. The report therefore emphasises the need for "a more consolidated system" to support the annual human rights programmes. The current system of management of human rights activities, involving a mixture of central administration, and with some recourse to "agencies", is unsatisfactory. Despite the major administrative reorganisation embarked upon within the Commission, the rapporteur suggests that, for the sake of greater effectiveness, the question of a fully-fledged agency for human rights and democracy should be reexamined, as well as Parliament's proposals for a cohesive unit at senior level within the Commission.