Human rights and democratisation: role of the Union in third countries

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PURPOSE: To set out a strategy on the EU's role in promoting human rights and democratisation in third countries. CONTENT: All fifteen Member States of the European Union are democratic states respecting fundamental human rights and adhering to the rule of law. This offers the EU, as an international organisation, a unique opportunity to promote, encourage and advance human rights and democratisation globally. The purpose of this Communication, prepared by the Commission and forwarded to the European Parliament and Council for consideration, is to assess the EU's future position on human rights and democratisation in its dealings with third countries. The European Union seeks to uphold the universality and indivisibility of human rights - civil, political, economic, social and cultural. This has been strengthened in recent years through the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights which was officially proclaimed following the Nice summit in December 2000. On a global perspective the EU has a number of sound reasons to promote human rights and democratisation. A large portion of the EU budget is devoted to development aid and financial assistance programmes. One of the main aims of these development programmes is poverty reduction. Poverty reduction and the equal distribution of EU funds, the Communication argues, is more likely to occur in cases where governance is democratic and fundamental human rights respected. The EU can claim to be the world's largest aid donor. As such is feels obliged to promote human rights and democracy. Since 1992 the EU has included in all its agreements with third countries a clause defining respect for human rights and democracy as "essential elements" in the EU's relationship with third countries. This clause is unique in bilateral agreements. The Communication calls on multinational corporation to play a more active role in the promotion of human rights and democracy. Multinationals frequently play an influential role in third countries and accordingly should become more involved in increasing respect for human rights world-wide. As the Communication points out, it is after all, in their interests to operate under regimes in which the rule of law is respected and human rights acknowledged. The Communication identifies three areas in which the Commission can play a more effective role: - promoting consistent human rights policies across the EU; - ensuring human rights remains a high priority in the EU's relations with foreign countries; - adopting a more focused and strategic approach to the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR). In parallel with this the Commission will promote coherence and consistency between EU actions under different Treaty pillars as well as between the Member States. Finally, the Commission will continue regularly to monitoring the points made in its Communication and assess progress.