European Union and United Nations relations

2003/2049(INI) - 10/09/2003 - Document attached to the procedure

PURPOSE : to present a new strategy for EU-UN relations. CONTENT : the Commission has presented a new strategy for EU-UN relations. The paper puts forward practical ways in which, by working through the UN system, the EU can strengthen its position as a central pillar of the multilateral system. The Communication presents a series of concrete ways of improving the way the EU engages with the UN system: - improving the EU co-ordinating mechanisms in Brussels, New York, Geneva and Vienna, - establishing early contacts/co-operation between EU services and those of UN agencies, including hands-on co-operation in the field. It should be noted that the EC budget provides some EUR 300 million per year for UN agencies, e.g. for development (UNDP) and humanitarian (WFP) assistance. When combined with national contributions from Member States, the EU is the largest contributor to UN operations. The European Union's significant weight, which is bound to increase with enlargement, gives the EU the opportunity, as well as the responsibility, to make proactive suggestions in the UN reform debate. The Communication builds on the extensive EU-UN co-operation that has developed in recent years across a wide range of policy areas. High-level political dialogue now involves regular meetings between the UN Secretariat and the Council, Commission and High Representative for CFSP. In addition, the EU and the UN already work together on development and humanitarian aid. This cooperation should expand to other areas. The point of departure of this Communication is the European Union's attachment to multilateral solutions on issues as varied as international security and climate change as a fundamental principle of its external relations. Equally, it notes that the EU's ability to influence multilateral debates has at times lagged behind its economic and combined political clout. Proposals : the Communication sets out three ways in which the EU could contribute more effectively to the work of the UN: 1) by taking the lead in the negotiation and implementation of key UN targets and instruments : the EU should apply the proactive approach it has shown on issues such as the Kyoto Protocol, the International Criminal Court or Financing for Development, much more widely in areas such as counter-terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, or human rights. It also commits the Commission to looking at how the implementation of multilateral targets can be integrated more systematically into the EU's external assistance programmes; 2) by moving towards a more systematic policy of partnership with the UN in the field : the Communication calls for a strengthened partnership with the UN in areas like human rights and conflict prevention, where concrete co-operation between the EU and the UN has yet to be developed more extensively, as well as in the field of crisis management, where the Italian Presidency has already initiated work towards reaching a framework agreement with the UN. The Communication calls in particular for regular upstream concertation on the EC's and UN's respective country-level assessments and programming, for action to make training standards compatible, and for regular joint training activities and exchanges of personnel; 3) by giving itself the means to become a dynamic, flexible and coherent force in policy debates in the UN : the EU has emerged in a short period of time as a visible presence at the UN, capable of arriving at common, coordinated positions in most UN policy forums (such as the General Assembly or many specialised agencies). However, it points to the factors which still prevent the EU from 'punching at its weight' in the UN, such as the persistence of occasional split votes by EU Member States in key UN bodies or the lack of effective EU coordination in certain multilateral forums which are crucial to the EU's sustainable development agenda. The Communication sets out concrete proposals for addressing these issues such as: - giving relevant Council groups in Brussels a strong role in determining EU policy in the main UN bodies; - moving towards a flexible, mandate-based approach for the EU's participation in UN negotiations; - extending EU coordination to all parts of the UN system. In this context, the Communication also covers some sensitive issues surrounding CFSP and the Security Council on which the Commission role is limited. However, the Communication suggests more can be done to improve the coherence of the EU foreign policy within the limits or Article 19 of the Treaty, which contains significant obligations for Member States to consult each other and to defend agreed EU positions on issues that are discussed in the Security Council. The Communication addresses this issue in the light of the Convention, aiming at a stepped up presentation of common EU positions in all UN bodies, including the Security

Council, including: - a reinforced role for the future Foreign Minister in bringing Member States' positions together to avoid split votes on Security Council resolutions; - a clearer arrangement regarding the presentation of agreed EU positions in the Security Council; - a more proactive consultation/concertation among Member States with a view to maximising the degree of consensus on matters discussed in Security Council. The Commission will now look to the Council and the Parliament for a wide-ranging debate on taking forward the concrete proposals contained in the Communication, many of which will require a concerted effort by the main EU institutions involved in external relations.