

Basic information	
2012/2062(INI) INI - Own-initiative procedure	Procedure completed
Review of the EU's human rights strategy Subject 6.10.08 Fundamental freedoms, human rights, democracy in general 6.10.09 Human rights situation in the world	

Key players				
European Parliament	Committee responsible		Rapporteur	Appointed
	AFET Foreign Affairs		TAVARES Rui (Verts/ALE)	21/03/2012
			Shadow rapporteur GÁL Kinga (PPE) OBIOIS Raimon (S&D) KAZAK Metin (ALDE)	
	Committee for opinion		Rapporteur for opinion	Appointed
	DEVE Development		SVENSSON Aif (PPE)	25/06/2012
	LIBE Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs		The committee decided not to give an opinion.	
Council of the European Union	Council configuration		Meetings	Date
	Foreign Affairs		3179	2012-06-25

Key events			
Date	Event	Reference	Summary
12/12/2011	Non-legislative basic document published	COM(2011)0886 	Summary
20/04/2012	Committee referral announced in Parliament		
25/06/2012	Debate in Council		Summary
06/11/2012	Vote in committee		

19/11/2012	Committee report tabled for plenary	A7-0378/2012	Summary
12/12/2012	Debate in Parliament		
13/12/2012	Decision by Parliament	T7-0504/2012	Summary
13/12/2012	Results of vote in Parliament		
13/12/2012	End of procedure in Parliament		

Technical information	
Procedure reference	2012/2062(INI)
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Other legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 165
Stage reached in procedure	Procedure completed
Committee dossier	AFET/7/09293

Documentation gateway				
European Parliament				
Document type	Committee	Reference	Date	Summary
Committee draft report		PE487.734	13/07/2012	
Amendments tabled in committee		PE496.432	28/09/2012	
Committee opinion	DEVE	PE492.637	09/10/2012	
Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading		A7-0378/2012	19/11/2012	Summary
Text adopted by Parliament, single reading		T7-0504/2012	13/12/2012	Summary
European Commission				
Document type	Reference	Date	Summary	
Commission document (COM)	COM(2011)0886 	12/12/2011	Summary	

Review of the EU's human rights strategy

2012/2062(INI) - 12/12/2011 - Non-legislative basic document

PURPOSE: to seek the views of the Council and the European Parliament on how opportunities can be exploited to make the EU's external policy on human rights and democracy more effective and to propose certain actions in this area.

BACKGROUND: the Lisbon Treaty has made the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union a legally binding document. The EU's obligation to respect human rights implies not only a general duty to abstain from acts violating these rights, but also to take them into account in the conduct of its own policies, both internal and external.

Ten years have passed since the Commission Communication of 2001 on "The EU's role in promoting human rights and democratisation in third countries". Since then there have been seismic changes in the world, and it is important now to renew the EU's efforts to frame an effective response to the challenges that human rights and democracy face worldwide.

The EU has developed in its external action a broad range of policy instruments and guidelines to put its commitment to human rights and democracy into practice.

In recent years, several challenges have emerged:

- the legitimacy of international human rights and democracy norms and standards has been called into question, sometimes by emerging powers with which the EU seeks cooperation;
- even where international standards are generally accepted, implementation at the national level often remains slow;
- there is also the perception that the EU's statements on human rights and democracy are not always fully matched by its external or internal policies;
- as a consequence of globalisation, new actors have emerged under the ever increasing internationalisation and interdependency of economies, with complex implications for human rights.

The EU has not always been as effective or as joined-up as it might have been.

CONTENT: the objective of this Communication is to open a discussion with the other European institutions on how to make the EU's external policy on human rights and democracy more active, more coherent and more effective.

It sets out a vision of how the EU will broaden, deepen and streamline its action on the international scene to make a real difference to people's lives. It proposes action in four areas (i) delivery mechanisms, (ii) integrating policies, (iii) building partnerships, and (iv) speaking with one voice.

The Communication poses certain questions.

- On external delivery mechanisms – would not a bottom-up, tailored, country-based approach, coupled with cross-cutting worldwide campaigns on specific themes achieve better the human rights and democracy objectives?
- On process – how can the EU become more joined up across the whole range of its policies and Institutions, and externally when working with international partners, NGOs, regional groupings and international organisations?
- On internal structures – should we place priority on the completion of a network of human rights and democracy focal points across EU Delegations worldwide, and a standing capability in the Council on external human rights and democracy issues?

Overhauling delivery: the Communication discusses the need to maximise impact on the ground through tailor-made approaches. Traditionally the EU has adopted a top-down approach to its human rights strategy, agreeing worldwide priorities in Brussels and then seeking to apply these through political dialogues and meetings with third countries. But even if the principles and objectives are universal, immediate priorities, and therefore the route and timetables, can and must vary from country to country. Thus, while the overall objectives of the EU's human rights and democracy policy remain unaltered, an approach that seeks to match objectives in a country with the realities on the ground is more likely to deliver concrete results than a one size fits all approach. **Tailor made country strategies covering human rights and democracy** should therefore be an integral part of the EU's overall strategy towards that country.

In addition to country based tailored strategies the EU should **identify cross cutting themes to put its collective weight behind as time limited, targeted campaigns**. The High Representative has proposed to focus on three themes for the next three years:

- judicial reform focusing on the right to a fair trial;
- rights of women – building on the EU's comprehensive approach to Women, Peace and Security, as well as the EU strategy for equality between women and men;
- rights of the child – building on the "EU agenda for the rights of the child" and both sets of EU guidelines on children.

EU Institutions and Member States should be involved in drawing up specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time-limited objectives along with implementation plans for each campaign.

The Communication also discusses the following topics regarding the overhaul of delivery mechanisms:

- the implications of the recent review of the European Neighbourhood Policy which further developed the EU's policies in support of democracy ;
- with the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), the Commission has proposed to scale up funding to EUR 1.4 billion (from EUR 1.1 billion) for the forthcoming Multi-Annual Financial Framework 2014-2020. Suggestions will be made for making the EIDHR more flexible so that it delivers better, faster and more, and so that more organisations are able to access funds, and a quick response is ensured to address the needs of civil society in countries facing the most pressing and difficult situations.

Integrating policies: the paper stresses that there is scope to be more joined up across the wide range of EU policies, so that together they achieve their full impact.

Various EU policies with an external dimension have clear relevance for human rights and democracy, and the Communication outlines actions taken in the following areas: development cooperation; trade; the area of freedom, security and justice; counter-terrorism; crisis management; conflict prevention; and governance of the internet. All actions developed in the framework of these policies (including measures taken by Member States implementing them within their respective areas of competence) must continue to be fully compatible with the respect, protection and promotion of human rights.

Building strong partnerships: the Communication discusses the need to strengthen actions in the context of **multilateral cooperation** and **regional organisations**. It also notes that human rights and democracy are an integral part of the EU's dialogue with other countries.

While the EU has launched some 40 dedicated human rights dialogues and consultations, these achieve best results when firmly embedded in the wider fabric of the EU's relations with a given country.

Learning from experience, the EU should take a number of steps to make these dialogues more effective:

- ensure a closer link of the human rights dialogues with other policy instruments;
- establish priorities, objectives and benchmarks for the dialogues to allow their review in conjunction with the human rights country strategies; generalise best practices across the various formats of human rights dialogues, including local dialogues with ACP countries under the Cotonou Convention (Art. 8);
- explore possibilities for reinforcing dialogue and cooperation with the EU's Strategic Partners.

Speaking with one voice to harness Europe's collective weight: to deliver on the approach set out above, the EU needs to strengthen the way that it deals with human rights and democracy in its external action.

- **European Parliament:** Parliament has made human rights and democracy one of its highest priorities. By making its voice heard systematically as well as urgently on the key questions of the day, Parliament has taken up a leading role in promoting human rights in all the EU does. Its work with other parliaments (through its parliamentary cooperation committees and delegations to regional parliamentary assemblies) is especially valuable in reinforcing the EU's signals. The European Parliament could usefully step up efforts to spread its vital human rights message beyond the Human Rights Sub-Committee to its delegations to third countries.
- **Member States:** Member States must continue to have strong ownership for the EU human rights and democracy policy both at the multilateral level and in bilateral relations with third countries. This requires the **formulation of strong common positions on human rights**, which guide both EU institutions and EU Member States, in order to speak as one. This can be facilitated by regular discussions on human rights questions also at the political level.
- **A standing capability on human rights and democracy in the Council:** the Council Working Group on Human Rights (COHOM) has a key role in steering EU human rights policy. Currently, COHOM is staffed from capitals and meets only once a month and can no longer fully respond to the increased workload. Effective implementation of EU external human rights policy would require **more frequent meetings of COHOM and also a standing capability and expertise** on human rights and democracy among the Permanent Representations in Brussels of EU Member States.
- **Building a culture of human rights and democracy:** a Directorate on Human Rights and Democracy has been created within the EEAS. There is now a human rights focal point in all EU Delegations worldwide – this system should be formed into a network for the delivery of cross-cutting campaigns. A similar network of focal points is in the process of being created in the EEAS and in the Commission services.
- **A rethink of EU communications:** the EU could **mobilise key Delegations** to use social media for digital diplomacy using existing communication resources. The EU will give practical support to those using social media to enhance civic engagement on the ground.

In order to track progress in achieving the objectives set out in the Communication, the EU will present its performance in its annual report on human rights and democracy in the world.

The Council and the Parliament are invited to review this performance regularly, and to review the EU's strategic objectives after five years.

Review of the EU's human rights strategy

2012/2062(INI) - 25/06/2012

Strategic framework: the Council adopted a Strategic Framework on Human Rights and Democracy with an Action Plan for putting it into practice. The adoption of the EU Strategic Framework on Human Rights and Democracy represents a watershed in EU policymaking. The EU has a long catalogue of statements on human rights and democracy, but these have tended to focus on particular issues or countries. Over time, the EU has also developed a range of 'guidelines' and other policy guidance, but it is the first time that a unified strategic document has been adopted. This is the first time that the European Union has had a unified Strategic Framework for this vital policy area, with such a wide-ranging plan of action for its implementation.

The Framework sets out principles, objectives and priorities, all designed to improve the effectiveness and consistency of EU policy as a whole in the next ten years. **They provide an agreed basis for a truly collective effort**, involving EU Member States as well as the EU Institutions.

The Strategic Framework also anchors a commitment to genuine partnership with civil society. The Framework is also designed to be as readable as possible, so as to be accessible to all citizens.

The key messages of the Strategic Framework are:

- Human rights throughout EU policy
- Promoting universality of human rights
- Pursuing coherent objectives
- Human rights in all EU external policies
- Implementing EU priorities on human rights
- Working with bilateral partners
- Working through multilateral institutions
- The EU working together.

The EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy brings together 97 actions under 36 headings, prepared on the basis of consultations by the European External Action Service, involving the European Commission and EU member states, which are jointly responsible for implementation. Informal consultations have also been held with MEPs and NGOs. The Action Plan covers the period until 31 December 2014.

One of the commitments of the Action Plan is that the EU should present its performance in meeting its objectives in its **annual report on human rights and democracy in the world**. This should give an opportunity to all stakeholders in EU policy, including civil society, to assess the impact of EU action and contribute to defining future priorities.

EU action on human rights: on the same day, the Council approved the 2011 report on EU action on human rights and democracy in the world, as set out in [9238/12](#).

Amongst the main elements brought to light in this document, the following may be summarised:

1. **the Arab spring** represented a landmark in the first year of the EEAS. A [joint communication on 8 March 2011](#), by High Representative Ashton and the European Commission, stressed the need to support the demand for political participation, dignity, freedom and employment opportunities, and sets out an approach based on the respect of universal values and shared interests. The EU has repeatedly condemned restrictions on **freedom of expression and access to the internet**;
2. the fight **against religious intolerance and discrimination** across the world : the report examines in-depth the issue of religious freedom or beliefs;
3. **the UN human rights system** : many resolutions have been adopted to support human rights in Syria, Belarus, Burma/Myanmar and North Korea;
4. child protection, including in armed conflicts;
5. **supporting the fight against impunity** for the most serious crimes of concern to the international community as a whole;
6. **continuous support for the abolition of the death penalty**;
7. **insert a human rights clause** in all political framework agreements.

Bilaterally, the EU held over 40 **bilateral human rights dialogues** with third countries thus providing many opportunities to address the EU's specific human rights concerns effectively. The EU launched the development of human rights country strategies for almost 160 countries worldwide, 130 being developed in 2011. The key objectives pursued through this approach are: to obtain a better and more comprehensive understanding of the key human rights challenges in partner countries; to focus EU action on key priorities in partner countries, both in policy terms and financial assistance terms, so that we can better tailor our approach to country situations and therefore be more effective, as requested by the High Representative; to facilitate and streamline relevant activities by Member States and EU diplomatic missions in the field; and to contribute in a more comprehensive and pertinent manner to the various country and regional strategies.

The report also highlights the following:

- the creation of a **European Endowment for Democracy** (EED) whose objective is to set up EED as an autonomous body with legal personality under the law of one Member State. EED would have an initial, although not exclusive, focus on the European Neighbourhood and it would be a new means to facilitate European support to political actors in democratic transitions or in peaceful struggle for democracy;
- the continuation of **Electoral Observation Missions** (EOMs) in particular in Tunisia, South Sudan, Niger, Peru and Zambia);
- the accountability of **private military and security companies** (PMSCs) to review existing initiatives and actual gaps in terms of accountability for human rights and international humanitarian law violations.

Review of the EU's human rights strategy

2012/2062(INI) - 19/11/2012 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Rui TAVARES (Greens/EFA, PT) on the review of the EU's human rights strategy.

Members recall that the EU is founded on the principle of respect for human rights and has a legal obligation, as outlined in its Treaties, to place human rights at the core of all EU and Member State policies, without exception, and at the core of all international agreements. To this end, the EU has developed an extensive toolbox of instruments as a policy framework to support this obligation. However, the cumulative effect of these policies has resulted in a piecemeal approach whereby the principle of coherence and consistency between the different areas of EU external action and between these and other policies has not been duly respected. This is why Members call for a high degree of consistency and of political will to obtain tangible results.

EU Strategic Framework on Human Rights and Democracy: in general, Members consider that the **strategic review initiative** strives to respond to the main challenges identified by Parliament and other stakeholders. However, Members call on the EU to **move from words to action** and to implement the pledges made in a swift and transparent manner. Members stress that, in effect, the Strategic Framework and Action Plan represent **a floor, not a ceiling, for EU human rights policy**. They therefore insist that the EU institutions and the Member States adopt a firm and coherent approach to human rights abuses worldwide, in a transparent and accountable manner.

Members consider that the Parliament, as the only directly elected EU institution, should be closely associated with this reshaped policy framework and be involved in ongoing communication and collaboration between the Parliament and the EU Special Representative for Human Rights on human rights. Members reiterate the willingness of Parliament to intensify interinstitutional cooperation at all levels and consider that all the institutions should be involved within the framework of a **joint declaration** committing them to common founding principles and objectives.

Coherence and cooperation in policy areas and between the EU and its Member States: Members stress the need for coherence and consistency across all policy areas. The EU and its Member States must strengthen the coherence and complementarity of policies and programmes in the area of human rights to lead to effective and measurable results. For their part, the Commission and the EEAS are urged to live up to the pledge of a “human rights-based approach” across the entire development cooperation process.

Once again, Members urge the EU to honour its role as a **leading defender of human rights in the world**, through the effective, consistent and considered use of all available instruments. In this regard, Members stress the need to strengthen policy coherence for development, including **within the borders of the EU**. Members also point out the need for greater visibility to enhance its legitimacy, credibility and accountability of the EU in this field in the eyes of the public.

Specifically as regards the countries in North Africa and the Middle East, Members call for their inclusion within the Council of Europe Neighbourhood Policy so as to provide complementary tools for an approximation of their legislative framework and best practices in this area.

Towards an inclusive and effective approach: Members consider it essential that the EU adopt an effective approach to its partners by **advancing selected key priorities relating to human rights, democracy and the rule of law**, and that it concentrate its efforts on this approach so as to channel them into deliverable and achievable outcomes.

Several priorities emerge in this regard: i) the resolute defence of freedom of expression; ii) the fight against the death penalty; iii) efforts to combat discrimination against women; iv) the defence of the rights of the child. They recall that development, democracy and the rule of law are prerequisites for, but not identical to, the realisation of human rights and that they interact with and support one another. These priorities should be linked, for each country, to **realistic objectives** and forms of political leverage to allow more effective EU action. This is why Members take the view that human rights country strategies should be mainstreamed in the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the EU’s trade and development policies (in both geographical and thematic programmes) in order to ensure greater efficiency, effectiveness and coherence. As part of the human rights country strategies, the EU should agree on a **list of “minimum items”** that its Member States and the EU institutions should raise with their relevant counterparts in third countries during meetings and visits.

Members believe that the Strategic Framework and the accompanying Action Plan should be limited to **three years**, the terms of which should be entirely assessed.

EU Plan of Action in favour of human rights and democracy: Members then reviewed some more technical points of the Plan of Action and expressed themselves as follows:

- **Human rights clause:** in this area, Members urge the Commission to propose legislation requiring EU companies to ensure that their purchases do not support perpetrators of conflicts and grave human rights violations, namely by carrying out checks and audits on their mineral supply chains. This mechanism should be based on an “early warning” system to respond in a progressive manner when a third state violates the rules, with full involvement of the European Parliament before any suspension of an agreement;
- **Human rights impact assessment:** Members call for human rights impact assessments before negotiating any bilateral or multilateral agreements with third countries as this is the only way to ensure consistency between primary law, EU external action and the third party’s own obligations;
- **A benchmarking policy:** the EU should make full use of the relevant instruments and expertise of the UN and of the Council of Europe, including the implementation of the European Convention on Human Rights as a viable element of such a human rights and democracy benchmark catalogue for the member countries of the Council of Europe. Members recommend developing a set of qualitative and quantitative indicators and country-specific public benchmarks that could serve as a coherent and consistent basis for the annual assessment of EU policies in these countries;
- **The renewed European Neighbourhood Policy:** for the countries affected by this policy, Members stress the importance of creating programmes and supporting projects that allow for contact between civil society in the EU and in third countries. As a priority everything must be done to build up the capacity of civil society to participate in decision-making processes at local, regional, national and international level. With regard to the countries of the **Arab Spring**, Members find that failure predominates rather than a real democratic transition. They stress that there are a number of shortfalls in EU policies towards the region, including the situation of young people, and call for a new approach, for example, through strengthened European exchange programmes and stronger contacts with **civil society** to understand the causes and consequences of the problems, particularly those of an economic and social nature, undermining progress in these countries. Special attention should be paid to the position of women. Members also encourage all mediation initiatives as well as the creation of national human rights institutions in the EU neighbourhood countries. In addition they believe that **countries clearly assessed as not making progress on deep democracy and deeply embedded institutional and social change should see the Union’s support reduced;**

- **Joint interinstitutional responsibility:** finally, Members call for Parliament to be duly involved in the implementation phase of the Action Plan, inter alia through exchanges in the Contact Group on Human Rights, which brings together the EEAS, the relevant services of the Council and the Commission, the EU Special Representative for Human Rights and the EP's Subcommittee on Human Rights and Committee on Foreign Affairs. They recommend that Parliament develop more dynamic relations with the EU delegations, and propose a series of technical measures to allow more systematic follow-up of developments relating to human rights worldwide. They also plead for improved cooperation in the field of human rights with the national parliaments of Member States, the need for better utilisation of the potential of the Sakharov Prize Network, and recommend, in cooperation with the national parliaments of the Member States, **an annual event on human rights defenders around the world.**

Review of the EU's human rights strategy

2012/2062(INI) - 13/12/2012 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution on the review of the EU's human rights strategy.

Parliament recalls that the EU is founded on the principle of respect for human rights and has a legal obligation, as outlined in its Treaties, to place human rights at the core of all EU and Member State policies, without exception, and at the core of all international agreements. To this end, the EU has developed an extensive toolbox of instruments as a policy framework to support this obligation. However, the cumulative effect of these policies has resulted in a piecemeal approach whereby the principle of coherence and consistency between the different areas of EU external action and between these and other policies has not been duly respected. This is why Parliament calls for a high degree of consistency and of political will to obtain tangible results.

EU Strategic Framework on Human Rights and Democracy: in general, Parliament considers that the **strategic review initiative** strives to respond to the main challenges identified by Parliament and other stakeholders. However, Members call on the EU to **move from words to action** and to implement the pledges made in a swift and transparent manner. Members stress that, in effect, the Strategic Framework and Action Plan **represent a floor, not a ceiling, for EU human rights policy.** They therefore insist that the EU institutions and Member States adopt a firm and coherent approach to human rights abuses worldwide, in a transparent and accountable manner.

Parliament, as the only directly elected EU institution, should be closely associated with this reshaped policy framework and be involved in ongoing communication and collaboration between the Parliament and the EU Special Representative for Human Rights on human rights. Parliament also reiterates its willingness to intensify interinstitutional cooperation at all levels and consider that all the institutions should be involved within the framework of a **joint declaration** committing them to common founding principles and objectives.

Coherence and cooperation in policy areas and between the EU and its Member States: Parliament stresses the need for coherence and consistency across all policy areas. The EU and its Member States must strengthen the coherence and complementarity of policies and programmes in the area of human rights to lead to effective and measurable results. For their part, the Commission and the EEAS are urged to live up to the pledge of a "human rights-based approach" across the entire development cooperation process.

Once again, Parliament urges the EU to honour its role as a **leading defender of human rights in the world**, through the effective, consistent and considered use of all available instruments. In this regard, it stresses the need to strengthen policy coherence for development, **including within the borders of the EU.** It also points out the need for greater visibility to enhance its legitimacy, credibility and accountability of the EU in this field in the eyes of the public.

Specifically as regards the countries in North Africa and the Middle East, Parliament calls for their inclusion within the Council of Europe Neighbourhood Policy so as to provide complementary tools for an approximation of their legislative framework and best practices in this area.

Towards an inclusive and effective approach: Parliament considers it essential that the EU adopt an effective approach to its partners by advancing **selected key priorities relating to human rights, democracy and the rule of law**, and that it concentrate its efforts on this approach so as to channel them into deliverable and achievable outcomes.

In an amendment adopted in plenary, Parliament considers that these key priorities should include core fundamental rights such as non-discrimination and freedom of expression, religion or belief, conscience, assembly and association. Other key priorities are (i) the fight against the death penalty; (ii) efforts to combat discrimination against women; (iii) defence of the rights of the child.

Parliament recalls that development, democracy and the rule of law are prerequisites for the realisation of human rights and that they interact with and supports one another. These priorities should be linked, for each country, to **realistic objectives** and forms of political leverage to allow more effective EU action. This is why Parliament takes the view that human rights country strategies should be mainstreamed in the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the EU's trade and development policies (in both geographical and thematic programmes) in order to ensure greater efficiency, effectiveness and coherence. As part of the human rights country strategies, the EU should agree on a **list of "minimum items"** that its Member States and the EU institutions should raise with their relevant counterparts in third countries during meetings and visits. Amongst other things, Parliament invites the competent EU institutions to engage with and provide assistance to religious actors and faith-based organisations in support of religious freedom and conflict resolution.

Parliament believes that the Strategic Framework and the accompanying Action Plan should be limited to **three years**, the terms of which should be entirely assessed.

EU Plan of Action in favour of human rights and democracy: Parliament then reviewed some more technical points of the Plan of Action and expressed themselves as follows:

- **Human rights clause:** Parliament urges the Commission to propose legislation requiring EU companies to ensure that their purchases do not support perpetrators of conflicts and grave human rights violations, namely by carrying out checks and audits on their mineral supply chains. In an oral amendment adopted in plenary, Parliament asks the Commission to produce and make public a list of EU companies which have been directly complicit in human rights violations in their dealings with authoritarian regimes. It takes the view that mandatory due diligence by EU companies would protect the reputation of European businesses and make EU human rights and development policies more coherent. This mechanism should be based on an “early warning” system to respond in a progressive manner when a third state violates the rules. Parliament also notes that it is not involved in the decision-making process as regards initiating consultation or suspending an agreement. It considers that in the event that Parliament adopts a recommendation calling for the application of the human rights clause, the Commission should carefully examine whether the conditions under this chapter are fulfilled and present a report to Parliament's responsible committee.
- **Human rights impact assessment:** Parliament calls for human rights impact assessments before negotiating any bilateral or multilateral agreements with third countries as this is the only way to ensure consistency between primary law, EU external action and the third party's own obligations. These assessments must be sent to Parliament.
- **A benchmarking policy:** the EU should make full use of the relevant instruments and expertise of the UN and of the Council of Europe, including the implementation of the European Convention on Human Rights as a viable element of such a human rights and democracy benchmark catalogue for the member countries of the Council of Europe. Parliament recommends developing a set of qualitative and quantitative indicators and country-specific public benchmarks that could serve as a coherent and consistent basis for the annual assessment of EU policies in these countries.
- **The renewed European Neighbourhood Policy:** for the countries affected by this policy, Parliament stresses the importance of creating programmes and supporting projects that allow for contact between civil society in the EU and in third countries. As a priority everything must be done to build up the capacity of civil society to participate in decision-making processes at local, regional, national and international level. With regard to the **countries of the Arab Spring**, Members find that failure predominates rather than a real democratic transition. They stress that there are a number of shortfalls in EU policies towards the region, including the situation of young people, and call for a new approach, for example, through strengthened European exchange programmes and stronger contacts with **civil society** to understand the causes and consequences of the problems, particularly those of an economic and social nature, undermining progress in these countries. Special attention should be paid to the position of women. The plenary calls for the establishment of a **Women's Interparliamentary Euro-Arab Convention** since the situation of women in the Arab Spring countries is often critical in order to assess progress with regard to democracy and human rights. It also encourages all mediation initiatives as well as the creation of national human rights institutions in the EU neighbourhood countries. In addition it believes that **countries clearly assessed as not making progress on deep democracy and deeply embedded institutional and social change should see the Union's support reduced**. Parliament also insists that the High Representative and the Commission implement with conviction the renewed European Neighbourhood Policy by applying with equal attention the ‘more for more’ and ‘less for less’ principles;
- **Joint Interinstitutional responsibility:** lastly, Parliament calls for its own proper involvement in the implementation phase of the Action Plan, inter alia through exchanges in the Contact Group on Human Rights, which brings together the EEAS, the relevant services of the Council and the Commission, the EU Special Representative for Human Rights and the EP's Subcommittee on Human Rights and Committee on Foreign Affairs. It recommends that Parliament develop more dynamic relations with the EU delegations, and propose a series of technical measures to allow more systematic follow-up of developments relating to human rights worldwide. It also pleads for improved cooperation in the field of human rights with the national parliaments of Member States, the need for better utilisation of the potential of the Sakharov Prize Network, and recommends, in cooperation with the national parliaments of the Member States, **an annual event on human rights defenders around the world**.