



## **HRDN Non-Paper: The New European Parliament Human Rights Action Unit**

The Human Rights and Democracy Network (HRDN) welcomes the decision to establish a new Human Rights Action Unit (HRAU) within the European Parliament (EP). We strongly believe that this new unit, if given the correct mandate, will serve to enhance EP activities on human rights. The HRAU should act in a complimentary manner to existing structures, reinforcing EP stances through operational tasks that will ensure adequate follow up and implementation of its human rights policies. Our network proposes the following mandate:

### **1. Support for human rights defenders worldwide:**

The EP can and should be doing more to help those around the world promoting human rights. The establishment of a HRAU provides a great opportunity to improve the work of the EP in supporting human rights defenders (HRDs) worldwide. The new HRAU should thus act as the EP's focal point on HRDs and centralise information on actions taken as well as promote EP activities in support of HRDs by:

- Organising an **annual event on HRDs** in Brussels, with the participation of HRDs from around the world, which would become a yearly unique opportunity to express the EP's support to HRDs worldwide and advance the rights of HRDs to speak up and pursue their rights in their own countries. Such an event should be a different one from the Sakharov award, combine a public visibility component (e.g. EP resolution) and concrete activities aimed at responding to the interests and needs as expressed by HRDs (organisation of trainings, debates, etc). The participation of EU national parliaments and National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) should be encouraged.
- Maintaining a secured **database of HRDs at risk** whose cases have been raised and followed by the EP, as a way to centralise information and make it available for follow-up actions. This database would include for instance: information on HRDs mentioned in urgent resolutions, letters sent by Chairs of Committees and Delegations, information regarding visits to third countries by MEPs and EP delegations (meetings with HRDs and cases raised). Personal information of HRDs should be handled with a certain level of security clearance in order to guarantee their personal safety at all times.
- Informing relevant actors in the EP about individual cases of HRDs that are facing attacks or are at risk and **support the EP's actions** on such cases. The HRAU should play a particular role in supporting consistent follow-up on any actions taken, such as coordinating joint letters on individual cases by the Chair of the Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI) and the Chair of a parliamentary delegation to the third country authorities in question, keeping record of the letter and the replies received, and ensuring that follow-up actions are undertaken by the EU delegation and/or the embassies of member states *sur place* (e.g. statement on the outcome of a trial).
- Supporting **DROI and relevant EP third country Delegations and Committees** (notably, AFET, DEVE, INTA, FEMM, LIBE) and EP rapporteurs on human rights in improving their relations with HRDs as interlocutors and contributors, e.g. by suggesting HRDs to be invited to participate in hearings and meetings. New technologies should be used by EU delegations and member state embassies *sur place* to facilitate the systematic participation of local HRDs in EP meetings (i.e. video conferencing).
- Supporting **EP visits to third countries** (individual MEPs, EP delegations) by providing relevant information on the situation of HRDs (briefing) – including individual cases which should be raised

with the authorities – and help organise meetings with local HRDs. The HRAU should liaise with HRDN member NGOs for additional input and contacts when necessary. After the visit the Unit should get feedback on the results of the meetings and replies received from the authorities (debriefing). The logbook of such encounters should be secured in order to avoid leaks of sensitive information regarding HRDs at risk.

- Contacting **Sakharov laureates**, as resource persons, to raise individual cases of HRDs at risk on an *ad hoc* basis.
- Regularly **meeting with other focal points**/relevant stakeholders in the EU working on HRDs (COHOM, DG DEVCO, EEAS Directorate for Human Rights and Democracy, national parliaments, National Human Rights Institutions) in order to ensure coordination and cooperation on different initiatives, and in particular on individual cases, e.g. agree with other focal points on an alert system to deal with urgent cases in a fast and flexible way.
- Liaising frequently with HRDN member NGOs and other key stakeholders on individual cases of HRDs and, in general, on all HRD-related issues.

## **2. Follow-up to EP actions on human rights:**

Over the years the EP has adopted a number of important human rights related reports and resolutions. Unfortunately the recommendations made in these reports have limited follow-up.<sup>1</sup> The HRAU can help to rectify this problem by:

- **Keeping track of any follow-up** to EP resolutions, reports, parliamentary questions regarding human rights (especially HRDs: individual cases, implementation of EU Guidelines, etc.) and replies received from the European Commission and the European External Action Service. The HRAU should also keep track of human rights references in reports, Election Observation Mission (EOM) recommendations, Inter-Parliamentary Meetings and Joint Assemblies resolutions, MEP visits, etc.

## **3. Mainstreaming human rights within the EP**

The new HRAU could assist the EP in stepping up its efforts to mainstream human rights effectively into its own structures and processes in order to ensure that human rights and democracy are at the core of all EP actions and policies. It is imperative that human rights concerns be systematically taken into account, debated and reported on by all EP Committees and Delegations within their respective areas of work.

- In conjunction with the establishment of the HRAU, every EP Committee and Delegation should task a Vice Chair with specific responsibility for human rights and democracy. The HRAU should thus be tasked with **liaising with these human rights focal points**.

## **4. Keeping track of relevant EU policies**

The HRAU has a role to play in helping the EP to improve alignment between its own activities and the EU's broader policy agenda (e.g. trade negotiations with third countries, review of third country sanctions, EU-third country summits and other high level meetings) and to work with other EU institutions to ensure a coherent and unified stance regarding any violations of human rights.

---

<sup>1</sup> HRDN's food for thought paper "Follow-up to European Parliament Resolutions" (June 2011) gave concrete suggestions on how the Parliament could ensure better follow-up to resolutions, e.g. by taking advantage of IT tools and considering the set-up of a database, which would include a category for follow-up action, thus ensuring greater overview and efficiency in implementing this task.

- The HRAU should be tasked with **maintaining a regularly updated calendar** of the EU's policy agenda that is accessible for all in the EP.

#### **5. Improving coordination with EU national parliaments**

The HRAU should assist the EP in improving cooperation on human rights and related matters with the EU's 27 (soon 28) national parliaments and National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs).

- **Liaise more frequently with EU national parliaments.** Once again, a centralization of the various initiatives can help ensure an EP added-value and improve the coherence of messages. The HRAU could assist with organising regular joint meetings to discuss urgent matters.
- **Establish working relations permitting a regular exchange of views with NHRIs** in EU Member States, invite NHRIs to EP hearings and meetings and exchange information on issues of common concern.

#### **6. The Sakharov Award**

Beyond the logistical organisation of the Sakharov award ceremony, the HRAU has a role to play in fostering the active involvement of NGOs, academics, and politicians beyond MEPs in the event. The HRAU also has a role to play in carrying out background research on the candidates for the award.

- **Dynamise the Sakharov network:** As mentioned above, the HRAU could facilitate contact between Sakharov laureates, as resource persons, to raise individual cases of HRDs at risk on an *ad hoc* basis and encourage the relevant EU services to keep contact with the members of the network.

*For any questions or comments or for more information about the EP Working Group of the HRDN, please contact the coordinator of the EP Working Group, Claire Ivers, iversc@hrw.org.*