

Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on Human Rights
The Chair

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Ms Federica Mogherini
High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy /
Vice-President of the European Commission
Rue de la Loi 200
B-1049 Brussels

Subject: The EU's new Action Plan on human rights

Dear High Representative / Vice-President,

The European Parliament has repeatedly expressed its support for the Human Rights Package adopted in 2012. Following discussions and consultations in Parliament's Subcommittee on Human Rights, we remain convinced that a new, ambitious and strategically designed Action Plan is necessary, building on the achievements of the first one but also taking into account the lessons learned since 2012. The EU should remain equally ambitious in addressing emerging challenges. The new Action Plan should be drawn up with realistic objectives and concrete and measurable benchmarks.

We share the conviction that under your leadership the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) should also play a key role towards mainstreaming human rights by regularly discussing democracy support and human rights policy in dedicated sessions. At the same time, further to the strategic guidance of the FAC and the Political and Security Committee, we remain convinced that EU Member States should take greater ownership of the implementation process of the Action Plan, as well as of specific actions, well beyond simply participating in the work of COHOM.

One of the key factors in the success of EU human rights policy is co-operation and co-ordination between the EEAS and the Commission, in all relevant areas of external action. We hope that under the current Commission structure you and Commissioners with portfolios on EU external action will be able to bring this coordination role to fruition, in the spirit of Article 21 of the Treaty.

The Strategic Framework formulated clear and ambitious commitments, to be shared jointly by Member States and EU institutions. Under the expiring Action Plan Member States are listed as partially responsible for over half of the specific actions. Yet the true ownership of the human rights agenda remains unevenly spread among EU Member States, and implementation relies predominantly on the EEAS and EU Delegations. Awareness of the EU Action Plan seems low, even among competent line ministry staff and national parliamentarians. Under the new Action Plan the role of Member States in implementing

specific actions should be better defined and there should be specific targets for burden-sharing, including with EU Delegations.

Member States could take real ownership by using the EU Strategic Framework and the Action Plan as their own blueprint to inspire actions by their own governments, bilaterally or in multilateral fora, in defending and promoting human rights and democracy, working closely together with you, the EEAS and the European Commission. We would remind you in this context, that the very origin of the reflection process culminating in the human rights package of 2012 was a joint initiative led by two dedicated Member States, while the EP itself was a staunch supporter of the idea of establishing a dedicated EEAS Directorate for human rights and the mandate of EU Special Representative for Human Rights from very early on. We believe that the EUSR has brought real added value to the EU's human rights policy, and we trust that the position of the first ever thematic EUSR will remain a strong pillar of EU policy and may be transformed into a permanent function in the future.

The systematic drafting of Human Rights Country Strategy (HRCS) papers was one of the welcome innovations of the 2012 human rights package. HRCSs should play a pivotal role in transforming overall strategic goals into country-specific objectives and actions and facilitate the evaluation of their progress. In this context, we would like to reiterate our earlier request for access to their content to be ensured to Members of the European Parliament.

HRCSs should systematically identify country-specific public diplomacy opportunities. We hope to see the development of emblematic EU public diplomacy events across the globe, so as to send out a strong and unified message. We count on you to lend your full support to these efforts, including through your personal presence and engagement, whenever possible. Furthermore, the EU should have a clearer strategy for supporting and engaging with regional human rights organisations and national human rights institutions in third countries, an element missing from the expiring Action Plan.

The role and status of human rights focal points in EU Delegations and CSDP missions must be upgraded and their work should be fully supported by EU Member State diplomatic staff as well. Human rights focal points should be given the tools and the space to carry out their work. We believe that you could make a real difference by signing and providing all EU Delegations with a clear guidance note regarding the role of the human rights focal points, in order for them to be empowered to act as true human rights advisers with the possibility of working directly with the Heads of EU Delegations and the EEAS headquarters.

Human rights dialogues and the corresponding civil society seminars should be conducted with a clear, results-oriented focus. We believe that the EU human rights agenda would be even better served by an enhanced strategic approach, whereby a number of selected human rights dialogues would be led by the EUSR.

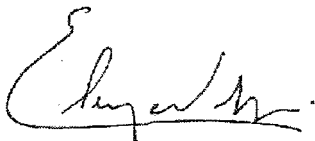
The Human Rights Guidelines have been instrumental in giving concrete tools to EU Delegations and practitioners in the field for turning policy into action and results. We would insist on a systematic assessment of their implementation against well-defined benchmarks in public reports presented to Parliament, as well as the sharing of best practices. We welcome the positive trend of involving Parliament through feed-back before the formal adoption of guidelines.

We hope that under your leadership the EU will be more proactive in guaranteeing greater levels of coherence between its approach to human rights in external relations and the way it promotes and safeguards fundamental rights in the EU. Migration, freedom of religion or belief, LGBTI rights, business and human rights, violence against women and the fight against torture are but a few examples of areas where the EU is leading in the international arena but where it still faces internal challenges of its own in various respects. As such, we can only encourage further dialogue and experience-sharing between COHOM and other Council formations, such as the Council Working Party on Fundamental Rights, Citizens Rights and Free Movement of Persons.

The EU must lead by example in continuing to work together with civil society. We hope the EEAS will further strengthen a genuine partnership with civil society, and will broaden the scope of consultations, including at local level. Shrinking NGO space and increasingly restrictive legislation in a growing number of third countries is one of the strategic challenges the new Action Plan must address.

The European Parliament remains fully committed to continuing discussions on the Action Plan and human rights policy in the framework of the Contact Group, through exchanges in COHOM as well as in Parliament's dedicated Subcommittee. We look forward to continuing our co-operation in good spirit in order to fulfil the expectations and aspirations of European citizens. In this context we would invite you to participate in two dedicated annual debates on the EU's human rights and democracy policy in plenary sessions of Parliament, to present the EU annual report on human rights and democracy, which has proven to be a good tool to report on the progress of the Action Plan, and, subsequently, to respond to Parliament's report, which is drafted annually in response to the EU's annual report.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elena Valenciano', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Elena Valenciano