

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

SPEECH

BY COMMISSIONER ANDRIS PIEBALGS

at

**the European Parliament inter-parliamentary committee meeting
with national parliaments**

Brussels, 11 October 2011

Introduction

Madam Chair, Honourable Members of the European Parliament and national parliaments, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to be here today. I am grateful to the European Parliament for having taken the initiative of organising this inter-parliamentary hearing on this crucial issue for the EU development policy of the future.

To start, I can do no better than quote from the UN report *In Larger Freedom*, which states that “Humanity will not enjoy security without development, it will not enjoy development without security, and it will not enjoy either without respect for human rights.”

It follows that there will be no EU development policy without security. There will be no EU security policy without development. And we can expect neither unless human rights are deeply rooted in our approach to development.

Isn't it high time, then, that we went that extra mile and gave human rights the place in development policy that they deserve?

That is exactly what we intend to do with the vision we have formulated through the new Commission's Development policy document Agenda for Change. This vision is based on a more strategic approach to reducing and eradicating poverty. It involves a better focus in EU programming on good governance and human rights. It involves a better focus on inclusive and sustainable growth in developing countries. But it also looks at resources. EU resources should be targeted where they are needed most and where they can have the greatest impact.

And who better to understand and embrace this vision than you? Because, let's face it, your experience and engagement in the fields of democracy and development alike is unrivalled.

It is not a romantic vision of development or human rights. It is a pragmatic vision. It is about developing smart conditionality. Given the lessons learned from recent events in North Africa, human rights, democracy and good governance will be given greater weight in determining the ways and means of providing assistance.

The Arab Spring has struck a chord with the whole world. For their courage, young people in the Arab world deserve nothing less. But what pragmatic lesson can we learn from the Arab Spring? Well, that the old “stability versus human rights” argument has had its day.

Before I go any further, let me stress three important points.

First, conditionality is not an excuse for cutting funding. Conditionality will not result in the people who need our help losing out. Funding will be determined based on the needs, capacities, commitments and the performance of a partner country, not because it is an ally or a friend. More attention will be given to the situation in terms of the country’s record on democratic governance, and in particular on human rights and gender.

Second, it is not about giving lessons. It is about peer support and interaction around universal and agreed values. Third, results will take time. We often overestimate what can be achieved in the short term. But we also systematically underestimate what can be achieved in the long term.

The EU will never remain indifferent to the violations of human rights. We must continue to maintain a balance between the preventive and reactive measures of our external policies. Therefore, we need a multi-dimensional approach to addressing human rights violations. Today I will mention four such dimensions. The first three are: political dialogue; financial and technical cooperation to promote the human rights agenda and restrictive measures. They, in turn, are all wrapped up in a fourth dimension – namely coherence in our actions.

The four dimensions

So to our first dimension. Our political dialogue with partner countries is pivotal in ensuring that human rights, democratic principles, the rule of law and good governance are systematically addressed at country level.

Our political dialogue is based on a comprehensive list of structured dialogues and consultations; agreement-based dialogues; ad-hoc dialogues and consultations.

Through such dialogue we can identify at an early stage problems.

To be effective, political dialogue needs to be conducted on a regular basis in a systematic way and involving civil society.

As a matter of fact, this kind of commitment is endorsed in the Action Plan for Gender Equality, adopted by the Council in June 2010, under which 50% of agendas for local political dialogue with partner countries should include gender equality.

Economic or other forms of restrictive measures in response to human rights violations – our second dimension – remain a last resort. They should not be standard practice.

That said, there are cases in which these measures become necessary. In such cases the impact of any proposed restrictive measures on the population affected – must always be taken fully into account.

Let me give you just one example of what I mean. Zimbabwe's human rights record needs no further comment from me. In 2002 it led the EU to suspend its assistance to Zimbabwe, with the exception of humanitarian aid and social support. This suspension has been extended, as the conditions attached to the Global Political Agreement have not been met in full.

This was not a decision against the Zimbabwean people: the EU is pursuing its humanitarian operations. Moreover, it continues to back projects giving direct support to the population in the social sphere and to civil society organisations campaigning for human rights and democratisation.

So restrictive measures should not undermine our support for people on the ground.

Which brings me to the third dimension: our assistance.

All our cooperation instruments support structural reforms and democratic governance. They provide a wide variety of support, including capacity- and institution-building for key human rights institutions and actors; training and education programmes; and awareness-raising and networking activities.

We also have the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights for situations considered sensitive and for countries with a limited or very limited space for non-State actors to operate in. The EIDHR can also operate where cooperation with government

authorities is suspended and without the host country's consent. It promotes key universal principles and values. It protects human rights and enhances democratic processes.

Week in week out we defend human rights activists and disfranchised groups. And in doing so, week in week out we succeed in rehabilitating a victim of abuse, or sometimes simply physically protecting an individual or removing them from danger. I am immensely proud of these efforts. I'm sure you are too.

But that is not enough. We can do so much more. The Agenda for Change that I am proposing sets out to take us beyond current practices and heighten the impact of our cooperation on the democratic future of our partner countries. I know from personal experience what it is like to live in a society where basic freedoms and human rights are denied. So anyone who thinks that I will tolerate allowing EU assistance to jeopardise such a future for our partner countries is quite simply mistaken.

Our cooperation instruments are due for revision as part of the revision of the new financial perspectives. This gives us a unique opportunity to embed human rights and democracy even more deeply in our practices. I have made this a priority in line with the Agenda for Change. Our aim must be to look beyond the instruments themselves so as to frame human rights and democracy in the tools we use and in our daily practices.

The budget support is a good illustration of this approach. It is one of the aid delivery instruments that allow us to meet key development objectives with partner countries while engaging in policy dialogue with the governments concerned. Human rights will be a central consideration when we analyse a partner country's profile and suitability as a recipient of the budget support.

These three dimensions in themselves give us a sound blueprint going forward. But the icing on the cake would be greater coherence between our political dialogues and our cooperation programmes with third countries. Hence the fourth dimension I mentioned earlier – coherence in our actions.

Checklist for the fourth dimension

There are a number of things that we can do to make this happen. Here is a four-point checklist to get us started:

- **One:** we need to pursue further a strategic approach to complementarity between the various EU financial instruments and then apply it systematically, starting with the programming phase.
- **Two:** governance profiles and human rights strategies prepared by EU Delegations alongside EU Member States could serve as important pointers to the main human rights problems in a given country and to the governmental commitments and monitoring mechanisms regarding respect for human rights.
- **Three:** human rights appear prominently on the agenda of the UN General Assembly. This should be the case also with other international organisations and major donors.
- **Four:** the EU is an important international actor and can thus use its clout to promote greater attention to human rights. This will involve Member States and the EU as a whole being more proactive in pushing human rights concerns up the international agenda.

Conclusion

Honourable Members,

I don't like the word "conditionality". Our objective is to support people in need, to alleviate and eradicate the poverty. But to make this process sustainable it is absolute need to keep the human rights issue high in the development policy agenda.

Thank you.

