



**Seminar**  
**“European Neighbourhood Policy: Human Rights in EU-Egypt relations”**  
**January 26-27, 2006, Cairo**

**Background Note**

**The establishment of a more consistent and efficient approach to human rights and democratisation through the participation of the civil society in the European Neighbourhood policy.**

**Background**

The European Union (EU) and Egypt aim at deepening their relations under the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP): However, what will be the place of human rights and democratization issues and the role of civil society in this new framework ?

The European Neighbourhood Policy launched in 2003 is designed by the European Union “to prevent the emergence of new dividing lines between the enlarged EU and its neighbours and to offer them the chance to participate in various EU activities, through greater political, security, economic and cultural co-operation<sup>1</sup>. “The ENP aims at increased stability, security and prosperity for the EU and its neighbours and it will be built on mutual commitment to common values including democracy, the rule of law, good governance and respect for human rights.”<sup>2</sup>

The first step was made on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2004 when the EU presented Country reports and then adopted a first set of bilateral Action Plans with Eastern European and Mediterranean countries (Moldova, Ukraine, Morocco, Tunisia, Israel, Palestinian Authority and Jordan). Furthermore, on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2005 the Commission presented Country Reports on Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Lebanon and Egypt and decided to start negotiations with these countries in order to conclude an Action Plan.

The Action Plans cover a timeframe from 3 to 5 years. They contain a set of priorities and actions, including in the field of democratization, rule of law and human rights. They are built on a differentiated approach: each Plan is designed by the EU in cooperation with the country and according to the ‘degree of commitment to common values as well as the capacity to implement jointly agreed priorities’. A financial incentive is linked to the effective implementation of the Plans, but its size is still unclear.

<sup>1</sup> European Commission's ENP Strategy Paper, 12 May 2004

<sup>2</sup> EU Council Conclusions, 13-14 Dec. 2004

This new approach which is complementary to the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) can be welcomed in so far as it could open new opportunities for the promotion of democracy, the rule of law and human rights in the Mediterranean region.

The ENP should be constructed on the assessment of success and weaknesses of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), in particular, the implementation of human rights commitments included in the human rights clause of the EU-Egypt Association Agreement. The ENP should not privilege the economic and security dimension to the detriment of the human rights and democratization. The forthcoming Action Plan should reflect these commitments and dedicate a significant chapter to actions regarding human rights and democratization issues.

It is regretful that - contrary to what happened with Eastern European countries - some Action Plans with Mediterranean partners have already been elaborated and negotiated secretly between the EU and Mediterranean governments without any consultation of civil society. Egyptian civil society has not been consulted during the current negotiations of the Action Plan between the EU and the Egyptian government. This contradicts all commitments to support and involve Mediterranean civil society in the democratization process and improvement of the human rights situation.

It is essential that NGOs are properly informed, consulted and involved in the elaboration of the EU-Egypt Action Plan as well as its future implementation, if it is meant to become an important platform for promotion of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

The principle of co-ownership stemming from the EMP and being one of the principles of the ENP, should imply not only the involvement of governments but the participation of civil society in this policy. No new development of the EU-Egypt relations can be efficiently implemented without the full and effective participation of the people to whom this policy applies. The ENP should involve civil society at each stage of the process from its elaboration to its monitoring.

### **Objectives of the seminar**

The EMHRN together with the CIHRS organizes this seminar to strengthen dialogue between Egyptian NGOs and representatives of the EU and Egyptian government on the human rights and democratisation aspects of the EU-Egypt Action Plan, currently being negotiated. The seminar will gather representatives from local and international NGOs, NGOs from other Mediterranean countries and Eastern European countries, representatives from the Egyptian government and the EU, as well as academics.

Four specific themes will be discussed :

1. The EU-Egypt relations as framed by the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership regarding democratisation and human rights issues
2. Experience of ENP Action Plans concerning Central and Eastern European countries and other Mediterranean countries
3. Human rights and democratisation in the negotiations of the EU-Egypt ENP Action Plan
4. Recommendations, monitoring of the drafting and implementation of the ENP EU-Egypt Action Plan by NGOs

The seminar aims at bringing together different actors dealing with the ENP and EU-Egypt relations in order to share best practices and express concerns and proposals for the Action Plan on Egypt with regard to democratisation and human rights issues. The overall purpose of the seminar is the establishment of a more consistent and efficient approach to human rights and democratisation through the participation of the civil society in the European Neighbourhood Policy.

The seminar will then be followed by:

- A report addressing the EU and the Egyptian government including recommendations as to possible improvements of the Action Plan and its future implementation
- A delegation meeting with the EU institutions in Brussels and presenting the conclusions of the report.

### **Organizers**

The Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN) is a network of currently 84 human rights organizations and individuals based in 30 countries in the Euro-Mediterranean region. The EMHRN aims at developing and strengthening partnerships between NGOs in the Euro-Mediterranean region and facilitating development of mechanisms for protecting and promoting human rights, for democratic reform, and for disseminating the values of human rights as well as generating capacity in this regard.

The Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS) is an independent non-governmental organization, established in 1994, working on promoting respect for values and principles of human rights and democracy in Egypt and the Arab region. It enjoys a consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (UN ECOSOC) and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. It is also a member in the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN) and the International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX).

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