



European Neighbourhood Policy: Human Rights in EU-Egypt Relations

Recommendations of Egyptian Non Governmental Organizations for the EU-Egypt Action Plan

Seminar organized by the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network
in cooperation with the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies
in Cairo, January on 26-27, 2006

Executive Summary

In 2003 the EU launched a new European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) which aimed at preventing ‘*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 [...]*¹. The ENP offers a privileged relationship with EU neighbours based on a mutual commitment to common values in the fields of the rule of law, good governance, the respect for human rights (including minority rights), the promotion of good neighbourly relations, and the principles of a market economy and sustainable development.

The first step was made on 9th December 2004 when the EU presented Country reports and then conducted a first set of bilateral Action plans with Eastern European and Mediterranean countries. Furthermore, on 2nd February 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 of 3 to 5 years. They contain a set of priorities and actions in the field of democratisation, rule of law and human rights. They build on differentiated approaches where each Plan is designed in cooperation with the country and according to the ‘*degree of commitment to common values, as well as its will and capacity to implement agreed priorities*². A cooperation and financial incentive is linked to the effective implementation of the Plans of a size that remains unknown.

¹Communication from the Commission “European Neighbourhood Policy-Strategy Paper”, 12 May 2004, COM(2004)373 final p.3

² Ibid p.8

The Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN) believes the new EU approach may have an important impact on human rights and democratisation policies in the region. It therefore launched a program to discuss the ENP, its Country reports and Action plans with its members and civil society in the region.

The EMHRN is a network of currently 84 human rights organizations and individuals based in 30 countries in the Euro-Mediterranean region. It 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 increasing capacity in this regard.

A first EMHRN seminar on the ENP was held in Cairo on 26-27th January 2006. It aimed at providing NGOs' inputs to ongoing negotiations between Egypt and the EU on an ENP Action plan, and to discuss the wider perspectives of the ENP in terms of its human rights and democracy agenda.

The seminar that was organised in cooperation with the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies gathered representatives of Egyptian civil society as well as civil society participants from the Euro-Mediterranean region and Ukraine. EU Commission and Member States' representatives also attended the meeting.

This report provides a summary of the proceedings of the seminar as well as key recommendations of the participants regarding the ENP in general and the Egyptian Action plan. The first part of this report summarizes the fruitful and constructive debates that took place during the sessions. Following this the general conclusions and recommendations of the seminar concerning the ENP are given. Annex 1 presents detailed recommendations on the EU-Egypt Action plan elaborated by the organizers of the seminar on the basis of its conclusions. Finally, annex 2 contains an expert analysis of the ENP with focus on Egypt and recommendations meant to further stimulate debate.

The main general recommendations addressing the ENP Action plans are:

- 1- Political reform and human rights should be given highest priority in the Action plans and be based on identified and agreed common universal values;
- 2- An effective system for monitoring progress in implementing the Action plans should be set in place including precise timetables, benchmarks and specific procedures for reviewing and evaluating the Action plans;
- 3- Sub-committees on human rights should be established within the framework of all bilateral Association Agreements;
- 4- The European and South Mediterranean civil society should be involved in elaborating, reviewing and evaluating of the Action plans, i.e. they should systematically and regularly be invited to present their suggestions and reports on the progress of the implementation of the Plans. They should also be involved in the work of the human rights Sub-committees;

5- The EU institutions should strengthen support to democracy and human rights activists in the Arab world and push toward lifting legal and political restrictions placed on the work of civil society in the South-Mediterranean region. In this regard the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders³ constitute a first step which should be implemented;

The main specific recommendations addressing the Action plan for Egypt concerns:

- The Lifting of the State of Emergency
- Combating Torture and the Status of Prisoners
- The Independence of the Judiciary
- Public freedoms (the right of association and assembly)
- Women's Rights
- Free and Fair Elections
- The Death Penalty
- Non-discrimination of disabled
- The rights of migrants and refugees
- Workers' rights
- Freedom of the Media
- Freedom of thought and belief

Participants in the seminar asserted the importance of a civil society engaging positively with the ENP at regional and national levels. This can take place through, for example, the establishment of a civil society monitoring body of the Action plans, the presentation of parallel reports, and the holding of civil society meetings parallel to official meetings gathering Arab and European parties.

EMHRN March 2006

³ See <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/GuidelinesDefenders.pdf>