

# Human Rights and plan of Europe Union for Reform in the Middle East

Abbas Moradi<sup>1</sup> and Saeed Mohammadi Sadeq<sup>2\*</sup>

- 1- Department of political sciences , Faculty of Humanism , Islamic Azad University, Zahedan Branch, Zahedan, Iran
- 2- Department of political sciences , Faculty Humanism, Islamic Azad University, Zahedan Branch, Zahedan, Iran

**Corresponding author:** Mohammadi Sadeq

**ABSTRACT:** The EU aspires to construct a global role for itself as a promoter of normative values and supporting human rights is one the most clearly established objectives in EU external relations. However, the effectiveness and appropriateness of the EU's role in promoting such norms, as well as the tools it uses to promote its agenda, are disputed. Devising an appropriate human rights agenda in EU external relations is made more complex but perhaps more vital in regions of instability or conflict. In the shifting context of the post-Arab spring Middle East, the EU has had to adapt its speech, policies and priorities toward the region. The Arab uprisings have increased awareness of the violence that is repeatedly targeted towards individuals and communities apparently as a result of their religious identity.

**Keywords:** Human Rights, Europe Union Foreign Policy, Policy, Middle East.

## INTRODUCTION

Human rights, democracy and the rule of law principle are some of the European Union's (EU) core values. They were embedded in the original treaty and have since been strengthened by the adoption of a charter on fundamental rights. Countries seeking membership of the EU must respect human rights, as must countries that enter into trade agreements and other agreements with the EU. However, the EU is anxious to interfere with domestic issues in non-member countries.

Just like the UN, the European Union considers human rights to be universal and indivisible. A proactive effort is therefore being made in Europe and in a number of developing countries in Asia, Africa and the Middle East to promote and defend them. The EU's human rights policy is focused around civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

### **Human Rights and EU policy**

As scholars of EU foreign policy note, the EU has established a public commitment to the pursuit of democracy and human rights, not only within the Union but also in its external relations.<sup>6</sup> particularly since the fall of the Berlin wall that dramatically altered internal European relations and strategies of international diplomacy, the EU has sought to bolster its weight as a global player through establishing a set of 'EU values' and an ethical foreign policy. Consequently human rights and democracy have become an integral part of EU foreign policy and are enshrined in EU treaties and agreements. This has been a gradual process that was not evident in the original Treaty of Rome that established the EEC in 1957. This can be contrasted with the framework of rights contained in the 2007 Treaty of Lisbon, which Wetzel argues demonstrates a "redefinition of the previously market-centered unions as a 'Union of Values' The EU has developed this by introducing human rights clauses into accession agreements and external trade agreements. It has also established a system of human rights dialogues, a European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) and a practice of demarches, which are statements issued to put pressure on foreign governments.

### ***The Development of Minority rights in the EU***

Despite the EU's inconsistent reactions regarding religious discrimination and particularly violence against Christians and other religious groups in the Middle East, the EU is not a stranger to addressing the challenges of promoting the inclusion of communities excluded or discriminated against on the basis of identity. However, the EU's experience has been largely focused on questions of what are termed national minorities. The two main challenges faced by the EU related to this are the inclusion of ethnic or linguistic national minorities in states seeking accession to the EU and the conflict in the former Yugoslavia.<sup>28</sup> In parallel to the EU's adoption of human rights and democracy as union values since the 1990s, the protection and inclusion of national minorities was also developed as a concern. A significant step was the adoption of the Charter of Paris for a New Europe in 1990 at a meeting of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The Charter affirmed "that the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of national minorities will be protected and that persons belonging to national minorities have the right freely to express, preserve, and develop that identity without any discrimination and in full equality before the law.

### ***The EU and the world***

In order to promote human rights across the world, the EU funds the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights. Its budget is EUR 1.1 billion for the period 2007–2013. The work to promote respect for human rights and democracy can be divided into four key areas:

Strengthening democracy by supporting good governance, a healthy judicial system and, political pluralism and free media.

### ***The EU and human rights***

The European Union sees human rights as universal and indivisible. It actively promotes and defends them both within its borders and when engaging in relations with non-EU countries.

The European Union is founded on a strong engagement to promote and protect human rights, democracy and rule of law worldwide. Sustainable peace, development and prosperity cannot exist without respect for human rights. This commitment underpins all internal and external policies of the European Union.

Within EU borders, those principles are embedded in the EU founding treaties, reinforced by the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights adopted in 2000, and strengthened still further when the Charter became legally binding with the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009.

Outside EU borders, the Lisbon Treaty stipulates that the Union's action on the international scene shall be guided by the principles which have inspired its own creation, development and enlargement and which it seeks to advance in the wider world: democracy, the rule of law, the universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for human dignity, the principles of equality and solidarity and respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter and international law.

Countries seeking to join the EU must respect human rights. And all cooperation (and trade) agreements with third countries contain a clause stipulating that human rights are an essential element in relations between the parties. These are only two examples illustrating how human rights represent a guiding principle for the Union's external action.

The EU's human rights policy encompasses civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. The EU is adamant about protecting the universal nature of human rights when questioned on ground of cultural or political differences.

Conscious that the respect for human rights cannot be taken for granted, the EU is throwing its full weight behind individuals and organizations promoting liberty, democracy and human rights throughout the world. It also actively engages in multilateral fora and supports efforts by regional organizations to further the human rights agenda.

In June 2012, the EU Strategic Framework and Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy were adopted. The Framework sets out principles, objectives and priorities, all designed to improve the effectiveness and consistency of EU Policy as a whole. Together with the Action Plan, it provides an agreed basis for a truly collective effort, involving EU Member States as well as the EU Institutions. The Action Plan, which expires at the end of 2014, calls for targeted actions, which are at the same time measurable and accountable.

Every year the Council adopts its Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy. This report encompasses two parts: the first one is thematic, reflects the structure of the Action Plan and provides an assessment of the actions taken to address the Action Plan's priorities. The second part is geographical and covers EU actions in third countries, thus mapping in detail human rights situation across the globe.

## **CONCLUSION**

This Article illustrates the difficulty in defining a human rights policy concerning the protection of Copts or other religious denominations in the Middle East. This dilemma should not lead to overlooking the problems faced by Copts or similar groups, however. To do so, weakens the credibility of the human rights agenda and since human rights has become firmly established in EU foreign policy, this lack of credibility impacts on the EU's influence in its external relations. But while any human rights violation should be actively condemned, Copts do not call for 'special' rights or protection, other than those due to all citizens. On both sides of the challenge the EU is perceived by Copts as failing. In the first aspect because of an inconsistent or weak approach to taking up violations of human rights with authorities despite insisting on including them in agreements such as the AA. Second, the findings suggest that a minority right, especially the national minority rights framework, is not a productive approach for the EU's goals of promoting human rights and stability in the Egyptian context.

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