



Newsletter for peace, disarmament and human rights

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Nothing new in the West?

Coming of age – the EU External action seen from the civil society perspective

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The European Union is newly shaped as of 1st of December 2009 with a new Foreign Policy representative and the future European Action Service, an emerging European Diplomacy. Will this bring to an end a policy which presented the EU mainly through its commercial and financial presence in the world and will this bring forward new political initiatives and stronger determination for solving conflicts?

Is the EU prepared to become a true global player rather than a single market with a common currency? What would be the conditions to improve EU presence and influence in the world? What kind of influence is the EU expected to have?

External trade and Development aid have become the biggest pieces of responsibility for more than 130 EU Delegations around the world. Although the expectations in countries outside the EU are mainly financial, people around the world have more respect and recognition of the European Union values and significance than those living within the EU. Being the biggest aid provider in the world the EU has got the reputation of the soft power agent, whose main argument is that the misery of the world can be changed by promotion of good governance, the respect for human rights and the true practice of democracy. This implies the fully operational system of checks and balances with an active civil society and human rights defenders, able to question and criticize governments' blunders.

The European Union has been one of the strongest advocates and supporters of civil society in emerging nations. Billions on Euros have been spent in the last decade to build up non-governmental organisations to support democracy and human rights. The European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) has been created and launched by the European Commission and the European Council. 27 European governments have campaigned and still campaign for democracy and human rights worldwide- for the rights of women and children, for media freedom and youth, for the international criminal court and the abolition of the death penalty, for a partnership for peace in the Middle East and for the protection of refugees.

These campaigns are carried out by non-governmental organisations world wide, not only EU based but more and more through local organisations and initiatives. In many places these initiatives created jobs and initiated small business. Hundred thousands of managers, human rights activists and experts are being paid by EU money while applying for EU funded call for proposals.

However, while the European Union appears in many countries around the world as a representative of hundreds of non-governmental organisations, the delegations are mainly busy with evaluations, monitoring and controlling of EU funds granted to local or international NGOs.

The European Union outside the EU is almost perceived as an activist and non-profit association, unlike national embassies that represent a policy and national interest of their respective countries. In addition some countries have voiced concern about activities of the EU or USAID to support opposition and critical voices in their countries by huge amounts of money, obviously going beyond aid and assistance.

There is no reason for the EU to get away from this civil society support and the mechanisms of campaigning for citizen movements.

But now is the time for the EU to become also an international player with particular interests and mechanisms of diplomatic and political empowerment.

In many cases political statements made by the European Council, the European Parliament or the European Commission are with no or little consequences for the target country. Only in conjunction with other powers, particularly the United States, EU sanctions or diplomatic initiatives are taken seriously.

It is known that the prospect for EU accessions was and still is the most effective diplomatic tool. Those countries that hope joining the EU are the most serious in playing by the rules. The question is how to set off a positive political dynamic in countries in the Middle East, Africa or Central and South East Asia where the geographical conditions exclude the membership prospect? The newly elected High Representative will have to face this question soon.

The future diplomatic service of the European Union needs to have full support by all EU institutions, the public and the local EU Delegations, if it is to act as a really new European representation in the world.

The EU has already established a reputation of a soft power. This legacy should be further reinforced by a credible High Representative and adjacent diplomatic service composed of experts and diplomats able to transform the conflict into the peace process and to turn misery into hope.

To achieve this stature the EU Delegations will have to increase their visibility by taking up proactive rather than reactive stance. Particularly where the EU presence is supplanted by an often more powerful US or individual Member States presence, the EU Delegations should play a crucial role in raising profile of the EU as a respective international player. Better visibility guarantees better credibility, provided that the political message is coherent and conform to EU core values and objectives. Because the EU does not pursue traditional state interests it is given the possibility to foster a new type of diplomacy, built on partnership and mutual trust, instead of traditional power based politics.

In doing so the EU should further encourage the strengthening of local civil societies by supporting projects that will guarantee sustainable democratic legacy and provide

opportunities for more visible EU action. This means that a project based approach should be revisited in order to reinforce a home grown civil society structure, independent of official government interference and sufficiently stable to endure political pressure.

This will be only possible with the support of qualified EU Delegations with a capacity to implement political strategies clearly formulated by the Headquarter and using all diplomatic mechanisms in the respective host countries, including the upgrading of EU Heads of Delegations into real Ambassadors. At this stage EU Delegations in the Middle East, one of the real hot spots and centre of global conflicts are busy with project management and contracting local or international NGOs instead of influencing or even talking to the governments in the region and offering good services for peace negotiations.

With the new Treaty provisions and hopefully better institutional set up the EU will be better known for its peace and human rights endeavours. By acting in such a way the EU would raise its credibility towards its own citizens as well.

The new EU treaty offers new opportunities that can make a real impact. It offers the possibility to upgrade the EU into the most important non military political agent on the world stage. Because the EU is not a state and has no ambition to become a substitute to the states it can offer a new model of the 21 century diplomacy.

Using the example of its own conflict resolution model in the aftermath of the Second World War the EU can and must help building political consensus in conflict prone and post conflict areas. This would help clarifying political consensus within the European Union, towards partners and the public, the civil societies and conflicting actors.

Visions of a European policy in the 21st century need a clear voice to mobilize citizens for creativity and participation and governments to cooperate with the EU as a serious global player.