



Resolution 1901 (2012)¹

Human rights and foreign policy

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly acknowledges the role and long-standing experience of the Council of Europe in seeking to promote the highest standards in the fields of human rights, democracy and the rule of law.
2. It notes with satisfaction that, in recent years, the development and consolidation of such standards within and outside the Council of Europe area has become an increasingly important concern for the Organisation, in particular through a Council of Europe policy towards its immediate neighbourhood and the establishment of new forms of partnerships, such as the Assembly's partner for democracy status.
3. It feels, however, that the Council of Europe member States should be doing more to project these standards in their national foreign policy strategies and, in particular, in their dealings with countries, inside the Council of Europe and beyond, whose governments act in blatant disregard of fundamental democratic and human rights principles.
4. The Assembly believes that the right balance has to be struck between national interests and respect for human rights in member States' foreign policies and notes that, when foreign policy neglects human rights for too long and focuses solely on strategic economic and geopolitical interests, human rights crises may erupt and "humanitarian interventions" become urgent and moral necessities.
5. Foreign affairs ministries of the Council of Europe member States can play a key role in improving the effectiveness of international efforts to promote and protect human rights worldwide, by launching specific initiatives aimed at developing universal human rights standards and ensuring a joint approach in the Council of Europe area, also through its monitoring mechanisms.
6. The Assembly believes that democracy must be nurtured from the inside, by supporting human rights movements and civil society forces. The viewpoint of the media, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and human rights defenders remains of crucial importance in any foreign policy strategy.
7. The Assembly therefore calls on the Council of Europe member States to:
 - 7.1. work actively and constructively, within the United Nations framework, to develop the ability of the international community as a whole to safeguard and promote human rights;
 - 7.2. contribute to the effective implementation of the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, by bringing pressure to bear on the governments of States where worrying delays in complying with judgments have arisen, as identified in [Resolution 1787 \(2011\)](#) on the implementation of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights;
 - 7.3. integrate all aspects (civil, political, social, economic and cultural) of human rights activities and concerns into various policy areas, in particular conflict prevention, security, combating terrorism, migration and asylum issues, trade policy and development co-operation, in order to pursue a consistent and results-oriented human rights policy;

1. Assembly debate on 3 October 2012 (33rd Sitting) (see [Doc. 13020](#), report of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy, rapporteur: Mr Marcenaro). Text adopted by the Assembly on 3 October 2012 (33rd Sitting). See also [Recommendation 2004 \(2012\)](#).

- 7.4. endeavour to guarantee the respect of human rights in all member States, as a necessary condition to affirm and promote them in the context of dialogue with neighbouring countries;
 - 7.5. adopt national plans for the protection of human rights and frame foreign policy around universal human rights principles applicable to all States so as to preclude any possible criticism about the use of double standards;
 - 7.6. develop national strategies to promote the full ratification of core human rights instruments and, once ratified, to guarantee their implementation;
 - 7.7. establish institutional mechanisms for the consideration and review of all governmental action on issues concerning human rights in the context of foreign policy and the implementation of human rights policy abroad, while also ensuring full regard for human rights at national level;
 - 7.8. make consistent and intelligent use of the “conditionality clause” in all bilateral agreements and take human rights violations into account in their political and economic dialogue with other countries;
 - 7.9. give prominence to human rights in foreign policy through the definition of common human rights standards and practices with regard to diplomatic action, in particular by:
 - 7.9.1. considering the establishment of a section devoted to human rights on the website of the ministry of foreign affairs to disseminate information and knowledge about human rights, offering all available documentation and tools from the United Nations system, the Council of Europe and, where relevant, the European Union;
 - 7.9.2. drawing attention to the human rights situation both internally and externally through public statements or speeches at the national, European and/or international levels;
 - 7.9.3. ensuring that human rights issues are on the agenda during exchange visits at all levels, especially summits of heads of State and government or other forms of high-level political dialogue with other countries;
 - 7.10. prepare regular reports to submit to parliament on the human rights situation in countries around the world and make use of the input and expertise of non-governmental organisations and consult human rights defenders, including through hearings;
 - 7.11. consider policies related to the fight against poverty, migration, asylum seekers and refugees not only as part of their domestic agenda but also as fundamental elements of foreign policy;
 - 7.12. implement policies based on dialogue and constructive engagement with, and bring political pressure to bear on, governments acting in blatant disregard of fundamental democratic and human rights principles, and keep these policies under regular review.
8. Specifically with regard to diplomatic action, the Assembly urges member States to:
- 8.1. instruct all ambassadors to systematically take account of the human rights situation in their country of appointment, irrespective of its record, thus avoiding any possible criticism of double standards;
 - 8.2. encourage ambassadors, or senior embassy representatives, of member States to meet regularly to exchange information on human rights issues;
 - 8.3. invite their embassies, regardless of the human rights record of the country concerned, to:
 - 8.3.1. involve in their activities civil society organisations and human rights defenders operating in the country and hold a regular dialogue between diplomatic officials and human rights defenders;
 - 8.3.2. provide systematic support to victims of serious violations of human rights, including publicly reacting to them, following up cases and granting visas or asylum to victims;
 - 8.3.3. support free and independent media organisations in those countries which restrict or prohibit the free flow of information.

9. Also referring to [Resolution 1773 \(2010\)](#) on promoting parliamentary diplomacy, the Assembly invites national parliaments to:
- 9.1. encourage and support parliamentary diplomacy through the participation of parliamentarians in the activities of international organisations, thus reinvigorating the strength of their action in promoting political pluralism and democratic parliamentary standards around the world;
 - 9.2. set up parliamentary committees or sub-committees on human rights working in conjunction with foreign affairs parliamentary committees;
 - 9.3. encourage the establishment of parliamentary friendship and similar groups among national parliaments, in order to promote the exchange of good practice, in particular in the parliamentary and political field.
10. The Assembly notes the creation by the European Union of the European External Action Service (EEAS), headed by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, which maintains diplomatic relations with nearly all the countries in the world via a network of European Union delegations.
11. It further takes note of the recent adoption of a European Union Strategic Framework and Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, which identifies the Council of Europe as a strategic partner in achieving greater policy coherence, and trusts that this represents an opportunity to improve synergies between the Council of Europe and the European Union and to improve significantly the effectiveness of international efforts to promote and protect human rights worldwide.
12. The Assembly, also referring to [Resolution 1836 \(2011\)](#) and [Recommendation 1982 \(2011\)](#) on the impact of the Lisbon Treaty on the Council of Europe, encourages the European Union, in particular through its High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, to:
- 12.1. make full use of the 2007 Memorandum of Understanding between the European Union and the Council of Europe;
 - 12.2. consult the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, especially as regards respective roles and key competencies, and make better use of the Council of Europe's benchmarking and advisory roles and expertise on democracy, human rights and the rule of law in the European Union common foreign policy strategy;
 - 12.3. promote accession to key Council of Europe conventions and to monitoring mechanisms and bodies in the context of its enlargement, neighbourhood and foreign policies, as appropriate;
 - 12.4. instruct all relevant European Union delegations to monitor the human rights situation in their host country and to promote ratification of core international human rights instruments by their host governments;
 - 12.5. include an adequate number of specialists in the field of human rights in the European External Action Service and ensure that the situation of human rights is the subject of regular reports.