

Remarks by Riina Kionka,
Personal Representative for Human Rights (CFSP)
of SG/HR Javier Solana
at the Establishment
of an all-European Parliamentary Network
of Human Rights Committees
Berlin, 15 June 2007

Sehr geehrter Herr Präsident des Deutschen Bundestages Dr. Lammert,
Sehr geehrte Frau Vorsitzende, Prof. Dr. Däubler-Gmelin,
Sehr geehrter Herr Kommissar Hammarberg,
Sehr geehrter Herr Beauftragter Nooke,
Sehr geehrte Frau Vorsitzende des Ausschusses des Europaparlamentes, Frau Flautre,
Verehrte Vorsitzende der nationalen parlamentarischen Ausschüsse für Menschenrechte,
Lieber Herr Rothen,
Meine verehrte Damen und Herren,

Es freut mich, im Namen des Hohen Vertreters Dr. Solana, hier bei der Gründung eines parlamentarischen Netzwerks für Menschenrechtler teilnehmen zu dürfen. Das ist eine Idee, wie die Frau Vorsitzende schon erwähnt hat, die im April dieses Jahres in Brüssel ihren Anfang gehabt hat, bei einer Tagung die von der Vorsitzenden des Unterausschusses für Menschenrechte des Europaparlaments, Frau Flautre, organisiert wurde.

Die Idee finde ich blendend, aber da viele hier das alles lieber auf Englisch hören möchten, mache ich weiter auf Englisch anstatt auf meiner beliebten deutschen Sprache....

As I was saying, the idea to launch a parliamentary network of those parliamentarians who focus on Human Rights was conceived a couple of months ago in Brussels, but is being born today in Berlin in the Deutschen Bundestag, restored and rebuilt to emphasise the transparency of democracy. And this is most fitting a place, not only because Germany holds the rotating Presidency of the EU Council, nor because this institution, the Bundestag, has its own intimate, historical connection to the need to maintain and promote Human Rights, both at home and abroad.

And as I was saying when I switched to English, I find this idea terrific. If Professor Däubler-Gmelin hadn't come up with it, you would have had to invent it anyway, and this for three reasons.

First, a network of parliamentarians has the potential to become another force in promoting Human Rights in our Common Foreign and Security Policy. In effect, you are establishing another instrument that heretofore did not exist. We in the EU have many ways in which we seek to improve Human Rights, including via dialogues with certain countries, by making declarations and demarches on topics such as torture or abolition of the death penalty, by raising Human Rights concerns when we talk to other countries, to name just a few. We also have many different institutions that in promote Human Rights policy in their own ways. I believe we will discuss these ways in just a while.

But the power of parliaments is a unique one, something I will come back to shortly. If in the EU, Member States gather to coordinate and forge common and thus stronger positions on the plethora of problems around the globe, why not parliaments, too? It strikes me as intuitively useful to harness the power of the national parliaments, together with the European Parliament, to form a stronger common parliamentary voice for Human Rights, just as the Member States do on the governmental side.

The second reason I think this idea is a good one has to do with the 18th century French political philosopher Charles Montesquieu. Here I come back to the unique role of parliaments: Montesquieu, as is well known, advocated the separation and balance of powers within government as a means of guaranteeing the freedom of the individual. While we have our share of disagreements, we on the Council side strongly support the increasing activity of the European Parliament in the area of Human Rights, because it makes our job easier.

Allow me to explain: parliamentarians can speak more freely and with less coordination than can governments, therefore you can often say things we cannot and should not, but things that nevertheless cry out to be said. Often, even if only one or two individuals speak out, those views are taken to represent the parliament as a whole, rightly or wrongly. While this can be problematic for governments on some occasions, it can be helpful in others. In addition, it may be easier to arrive at a mutually agreeable decision within parliaments because you can vote and do not have to achieve consensus in foreign and security policy, as we do on the Council side.

This means parliaments can take a more forward-leaning stance on many Human Rights issues, can more easily make declarations, write letters and pass resolutions that would be more difficult for governments or a group of generally like-minded governments such as the EU. Moreover, the burden is on governments to make policies work, thus the burden is heavier to say words against what actually can be achieved (lest those same governments be accused later of setting goals—our beloved benchmarks--that are unattainable). Taking a forward-leaning stance also raises the political profile for the EU's Human Rights and Democracy agenda: these parliamentary channels raise awareness on the relationship between Democracy, the Rule of Law, Human Rights and Good Governance.

Finally, the third reason I like the establishment of this network is for what it says about European integration. By agreeing today to work more closely together in Human Rights, national parliaments are sending a strong signal to Member State governments who are in the process right now of deciding what will become of the Constitutional Treaty, in effect, of deciding what will become of Europe.

A strengthened and further integrated Europe is the only way for Europe to continue its trajectory of being a global player, of pursuing a genuine external policy, including a defence and security policy. And the basis, as well as the aim of this policy, as you, esteemed guests, know all too well, is shared values, including the promotion of Human Rights. Therefore, in order to do better at promoting Human Rights, we need the structures that will allow us to have what European citizens have been demanding—to have more Europe in the external field. And the only way to do that is to take the next step and become a factor for peace in the international community.

Last month, my boss, the SG/HR, was honoured with the Karlsprize, the most prestigious award of this kind in Germany, arguably in Europe. Accepting the distinction, Dr. Solana expressed his unreserved support for Chancellor Angela Merkel in her efforts to move forward with the European project.

I conclude today by quoting Dr. Solana last month in Aachen: „Europe is a global player speaking with one voice and playing a decisive role in world peace and stability. Europe is an inescapable factor in resolving any international conflict or crisis. Europe, a point of reference for a world based on solid, respected laws and institutions. That is my idea of Europe. And I believe with all my heart that this can and should be the next achievement in the grand European project. We have the capability. Let us mobilise the political will and make it happen.“
Thank you.