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An Ambitious Human Rights Strategy Needs To Be Delivered by Ashton

The third meeting of the EP-HRDN "Friends of Human Rights and Democracy Group" took place in the European Parliament on Tuesday, 18 October 2011.

The group, which aims to assess and strengthen the European Parliament's work as the watchdog on human rights and democracy, used today's meeting to discuss the forthcoming, and overdue, new EU human rights strategy and unanimously agreed on the need for an "ambitious" strategy that would "make the strongest EU statement so far on human rights in terms of purpose, EU policy and EU commitment".

On 16 June 2010, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the European Commission, Catherine Ashton, announced before the European Parliament her intention to launch a consultation to inform a new EU human rights strategy, but this strategy has yet to be delivered.

Edward McMillan-Scott MEP (LibDem, UK), Vice-President responsible for Democracy and Human Rights, who co-hosted the meeting, said: "The current, informal draft of Catherine Ashton's new EU human rights strategy is disappointing in its lack of new thinking. The EU should be setting a new approach especially after the Arab Spring, not just reflecting existing arrangements, however worthwhile they may be. The strategy should not only reflect on the 'what', but also most importantly 'who' and 'how'."

Nicolas Beger (Amnesty International), on behalf of the HRDN, said: "To be meaningful, the strategy must clearly commit all actors, the External Action Service, member states, and the European Parliament. It must spell out an ambitious implementation in all policy areas and mechanisms, externally and internally, including migration, development, energy and trade."

Richard Howitt MEP (Labour, UK) who is the rapporteur on the European Parliament's report on the review, told the meeting: "The European Parliament will press for not simply an ambitious human rights agenda, but for full transparency so that the European Union itself can be held to account for its actions."

Lotte Leicht (Human Rights Watch), on behalf of the HRDN, said: "To guarantee effective implementation of this new strategy we call on EU member states and the High Representative to ensure the appointment of EU Special Representatives on human rights. Dedicated EU Special Representatives on various aspects of human rights would be the much needed high-level faces and voices to shape the EU's external policies on human rights, whether these relate to common foreign policy, common security and defence policy (CSDP), trade, development or humanitarian assistance."

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