

Wednesday, 5 September 2007 - Strasbourg

Human rights dialogues and consultations on human rights with third countries (debate)

Ana Maria Gomes (PSE). - (PT) Congratulations to my colleague, Mrs Valenciano, on her important report making concrete proposals to involve Parliament in the political dialogues on human rights held by the Council and the Commission.

That is not merely a question of trying to strengthen the EU as a global player at inter-institutional level. It is a question of trying to reap the benefit of the added value which the European Parliament's participation could bring to the substance of those dialogues and to the practical results they contribute to an area in which the insensitivity and diffidence of various European governments and bodies strikes an unfortunate contrast with the commitment and historic leadership of the European Parliament, the body representing the voice of the citizens of Europe.

It has to be admitted that there are many cases of inconsistency which detract from Europe's credibility. Only this morning in the debate on terrorism I criticised the European governments' collaboration with the Bush Administration's programme of trade in torture.

But, let us also consider European development policy, which is supposed to promote good governance and therefore human rights. The current Portuguese Presidency is even aiming to strengthen European relations with Africa in this context. Why do the Commission and the Council fail to make even the most basic use of the instruments already available to them, such as the Cotonou Agreement, which has specific articles on the subject of human rights?

It is already clear today to 77 million Ethiopians and many more millions of Africans that the EU does not take the Cotonou Agreement seriously. Thirty-eight elected members of parliament, journalists and activists imprisoned in Ethiopia following the 2005 elections, monitored by a European Union Mission, were released recently thanks to repeated pressure from this Parliament and in the face of an incomprehensible silence on the part of the Council.

Others, however, remain imprisoned, such as Netsanet Demissie and Daniel Bekele. Will they ever be able to believe in the Cotonou Agreement and in the EU? Examples of failure to act or even nauseating grovelling on the part of EU representatives abound throughout the world - from Addis Ababa to Beijing, from Moscow to Riyadh and from Teheran to Havana.

Let us hope that the reports of a European Commissioner recently apologising to the Government of Sudan in order to avoid the expulsion of local Commission delegates prove unfounded.