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[Publication](#) | 10.10.2008

EU policy: human rights or economic cynicism ?

Report from the 1st panel of the conference

Daniel Cohn-Bendit, co-president of the Greens Group in the European Parliament, opened the debate describing Europe as at the crossroads of crises and the right political space to address them. How, with Russia and China particularly in mind, can the French EU presidency help to reconcile human rights and economics?

The French Secretary of State for European affairs, **Jean-Pierre Jouyet**, underlined that France should not be held to account for everything. The controversial returns directive on immigration, for example, was voted in by conservatives and socialists before its presidency. When it comes to Member States and the EU, there is a general lack of solid strategies that offer effective action and follow-up. On human rights issues, Jouyet pointed to the importance of speaking out and highlighting what is going on. On this point, he referred to the European Parliament's role of vigilance and congratulated the Greens for their part in fighting just causes, such as the liberation of Ingrid Betancourt. EU action and sanctions, he argued, should be underpinned by a progressive but conditional approach.

Hélène Flautre, chair of the European Parliament subcommittee on human rights, outlined the instruments available to the EU in the human rights field: human rights clauses in treaties, dialogue and setting guidelines. But there is a political failure because many Commission delegations and third countries lack awareness of these. Security policy remains mostly the business of national governments and the European parliament faces a hard task in giving enough weight to human rights considerations. An upcoming review of sanctions against Uzbekistan and a possible EU-Turkmenistan deal are cases in point and causes for concern. It is possible to respect strategic interests while still arguing a clear case for human rights. International law must not be undermined.

Jean-Pierre Jouyet responded that there is no consensus in the Council regarding lifting sanctions against Uzbekistan and the case needs to be reopened. It has been questioned whether European values and action should be imposed as universal. In Zimbabwe for example, African-led mediation was called for and achieved results.

Rebecca Harms, Green MEP and vice-chair of the temporary committee on climate change, spoke of the many pitfalls of France's nuclear policy. In Brussels, people have questioned the wisdom of France's nuclear push to southern Mediterranean countries and Greens do not accept the premise that climate protection is the motivation. The sale of nuclear technology, even if supposedly limited to civil applications, has been grossly irresponsible in countries such as Iraq, Iran, Korea, India and Pakistan. France should be prepared to accept its share of responsibility if military use arises, or nuclear installations are subject to terrorist attack ☒ as occurred recently in Israel.

Jean-Pierre Jouyet insisted that there is a reliable difference in exporting nuclear technology for civil

purposes. He took exception to citing southern Mediterranean countries, saying they should be as eligible as any other for nuclear trade. France, he said, had made progress since Chernobyl in terms of safety and information.

Marie-Anne Isler-Béguin, chair of the European parliament South Caucasus delegation, noted that Europe had invested itself politically in that region for the first time following the outbreak of the conflict in Georgia. A war between two members of the Council of Europe is a failure for the continent. Several former Soviet countries in the region have turned to Europe for the values it represents but their people have had nothing in return. The EU must ask itself if it has done all it can to support human rights and democracy. The region is sensitive: what was once the silk route is now the energy route. The French presidency should lead in forming a real policy, not rely on improvisation.

Jean-Pierre Jouyet said that we cannot criticise all forms of energy. He underlined that France supports the climate and energy package that is on the European agenda, as well as nuclear power although it is not an integral part of that. France has lined up conferences on South Ossetia and Georgia with a view to supporting the civilian population and reconstruction. France agrees that a perspective for closer partnership should be open to Georgia but excludes NATO membership.

Daniel Cohn-Bendit closed the debate, thanking Jean-Pierre Jouyet for his participation. He commented that it was rare for an incumbent presidency of the EU to engage in such a debate and welcomed Mr. Jouyet's frank responses to the questions.

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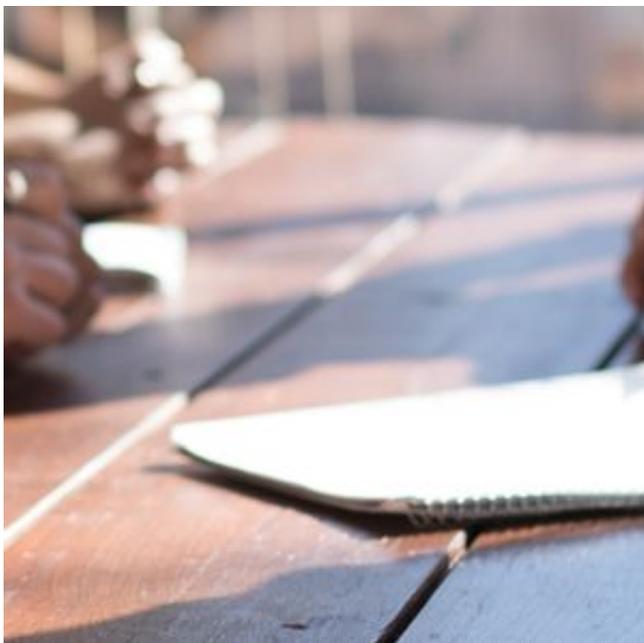
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