



Global Governance, Regionalisation and Regulation:  
The Role of the EU  
6th EU Framework Programme

# The Regional Dimension of Human Security. Lessons from the European Union and other Regional Organisations

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## Garnet Policy Brief

Number 9, October 2009

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# THE REGIONAL DIMENSION OF HUMAN SECURITY. LESSONS FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION AND OTHER REGIONAL ORGANISATIONS

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## 1. Introduction

A paradigm shift has occurred during the first decade of the 21st century in which nation states and intergovernmental organizations are no longer the sole providers of public goods nor the corner stones of international order. Today, sub-national and regional entities as well as nongovernmental organizations also play major roles. This period has also seen the appearance of new global security threats. In consequence of these two developments it is essential to rethink the concept of security in such a way that it goes beyond a state-centred approach.

Concepts affect the way we think about, and discuss how we can shape, the world. Thus, the articulation of new concepts necessarily affects policy. The new concept of *sustainable development*, for instance, was coined in 1983 and has since had significant policy implications. The concept of *human security* has recently gained widespread recognition in International Relations and altered our approach to security. However, it remains an ambiguous and elastic concept that needs further analysis.

Human security, as opposed to simply security, shifts the focus of concern from the security of the state to the security of the individual, and highlights the importance of protecting individuals from severe disruptions in their lives that may derive from a variety of sources, including the economy, the environment, and politics.

## 2. Regional Integration in the Promotion of Human Security

The problems affecting human security are not confined within political borders, rather they tend to affect more than one state. Similar problems generally affect a set of neighbouring countries and even primarily national issues have cross-border implications for neighbouring states. Individual states therefore cannot be relied upon as the sole protectors of human security. States throughout the world are aware that they can most effectively address the problems of human security by combining their efforts. Indeed, regional integration has emerged as one of the key developments in international relations at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

The number of regional frameworks has in fact reached a level at which it is now possible to say that a new level of governance has been created which allows neighbouring states to collaborate on a given set of issues without undermining the effectiveness of global or national governance.

This new level of governance will not necessarily be *good governance*. Regional governance, just as is the case for global, national or local governance, must be benchmarked, so that its effectiveness can be evaluated. Regional governance must be assessed with reference to its actual capacity to provide the citizens of the member states with a higher level of human security. So far, most studies on good governance and regional governance focus only on legitimacy and democracy promotion and little on human development, stability and human security – the latter three being the end that good governance is expected to achieve. Consideration of its effects on human security allows one to evaluate the far-reaching consequences of the integration process.

### The European Union

The concept of human security was first presented in the 1994 *Human Development Report*. Since that time the European Union has embraced the concept and included it as an objective in many of its policy documents related to its external relations, particularly in regards to conflict management and humanitarian development. Moreover, there is evidence which suggests that the European integration process itself is improving levels of human security within its borders.

The EU also aspires to become a global actor in the field of peace and security. It is under the aegis of this European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) that the EU has been able to deploy troops in different parts of the world and thus advocates a human security approach to international affairs. At the request of EU High Representative Secretary General Javier Solana, a study group was convened to examine the possibilities for integrating human security into the foreign policy of the EU. The group's report, issued in September 2004, *A Human Security Doctrine for Europe* boldly proposed the formation of a 15,000-strong human security response force (HSRF), with at least one third being civilian (police, human rights monitors, development and humanitarian specialists, administrators, etc.), and a human security volunteer service to assist the HSRF. Although these proposals were never adopted, the EU has repeatedly expressed the need to reconcile security with development in all aspects of its foreign policies. The same study group presented a second report in 2007 entitled *A European Way of Security*, in which it articulates a proposal for a European military and security doctrine based on the principles of human security. Both the large spectrum of foreign policy tools at the disposal of the EU (including development policies) and the fact that it has strived to become a global military security actor open up the possibility for the EU to engage in the protection of human security.

The EU is similarly an actor in the area of economic security. The European integration process has led to the creation of a single European market in which goods, people, services and capital move freely. In consequence European citizens enjoy increased *per capita* GDP and improved economic security. Citizens of member states having adopted the euro additionally benefit from modest levels of inflation, a strong currency and a relatively stable exchange rate which provides protection from speculative attacks.

The social challenges created by globalization are also addressed at the European level. The EU has developed a more sophisticated, multi-faceted role in social policy that goes beyond the supra-national regulation of *working* conditions, towards taking responsibility for establishing frameworks for adequate *living* conditions, and guiding member states through inter-governmental coordination procedures. Although many will point to the slow advancements in dealing with social policy issues at the European level, the EU has proven to be a dynamic forum for advancing a *sui generis* form of social integration and has transformed itself into an actor that has a role in the protection of the various components of human security. The Luxembourg European Council in 1997 paved the way for the *European Employment Strategy* (EES), also known as the “Luxembourg processes”. The EES aims at achieving better European convergence of national employment strategies, while respecting national diversity. Furthermore, the Commission’s report from 2005, *European values in the globalized world*, stressed that the gains made so far through the European integration process were under threat if Europe could not rise to the challenge of responding to the negative consequences of globalisation, especially with regard to job loss. As part of the solution, the Barroso Commission proposed the establishment of a Globalization Fund, which was endorsed after a few alterations at the December 2005 European Council.

As it has advanced in terms of political integration and the size and power of the European Commission and the European Parliament have increased, Europe has come to play an important role in protecting and promoting political security- an important component of human security. In fact, these European institutions have the authority to protect European citizens from acts committed by the member states themselves.

The EU promotes human security outside as well as within its borders. In the case of future member states, the establishment of accession criteria, known as the *Copenhagen Criteria*, has had a significant and positive impact on human security in candidate countries. The Phare program, aimed at assisting applicant countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilization (CARDS) destined specifically for the Western Balkan region, and the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) designed to assist countries aspiring to join the Union in the period 2007-2013, have had similar positive effects on human security. Even in neighbouring countries not expected to join the EU, the EU has had a positive influence on human security through the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).

### **The African Union: APSA and NEPAD**

When the African Union was established to replace the Organization of African Unity (OAU), it marked a major turning point in the importance that protecting human security was accorded on the continent. One of the most persistent criticisms that had been expressed towards the OAU was specifically the inability of the regional organisation to intervene in cases where human security was under threat. In particular, the OAU’s failure to prevent the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 demonstrated that its strict adherence to the concept of state sovereignty was detrimental to the very security of African citizens. The inclusion in the *Constitutive Act of the African Union* of a clause clearly allowing the regional

organisation to intervene in cases of “namely war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity” (Protocol, Article 4-j; Constitutive Act, article 4-h) marks a u-turn as it ensures the recognition of the responsibility to protect.

Since its establishment the AU has taken steps to ensure that it can play an effective role in protecting human security on the continent. Of primary importance are the creation of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) and the adoption of the New Economic Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD).

The backbone of APSA is the *Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council* adopted in 2002 which laid out the actions the AU needed to take to become an effective actor. The Protocol’s provisions included: the establishment of a Panel of the Wise in charge of mediation, conflict prevention and peacemaking efforts; a Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) to monitor political dynamics and prevent crisis; an African Standby Force (ASF) which establishes brigades that the AU may deploy as peacekeeping forces; and a Peace Fund to provide financial support

The ASF is to be established by the Regional Economic Communities (REC). Each of the five sub-regions of the AU (namely East, South, Central, West and North) is to implement a scheme whereby Regional Brigades can be deployed when a crisis erupts. Similarly, establishment of the CEWS will depend largely on regional early warning mechanisms.

It is worth mentioning that the APSA opens the door for other actors to collaborate with the African Union in providing for peace and security in the continent. For example, African citizens may contribute to this effort through the involvement of the Pan-African Parliament (established in 2004) and as members of civil society organisations.

The creation of the APSA is a promising step forward. However, implementation of its various components has encountered many difficulties, both institutionally and financially, and none of the APSA instruments have been implemented fully and efficiently.

The New Economic Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), adopted in 2001 is the official economic development program for Africa which is a key mechanism for combating threats to human security. It is multi-faceted, touching on many aspects that are of direct concern to human security, including not only economic development but also issues such as good governance, women’s empowerment, the eradication of poverty and human development, with a focus on health, education, science and technology and skills development.

All in all, and despite its shortcomings, it is possible to say that the AU as a regional organisation has the ability to play an important part in the human security equation. Whether it is through the APSA, that directly relates to freedom from physical violence or the NEPAD, whose various instruments touch on many aspects of human security, the AU has been making important steps to improve the security of African citizens and reduce the threats they face. Unfortunately, due to a lack the resources and capacity, much remains to be done.

#### **The Association of Southeast Asian Nations: the Economic Crisis and Pandemics**

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was first established in 1967 with the aims of accelerating economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region and promoting regional peace and stability through abiding respect for justice and the rule of law in the relationships between countries in the region and adherence to the principles of the UN *Charter*. The institutional set-up was strongly influenced by the so-called “ASEAN Way” according to which states strictly adhere to the concepts of state sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs of other nations. Thus a strictly inter-governmental approach was adopted with weak regional institutions and pre-eminence given to nation states. Consequently, in the area of security the focus is on state security rather than the security of

individual citizens. The 1971 *Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality Declaration (ZOPFAN)* seeks to protect state security by committing all ASEAN members to “exert efforts to secure the recognition of and respect for Southeast Asia as a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality, free from any manner of interference by outside powers”, and to “make concerted efforts to broaden the areas of cooperation”.

In contrast, in dealing with various other important socio-political and economic issues, ASEAN has adopted a regional approach. The lack of adequate instruments to protect ASEAN citizens against the threats created by the 1997 Asian economic crisis drew the attention of the member states to the precarious nature of the human security of their citizens. Eventually, in December 1997 the governments of ASEAN adopted the *ASEAN Vision 2020*, which laid out the joint plan to help move the region out of the crisis. This document is significant in that it makes clear linkages with some of the components of human security. With the adoption of the *ASEAN Vision 2020*, ASEAN and its member states have clearly readjusted their priorities from focussing exclusively on state security to paying more attention to the security of their citizens. The regional organisation can be expected to work with the member states to protect their citizens from threats and “unfreedoms”.

The emphasis on human security made in the *ASEAN Vision 2020* was evidenced by the ASEAN approach to recent health pandemics and was reinforced by the adoption in 2007 of a new *ASEAN Charter*. This *ASEAN Charter* clearly states that the regional organisation shall, among other things, “ensure that the peoples and Member States of ASEAN live in peace with the world at large in a just, democratic and harmonious environment” (Par. 4). In the case of the SARS and Avian Flu pandemics ASEAN nations adopted a coordinated response to protect their economies and the health of their citizens. The Special ASEAN Summit on SARS outlined the necessary regional mechanism to deal with SARS and its various socio-economic consequences. It is important to note that, in these cases, ASEAN countries also collaborated with non-member neighbouring states, Japan, Korea and China as ASEAN+3. A similar regional response was adopted to address the subsequent pandemic: the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI). A joint HPAI Task Force was established to formulate and assist in the implementation of definitive measures and areas of cooperation to control HPAI in the animal health sector.

The interest in the security of citizens rather than the security of the member states which began in the late 1990s has allowed the regional organisation to design various instruments and mechanisms that have ensured and promoted human security. Whether it concerned economic security in the aftermath of the 1997 Asian economic crisis or health threats following the two pandemics of SARS and the Avian Flu, the role of the regional organisation in finding a solution to the threats affecting the region has been crucial. It is also interesting to see that the very existence of ASEAN as a coordinating mechanism for its member states has facilitated cooperation with non-member states of the region through the ASEAN+3 framework.

### **Pacific Islands Forum and Environmental Security**

In 2000 the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) transformed itself from an international arrangement known as the South Pacific Forum into a full-fledged regional organisation following the establishment of its Secretariat. This evolution attests to the willingness of the various states in the Pacific region to further empower the regional level so as to improve collaboration and cooperation among themselves.

The Pacific region was amongst the first regions to recognize and endorse the concept of human security. In 1997

it adopted the *Aitutaki Declaration on Regional Security Cooperation*. This document represented a major step towards a more inclusive definition of security and greater concern for non-traditional security threats. This commitment to human security has been further strengthened by the various decisions that have been adopted by the PIF.

In order to ensure an effective response to environmental threats, the Secretariat was empowered to coordinate the efforts of the member states. The PIF Secretariat provides policy as well as technical assistance. For example, the *Pacific Plan*, which consists of a regular review of the implementation of the adopted policies and programs, ensures that the various *National Sustainable Development Strategies* (NSDS), implemented in the member states, take due consideration of environmental security and receive sufficient support to do so. In 2008 the PIF adopted the *Niue Declaration on Climate Change* which explicitly stated that the PIF and its member states envisioned climate change and environmental threats as being integral factors affecting their security.

#### 4. Conclusion

Human security encompasses both freedom from fear and freedom from want. It implies a paradigm shift from the old concept of security. It changes its referent from the state to people and covers formerly neglected security areas such as sudden and severe disruptions in peoples' lives that may derive from any number of real and perceived threats.

Because the causes of insecurity may be of a local, national, regional or even international origin, and vary from case-to-case, any analysis of human security must necessarily be conducted from a multilevel perspective. Indeed, providers and facilitators of human security can range from authorities at the village level to regional or global institutions. Global public goods are of central relevance to human security and, because of their very nature, need to be secured by regional and global actors. This means that the state is no longer the sole provider of human security to its citizens, although it continues to play a critical role. The rise of regional frameworks and institutions has created a new level of governance that oscillates between the national and international governance competencies. At such regional levels of governance, the concept of human security has been widely used, but its interpretation has generally been limited to meaning freedom from fear and physical threat.

In the EU, the concept of human security has been applied mainly, but not solely, in its external relations and foreign policy, with the aim of providing increased human security outside its borders, as can be seen from the impact that accession perspectives have had on neighbouring countries. The human security of European citizens within the EU has been greatly enhanced as well by the political, economic and social integration policies of the EU including the application of the four freedoms (i.e. the free movement of goods, persons, services and capital) and a monetary system in which some member states use the same currency.

The EU represents the most advanced, but not the sole case of successful regional integration which fosters human security. Other regional organisations such as the African Union (AU), the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) have shown that they too can contribute to the promotion of human security in their regions. Several organisations have already adopted instruments to respond to human security threats, including more than just physical security. The examples drawn from the AU, the ASEAN and the PIF also illustrate the wide spectrum of threats that can be tackled by regional organisations. Far from restricting themselves to military operations such as the establishment of a peacekeeping force, these regional organisations have demonstrated their willingness to address, at the regional level, issues such as economic development, health and food security, environmental security and many other

cross-border threats that cannot effectively be addressed at the national level. In addition, they create momentum for their member states to focus more on their own role as providers of human security for their citizens.

The debate is by no means concluded. Reconceptualising security, changing its referent, advocating new instruments that can foster it and helping to put right major disruptions in peoples' daily lives has created a paradigm shift. The abundance of references to human security, their inclusion in government agendas, and those of international and regional institutions is a clear indication that this is a concept with the power to reframe thinking about development and reorient policy responses to the ever changing nature of local and global insecurities.

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## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

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- Human security is a concern for all levels of governance and should therefore be on the agenda of all global, regional, national and local actors
- Given the cross-border dimensions of many human security issues, regional organisations must play an important role to play as providers and guarantors of human security.
- The EU is well-positioned to play an important role in promoting human security and it should include human security as a fundamental part of its aspirations to be a global actor
- Having demonstrated that regional integration can be an important instrument in providing human security to the citizens of its member countries, the EU should promote human security in its relations with third countries
- Regional organisations beyond Europe can take advantage of the lessons learned by the EU regarding how to achieve greater levels of human security through the regional integration processes.
- The UN should increase partnerships with regional organisations in order to further promote human security at a global level



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