

# EUROPEAN UNION

2014 was an election year with less opportunities for interaction with members of the European Parliament (EP) compared to previous years; partly due to the election campaign and constitution periods, and partly as many relevant [legislative processes](#), such as the new funding instruments, were concluded in 2013.<sup>1</sup> IDSN was, however, able to engage with MEPs and parliament officials on different occasions with fruitful outcomes.

Some of the long-standing supporters of the Dalit cause left the parliament in connection with the election and IDSN wishes to acknowledge the important role they have played in putting the issue strongly on the agenda of the Parliament and other EU institutions. Leonidas Donskis (Lithuania), Michael Cashman (the UK), Thijs Berman (the Netherlands) and Graham Watson (the UK) are among those who have made valued contributions in defence of Dalit human rights.

As in previous years, IDSN regularly informed MEPs, Parliament staff and officials of the Commission and the EEAS about key developments in the UN and in caste-affected countries on the topic of caste discrimination.

*“IDSN is key for bringing the issue of caste discrimination to the attention of EU. It has credibility with EU and UN, works SMART, and is strong in lobbying and follow up.”*

Bert Theuermann, Chair of COHOM, Human Rights Working Group, Council of EU

## European Parliament

The strong engagement on the issue of caste-based discrimination by the Parliament in 2013 was followed up in the March resolution on EU priorities for the 25th session of the UN Human Rights Council, to which IDSN had given input. In the resolution, the Parliament welcomes the work of the OHCHR and the UN Special Procedures mandate holders on combating caste-based discrimination, and furthermore urges EU member states to promote the endorsement of the draft UN Principles and Guidelines for the Effective Elimination of Discrimination based on Work and Descent.

IDSN further provided input to the EP's draft resolution on the EU Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World through a submission to the rapporteur, Antonio Panzeri. The amended EP resolution, which is to be adopted early in 2015, will include a section on caste-based discrimination with recommendations for policy action by EU institutions, and inclusion of policy objectives on caste-based discrimination in the new EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy.

As Chair of the Sub-Committee on Human Rights, Barbara Lochbihler brought up caste-based discrimination as a human rights issue for the EU to prioritise in her interaction with the EU Council's working group on human rights, COHOM, in May. Ms. Lochbihler furthermore contributed with a statement for the [side-event](#) on Caste-Based Violence against Dalit Women and

Girls at the UN Human Rights Council in June, and she called for implementation of legislation to end caste discrimination and highlighted the recommendations in the European Parliament resolution on caste-based discrimination.<sup>ii</sup>

## **European Commission/EEAS**

As a first, the EU [Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World](#), published by the EEAS, includes several references to caste-based discrimination in the sections on India, Nepal and Pakistan.<sup>iii</sup> IDSN has for several years pointed out the lack of reporting on the issue in the annual reports as a serious omission and welcomes the representation of the issue in relation to different topics, including humanitarian aid with specific reference to the EU funded IDSN report '[Equality in Aid](#)'.<sup>iv</sup> Caste-based violence is furthermore mentioned, including as an aspect of violence against religious minorities in Pakistan. It is noted that the important EP resolution on caste discrimination is mentioned only in the section on Pakistan.

Dalit human rights defenders and a team from the IDSN secretariat took part in the European Instrument on Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) [2014 Forum](#), which focused on human rights defenders.<sup>v</sup> General Secretary of the National Dalit Women's movement in India (AIDMAM), Asha Kowtal, was invited to speak about Dalit women human rights defenders as part of a panel that addressed issues of human rights defenders from minorities, indigenous peoples and communities affected by caste-based discrimination.

IDSN had nominated Asha Kowtal as a speaker, and it was the first time a Dalit speaker was included in the programme of the EIDHR Forum. Ms. Kowtal highlighted the structural mechanisms of gender and caste dominance that enforce the pressure on defenders of Dalit women's human rights. Henri Tiphagne, Director of People's Watch Tamil Nadu, raised the issue of shrinking space for human rights defenders in India and the Forum was furthermore an opportunity to share information with some key contacts in the Commission and civil society representatives.

Brussels based media, Mo Magazine and New Europe, brought interviews with Henri Tiphagne and Asha Kowtal in connection with the EIDHR Forum, and the articles highlighted the current human rights situation of Dalits in India and the call for the EU to put the issue strongly on the agenda.

Following the EIDHR Forum, Asha Kowtal went on a tour to seven European countries together with filmmaker Thenmozhi Soundararajan to participate in public awareness and political advocacy activities together with Dalit Solidarity Networks.

IDSN made several submissions to the EU and was invited to give input for the coming EU Human Rights Action Plan. IDSN suggests a specific heading on caste-based discrimination, development of an EU policy with set specific objectives for addressing caste-based discrimination in policies and programmes, and in dialogues with affected countries.

Pursuit of public diplomacy by EU high level officials on human rights issues such as caste discrimination remains an ideal in contrast to the case of UN high level officials. IDSN notes that statements by high level representatives, including the High Representative of Foreign Affairs and

EU Special Representative for Human Rights, as well as EU policies and thematic papers are devoid of references to discrimination based on caste, despite its impact on human rights and poverty reduction challenges.

IDSN maintained a positive dialogue with the EEAS and Commission officials and continued to share updates on key developments and recommendations with officials. A number of high-level officials, including the EU Special Representative on Human Rights, Stavros Lambrinidis, met with the IDSN team in Brussels.

Fruitful discussions with ECHO officials on the inclusion of Dalit communities was maintained following the cooperation on the 2013 IDSN report “Equality in Aid”, which was officially launched in January 2014 in New Delhi jointly with ECHO India. The awareness of caste issues is high in the EU’s humanitarian agency, as illustrated in the [2015 Humanitarian Implementation Plan](#) for South Asia, which has a focus on caste-based discrimination in analysis and target groups, “Particular attention will be paid to excluded communities (scheduled castes, tribes, other minorities)”.<sup>vi</sup>

EU representations in some caste-affected countries have taken a proactive approach. They have on several occasions interacted with Dalit human rights defenders, and EU Delegations and member states’ embassies have invited presentations by Dalit representatives at joint meetings in India and Nepal respectively. In a [statement on political developments in Nepal](#), the EU delegation and Ambassadors of EU member states in the country urged Nepal’s political leaders to find common ground for a timely completion of the constitution process ensuring protection of human rights for/of all citizens without discrimination on the basis of caste or other grounds.<sup>vii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> [European Union - 2013](#)

<sup>ii</sup> [European Parliament resolution of 10 October 2013 on caste-based discrimination](#)

<sup>iii</sup> [Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World](#)

<sup>iv</sup> [Equality in aid](#)

<sup>v</sup> [Dalit leaders speak at EU Human Rights Defenders Forum](#)

<sup>vi</sup> [HUMANITARIAN IMPLEMENTATION PLAN \(HIP\) SOUTH ASIA](#)

<sup>vii</sup> [Local EU Statement on political developments in Nepal](#)