EU external policies in favour of democratisation

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The European Parliament adopted by 537 votes to 24, with 61 abstentions, a resolution on EU external policies in favour of democratisation.

Recalling that democracy has evolved into a universal value, Members believe that only democracies based on the rule of law can function as a foundation for balanced structural partnerships between third countries and the EU that are also in keeping with the needs and interests of both parties and their respective populations.

In this context, they intend to redefine EU policy on this issue.

Need for a paradigm shift: Parliament considers that the EU's role as a 'soft power' in the international system can only be consolidated if protection of human rights constitutes a **real priority** for it in its policy towards third countries. It points out that it is essential, if the EU is to have a credible, consistent foreign policy and support the development of democracy, that an exemplary policy of respect for human rights and democracy is always pursued within the EU and its Member States, both now and in the future.

However, Members note that the events unfolding in North Africa and the Middle East have demonstrated the limitations of a focus on security. They consider therefore that the question of social justice and the fight against inequalities has to become an essential objective of the Union's external policy, as it is an indispensable factor in the building of a peaceful, prosperous and democratic society. They stress that 'security versus democracy' is a false dilemma since there can be no human security in a society without a democratic and accountable government; believes that, although there has been economic growth, its benefits have not been distributed fairly. They consider therefore that the question of social justice and the fight against inequalities has to become an essential objective of the Union's external policy, as it is an indispensable factor in the building of a peaceful, prosperous and democratic society.

Members take the view that the experience of democratic transition following the collapse of communist dictatorships in Central and Eastern Europe should be shared with the newly emerging democratic forces in North Africa and the wider Middle East.

If a democratisation process is to be successful, Members consider it crucial that it should address the social and economic development of the country concerned, in order to ensure that the inhabitants' basic rights, such as the right to education, health and employment, are met.

Priority should be given to:

- making greater and more vigorous practical use of the Union's existing range of instruments and incentives;
- consistent policies aimed at discouraging human rights violations, such as **reducing the financial envelopes for governments that fail to respect democracy** and human rights;
- strengthening the EU's common commercial policy in terms of sustainable development, the eradication of poverty and the protection of human rights;
- the ratification of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), giving priority to the regions that are underrepresented;
- the inclusion in all free trade agreements legally binding clauses on social and environmental aspects and respect for human rights, taking as a minimum basis the list of conventions contained in the GSP+ Regulation;
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the involvement of the European Parliament at every stage in the negotiation, conclusion, application and suspension of international agreements with third countries;
- a detailed analysis of the scope for reform in third countries based on regular exchanges of views with all democratic forces in a country, in order to ensure that it is rooted in mutual confidence and knowledge;
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- imposing **appropriate, proportionate and smart sanctions** targeted against the regime's main authorities – while providing support for the population and increasing direct assistance to strengthen civil society – on countries which fail to honour their commitments with regard to human rights, good governance and democratisation;
- mainstreaming, the EEAS, the use of 'smart' sanctions, and threats thereof, as an instrument of EU human rights policy vis-à-vis the most repressive regimes;

- to put pressure on the governments of states known for their bad human rights track records, in order to improve the human rights situation in these states and thus accelerate the process of democratisation.

Parliament recommends, in the case of the most problematic partnerships, that the Union refrain from isolating the countries concerned, and that it instead conduct relations with them on the basis of appropriate, effective conditionality, serving as a genuine incentive to democratic reform. It endorses the 'more for more' approach outlined in the communication entitled 'A partnership for democracy and shared prosperity with the southern Mediterranean'. It believes that, by the same token, the Union should not hesitate to reassign funds previously earmarked for countries whose governments fail to honour their commitments in the area of democratic governance to countries that have made more progress in meeting the commitments entered into within the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and the Eastern Partnership. Members call for stronger emphasis on promoting democracy in partnership and neighbourhood policies.

The resolution stresses, however, that this approach, together with the upcoming revised European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), implies that the differentiated approach can only be a valuable and credible instrument if it requires the same human rights and democracy objectives for all ENP partner countries. It stresses that the **EU would lose its credibility** once again by making a difference between '**minimum standards**' to be respected by the most difficult countries and **more ambitious standards** for the most advanced countries.

Further developing the political dimension: Parliament considers that a **global, coherent approach** is required, based on targeted strategies relating to development, human rights, good governance, social inclusion, promotion of women and minorities and religious tolerance, as an additional instrument of EU foreign policy.

It supports the following initiatives which aim:

- to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, especially in connection with financial assistance given by the EU;
- to continue upholding the apolitical nature of humanitarian aid provided during the democratisation process;
- to call for systematic support for new, freely and fairly elected parliaments;
- to insist on a right of scrutiny and involvement for the European Parliament in the process of setting up the **European Endowment for Democracy** (EED) and in its functioning, in the determination of annual objectives, priorities, expected results and financial allocations in broad terms, and in the implementation and monitoring of activities
- to strengthen dialogue with as wide a range of local actors as possible;
- to emphasise the role that legitimate democratic political parties, genuine social movements and a free press can play in safeguarding the public interest;
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- to enlarge the mandate of the Election Coordination Group (ECG) to include democracy support policies and encourage the Office for the Promotion of Parliamentary Democracy (OPPD) to cooperate closely with the Election Coordination Group (ECG);
- to underline the important role of third countries' civil society and parliaments in democratic budget oversight
- to develop country strategies in the area of human rights and for these strategy papers to be made available to Parliament;
- to involve women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts;
- to call for an overall strategic, prioritised and longer-term approach which ensures that gender equality is put at the heart of all policies, programmes, projects and activities promoted at EU level;
- to create a Human Rights and Democracy Directorate within the EEAS;
- to support regional programmes to protect the most vulnerable individuals, particularly for the benefit of children, women and older people;
- to strengthen electoral observations mission;
- to enhance the EP's standing delegations and the joint parliamentary assemblies role;
- to promote the role of women as peacemakers in preventing and resolving conflicts, and seeks their active involvement for the benefit of society;
- to emphasise that governments must be held accountable for human rights violations, bad governance, corruption and misappropriation of national resources intended to be used for the benefit of the whole of society;
- to strengthen the EIDHR and improve and streamline other existing instruments and frameworks aimed at democracy support in third countries.

Parliament calls on the EU to link future financial commitments to the progress made by third countries in the implementation of human rights strategies and real democratic progress.

Strengthening gender equality in the democratisation process: in addition to the aforementioned measures, Plenary stresses the importance, for the democratisation of any society, of protecting the rights of girls and women, including the rights to equal treatment and education. It firmly supports all initiatives, incentives and capacity-building measures included in EU external policies with a view to promoting participation by women in decision-making at all levels in both the public and the private sphere. It highlights the fact that equal participation by women and men in all spheres of life is a crucial element of democracy and that women's participation in development constitutes a fundamental and universally accepted value and precondition for socioeconomic development and good democratic governance. Parliament urges the EU institutions to make **gender equality a priority** on their agenda for democracy promotion. The resolution stresses the importance of supporting defenders of women's rights and female parliamentarians, inter alia by developing gender budgeting capacities.

It calls on the EU to **support financially**, and provide capacity-building to, **women's rights organisations and female political candidates**.

Parliament supports mainstreaming and reinforcing gender equality issues in thematic priorities and through the use of participatory approaches in programme design and development, with an emphasis on combating gender stereotypes and all forms of discrimination and violence against women.

Supporting civil society: Parliament calls for the support for both local and regional organisations, which help to consolidate democracy by creating fora for dialogue and exchange of good practice with the Union. It proposes developing a **more open and active policy** of supporting driving forces in society and those encouraging civic participation. It suggests fostering the influence of civil society by means of specific programmes and by incorporating this concept into existing programmes. The resolution: (i) emphasises the need to enhance civil society capacities through education and awareness-raising; (ii) calls for targeted support for non-extremist social movements, genuinely independent media and political in order to promote public participation, support sustainable multi-party systems and improve human rights;

(iii) supports the established practice of looking for innovative ways to involve civil society, political parties, the media and other non-governmental political players in the EU's dialogues with third countries; (iv) reiterates its support for the freedom, protection and promotion of the media, for the reduction of the digital divide and for the facilitation of internet access; (v) supports funding for civil society through the EIDHR and allocating funds to local NGO projects; (vi) suggests allocating progressively more funds if the situation in the country is such that there is a civil society and democracy on the road to success.