Human rights in the world 2012 and European Union's policy on the matter

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The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Eduard KUKAN (EPP, SK) on the Annual Report on Human Rights in the World 2012 and the European Union's policy on the matter.

General points: Members considered human rights to be at the centre of the EU's relations with all third countries, including its strategic partners. EU human rights policy needs to be consistent in complying with the Treaty obligations, ensuring coherence between internal and external policies and avoiding double standards in external policies.

Accordingly, Members called for the adoption of EU Foreign Affairs Council Conclusions on human rights and strategic partners that would **establish a common threshold in terms of the human rights concerns**. They called on the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security (VP/HR), the EU Special Representative for Human Rights and the EEAS to pursue these commitments and mainstream human rights and democracy in the EU's relations with its partners.

Recognising that EU institutions and all Member States should take a firm and coherent approach to human rights abuses worldwide, Members called for **close cooperation** on the EU Strategic Framework on Human Rights and Democracy with Council.

The 2012 EU Annual Report: recalling the main objectives of the annual report as well as the actions taken by the EU to promote human rights and democracy worldwide, Members called for use to be made of Parliament's achievements and potential, including the numerous studies and analyses carried out by Parliament. They encouraged the VP/HR and the EEAS to **report on the EU action taken on Parliament's resolutions,** including on urgency resolutions. They also welcomed the EU Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World in 2012, as it showed the efforts that the EU is deploying to promote the mainstreaming of human rights, gender equality, democracy and good governance in development policies and instruments.

Members discussed the content of the report as follows:

EU Policy Framework: the report underlines the need for a **general consensus** and enhanced coordination of the EU's human rights policy **between the EU institutions and the Member States.** It stressed that credibility requires adequate resourcing of dedicated human rights policies and regretted the fact that economic, social and cultural rights remain largely neglected by the EU's human rights policy. Noting that the **current Action Plan** would be concluded at the end of 2014, Members expected the VP /HR and the EEAS to engage in a timely review and consultations with the Member States, the Commission, Parliament and civil society, leading to a new Action Plan that would take effect **in 2015.**

Members also made some recommendations on the following points :

- **the EU Special Representative for Human Rights** should enhance the visibility, mainstreaming, coherence, consistency and effectiveness of EU human rights policy ;

- **EU Guidelines on Human Rights** should involve more involvement with the European Parliament regarding their definition and implementation ;

- **human rights dialogues with third countries** should be more meaningful and effective;

- **human rights country strategies and human rights focal points** should entail transparency regarding the contents of the country strategies;

- **human rights in the EU‘s trade policy** should include legally binding and non-negotiable human rights clauses in the EU‘s international agreements concluded with third countries, with Parliament withholding its consent to international agreements when serious breaches of human rights occur;

- human rights in EU development policies should include extensive impact assessments of EU development cooperation projects.

European Union policy on transition processes : Members noted that the Union should give its full support to countries that have dislodged authoritarian regimes and are undergoing a transition to democracy by supporting civil society as a crucial actor. Considers the EU’s external financial instruments an important tool for promoting and defending EU values abroad, including the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR).

They welcomed the creation of the European Endowment for Democracy (EED), and recommended :

- an **enlargement process** as a means of supporting democratisation and enhancing human rights protection;

- **a Neighbourhood Policy** differentiating between the Southern and Eastern dimensions of the Neighbourhood Policy in order to target the specific needs of each country in the light of the deteriorating human rights situation in Ukraine, Belorussia, Egypt and especially in Syria ;

- **peace-building measures** following crisis periods, through utilising all international bodies such as the ICC. Members welcomed the launch in January 2014 of the EU Aid Volunteers initiative, which would create opportunities for more than 8 000 EU and non-EU citizens to be trained for and deployed to humanitarian operations worldwide;

- measures for **trapped transition countries**, where human rights defenders are particularly vulnerable, such as Russia, Cuba, China, North Korea or the Sahel;

- following up on the Election Observation Missions;

- measures in support of freedom of expression, with emphasis on the right of free access to the internet as a form of free expression.

EU support for universal human rights: Members supported fully the affirmative position taken by the EU regarding the promotion and protection of all human rights, as well as the pledge to ‘speak out against any attempt to undermine respect for the universality of human rights’. They reiterated their full support for the **indivisibility and universality of human rights.**

Members particularly expressed support for the UN human rights system and for the International Criminal Court (ICC). They called on the EU Member States to fully implement the Rome Statute by aligning national legislation with all Statute obligations and to comply with the ICC‘s requests for assistance and cooperation at all stages of the Court‘s proceedings.

Once again, Members reiterated their univocal opposition to capital punishment, and considered implementation of a universal moratorium with a view to the global abolition of the death penalty to be a central objective of the EU‘s policy on human rights.

Lastly, they called for :

- European companies to ensure that their activities respect human rights standards, including when operating outside the EU ;
- effective and strong measures in the fight against all forms of discrimination, including with regard to LGBT persons ;
- reaffirmation of the principles of freedom of conscience and religion, condemning the blasphemy laws in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Egypt, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia which allow for imprisonment and the death penalty;
- the rights and empowerment of women and children, condemning again all forms of violence against women including domestic violence, genital mutilation, sexual abuse of young girls, early and forced marriages, feminicides and other gender-based human rights violations.)