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

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The European Parliament adopted a resolution on the Annual Report on Human Rights in the World 2012 and the European Union's policy on the matter.

General points: Parliament 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, it 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**. It also 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, the resolution called for use to be made of Parliament's achievements and potential, including the numerous studies and analyses carried out by Parliament. It encouraged the VP/HR and the EEAS to **report on the EU action taken on Parliament' s resolutions,** including on urgency resolutions. It 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 in third countries.

The resolution also reiterated its view that the country reports should be further strengthened and should reflect the implementation of the human rights country strategies and thus refer to specific benchmarks based on a set of indicators to assess both positive and negative trends.

Parliament discussed the content of the report as follows:

EU Policy Framework: Parliament underlined 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, Parliament 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, in particular on women's

rights and the rights of all minorities, and to strike the right balance between silent and public diplomacy in carrying out his mandate;

- **EU Guidelines on Human Rights** should involve more involvement with the European Parliament regarding their definition and implementation and the correct implementation of the human rights of LGBTI persons;
- **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: Parliament 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. It considered 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). It 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 Ukraine, Belorussia, Egypt and **especially in Syria.** Plenary supported the democratic and pro-European processes in Ukraine and condemns the recent use of force against peaceful public demonstrations in Kiev;
- peace-building measures following crisis periods, through utilising all international bodies such as the ICC. Parliament 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;
- urgent need to bring about a fair and lasting solution to the conflict in the Middle East with a view to achieving a two-State solution – an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State and the State of Israel, living side by side in peace and security on the basis of the internationally recognised 1967 borders;
- measures for trapped transition countries, where human rights defenders are particularly vulnerable, such as Russia, Cuba, China, North Korea or the Saheland called for a guarantee of human rights for the Saharawi people;
- 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: Parliament 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'. It reiterated their full support for the **indivisibility and universality of human rights.**

Plenary regretted the adoption by the United Nations Human Rights Council of its resolution A/HRC/RES /21/3 on traditional values, undermining the principle of universal and indivisible human rights, and commends the EU's opposition to it.

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 in several sub-Saharan countries, especially Uganda, Nigeria, Cameroon and Senegal;
- 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) and measures to further protect reproductive rights and stresses the need to place these policies at the heart of development cooperation with third countries;
- the EU to develop a **common EU position on armed drones**.