Annual report on human rights and democracy in the world 2013 and the European Union’s policy on the matter

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The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Pier Antonio PANZERI (S&D, IT) on the Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World 2013 and the European Union’s policy on the matter.

Centrality of human rights in EU external policies: the report called on all the EU institutions and the Member States to place **human rights at the centre of the EU’s relations with all third countries**, including its strategic partners and in all high-level statements and meetings. It reiterated its call for the systematic inclusion of binding, enforceable and non-negotiable human rights clauses in the EU's **international agreements**, including trade and investment agreements concluded or to be concluded with third countries.

In addition to human suffering, the EU should also take into account all the consequences of the non-observance of human rights where failure to respect human rights and lack of legitimate democratic participation lead to instability, corruption, failed states, humanitarian crises or armed conflicts.

As regards the implementation of the **EU Strategic Framework and Action Plan**, Members called on the VP/HR, in coordination with all the other Commissioners, to draft a programme that mainstreams human rights in various EU activities, particularly in the areas of development, migration, the environment, employment, internet data protection, trade, investment, technology and businesses. The need to ensure **coherence between internal and external policies** and avoiding double standards has been stressed.

Moreover, recognising the importance of the mandate given to the first ever **EU Special Representative (EUSR) for Human Rights**, the report called on the Council to adopt as a general principle the practice of including cooperation with the EUSR for Human Rights systematically in the mandate of future geographical EUSRs.

EU human rights policy tools: the report made the following recommendations:

- the public disclosure of the key priorities of each **country strategy**, and for Parliament to have access to the strategies, in an appropriate setting, so as to allow a proper degree of scrutiny; the need for the EU Delegations to draft an annual report on their activities in the field of human rights;

- the EEAS should develop a comprehensive review mechanism to help evaluate the **dialogues** in the light of their failure to achieve significant and tangible results;

- the Commission should complete the **guidelines**, which ought to set out objectives, criteria, means, timetables and indicators and include a regular review;

- the Commission and the EEAS should support ongoing **democratic processes** in third countries; emphasises, in this connection, the importance of following up on the reports and recommendations of election observation missions by using them as part of the EU's engagement in support of democracy with the country concerned;

- the EU should place a particular focus on the issue of **jailed human rights defenders** around the world and the need for the EU to collectively step up its action to secure the release of these individuals by, among other strategies, establishing a European Parliament internal working group that keeps itself up to date, through close collaboration with civil society, on cases of jailed activists worldwide.

International criminal justice: Members reiterated their full support for the work of the **International Criminal Court (ICC)** in its role of ending the impunity of perpetrators of the most serious crimes of concern to the international community and of providing justice for the victims of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. They called on the EU Member States, as States Parties to the Rome Statute of the ICC, to provide it with the resources it needs to exercise its mandate fairly and effectively. In addition, they reiterated their call for the creation of an **EU Special Representative on International Justice and International Humanitarian Law**.

Moreover, Members stressed the following points:

- to continue to use cooperation and diplomacy in all possible forums worldwide with a view to the abolition of the **death penalty**;

- to step up the EU's efforts in the fight against **torture** and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment;

- to adopt legally binding rules on **corporate social responsibility** (CSR);

- to ensure **freedom of expression rights online and offline** and to limit the impact of surveillance technologies on human rights;

- to ensure EU support for civil society and for freedom of assembly and association and to make it a key priority in the future EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, and to lay out specific actions in that area, as freedom of assembly and association are vital elements for democracy and an open society;

- to condemn all violence and discrimination on the basis of **ideology, religion or belief**, which encompasses the right to believe or not to believe, the right to manifest or not to manifest any religion or belief, and the right to adopt, change and abandon or return to a belief of one's choice, as enshrined in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;

- to combat **violence against women and girls**, notably sexual violence against women and girls as a tactic of war and domestic violence;

- to develop innovative financial mechanisms for implementing fiscal reforms and strengthening the **fight against corruption**, illicit financial flows and tax evasion;

- to prioritise the fight against **trafficking in human beings** in both its internal and external policies;

- to support the efforts of the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights to combat these discriminatory laws against **LGBTI** people (78 countries still criminalise homosexuality, including 7 which provide for the death penalty;

- to propose an ambitious and comprehensive **Child Rights** Strategy and Action Plan for the next five years, as requested in its resolution of 27 November 2014 on the 25th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

EU action on migration and refugees: denouncing the dramatic number of deaths at sea in the Mediterranean, estimated at 3 000 in 2013, the report stressed the urgent need to develop **stronger, more integrated policies** that are more closely rooted in the principle of solidarity at Union level, so as to address the pressing issues relating to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in a manner consistent with international human rights law and fundamental human dignity. It called for the EU to introduce a **common European asylum system** and to guarantee effective common standards for reception procedures throughout the Union in order to protect unaccompanied minors and the most vulnerable.

Lastly, the report emphasised the need for continued reflection regarding the most appropriate ways **to maximise the credibility, visibility and effectiveness of Parliament's resolutions** on breaches of human rights, democracy and the rule of law.