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 European Parliament adopted by 390 votes to 151, with 97 abstentions, a resolution concerning 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: Parliament 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 by the Union whilst ensuring that trade agreements signed with third countries facilitate their **economic and social development** and ensure that their natural resources – including land and water – are well managed.

The Commission and the Member States are called upon to develop a **human-rights-based crisis prevention element** which should be added to the EU's comprehensive approach to external conflict and crises and should be included in the forthcoming revised European Security Strategy.

Implementation of the EU Strategic Framework and Action Plan adopted in 2012: reconfirming the EU's commitment to the Treaty obligation to mainstream human rights in all EU external policies 'without exception', Parliament 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 resolution 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 clarify the selection process covered by the **guidelines** in conjunction with Parliament and civil society representatives and complete the **guidelines**, which ought to set out objectives, criteria, means, timetables and indicators and include a regular review;

- support should be given to the ongoing democratic processes in third countries through the 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. They called for the EU, its Member States and EU Special Representatives actively to promote the ICC, the enforcement of its decisions, and the fight against impunity for crimes under the Rome Statute.

In addition, they reiterated their call for the creation of an **EU Special Representative on International Justice and International Humanitarian Law**.

Moreover, Parliament stressed the following points:

- to maintain a high-profile policy aimed at global 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), including in business operations outside the EU, and ensuring that they are respected throughout the supply chain in particular with regard to the illegal timber trade, wildlife trafficking and trading of minerals from conflict zones;

- 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;

- 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 10 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, Parliament 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.

It called for the EU to introduce a **common European asylum system** and to **guarantee effective common standards for reception procedures** throughout the Union. To this end, it called for the implementation of the crisis mechanism provided for the Dublin Regulation, which would include a **clearlydefined minimum contingent per Member State**, in order to rapidly achieve a functioning crisis mechanism.

Russia and China: highlighting the considerable challenges posed by Russia's annexation of Crimea and the continuing military involvement in eastern Ukraine, Parliament stressed that this policy of aggression is a continuation of Russia's slide towards authoritarian rule, with a worsening human rights situation inside the country; stresses that Russia is now a 'strategic challenge' for the EU, and **no longer complies with strategic partnership criteria**.

Moreover, Parliament urged the EU, in the light, for example, of the failure of the **EU-China** human rights dialogue to achieve significant and tangible results, and of the recent developments in Hong Kong, to rethink its human rights strategy and to adopt a more coherent, unified and strategic approach.

Lastly, the resolution 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.