

Annual report on human rights and democracy in the world 2014 and the European Union's policy on the matter

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The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Cristian Dan PREDA (EPP, RO) on the Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World 2014 and the European Union's policy on the matter.

Recalling that more than half the world's population is still living under non-democratic and repressive regimes and global freedom has continuously declined over the past few years, the report stressed that human rights and democracy support policy should be mainstreamed across all other EU policies with an external dimension, such as development, migration, security, counter-terrorism, enlargement and trade, in order to continue the promotion of respect for human rights.

EU Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World: Members considered that the Annual Report is an indispensable tool for scrutiny, communication and debate regarding the EU's policy on human rights, democracy and the rule of law in the world. The EEAS and the Commission are called upon to ensure comprehensive **follow-up** to the issues raised in the Annual Report, including specific proposals tailored to resolving these problems. They also considered that the current format of the Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy could be improved by offering a better overview of the concrete impact of the EU's actions on human rights and democracy in third countries.

EU Strategic Framework and the (new) Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy: the report welcomed the adoption by the Council in July 2015 of a new Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy for 2015-2019. In order to fulfil the ambitious objectives set out in the new Action Plan, the EU must set aside sufficient resources and expertise, both in terms of dedicated human resources in Delegations and in Headquarters and in terms of funds available for projects.

Mandate of the EU Special Representative for Human Rights: Members welcomed the extension of the EUSR's mandate until February 2017, and reiterated their request for this mandate to be turned into a permanent one. They called, therefore, for the revision of the mandate, so as to grant the EUSR own-initiative powers, adequate staff and financial resources.

Enlargement and neighbourhood policy: Members expressed their conviction that the **revised European Neighbourhood Policy** should continue to have the promotion of human rights and democratic principles at its core.

EU action on migration and refugees: expressing deep regret at the tragic loss of lives among people trying to reach the EU's borders, Members stressed the urgent need to **tackle the root causes** of migration flows. There is an urgent need to **develop stronger policies** at Union level in order to deal with the pressing issues related to migrants and refugees and find an effective, fair and sustainable mechanism for burden-sharing among Member States.

Member reiterated their call for an EU **common position on the use of armed drones** which upholds human rights and international humanitarian law and should address issues such as legal framework, proportionality, accountability, protection of civilians and transparency.

Freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief: the report called on the EU and the Member States to step up their efforts to contribute to the eradication of all form of religious discrimination and to promote inter-religious dialogue when engaging with third countries. Members maintain their view that the **worldwide abolition of the death penalty** should be one of the **EU's central objectives** as regards human rights.

Respect for the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex (LGBTI) and persons with disabilities should be enhanced.

Rights of women and girls: the report strongly condemned all forms of abuse and violence against women, girls and children, especially the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war. Members stressed the need for women, girls and children abused in conflicts to have access to health and psychological care. Members called on the Commission, the EEAS and the VP/HR to continue promoting the political and economic empowerment of women and girls by mainstreaming gender equality in all their external policies and programmes and ensuring sufficient resources for this purpose.

Children's rights: reaffirming the urgent need for universal ratification and effective implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Child and its Optional Protocols, Members called on all states to commit themselves to eliminating the worst forms of child labour which include child slavery, trafficking, prostitution, and hazardous work affecting a child's physical and mental health.

The Commission is urged once again to propose a **comprehensive Child Rights Strategy and Action Plan** for the next five years, in order to prioritise children's rights within EU external policies.

Defending freedom of expression and strengthening civil society: the EU and its Member States should enhance their monitoring of all types of restrictions on freedom of expression and the media in third countries, and to rapidly and systematically condemn such limitations even when imposed with legitimate aims such as counter-terrorism, state security or law enforcement. Increased support is needed in the areas of promoting freedom of the media, protecting independent journalists and bloggers.

EU support for human rights defenders: renewed efforts are required to challenge the restrictions and intimidation that people working for civil society organisations face worldwide, and for the **EU to set an example** in protecting and promoting the rights concerned. Members called on the Commission, the EEAS and the EU Delegations to ensure that the **funding available for human rights defenders is properly used**.

Supporting electoral processes in third countries: Members reiterated their positive view of the EU's continued support for electoral processes and its provision of electoral assistance and support for domestic observers. However, proper follow-up is needed of the Election Observation Missions (EOMs) in order to enhance their impact.

Enhancing the European Parliament's actions on human rights: lastly, Members 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. They encouraged discussion of the inclusion of the different tools available to Parliament regarding support for and promotion of human rights in a **single strategy document**, to be adopted by Parliament in plenary.