

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 European Parliament adopted by 421 votes to 86, with 116 abstentions, a resolution 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, Parliament 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.

Consistent EU action: Parliament insisted on the importance of ensuring coherence of EU policy towards situations of occupation or annexation of territory and recalled that it expressed its **firm opposition to the annexation, occupation and settlement of territories**, and insists on the inalienable right of peoples to self-determination. In general, Parliament considered that the EU and its Member States need to speak with a consistent, single voice and ensure that their message is heard.

EU Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World: Parliament 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. It 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: Parliament 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. It reiterated its view that a **solid consensus** and enhanced coordination between Member States and the EU institutions is needed in order to coherently and consistently advance the human rights and democracy agenda. In this regard, Member States should, without exception, take on greater ownership of the implementation of the Action Plan and of the EU Strategic Framework and use them as their **own blueprint in promoting human rights** and democracy bilaterally and multilaterally.

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

Human rights country strategies and the role of the EU Delegations: Parliament recalled its recommendation to the VP/HR and the EEAS to develop clear operational guidelines as to the role of focal points in Delegations, in order to **empower them to act as true human rights advisors**. This

should enable them to efficiently carry out their work with coherence and inclusiveness, so as to optimise the work of the Delegations. The work of the human rights focal points should be fully independent and free of political interference and harassment from national authorities of third countries. The EU and its delegations should increase their political dialogue with governments in breach of human rights and this dialogue must include a more inclusive and comprehensive definition of non-discrimination, inter alia with regard to LGBTI people, religion or belief, sex, racial or ethnic origin, age, disability and sexual orientation.

Enlargement and neighbourhood policy: Parliament recalled that EU enlargement policy is one of the strongest tools for reinforcing respect for human rights and democratic principles. It noted that the enlargement process will be pursued despite the fact that no enlargement can take place until 2019 because of the state of negotiations and the situation in the countries concerned.

Human rights through trade: Parliament reiterated its support for the **systematic introduction of human rights clauses in all international agreements** between the EU and third countries. It called on the Commission to effectively and systematically monitor and assess the implementation of the human rights clauses and to report regularly to Parliament on partner countries' respect for human rights.

It considered that trade and human rights can go hand in hand and that the business community has an important role to play in promoting human rights and democracy. It reaffirmed in this context that European companies should undertake adequate measures to ensure that their operations in third countries respect human rights standards. It also reaffirmed the importance for the EU to promote corporate social responsibility and for European enterprises to play a leading role in promoting international standards on business and human rights.

Da'esh: Parliament took a positive note of the counter-terrorism guidance document drafted by the EEAS and the Commission and endorsed by the Council with the aim of ensuring respect for human rights in the planning and implementation of counter-terrorism assistance projects with third countries. It recalled that respect for fundamental rights and freedoms is the foundation of successful counter-terrorism policies, including the use of digital surveillance technologies. **It supported the international efforts to stop the human rights violations being perpetrated by ISIS/Da'esh.**

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. They stressed the 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.**

It called on the Union to participate actively in the debate on the term 'climate refugee' and reiterated its 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. Once again, Parliament urged the EU to ban the development, production and use of fully autonomous weapons which enable strikes to be carried out without human intervention.

Western Sahara: in an amendment adopted in plenary, Parliament called for the fundamental rights of the people of Western Sahara, including freedom of association, freedom of expression and the right to assembly, to be respected demanded the release of all Sahrawi political prisoners.

Freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief: the resolution 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. Parliament maintained its view that the **worldwide abolition of the death penalty** should be one of the **EU's central objectives** as regards

human rights. Members expressed concern at the growing number of death sentences and executions worldwide (e.g. in Belarus).

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

Rights of women and girls: Parliament strongly condemned all forms of abuse and violence against women, girls and children, especially the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war. It stressed the need for women, girls and children abused in conflicts to have access to health and psychological care. It 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.

In parallel, Parliament deplored the fact that half the world's population is faced with wage discrimination, and that globally women earn between 60 and 90 % of men's average income. It invited 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, including through structured dialogues with third countries.

Parliament also stressed the importance of **family planning, maternal health and easy access to contraception and safe abortion** in saving women's lives and helping them rebuild their lives if they have been victims of rape. These policies should be placed at the core of development cooperation with third countries. Parliament condemned the practice of **surrogacy**, which undermines the human dignity of the woman since her body and its reproductive functions are used as a commodity. For the Parliament, **this practice should be prohibited and treated as a matter of urgency in human rights instruments.**

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, Parliament 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. Parliament 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: Parliament reiterated its 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, Parliament 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. It 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.