Annual report on human rights and democracy in the world and the European Union’s policy on the matter 2015

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The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Josef WEIDENHOLZER (S&D, AT) on the Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World 2015 and the European Union’s policy on the matter.

Centrality of human rights in EU external policies: Members expressed their serious concern that the protection of human rights and democratic values are **under threat worldwide**. They called on all the EU institutions and Member States to act on their commitments to promote democracy and the rule of law, protect human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development by all peaceful means, and to place human rights at the centre of the EU's relations with all third countries

They were also deeply concerned that **many human rights defenders are under attack** nowadays, and called on the EU, and the VP/HR in particular, to adopt a policy to denounce, systematically and unequivocally, the killing of HRDs and any attempt to subject them to any form of violence or threat. The report also wanted to see the EU and its Member States promoting a **free space for civil society**, calling for the establishment of a system to monitor civil society space effectively and with clear benchmarks and indicators. It reiterated the importance of the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) in providing urgent direct financial and material support for HRDs at risk. It supported the EU Special Representative's focus, as a key priority during his mandate, on the promotion and protection of an open space for civil society and HRDs, and called for regular reports to Parliament after his visits.

In addition, Members encouraged:

- the establishment of national human rights institutions (NHRIs), in accordance with the United Nations' Paris Principles, with sufficient mandate, resources and expertise to fulfil the safeguarding of human rights.
- further inter-parliamentary relations between the Union and its partner countries.

They went on to welcome the adoption of the **EU Strategic Framework and the new Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy (2015-2019),** calling also for sufficient resources and expertise, both in terms of dedicated human resources in delegations and at the Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS).

The report made the following recommendations:

- **Human Rights and Democracy Country Strategies (HRDCSs)** should correspond to EU actions to be implemented in each country depending on specific situations, and should contain measurable progress indicators. The European Parliament should give access to the HRDCSs and as well as information on how the EU implements these strategies;
- the EEAS should develop a mechanism for **reviewing Human Rights Dialogues**, with a view to improving them, and alternative tools to support the advancement of human rights should dialogues fail ;

- the Commission should conduct a thorough evaluation of the implementation of the **Guidelines on human rights** by EU Delegations and Member States' diplomatic representations in all third countries;
- the EU and its Member States should support, in the process of building sustainable reconciliation, the **systematic participation of women** as a vital component of peace processes;
- **further European military integration** is needed improve European armed forces' readiness and flexibility, in order to allow them to respond to threats and to instances of grave violations of human rights, genocide or ethnic cleansing;
- the concept of 'Responsibility to Protect' should be consolidated into international law.

On **migration,** the report called urgently for measures to improve the coherence of the migration policies, and stressed the need for a holistic approach to find sustainable, long-term and coherent solutions, based on international human rights standards while tackling the root causes of the refugee crisis. The EU and the Member States were asked to establish full transparency concerning the **funds allocated to third countries** for cooperation on migration, and ensure that such cooperation does not benefit, directly or indirectly, security, police and justice systems involved in human rights violations.

Moreover, Members stressed the following points:

- the EU must make the **fight against trafficking in human beings** a priority in its external policies, addressing both the demand and supply side of the phenomenon, with all Member States implementing Directive 2011/36/EU;
- human rights for all must be a cross-cutting feature in the achievement of all goals and targets of the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**;
- the EU should ensure that the necessary guidelines, impact assessments and reporting mechanisms make **Policy Coherence for Development** a reality in EU policies and in those of its Member States;
- **trade and human rights** can go hand in hand, and there should be comprehensive implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights;
- the Commission should ensure that implementation of the **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)** is raised systematically in human rights dialogues with third countries;
- **women's rights** cannot be compromised in deference to specific proscriptions by any religion or belief, and the EU should step up its support to the implementation of the obligations and commitments in the area of women's rights;
- the EU should systematically consult with local and international child rights organisations, and raise, in its political and human rights dialogues with third countries, the issue of State parties' obligations to implement the **UN Convention on the Rights of Child to which the EU should accede**;
- the EU should contribute further to reflections on the recognition of **same-sex marriages or same-sex civil unions** as a political, social, human and civil rights issue;
- the EU should further protect **the rights of indigenous people and of persons belonging to minorities,** who are particularly affected by human rights violations related to resource extraction;
- the EU should continue to use cooperation and diplomacy in all possible forums worldwide to **advocate against the death penalty**;
- the VP/HR should launch an initiative aimed at imposing an **EU arms embargo** against countries that are accused of serious allegations of breaches of **international humanitarian law (IHL),** notably with regard to the **deliberate targeting of civilian infrastructure.**

Lastly, Members expressed grave concern over the **use of armed drones** outside the international legal framework, urging Member States to articulate clear policy and legal positions and reiterating their call for an EU common position on the use of armed drones, which upholds human rights and IHL.