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 European Parliament adopted by 463 votes to 115 with 113 abstentions a resolution 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: Parliament expressed its serious concern that the protection of human rights and democratic values are **under threat worldwide**. It 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

It was 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 resolution 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).

United Nations: Parliament underlined the need for the EU leadership to push for reforms of the UN with the goal of ensuring more efficient human rights protection and the advancement of international law. It encouraged the EU to intensify the practice of cross-regional initiatives, to initiate and co-sponsor resolutions, and to closely follow the UN Universal Periodic Review (UPR) procedure. The resolution condemned the fact that **seats on the UNHRC are often occupied by countries with proven track record of grave human rights violations,** and called on the EU Member States to publicise their UNHRC votes.

Parliament 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;
- **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,** Parliament 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.

In addition, Parliament pointed out that CSDP missions such as European Union Naval Force – Mediterranean Operation Sophia (EUNAVFOR MED) are an effective way of tackling migrant smuggling, calling for such operations to be stepped up.

Role of women: Parliament supported the implementation of the UN Security Council's recent Resolution 2242 making women a central component in all efforts to address global challenges and calling for additional efforts to integrate the women, peace and security agendas in all the different dimensions of peacekeeping. It recommended that a quota system be introduced in order to provide a way of promoting women's participation at all political levels, and stressed the importance of women's equal, full and active participation in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, and in the peace negotiation and peace-building process.

Moreover, the resolution 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.**

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

Lastly, it reiterated its strong call for the systematic introduction of human rights clauses in all international agreements, including trade and investment agreements between the EU and third countries. There should be ex ante monitoring mechanisms before any framework agreement is concluded, and on which such conclusion is made conditional as a fundamental part of the agreement. Parliament also wanted to see ex post monitoring mechanisms that enable tangible action to be taken in response to infringements of these clauses, such as appropriate sanctions.