Hong Kong, 20 years after handover. Recommendation to the Council, the Commission, and the EEAS

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The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Alyn SMITH (Greens/EFA, UK) on a European Parliament recommendation to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on Hong Kong, 20 years after handover.

The recommendations on Hong Kong mark the 20th anniversary of Hong Kong handover from the United Kingdom to China on 1 July 1997. Members recalled that the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration guaranteed, and the 1990 Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) stipulates that Hong Kong will maintain the autonomy and independence of the executive, legislature and judiciary for 50 years after the handover of sovereignty. It made the following points in its recommendations tothe Council, the Commission and the Vice President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy:

One China, but two systems: the committee confirmed that the EU and the European Parliament remain strong supporters of the '**one country, two systems'** principle and Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy under China. This principle is of key importance for the further strengthening of present and future relations with the EU, and it should be underlined to Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) and China that **intervening in Hong Kong's internal affairs** has the potential to undermine that principle and should therefore be avoided. Members **condemned the constant interference of the PRC** in Hong Kong's internal affairs, which may put at risk the long-term viability of the 'one country, two systems' model.

Bilateral dialogue: Members recommended that the EU **reinforce bilateral dialogue** with the Government of the Hong Kong SAR on a wide range of topics and policy areas, such as democracy, human rights, the rule of law, trade, investment, financial services, customs, the environment, climate change, research and education, to support the implementation of the 'one country, two systems' principle.

Reform and elections: the report supported the start of a political reform process that **grants the people of the SAR the right to elect and to be elected** in the selection process for top leadership positions, and which reflects the majority view within Hong Kong public opinion. The Governments of Hong Kong and China must maintain their commitment and to build up momentum once again for the reform of **universal suffrage** in the future election of the Chief Executive and the members of the Legislative Council in Hong Kong, in order to have an election system that is democratic, fair, open and transparent.

Press freedom and harassment of opposition political parties: Members expressed concern at the increasing harassment of opposition political parties and the refusal of the Companies Registry to register a number of pro-democracy groups. They condemned threats to the personal safety of pro-democracy politicians, including abductions and physical violence, as reported by some lawmakers.

They also expressed concern at the **steady deterioration of press freedom in Hong Kong**, with growing pressure on the media, both print and electronic, increasing self-censorship with regard to covering

sensitive issues on mainland China or concerning the Hong Kong Government, and the tightening of control over the sale of sensitive political books by monopolising ownership of almost all storefront bookshops.

EU support: Members recommended that the EU find ways to support the **independence of the judiciary** which is under some pressure as well as support **Hong Kong's civil society**, in particular organisations that uphold universal values, promote human rights and support the independence of the judiciary and press freedom.

North Korea: lastly, Members noted with concern that the UN Panel of Experts on North Korea has established in its reports that Hong Kong is one of two business jurisdictions in which the largest share of North Korean-controlled front companies have been operating. Joint international ventures with North Korea are in violation of the most recent UN Security Council resolution (2388) and Members urged the Hong Kong authorities to address the concerns of the UN Panel of Experts on North Korea.