Annual report on human rights and democracy in the world 2017 and the European Union’s policy on the matter

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The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the report by Petras AUŠTREVIIUS (ADLE, LT) on the Annual report on human rights and democracy in the world 2017 and the European Union’s policy on the matter.

Members expressed profound concern at the **pushback against democracy, human rights and the rule of law worldwide in 2017**, and urged the EU to:

- pursue unconditionally the **mainstreaming of the European and international standards** regarding human rights, the rule of law, democracy and the rights of minorities to which they are bound;
- ensure **increased coherence between the EU’s internal and external human rights policies** and greater coordination between the external policies of the Member States, in fields such as migration, counter-terrorism, development women's rights and gender equality, enlargement and trade, in particular through the implementation of human rights conditionality;
- strive to be the **leading global actor in the universal promotion and protection of human rights**, including on the level of multilateral cooperation, in particular through an active and constructive role in diverse UN bodies and in compliance with the UN Charter, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and international law, as well as the obligations in the area of human rights and of the commitments assumed under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Specific challenges: Members expressed grave concern at the gradual shrinking of civil society space in 2017, and deplored the fact that human rights defenders, journalists and NGOs are too often the targets of harassment, intimidation and violence, including killings. They regretted the fact that the increasing global phenomenon of shrinking civil society space might also occur in established democracies and middle- and high-income countries. The European Union and its Member States should allocate more financial resources to promoting and strengthening the participation of civil society in the protection and support of human rights defenders at risk.

The EU was also asked, *inter alia*, to:

- pay special attention to the independence of the judiciary and the transparency the absolute transparency of a system for the administration of justice in the context of its diplomatic relations with non-EU countries;
- develop a stronger positive narrative on human rights, to stand firm in the face of governments sponsoring disinformation or challenging the universality and indivisibility of human rights, and to increase its efforts to support free and independent media worldwide;
- step up its action to improve respect for freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief and to encourage intercultural and inter-religious dialogue when it cooperates with third countries and to eradicate torture, inhuman or degrading treatment and the death penalty;
- encourage all UN member states to ratify and implement the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC);

- urgently develop a legally binding framework for the use of armed drones and work towards an international ban on weapon systems that lack human control over the use of force;
- develop programs covering both human rights and the fight against corruption, in particular projects aimed at improving transparency, combating impunity, strengthening anti-corruption agencies and improving the transparency and traceability of the use of European funds;
- fight all forms of violence against women, including domestic violence; Member States that have not yet done so are invited to ratify the Istanbul Convention as soon as possible;
- continue to include support for women in Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) operations, conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction;
- cooperate with third countries to end early marriages, child marriages and forced marriages by setting the legal minimum age for marriage at 18 and to develop an action plan to stop children being detained as a result of their migratory status;
- strengthen efforts to prevent and combat terrorism and radicalisation, including EU-wide initiatives and networks such as the Radicalisation Awareness Network;
- integrate climate diplomacy into EU policies for conflict prevention.

Members recalled that the **EU action plan** on human rights and democracy 2015-2019 and its midterm review in 2017 should serve as a guide for any action on human rights. The current action plan contains 34 types of actions, which correspond to the following broader objectives: boosting ownership of local actors, addressing human rights challenges, ensuring a comprehensive human rights approach to conflict and crises, fostering better coherence and consistency and a more effective EU human rights and democracy support policy.

Members stressed in this respect the need to **provide sufficient resources** and expertise to properly implement key Union priorities. They underlined the importance of **parliamentary scrutiny** in order to exercise oversight over the other institutions, to ensure the proper use of the EU budget and to ensure the correct application of EU law.