# 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 European Parliament adopted by 369 votes to 115 with 119 abstentions a resolution on the annual report on human rights and democracy in the world 2017 and the European Union's policy on the matter.

It expressed profound concern at the pushback against democracy, human rights and the rule of law worldwide in 2017, and urged the Council to adopt the sanctions provided for in EU legislation when they are deemed necessary to achieving the objectives of the common foreign and security policy (CFSP).

Parliament urged the EU to:

- 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, 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.

**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 the participation of civil society in the protection and support of human rights defenders at risk.

Parliament went on to welcome the EU's signature of the Istanbul Convention and called on the Member States that have not yet done so to ratify and implement this Convention as soon as possible. Stressing the importance of reliable statistics on the prevalence, causes and consequences of all types of violence against women, it called for the EU to help countries to improve data collection in this area and meet international legal obligations. The EU was asked to work with other countries to step up funding and programming to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence worldwide. Parliament stressed that **proper and affordable healthcare and access to sexual and reproductive rights** and education should be guaranteed for all women and that they should be able to make free and responsible decisions about their health, body and sexual and reproductive rights.

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

- pay special attention to the independence of the judiciary and the need for transparency in the administration of justice in the context of its diplomatic relations with non-EU countries;

- stand firm in the face of governments sponsoring disinformation and to increase its efforts to support free and independent media worldwide;

- step up its action to improve respect for freedom of thought, 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 and improving the transparency and traceability of the use of European funds;

- 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.

Parliament emphasised the possibility of separating development cooperation from cooperation on readmission and migration management, and was concerned about the possible instrumentalisation of EU foreign policy as ‘migration management’. It stressed the urgent need to tackle the root causes of migration flows and therefore to address the external dimension of the phenomenon of migration, including by finding sustainable solutions to conflicts and economic underdevelopment, in the EU’s neighbourhood and worldwide. Members called on the Commission to continue to treat the protection and promotion of the rights of migrants and refugees as a priority in its policies. They stressed the need for safe and legal migration routes and humanitarian visas. They called for Parliament to have oversight of migration agreements. Member States were asked to engage in a serious dialogue to establish a common understanding, shared responsibilities and a unity of purpose with regard to migration.

Parliament 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. It stressed the need to **provide sufficient resources** and expertise to properly implement key Union priorities, and 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.