Recommendation on the new comprehensive agreement between EU/Uzbekistan

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The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the report by David McALLISTER (EPP, DE) 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 the new comprehensive agreement between the EU and Uzbekistan.

The committee suggested that Parliament should make the following recommendations to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR/VP):

EU-Uzbekistan relations

- welcome the commitments and steps taken by Uzbekistan towards a more open society and stress the EU's interest in strengthening its relations with Uzbekistan on the basis of common values and acknowledge Uzbekistan's role as an important cultural and political bridge between Europe and Asia;
- ensure a regular and thorough dialogue and monitor the full implementation of political and democratic reforms aimed at creating an independent judiciary, an independent parliament following a genuine election, the protection of human rights, gender equality and media freedom, depoliticize the security services and closely involve civil society in the reform process;
- support Uzbekistan's commitment to ongoing structural, administrative and economic reforms aimed at improving the business climate and security services, working conditions and the responsibility and effectiveness of the administration;
- ensure that human rights defenders, civil society, international observers and human rights organisations can operate freely in a legally sound and politically safe environment;
- call for the release of all remaining political prisoners and all other individuals imprisoned or persecuted for political reasons such as human rights activists, civil society and religious activists, journalists and members of the opposition;
- expect the Government of Uzbekistan to take measures to eradicate all forms of forced labour financed by the State in the cotton and silk industries and in other areas;
- encourage the authorities to define action plans to reduce unemployment in the country, including by opening up the private sector and strengthening small and medium-sized enterprises;
- urge the authorities to provide the necessary support to enable Uzbekistan, and in particular the Autonomous Republic of Karakalpakstan, to cope with the economic, social and health related consequences of the environmental disaster in the Aral Sea;
- improve the local health care system and increase national resources for this purpose;
- ensure effective cooperation in the fight against corruption, money laundering and tax evasion.

New comprehensive agreement

Members called for negotiations to be used to support genuine and sustainable progress towards an accountable and democratic regime that guarantees and protects the fundamental rights of all citizens and

to negotiate a comprehensive and ambitious agreement between the EU and Uzbekistan by strengthening political cooperation, trade and investment relations and cooperation in the fields of sustainable development, environmental protection, connectivity, human rights and governance.

Members called for:

- support Uzbekistan's renewed efforts towards multilateral and international cooperation on global and regional challenges;
- ensure that the comprehensive agreement facilitates and strengthens regional cooperation and the peaceful settlement of existing disputes, paving the way for genuine good neighbourly relations;
- strengthen provisions on trade and economic relations by better linking them to human rights provisions and by committing to the implementation of the UN Guidelines on Business and Human Rights;
- ensure the participation of all relevant actors, including civil society, both in the negotiations and in the implementation phase of the agreement;
- include provisions on the possible suspension of cooperation in the event of a breach of an essential element of the Agreement by either Party, in particular with regard to respect for democracy, human rights and the rule of law, including consultation of the European Parliament in such cases.

The European Parliament should be closely involved in monitoring the implementation of all sections of the agreement once it enters into force.