Recommendation on the new comprehensive agreement between EU/Uzbekistan

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The European Parliament adopted a 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.

On 23 November 2018, the Union and Uzbekistan launched negotiations on a comprehensive Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (EPCA), with a view to replacing the current EU-Uzbekistan PCA.

The objective of this agreement is to enhance cooperation in areas of mutual interest, based on the common values of democracy, the rule of law, respect for fundamental freedoms and good governance, in order to promote sustainable development and international security and to effectively address global challenges, such as terrorism, climate change and organised crime.

Parliament addressed 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, and amend the provisions of its criminal code relating to extremism, which are sometimes misused to criminalise dissident;

- put an end to pressure and monitoring on the media, stop blocking independent websites and allow international media to accredit correspondents and operate in the country;

- 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 and encourage in this regard increased cooperation with the International Labour Organisation (ILO);

- 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.

- recall the EU's commitment to assist Uzbekistan in its fight against toxic and radioactive waste and encourage Uzbekistan to sign the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons;

- make the provision of assistance to Uzbekistan under the EU's external financial instruments and EIB and EBRD loans conditional on the continuation of reforms.

New comprehensive agreement

Parliament 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.