Situation of Fundamental Rights in the European Union - Annual Report for the years 2018-2019

2019/2199(INI) - 26/11/2020 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 330 votes to 298, with 65 abstentions, a resolution on the situation of Fundamental Rights in the European Union - Annual Report for the years 2018 - 2019.

Members recalled that in the years 2018 and 2019, the EU has faced serious and multifaceted challenges in relation to the protection of fundamental rights, the rule of law and democracy.

Few citizens are aware of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. According to the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), in 2018, not only human rights violations but also the rejection of human rights protection systems as a whole have been observed in the EU.

Economic and social rights

Parliament called on the EU to develop specific programmes to eradicate child poverty, as children are at disproportionate risk of social and economic exclusion and face the violation of their fundamental rights resulting from abusive treatment, violence, exploitation and all forms of social exclusion.

In the face of growing inequalities that particularly affect women, people with disabilities, the elderly, children, Roma, Travellers, LGBTI+ people and members of other disadvantaged groups, Members called on Member States to ensure appropriate working conditions and protection against economic exploitation and discrimination, especially for those groups most vulnerable to such inequalities, including young people.

The resolution called on Member States to make citizens' right to adequate housing one of their social policy priorities and to increase investment in social and affordable housing. It called on Member States to ensure equal access to healthcare, quality education and housing for all.

Right to equal treatment

Parliament condemned the organised backlash against women’s and girl’s rights in recent years, where some Member States have sought to roll back on sexual and reproductive health and rights, such as existing legal protections for women’s access to abortion care. It strongly condemned the alarming number of feminicides in the EU, calling on the Council to finalise the Union's ratification of the Istanbul Convention.

Members also warned against the trivialisation of hate speech and different forms of racism, such as Islamophobia, anti-Gypsyism, anti-Semitism and racism against black people and people of colour in many Member States, encouraged by the rise of extremist movements and by political leaders in some Member States who use hate speech by spreading racist, xenophobic and anti-LGBTI invectives.

Member States should ensure that hate crimes and hate speech are recorded, investigated, prosecuted and brought to justice. They should also impose an effective ban on neo-fascist and neo-Nazi groups.

Freedoms

Parliament called on Member States to protect a vibrant, independent, pluralistic and free media sector. In this regard, it condemned all measures aimed at silencing critical media and undermining media freedom and pluralism.

The Commission was invited to present a proposal for strong and comprehensive mechanisms to protect freedom of expression and media freedom and to enhance the protection of journalists, including: (i) guaranteeing transparency of media ownership; (ii) adopting an EU-wide anti-SLAPP directive; (iii) establishing a permanent EU fund for independent media and investigative journalists and (iv) establishing a rapid reaction mechanism for journalists at risk.

Parliament condemned the violent and disproportionate interventions by law enforcement authorities during peaceful demonstrations. It called on Member States to ensure that any use of force by law enforcement authorities is always lawful, proportionate and necessary, that it is used as a last resort and that it safeguards the life and physical integrity of individuals.

Concerned about the increasingly limited space for independent civil society in some Member States, Members called on the Commission to propose an action plan to protect and promote civil society, including the adoption of guidelines for the protection of freedom of expression, freedom of association and freedom of peaceful assembly and the protection of human rights defenders at risk, and to set up an emergency fund for their protection.

The resolution also stressed that the approach to artificial intelligence (AI) should be 'human-centred', seeking to ensure that human values are central to the way in which AI systems are developed.

Fundamental rights of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees

Parliament called for placing the human rights of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, as well as the principle of shared responsibility, at the centre of migration and asylum policies. It called on the Commission to propose an urgent solution to resolve the flagrant cases of human rights violations in reception centres for refugees and migrants on European soil.

The resolution stressed that saving lives is a legal obligation under international and EU law and that undocumented migrants should have full access to their basic fundamental rights. The detention of children should be ended, particularly in the context of migration in the EU.

Rule of law and fight against corruption

Stressing that the rule of law is a cornerstone of democracy, Parliament condemned the efforts made by the governments of some Member States to weaken the separation of powers and the independence of the judiciary. It called on the Commission to react in a timely manner to all violations of Article 2 of the EU Treaty, in particular those affecting fundamental rights, reaffirming the crucial need for an EU mechanism on democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights, as proposed by Parliament.

Members called for the development of effective instruments for preventing, combating and punishing corruption, fighting fraud and regularly monitoring the use of public funds.