Human rights and democracy in the world and the European Union’s policy on the matter - annual report 2022

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The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Isabel WISELER-LIMA (EPP, LU) on human rights and democracy in the world and the European Union’s policy on the matter – annual report 2022.

Context

Members express deep concerns at the grave threats to human rights and democracy worldwide, noting that the number of democracies has continued to decline, while the number of authoritarian regimes has grown and nearly 75 % of the world’s population have experienced a deterioration in the situation of human rights in their country in the past year.

Global challenges to democracy and human rights

While emphasising the importance of the EU and its Member States consistently acting together, notably in multilateral forums, to address global challenges to human rights and democracy, Members are of the opinion that maintaining the **unanimity rule** for certain EU foreign policy decisions, including sanctions on human rights offenders, stands in the way of necessary decisive action owing to changing geopolitical circumstances, and should therefore be reconsidered.

The report calls on the EU to take particular care to prevent any violations linked to its own policies, projects and funding, including by the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, in third countries and to create a complaints mechanism for individuals or groups whose rights may have been violated by EU activities in these countries.

War of aggression against Ukraine

Members express their deep grief at the human suffering and condemns the serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed by the Russian armed forces and their proxies in Ukraine. However, they reiterate the need to increase EU diplomatic efforts towards the states that abstained from or voted against the resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly on 2 March 2022 on aggression against Ukraine and the following resolutions on the matter in order to explain the seriousness of Russia’s aggression and the need for a unanimous response from the international community against this flagrant violation of international law.

Stressing the importance of swiftly gathering and preserving evidence of war crimes and crimes against humanity, Members call on the Commission to provide all the necessary assistance in this process, including funding from the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI – Global Europe).

The EU should also continue to use all of the instruments at its disposal to support the fight to free Ukraine from its occupiers and to bring aid to people fleeing Ukraine and seeking support in the EU Member States.

Enhanced funding for the host countries is needed in this regard.

Enhancing EU policies, instruments and diplomacy to protect and advance human rights and democracy in the world

Members call for the EU to reflect on how to promote and best apply a human rights–based approach in all EU instruments and strategies in order to strengthen the EU's human rights foreign policy and to adapt to and shape the evolving geopolitical situation. They underline Parliament's role in the instrument's programming process and call on the Commission and the EEAS to improve the sharing of all relevant information in a timely manner in order to enable Parliament to fulfil its role as enshrined in the treaties, in particular during high-level geopolitical dialogues with the Commission.

EU Special Representative for Human Rights

While fully supporting the work of the EU Special Representative (EUSR) for Human Rights in defending and advancing human rights in the world, the report underlines the need for close cooperation between the EUSR for Human Rights and other EUSRs on countries and regions to further improve this consistency. The EUSR for Human Rights is urged to pursue diplomatic efforts to enhance the EU's support for international humanitarian law and international justice.

EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime (GHRSR – EU Magnitsky Act)

The report welcomes the fact that the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime has been increasingly used as an essential tool that strengthens the EU's role as a global human rights actor through the use of targeted sanctions by the Council. It calls for the restrictive measures that have already been adopted to be implemented effectively, in full and in a coordinated manner, and for the adoption of additional measures if necessary.

Multilateralism and EU work at a multilateral level

The report reaffirms that the effective protection of human rights around the world requires strong international cooperation at a multilateral level. It underlines the particularly important role of the UN and its bodies as the main forum which must be able to effectively advance the efforts for peace and security, sustainable development and respect for human rights and international law.

The EU and the Member States are called on to support the strengthening of **regional human rights systems**, including through financial assistance and cross-regional experience sharing.

Upholding international humanitarian law

Members noted with concern the increasing disregard for international humanitarian law and international human rights law, particularly in the ongoing conflicts around the world. They call for the systematic creation of **humanitarian corridors** in regions at war and in combat situations in order to allow civilians at risk to escape the conflict, and strongly condemn any attacks on them.