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

2022/2049(INI) - 18/01/2023 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 438 votes to 75, with 121 abstentions, a resolution on human rights and democracy in the world and the European Union’s policy on the matter – annual report 2022.

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

Parliament insists that the protection of human rights, fundamental freedoms and the dignity of every human being must be the cornerstone of the Union’s external policy.

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.

Parliament calls on the EU and its Member States to thwart unacceptable attempts to weaken democratic institutions and universal human rights and diminish the space for and role of civil society, reaffirming the value of multilateralism as an instrument to achieve this goal. It also stresses the importance of placing human rights matters at the heart of EU parliamentary activity, including by upgrading the Subcommittee on Human Rights to a stand-alone committee.

War of aggression against Ukraine

Parliament condemns the serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed by the Russian armed forces and their proxies in Ukraine. It welcomed the solidarity shown by many countries towards Ukraine, while stressing the need to **increase the EU's diplomatic efforts** towards those states that abstained or voted against the resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly on 2 March 2022 on the aggression against Ukraine.

Members urge the EU and its Member States to offer the Ukrainian people the help they need to defend their freedom, democracy, human rights and international law and called for the unprecedented sanctions imposed in the context of the war to be implemented in a coordinated manner.

They also called for all necessary measures to be taken to ensure that perpetrators of war crimes and human rights violations in Ukraine are identified and held to account. Stressing the importance of the swift gathering and preservation of evidence of war crimes and crimes against humanity, Members called on the Commission to provide all necessary assistance to this process.

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. NDICI – Global Europe, including its thematic programme on human rights and democracy, is one of the main tools at the EU's disposal to improve the human rights situation around the world. Members underline **Parliament's role** in the instrument's programming process.

Parliament supported the work of the **EU Special Representative** (EUSR) for Human Rights in defending and promoting human rights in the world through dialogue with third countries and cooperation with like-minded partners. It called for an assessment of the added value of the mandate of the EU Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the European Union.

The resolution called for:

- making more vigorous use of the **EU's global human rights sanctions regime** (EU Magnitsky Act) through rigorous, consistent and uniform application of restrictive measures and their monitoring in all Member States;

- work to propose the creation of a set of **anti-corruption standards** that would be uniformly applicable worldwide;

- the inclusion of robust human rights clauses in agreements between the **EU and third countries**, with a clear set of criteria and procedures to be followed in case of violations.

Multilateralism and EU work at a multilateral level

Parliament 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 resolution also stressed the importance of:

- **upholding international humanitarian law**: Members called for the systematic creation of humanitarian corridors in war zones and combat situations to allow civilians at risk to escape the conflict;

- **fighting impunity and strengthening international criminal justice**: Members called on the EU to assist the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in investigating and prosecuting alleged perpetrators of war crimes, crimes against humanity and possible genocide. The Commission should develop a comprehensive European action plan to combat impunity;

- fighting relentlessly for the **total abolition of the death penalty** as a major objective of its human rights policy.

Responding to global challenges

Parliament called on the EU and its international partners to:

- redouble their efforts to ensure that **women**, girls and vulnerable groups enjoy full human rights and equal opportunities for all;

- establish a systematic and consistent approach to the promotion and protection of **children's rights** in the EU's external policies: Members called for more concerted efforts to protect children's rights in crisis or emergency situations; they condemned the forced recruitment of underage children in war zones.

Parliament strongly condemned **intolerance, xenophobia and discrimination** based on race, ethnic origin, nationality, class, disability, caste, religion, belief, age, sex, sexual orientation or gender identity, which in many parts of the world are used to justify killings and persecution.

Members called for increased efforts to mitigate the growing risks faced by **human rights defenders** globally.

Lastly, they reaffirmed the inalienable fundamental rights of migrants, refugees and displaced persons, which must be reflected in the EU's migration and asylum policy and in its cooperation with third countries in this field.