Human rights and democracy in the world and the European Union’s policy on the matter – annual report 2023

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The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the report by Nacho SÁNCHEZ AMOR (S&D, ES) on human rights and democracy in the world and the European Union’s policy on the matter - annual report 2023.

Addressing global trends and major challenges

The report reaffirmed the duty of the EU and its Member States to promote and protect democracy, the rule of law and the universality and inalienability of human rights around the world in a resolute, coherent and consistent manner.

Members stressed that the EU must be **fully prepared to counter the rise and malign influence of authoritarianism, illiberalism and extremism**, as well as the threats to human rights protection and the increasing attacks on the universality of human rights, democracy, the rule of law and international humanitarian law. They called for the EU and its Member States to lead by example and strictly uphold human rights, ensure an enabling environment for their civil society and to address any negative trends in this field.

The report denounced the tailor-made narratives that authoritarian and illiberal regimes are developing to attack the universality of human rights and the rule of law. It warned that the above-mentioned narratives are being spread by these regimes in international forums such as the United Nations Human Rights Council. The EU and its Member States should counter these hostile narratives.

Overall, Members condemn the **increasing trend of violations of human rights** and democratic principles and values across the world, such as deepening levels of social, economic and political inequality, the reversal of rights, notably for women, the persistent and systematic exclusion of and discrimination against entire social groups, executions, extrajudicial killings, torture, gender-based violence, arbitrary arrests and detentions, clampdowns on marginalised and vulnerable individual and groups, civil society, political opponents and ethnic and religious minorities, slavery and forced labour, censorship and threats to independent media and journalists.

Responding to universal human rights and democracy challenges

The report makes a series of recommendations concerning: (i) upholding international human rights and humanitarian law, (ii) progress towards the universal abolition of the death penalty, (iii) the right to freedom of expression, media freedom, academic freedom and the right to information, (iv) the right to equality and non-discrimination, (v) freedom of torture or inhuman or degrading treatment, (vi) the right to public participation, (vii) cultural rights, (viii) the rights of women and LGBTIQ+ persons, (ix) the rights of minorities, migrants and refugees, (x) the rights of the child, (xi) the rights of elderly people and persons with disabilities, (xii) the right to food, water and sanitation and to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment; (xiii) human rights in the face of threats posed by artificial intelligence (AI).

Strengthening the EU’s toolbox for the promotion and protection of human rights and democracy around the world

In particular, Members called for:

- a strengthening of the **EU Action Plan** for Human Rights and Democracy to maximise synergies and complementarity between human rights and democracy at local, national and global levels. Member States should take ownership of the EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy and report publicly on their actions under this strategic document;

- the strengthening of the role of the **European Union Special Representative** (EUSR) for Human Rights and as well as its visibility with regard to the promotion and protection of human rights by the Union in the dialogue with third countries and like-minded partners;

- better support for **civil society organisations**, democracy activists and media organisations, in particular through the European Democracy Fund;

- greater **transparency** regarding human rights-related provisions in financing agreements under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe and the human rights and democracy thematic programme and a clarification of the mechanism and criteria for the suspension of such agreements in the event of a breach of human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law;

- the consistent application of human rights clauses to all the Union's international agreements with third countries, including sectoral and investment agreements;

- an enhanced role for human rights dialogues within the EU's human rights toolbox; these dialogues should address the situation of all human rights and democracy with the countries concerned;

- more dynamic and coherent use of the EU's global human rights sanctions regime; Members reiterated their call for the introduction of qualified majority voting for decisions relating to this regime;

- increased efforts to raise awareness of the weakening of democratic culture in third countries;

- the complete revision of the **Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders**, with a view to addressing the emerging threats and challenges and ensuring their applicability and effectiveness in the protection of human rights defenders globally;

- stepping up efforts to reform the justice system, combat impunity and improve transparency and **anti-corruption** institutions in third countries.

Parliament stressed the need for the EU and its Member States to act in a **united manner with a single voice** and effectively in tackling global human rights and democracy challenges in multilateral forums.