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

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The European Parliament adopted by 377 votes to 90, with 68 abstentions, a resolution on human rights and democracy in the world and the European Union’s policy on the matter – annual report 2023.

Parliament stressed the duty of the EU and its Member States to promote and protect democracy and the rule of law, as well as the universality and inalienability of human rights in the world.

Addressing global trends and major challenges

Deploring the attitude of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes that undermine multilateral institutions, in particular the UN Human Rights Council, Parliament called on the Council and Member States to work with their democratic allies committed to the same principles to encourage the reform of multilateral institutions, with the aim of making them more resilient to the deleterious influence of authoritarian regimes.

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.

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.

Members called for an **immediate ceasefire** in Gaza and called on the Union and its Member States to grant UNRWA support with the proper funding to continue and to improve its life-saving humanitarian work.

Responding to universal human rights and democracy challenges

The resolution 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;

- 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** and the development of strong and effective national guidelines and laws on human rights defenders, which will serve as a model for other countries to follow;

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

EU actions in multilateral fora

Reaffirming the need for the EU and its Member States to act in a united manner with a single voice in the United Nations and other multilateral fora, Parliament called on the EU and its Member States to advocate a **separate and permanent seat** for the EU in multilateral fora, including the UN Security Council, in addition to the existing seat allocated to EU Member States.

The resolution underlined the need for the EU and its Member States to act effectively and in unison to address global human rights and democracy issues in multilateral fora. It stressed the important role of the EU's public and cultural diplomacy and called on the Commission, the EEAS and the Member States to adopt a **genuine Team Europe strategy** involving regular collaboration with Parliament and involving it meaningfully at every meeting.