Human rights and democracy in the world and the European Union’s policy on the matter – annual report 2024

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The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the 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 2024.

Global challenges to democracy and human rights

The report strongly encouraged the EU and its Member States to strive for a continued ambitious commitment to make freedom, democracy and human rights and their protection a central part of all EU policies in a streamlined manner and to enhance the consistency between the EU’s internal and external policies in this field, including through all of its international agreements.

Members reiterated that the EU must be fully prepared to counter the rise of authoritarianism, totalitarianism and populism, as well as the increasing violations of the principles of universality of human rights, democracy and international humanitarian law. They condemned the increasing trend of violations and abuses of human rights and democratic principles and values across the world and deplored the weakening of the protection of democratic institutions and processes, and the shrinking space for civil societies around the world.

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

The report noted with concern the increasing divide worldwide and stressed the shared responsibility of the EU to continue defending democratic values and principles and human rights, international justice, peace and dignity around the world, which are even more important to defend in the current volatile state of global politics.

EU Special Representative (EUSR) for Human Rights

While fully supporting the work of the EUSR for Human Rights in contributing to the visibility and coherence of the EU’s human rights actions in its external relations, the report called for **greater visibility for the role of the EUSR for Human Rights** as well as his work to be support with **increased resources** and better coordination with EU delegations around the world. Members also insisted on the need for the EUSR to report back to Parliament regularly.

Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe and the human rights and democracy thematic programme

Recalling the fundamental role of the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) – Global Europe, including its thematic programme on human rights and democracy, as a flagship EU instrument in promoting and protecting human rights and democracy around the world, Members reiterated the importance of **streamlining a human-rights based approach in the EU’s external action instruments**. Furthermore, the report called for a **suspension** of projects that (in)directly contribute to human rights violations in non-EU countries.

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

Members welcomed the increasing use of the EU GHRSR as a key political tool in the EU's defence of human rights and democracy across the world. However, they regretted that its use has continued to be limited, especially in the current geopolitical landscape. Members demanded that the **fight against terrorism** be at the top of the EU's domestic and foreign affairs agenda.

Team Europe approach

The report stressed the potential for stronger alignment in approaches to human rights protection and promotion between EU institutions, Member States' embassies and EU delegations in non-EU countries. In this respect, the EU and its Member States are called on to intensify their collective efforts to promote the respect, protection and fulfilment of human rights and to support democracy worldwide.

Human rights and trade policy

The report stressed the role of trade as a major instrument to promote and improve the human rights situation in the EU's partner countries. In this regard, the Commission is urged to improve coordination between the EU's trade, investment and development policies and prioritise and promote the development of human rights through EU trade policies, including the Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus. Robust clauses on human rights should be included in agreements between the EU and non-EU countries.

Human rights and digital technologies

Members are concerned by the threat that AI can pose to democracy and human rights, especially if it is not duly regulated. They highlighted the need for oversight, robust transparency and appropriate safeguards for new and emergent technologies, as well as a human-rights based approach.

While welcoming the adoption of the EU Artificial Intelligence Act, Members are deeply concerned about the harmful consequences of the misuse of AI and deepfakes, particularly for women and children. They also condemned the use of new and emerging technologies, such as facial recognition technology and digital surveillance, as coercive instruments and their use in the increasing harassment, intimidation and persecution of human rights defenders, activists, journalists and lawyers.