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

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The European Parliament adopted by 390 votes to 116, with 126 abstentions, a resolution 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

Parliament emphasised the duty of the EU and its Member States to **promote and protect democracy and the universality of human rights worldwide**. It called on the EU and its Member States to lead by example and strictly promote and defend human rights and international justice. Respect for, protection of, and enforcement of human rights and fundamental freedoms must be the **cornerstone of the Union's external policy**.

Denouncing the rise of authoritarianism, totalitarianism and populism, Members condemned in particular the growing trend towards violations of human rights and democratic principles and values in the world (decline in women's rights, torture, repression of civil society, etc.), as well as the shrinking of the space allocated to civil society throughout the world.

Parliament noted with deep concern the ongoing international crisis of accountability and the challenge to the pursuit of **ending impunity** for violations of core norms of international human rights and humanitarian law in conflicts around the world. It underlined the serious consequences of discrediting and attacking the organisations of multilateral forums, such as the UN, which can foster a culture of impunity.

Strengthening the EU Toolbox

Members welcomed the extension of the **European Union Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy** until 2027, with a view to maximising synergies and complementarity between human rights and democracy at local, national, and global levels.

The resolution:

- calls for greater visibility of the role of the **European Union Special Representative (EUSR) for human rights** and requests that the EUSR be provided with additional resources;

- recalls the fundamental role played by the **Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument** (NDICI) – Global Europe and calls for the suspension of European Neighbourhood Policy projects that directly or indirectly contribute to human rights violations in third countries;

- reiterates its call for robust human rights clauses in **agreements between the Union and third countries** , with a clear set of criteria and procedures to be followed in the event of violations;

- underlines the need to increase the visibility of the **Union's human rights dialogues**;

- suggests that the **EU Global Sanctions Regime** and other ad hoc sanctions regimes be used more effectively against those responsible for serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, including senior officials;

- calls on the Commission to continue and expand its democracy support activities by increasing funding for EU bodies and agencies and by directly supporting civil society, given the growing attacks against the rules-based global order by authoritarian and totalitarian regimes;

- stresses the urgent need for a comprehensive review of the EU Guidelines on **Human Rights Defenders**, given the continued shrinking space for civil society and the increasing threats to the work of human rights defenders and CSO members;

- emphasises the important role of civil society and journalists in third countries in monitoring the **fight against impunity and corruption**, and calls on the EU to step up efforts to reform the justice system, combat impunity, and improve transparency and anti-corruption institutions in third countries;

- calls on all Member States to comply fully and unconditionally with **international humanitarian law**, calls for the systematic establishment of humanitarian corridors in war zones and to give high priority to gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights in their response to humanitarian and refugee crises. Members deplored the discrimination and violence suffered by women and girls, particularly during conflicts.

EU Actions at the Multilateral Level

Parliament highlighted the particularly important role of the **United Nations** as the primary forum capable of effectively advancing efforts to promote peace and security, sustainable development, and respect for human rights, and reaffirmed that the EU and its Member States must speak with one voice within the United Nations and other multilateral fora.

Member States and partners who share their values are called upon to develop a robust strategy to counter the increasingly frequent attacks on the rules-based global order by authoritarian and totalitarian regimes.

Members reaffirmed the EU's strong support for the **International Court of Justice** and the International Criminal Court (ICC) as essential, independent, and impartial judicial institutions in a particularly challenging context for international justice. They expressed their deep concern about the sanctions imposed on the ICC, which constitute a serious attack on the international judicial system and called on the Commission to urgently activate the **blocking statute** and on Member States to strengthen their diplomatic action to protect and safeguard the ICC.

Responding to universal human rights and democracy challenges

The resolution makes a series of recommendations regarding: (i) the right to freedom from torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment; (ii) the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association; (iii) the right to food, water, and sanitation; (iv) the rights of the child; (v) the rights of women, refugees, LGBTIQ+ people, and elderly persons; (vi) the right to equality and non-discrimination; (vii) the right to life (towards the universal abolition of the death penalty); (viii) the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion, and belief; (ix) the rights of indigenous peoples; (x) the right to public participation; the role of trade as a key instrument for improving the human rights situation in the EU's partner countries; (xi) and, lastly, human rights in the face of threats posed by artificial intelligence (AI).

Lastly, Parliament expressed concern about the threat that **artificial intelligence** (AI) poses to democracy and human rights when it is not duly regulated, stressing the need for oversight, strict transparency, and

appropriate safeguards for new and emerging technologies, as well as a human rights-based approach. Members are also concerned about how the internet is being used to restrict political freedom and undermine the integrity of elections.