Human Rights and Democracy in the world and the European Union’s policy on the matter – annual report 2025

2025/2166(INI) - 21/01/2026 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 421 votes to 120, with 108 abstentions, a resolution on human rights and democracy in the world and the European Union’s policy on the matter – annual report 2025.

Parliament stressed that the effective respect for and protection of human rights and freedoms must be **the cornerstone of the EU's external policy**. It called on the EU to continue developing a comprehensive toolbox to strengthen human rights and democracy globally and to continue leading by example, in line with its values.

Democratic backsliding

Members condemned the **deterioration of the global human rights landscape** and the clearly accelerating trends in human rights violations and abuses and democratic backsliding around the world, such as violations of women’s rights, executions, extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests and detentions, torture and ill treatment, gender-based violence, and clampdowns on civil society, political opponents, marginalised and vulnerable groups including children and elderly people, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, and ethnic and religious minorities.

The EU must be prepared to counter the **rise of authoritarianism, totalitarianism, and populism,** as well as the increasing violations of the universality of human rights, democracy, and international humanitarian law.

The resolution also stressed the importance of ensuring **girls** have access to quality education and equal opportunities, combating all forms of sexual exploitation of women, making rape a criminal offence in Union law and denouncing practices such as female genital mutilation, forced marriages and child marriages as well as honour killings and violence.

Parliament noted that **cyberattacks and disinformation**, often used as tools of foreign interference, including during election periods, contribute to this trend of democratic decline. It expressed extreme concern about the continued shrinking of **civic space** and the increasing threats to the work of **human rights defenders** and members of civil society organisations, as well as to their families, associates, and lawyers.

Multilateralism

Parliament called for the EU to use the tools at its disposal to address the growing challenges to multilateralism to ensure that the work of international institutions continues to be respected. It requested that **the European Union Special Representative** (EUSR) for Human Rights be given additional resources and enhanced coordination with EU delegations. It urged the Commission to ensure the timely appointment of the EU Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief and called for the abolition of the laws on apostasy and blasphemy.

Members urged all EU Member States, as States Parties to the UN Charter, the Rome Statute and the European Convention on Human Rights, to fully abide by rulings with decisions of the competent international courts, including the European Court of Human Rights.

Funding of external action in support of human rights and democracy

Parliament welcomed the human rights and democracy-related objectives in all pillars of the proposed Global Europe instrument and the proposed increase in EU funding for external action. However, it regretted the deletion of the thematic programme on human rights and democracy and deplored the absence of a dedicated budget and earmarking.

The resolution stressed the need for **clear percentage targets, ring-fenced budget lines, and transparent tracking** to ensure funds effectively address global challenges and support vulnerable populations. Members reiterated the prohibition on allocating EU funds to activities that are contrary to EU fundamental values, such as terrorism or extremism.

They also deplored the absence of a **transparent and enforceable human rights and democracy conditionality** for cooperation with non-EU countries, which would be an effective tool to give tangible effect to the EU's commitment to the promotion of human rights worldwide and called for enforceable human rights and robust democracy clauses to be introduced in the new Global Europe instrument for funding partner non-EU countries.

Recommendations

The main recommendations are as follows:

- adopt a new action plan on gender equality for the period after 2027 and propose the inclusion of 'gender apartheid' as a crime against humanity;

- ensure the protection of civilians during armed conflicts and establish humanitarian corridors, when necessary, to allow civilians to escape conflicts;

- define clear timelines and indicators in the post-2027 EU action plan on human rights and democracy;

- explore new avenues to improve decision-making, including qualified majority voting, to ensure that human rights are sufficiently guaranteed;

- strengthen human rights dialogues through clear benchmarks and deliverables;

- put in place European and international instruments to guarantee access to justice for victims of corporate human rights abuses;

- assess the effectiveness of the toolbox to combat disinformation campaigns against the EU;

- tackle gender disinformation and online harassment targeting women active in politics, journalism and civil society;

- recall the leading role played by the EU in digital diplomacy and around AI to promote models that guarantee high standards in human rights;

- invite the Council to finally adopt an anti-corruption sanctions regime, a long-standing priority of Parliament.