












Procedure file

Basic information		
INI - Own-initiative procedure	2021/2181(INI)	Procedure completed
Human rights and democracy in the world and the European Union's policy on the matter - annual report 2021		
Subject 6.10.09 Human rights situation in the world		

Key players			
European Parliament	Committee responsible	Rapporteur	Appointed
	 Foreign Affairs	 RODRÍGUEZ RAMOS María Soraya	14/07/2021
		Shadow rapporteur	
		 CLUNE Deirdre	
		 SANTOS Isabel	
		 SOLÉ Jordi	
		 KRAH Maximilian	
		 KARSKI Karol	
		 PINEDA Manu	
	Committee for opinion	Rapporteur for opinion	Appointed
	 Women's Rights and Gender Equality	 VAUTMANS Hilde	14/09/2021
European Commission	Commission DG International Cooperation and Development	Commissioner JOUROVÁ Věra	

Key events			
07/10/2021	Committee referral announced in Parliament		
10/12/2021	Vote in committee		
20/12/2021	Committee report tabled for plenary	A9-0353/2021	Summary
15/02/2022	Debate in Parliament		
17/02/2022	Decision by Parliament	T9-0041/2022	Summary

Technical information	
Procedure reference	2021/2181(INI)
Procedure type	INI - Own-initiative procedure
Procedure subtype	Annual report
Legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 54
Other legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 159
Stage reached in procedure	Procedure completed
Committee dossier	AFET/9/07056

Documentation gateway					
Committee draft report		PE696.496	08/09/2021	EP	
Amendments tabled in committee		PE697.688	13/10/2021	EP	
Amendments tabled in committee		PE699.000	13/10/2021	EP	
Committee opinion	FEMM	PE697.571	25/11/2021	EP	
Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading		A9-0353/2021	20/12/2021	EP	Summary
Text adopted by Parliament, single reading		T9-0041/2022	17/02/2022	EP	Summary

Human rights and democracy in the world and the European Union's policy on the matter - annual report 2021

The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by María Soraya RODRÍGUEZ RAMOS (Renew Europe, ES) on human rights and democracy in the world and the European Unions policy on the matter.

Firstly, Members stressed that serious threats to multilateralism and international law witnessed at present are such as to require the EU to have an even more committed role in promoting and protecting human rights around the world. The EUs policies and actions on human rights should lead to more assertive, decisive and effective actions, with the aid of all of the instruments at its disposal.

The EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024 is a roadmap of the EUs priorities concerning human rights, which should be at the centre of all EU external policies. However, in order to effectively advance human rights in the world, the EU must ensure coherence between its various internal and external policies.

General challenges and policy tools

The report highlighted the weakening of the protection of democratic governance and institutions and of universal human rights, as well as the shrinking space for civil society, observed around the world. They called for the EU and its Member States to make more concerted efforts to address the challenges to human rights worldwide, both individually and in cooperation with like-minded international partners, including in the UN.

The importance of both the new Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) Global Europe and the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024 for this goal was stressed. Members called for the use of qualified majority voting in the Council on human rights issues which would strengthen cooperation on matters of key strategic interest for the EU.

Autocratic regimes

Deeply concerned by the increasing number of illiberal democracies and autocratic regimes, which are in the majority worldwide for the first time in 20 years, the EU and the Members States are called on to make full use of the tools at their disposal, including their economic leverage in mutual trade relations, to develop more ambitious support for freedom, good governance, the rule of law and democratic institutions, as well as to help to ensure space for civil society globally.

The EU should continue to intensify its cooperation with the United States and other like-minded democratic partners to support freedom and democracy worldwide and to push back against authoritarian and totalitarian regimes.

Human rights and democracy thematic programme

Members called for greater transparency regarding human rights provisions in financing agreements under the NDICI 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 or of serious cases of corruption.

The Commission should strictly refrain from disbursing budget support to the governments of third countries as an operational modality for the provision of aid in countries witnessing widespread violations of human rights and the repression of human rights defenders.

International justice

Members reiterated their strong support for the International Criminal Court (ICC) as the only international institution able to prosecute some of the world's most heinous crimes and deliver justice for their victims. Adequate financial support should be provided to enable the ICC to carry out its tasks.

COVID-19

The report underlined that COVID-19 has significantly strengthened the recent trends of illiberal democracies and autocratic regimes weakening democracy. In this regard, Members deplored the abuse of the epidemiological crisis by these regimes to further constrain the freedoms of expression, assembly and religion and belief by restricting the functioning of democratic institutions and repressing dissent, including limiting media freedom both online and offline and targeting critics and whistleblowers with defamation campaigns.

Furthermore, the EU is called on to increase its support to tackle the negative consequences of COVID-19, particularly for groups in vulnerable situations.

Human rights defenders

Expressing serious concern about the precarious situation of human rights defenders and the fact that they are the victims of increasing violence, including targeted killings, the EU should develop a strategy for ambitious EU action to address the rising number of attacks against human rights defenders. It is also urged to create an EU-wide scheme for issuing short-term visas for the temporary relocation of human rights defenders.

The freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly and association

The report recalled that recent revelations such as the NSO Pegasus scandal confirm that spying against human rights defenders and journalists, among others, is an extremely alarming matter and appear to confirm the dangers of the misuse of surveillance technology to undermine human rights. Members underlined the need for more robust national and international regulation in this area.

The right to a safe environment

Members noted that 2020 saw a considerable deterioration in the situation of the victims of trafficking, the majority of whom are women, as they were left in an even more vulnerable position by the COVID-19 pandemic. The report welcomed the launch of the EU's Strategy on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (2021-2025).

The right to participate in free and fair elections

Members strongly condemned the erosion of democratic values in a number of third countries and challenges to electoral integrity, electoral violence, the misuse of administrative resources by governing parties, clampdowns on political opponents, the censorship of and threats to independent media, and the rise of disinformation. The EU is urged to target and counter this extremely worrisome situation and come forward with concrete and effective proposals, reaffirming its willingness to take a leading role in promoting democratic values and free and fair elections in third countries.

Corruption and human rights

Stressing that corruption facilitates, perpetuates and institutionalises violations of human rights, the EU is called on to adopt tools against authoritarian leaders and their financial enablers, including those involved in electoral fraud, to uncover and freeze illicit assets, and to promote the application of universal jurisdiction in cases of gross human rights violations.

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

The report welcomed the adoption of the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime (EU GHRSR EU Magnitsky Act) as an essential addition to the EU's human rights and foreign policy toolbox, which strengthens the EU's role as a global human rights actor by allowing it to take restrictive measures against legal and natural persons involved in grave human rights violations around the world. Members reiterated their request to extend the scope of the EU GHRSR to include acts of corruption in order to ensure that the economic and financial enablers of human rights abusers are targeted effectively. The Commission should come forward with a legislative proposal to adopt a new thematic sanctions regime to address serious acts of corruption defined on the basis of the UN Convention against Corruption.

Human rights and democracy in the world and the European Union's policy on the matter - annual report 2021

The European Parliament adopted by 487 votes to 80, with 120 abstentions, a resolution on human rights and democracy in the world and the European Union's policy on the matter - Annual Report 2021.

Parliament expressed its deep concern about the threats to human rights and democracy, which are reflected in the weakening of the protection of democratic governance and institutions and universal human rights, as well as in the shrinking space for civil society worldwide.

Stressing the link between the rule of law, democracy and human rights violations, Members called on the EU and its Member States to increase their concerted efforts, to lead by example and to be true global leaders in the promotion and protection of human rights, gender equality and the rule of law.

Key issues and instruments

Parliament underlined the importance of both the new Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) Global Europe and the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024 for this goal. It recalled that the use of qualified majority voting in the Council on human rights issues would lead to more effective and forward-looking action in the Union's foreign and security policy.

Concerned about the growing number of illiberal democracies and autocratic regimes, which are in the majority in the world for the first time in 20 years, Members called on the EU and Member States to use the tools at their disposal, including their economic leverage in bilateral trade relations, to provide more ambitious support for freedom, good governance, the rule of law and democratic institutions.

Recalling that respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law is a cross-cutting objective throughout the whole NDICI, Parliament reaffirmed that diversifying and maximising the modalities and mechanisms for funding civil society actors under the NDICI are essential elements. However, it called on the Commission to strictly refrain from using budget support to third country governments as an operational modality for humanitarian aid in countries where there are widespread human rights violations and repression of human rights defenders.

Parliament also welcomed the work of the European Union Special Representative (EUSR) for Human Rights, who makes a significant contribution to enhancing the effectiveness of the Union's human rights policies through his dialogue with third countries, cooperation with like-minded partners and improving the internal and external coherence of the Union's policies on the ground.

Multilateralism and international justice

Members called on the EU and its Member States to continue their efforts to speak with one voice in the UN and other multilateral fora. They condemned the increasing number of actions that seek to undermine the functioning of UN bodies, in particular the Human Rights Council, by questioning the universality of human rights, and to undermine the rules-based international order. They reiterated their strong support for the International Criminal Court (ICC) as the only international institution capable of prosecuting some of the world's most heinous crimes and bringing justice to their victims. Adequate financial support should be provided to enable the ICC to carry out its tasks.

COVID-19

The resolution underlined that COVID-19 has significantly strengthened the recent trends of illiberal democracies and autocratic regimes weakening democracy. In this regard, Members deplored the abuse of the epidemiological crisis by these regimes to further constrain the freedoms of expression, assembly and religion and belief by restricting the functioning of democratic institutions and repressing dissent, including limiting media freedom both online and offline and targeting critics and whistleblowers with defamation campaigns.

Furthermore, the EU is called on to increase its support to tackle the negative consequences of COVID-19, particularly for groups in vulnerable situations.

Human rights defenders

Expressing serious concern about the precarious situation of human rights defenders and the fact that they are the victims of increasing violence, including targeted killings, the EU should develop a strategy for ambitious EU action to address the rising number of attacks against human rights defenders. It is also urged to create an EU-wide scheme for issuing short-term visas for the temporary relocation of human rights defenders.

The freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly and association

Parliament recalled that recent revelations such as the NSO Pegasus scandal confirm that spying against human rights defenders and journalists, among others, is an extremely alarming matter and appear to confirm the dangers of the misuse of surveillance technology to undermine human rights. Members underlined the need for more robust national and international regulation in this area. They also stressed the need for increased public support for independent journalism worldwide.

The right to a safe environment

Stressing that climate change is one of the greatest threats to the human rights of our generation and future generations, Parliament encouraged the EU and the Member States to promote the recognition of ecocide as an international crime and asked the Commission to study the relevance of ecocide to EU law and diplomacy.

Other issues

Parliament also called on the EU AND its Member States to:

- advance women's rights and welcome the EU Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in the EU's External Action for 2021-2025 (GAP III);
- strengthen their efforts to eliminate all forms of child abuse;
- take the lead in multinational fora to eradicate all forms of human trafficking, forced labour and modern slavery;
- intensify efforts to develop and implement action plans to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance;
- play a leading role in defending the rights of LGBTIQ people in international fora, including working towards the decriminalisation of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sexual characteristics;
- implement ambitious programmes to defend freedom of religion or belief worldwide;
- make the protection of democratic and electoral processes one of the main global concerns and establish a framework for effective intervention in the face of interference in electoral processes, in close cooperation with international organisations, such as the OSCE;
- extend the scope of the EU global human rights sanctions regime to include acts of corruption so that the economic and financial facilitators of human rights abusers are effectively targeted, and adopt a new thematic sanctions regime to combat serious acts of corruption;
- fully respect the human rights of migrants, refugees and forcibly displaced persons and integrate them into their cooperation with third countries.