

Annual report on human rights and democracy in the world 2016 and the European Union's policy on the matter

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The European Parliament adopted by 443 votes to 95, with 84 abstentions, a resolution on the report on the Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World 2016 and the European Unions policy on the matter.

General considerations: Members expressed profound concern about the pushback against democracy, human rights and the rule of law and reiterated that the EU and its Member States must actively pursue the principle of mainstreaming human rights and democracy, ensuring increased coherence between the EUs internal and external policies and greater coordination between the external policies of the Member States.

Parliament recalled that the EUs objective to increase its international influence as a credible and legitimate international actor is greatly shaped by its ability to pursue human rights and democracy internally and externally through timely coordination at Union level and an active approach during negotiations. It welcomed the fact that breaches of democratic principles and human rights were regularly debated in plenary sessions of Parliament.

Addressing human rights challenges: Members expressed particular concern about the increasing number of attacks against religious minorities which are often committed by non-state actors such as ISIS/Daesh and deplored the fact that many countries have and enforce anti-conversion and blasphemy laws. It noted that civil society, including faith-based organisations, is increasingly under attack worldwide, through a growing number of repressive laws adopted throughout the world.

The EU and its Member States were called upon to constantly raise cases of the various forms of bans on civil society organisations (CSOs) and their activities. Members reiterated the importance of freedom of expression online and offline that nourishes a culture of pluralism that empowers civil society and citizens to hold their governments to account. They welcomed the new European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) launched in 2016, with its specific focus on how to apply the EU Guidelines on Freedom of Expression Online and Offline. They also condemned hate speech and incitements to violence, both on the internet and elsewhere, since they constitute a threat to the rule of law and the values embodied by human rights.

The Union is called on to intensify its efforts to eradicate torture, inhuman or degrading treatment and the death penalty that continue in many countries.

The resolution also insisted, inter alia on:

- the importance of introducing human rights clauses in international agreements between the EU and third countries and to ensure that companies operating in third countries, including those which are European, respect international human rights standards;
- the crucial role played by human rights defenders and the need to support them;
- the importance of defending womens rights, including their sexual and reproductive rights, through legislation, education and by supporting CSOs, and the aims of EU Gender Action Plan 2016-2020 and the Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality 2016-2019. Gender mainstreaming should be integrated into all EU legislation, with a special emphasis on EU external relations policies;
- the EUs efforts to support the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM) set up by the UN to assist in the investigation of serious crimes committed in Syria;
- the urgent need to take genuine steps to tackle the root causes of migration flows and find long-term solutions based on respect for human rights and dignity;
- the need to help third countries in a more coherent and systematic way to fight against corruption;
- put in place an appropriate regulatory framework to ensure access for all to a minimum amount of water;
- the need to develop a common EU position on the use of armed drones.

Addressing democracy support challenges and activities: Members welcomed the invaluable assistance provided to CSOs worldwide under the EIDHR, which continues to constitute the flagship instrument of the EU in implementing its external human rights policy.

They reiterated their positive view of the EUs continued support for electoral processes and recalled the importance of proper follow-up of the reports and recommendations of the EUs electoral observation missions as a way of enhancing their impact and strengthening the EUs support for democratic standards in the countries concerned.

Parliament suggested that the EUs experience with enlargement could be of great assistance in its support for democratisation and the rule of law. It called for the Commission to develop EU guidelines for democracy support.

Ensuring a comprehensive approach via EU policies: Parliament welcomed the adoption by the Council in July 2015 of a new Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy for 2015-2019 and the performance of a mid-term review in 2017. It called on the EU institutions and Member States to ensure the efficient and coherent implementation of the current Action Plan, including through genuine collaboration with civil society organisations.

The resolution went on to recognise the key role of the EUSR for Human Rights in enhancing the EUs visibility and effectiveness and reiterated its request for his mandate, which expires in 2019, to be made permanent.

Members recommended that the EUSR be given own-initiative powers, higher public visibility and adequate staff and financial resources.

Lastly, Members reiterated their full support for the EUs strong engagement in promoting the advancement of human rights and democratic principles through cooperation with UN structures and other international bodies.