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# **DRAFT REPORT**

on human rights and democracy in the world and the European Union's policy  
on the matter – annual report 2025  
(2025/2166(INI))

Committee on Foreign Affairs

Rapporteur: Francisco Assis

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## MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

### on human rights and democracy in the world and the European Union's policy on the matter – annual report 2025 (2025/2166(INI))

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union,
- having regard to the European Convention on Human Rights,
- having regard to Articles 2, 3, 8, 21, 23 and 36 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU),
- having regard to Articles 17 and 207 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,
- having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other relevant United Nations human rights treaties and instruments,
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 27 January 2025 on EU Priorities in UN Human Rights Fora in 2025,
- having regard to the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024, adopted by the Council on 17 November 2020, and its mid-term review adopted on 9 June 2023,
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 27 May 2024 on the alignment of the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024 with the multiannual financial framework 2021-2027,
- having regard to the EU Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in External Action 2021-2025 (GAP III),
- having regard to the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders, adopted by the Council on 14 June 2004,
- having regard to the 2024 EU Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World,
- having regard to its Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought,
- having regard to its resolution of 2 April 2025 on human rights and democracy in the world and the European Union's policy on the matter – annual report 2024<sup>1</sup>, and to its previous resolutions on earlier annual reports,
- having regard to its resolutions on breaches of human rights, democracy and the rule of

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<sup>1</sup> OJ C, C/2025/4390, 9.9.2025, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2025/4390/oj>.

law (known as urgency resolutions), adopted in accordance with Rule 150 of its Rules of Procedure, in particular those adopted in 2025,

- having regard to Rule 55 of its Rules of Procedure,
  - having regard to the opinion of the Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality,
  - having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (A10-0000/2025),
- A. whereas the EU is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, as set out in Article 2 TEU; whereas the EU’s action worldwide must be guided by the universality and indivisibility of human rights, as set out in Article 21 TEU;
- B. whereas consistency and coherence across the EU’s internal and external policies are key for achieving an effective EU human rights policy;
- C. whereas democratic systems are the most suitable to guarantee that every person has the ability to enjoy their human rights; whereas today, only 29 % of the world’s population lives in liberal democracies, which is a sharp decrease compared to 52 % in 2009; whereas the rise in authoritarianism, illiberalism and populism threatens the global rules-based order, the protection and promotion of human rights in the world, and the values and principles on which the EU is founded;
- D. whereas the legitimacy of the international rules-based order, which the EU strongly supports, is dependent on compliance with the orders of international bodies, such as the UN Security Council resolutions and orders and decisions issued by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the International Criminal Court (ICC); whereas there are increasing and unprecedented global threats to compliance with such orders and decisions, as well as, generally, with international law, human rights law and international humanitarian law in emerging and ongoing conflict situations;
- E. whereas the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024 was extended to 2027 and work should start on drafting an improved plan for 2028-2034, alongside the new multiannual financial framework (MFF), to address the new challenges that the world is facing;
- F. whereas human rights defenders (HRDs) and civil society organisations (CSOs) are crucial partners in the EU’s efforts to safeguard and advance human rights, democracy and the rule of law; whereas governments around the world are increasingly censoring, silencing and harassing HRDs and CSOs in their work;

### ***Growing threats to human rights and democracy***

1. Reasserts its positions expressed in its 2024 annual report adopted on 2 April 2025 regarding individual human rights and fundamental freedoms, based on the EU values and principles that guide Union action on the international stage under Article 21 TEU; reiterates, in particular, its conclusions regarding the rights of women, children, migrants and refugees, religious and ethnic minorities, and all those who continue to be

affected by human rights abuses in particularly insidious ways due to their race, ethnicity, religion, caste, gender, sexuality, disability or socio-economic status;

#### *Democratic backsliding*

2. Notes with grave concern the deterioration of the global human rights landscape and the clearly accelerating trend of democratic backsliding across the world;
3. Stresses that cyberattacks, disinformation and misinformation, often used as tools of foreign interference, including during elections, contribute to this trend of democratic decline; stresses the critical significance of trustworthy, independent and diverse sources of information and of quality journalism for solid democratic societies and a thriving civic space; is therefore deeply concerned by the growing and multifaceted challenges faced by independent media, including increasing attacks against journalists and the decrease in available funding;
4. Reiterates the essential role played by civil society for a flourishing democracy, and deplores actions taken by governments across the world to shrink the civic space, such as their introduction of tailored legislation aimed at restricting financing for non-governmental organisations and curbing freedom of assembly;
5. Highlights the crucial work of HRDs in advancing human rights; deplores, however, the growing attacks against HRDs and the increased sophistication of the methods employed for persecuting them within and outside their countries, including through various forms of transnational repression;
6. Considers that while the use of new and emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI), has the potential to considerably improve human well-being, their unrestricted or undiscerning application also poses serious threats to democracy and human rights; notes with particular concern the use of facial recognition technology, mass digital surveillance and information suppression as powerful coercive instruments;

#### *Multilateralism*

7. Is deeply concerned by the fact that the work of multilateral institutions on human rights and the multilateral rules-based order is under unprecedented threat; strongly regrets the decision made by some countries to withdraw from the UN Human Rights Council and their announcements that they would not participate in the Universal Periodic Review;
8. Notes that this departure from a multilateral approach to the global order does not only pose a threat to the effective resolution of current crises, but also makes the outbreak of new crises more likely; underlines that the multilateral system, with the UN at its core, remains the most effective way of addressing global challenges in a just, sustainable and principled manner;
9. Highlights that growing disrespect for international law and the politicisation of debates concerning international justice institutions, such as the ICJ and the ICC, poses an existential threat to the rules-based global order; expresses its deep concern about the increasing disregard for and polarisation around international humanitarian and human rights law; deplores the unprecedented threats faced by the ICC, in particular owing to

the imposition of sanctions on its judges and staff; recalls that international law and the competent independent legal authorities are essential in upholding international justice, ensuring accountability and fighting against impunity, which are necessary preconditions of any reconciliation process and sustained peace;

***Assessing the EU's toolbox for the promotion and protection of human rights and democracy around the world***

*EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2027*

10. Recognises that the time frame of the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy is now aligned with the EU budget cycle, which should help ensure funding for action plan priorities; recalls, however, that the mid-term review did not rely on clear benchmarks for assessment and therefore did not provide clear guidance for tackling shortcomings; believes that a full review of the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy should not be further delayed and that it is time to begin setting the parameters for an improved plan as soon as possible;
11. Believes that Parliament should be consulted in the preparation of the new action plan;

*Funding of external action for human rights and democracy – proposed Global Europe instrument under the 2028-2034 MFF*

12. Welcomes 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, especially considering the dramatic cuts by other major global contributors; strongly regrets, however, the deletion of the thematic programme on human rights and democracy as a flagship EU instrument in promoting and protecting human rights and democracy around the world, and the absence of a dedicated budget and earmarking;
13. Regrets the absence of 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;

*EU Special Representative (EUSR) for Human Rights*

14. Continues to regard the EUSR for Human Rights as an essential voice of the EU's external human rights policy, contributing to its visibility and coherence in close cooperation with all EU bodies;

*EU trade and international agreements with non-EU countries*

15. Emphasises the crucial role of international agreements, including association and trade agreements, and of instruments such as the generalised scheme of preferences (GSP) and GSP+ for placing human rights and democratic standards at the core of the EU's relations with non-EU countries, for encouraging and monitoring compliance with such standards and for implementing human rights conditionality in the EU's external policy;

*EU human rights dialogues*

16. Notes that 35 human rights dialogues and consultations were organised in 2024; considers that these dialogues continue to be an important instrument in advancing human rights and democracy, but regrets that they are often isolated events rather than a key element of sustained engagement on human rights in relations with non-EU countries and regions; considers that there is space for enhancing Parliament's role in the dialogue process; takes note of the fact that several human rights dialogues continue not to be held in EU headquarters;

*EU sanctions instruments and tools, including the Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime (GHRSR – Magnitsky Act)*

17. Reiterates its support for increasing the use of the GHRSR, along with other ad hoc sanctions frameworks, as a key political EU policy tool promoting the rule of law, democracy and human rights, which complements other judicial instruments; recalls, however, the limitations and slowness of the current decision-making system for these instruments' activation and the loopholes in enforcement mechanisms that allow circumvention;

*EU support for HRDs*

18. Welcomes the fact that, in 2024, the Human Rights Defenders Mechanism, funded under the Human Rights and Democracy thematic programme of the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe, supported 10 050 HRDs considered high-risk, 51 % of whom were women, and provided support to more than 700 journalists at risk in 60 countries over the same period;
19. Welcomes the 2024 update of the EU Visa Code Handbook, aimed at clarifying flexible handling of HRD cases to speed up short-stay visa applications for those at risk; regrets, however, that procedures for allowing HRDs to access international or humanitarian protection, such as visas, are too often cumbersome and not adapted to their specific needs, in particular for continuing their human rights work abroad, and that serious and harmful delays in issuing visas have occurred;

*EU actions at multilateral level for upholding the global rules-based order*

20. Welcomes EU efforts in sponsoring or supporting resolutions at the UN Human Rights Council and UN General Assembly; is concerned that recent decisions by non-EU countries to scale back funding for the Human Rights Council already have tangible implications for its ability to carry out its mission;
21. Welcomes the fact that the Council of Europe has been at the forefront of addressing concerns and advancing the setting of global norms and standards in several areas related to human rights, such as academic freedom, the protection of lawyers and journalists, AI and human rights;
22. Welcomes the EU's continued financial support of the ICC amid a particularly challenging time for international justice; regrets the persistent failure to activate the EU blocking statute to shield the ICC from the extraterritorial effects of sanctions;

### *Team Europe approach and democracy support*

23. Recognises the value of aligning approaches to human rights protection and promotion across all EU institutions, bodies and Member States' representations engaged in external action, first and foremost across Member States' embassies and EU delegations in non-EU countries, but also of making use of Parliament's full potential; stresses that flexible and coordinated approaches should remain inclusive to allow for the EU institutional checks and balance system to fully operate; emphasises that Parliament plays a strong role in upholding EU values and human rights, for instance through parliamentary diplomacy, interparliamentary dialogues and resolutions; takes note of the ongoing work of the Team Europe Democracy initiative in several countries; considers that enhanced collaboration between Parliament's Democracy Support and Election Coordination Group, the relevant Commission Directorates-General and the European External Action Service (EEAS) would greatly contribute to democracy support activities in non-EU countries;

### ***Recommendations***

24. Calls for the EU to use the tools at its disposal to counter the growing challenges to multilateralism so as to ensure that the work of international institutions continues to be respected; calls for the EU and its Member States to step up their support for the work of the UN, both politically and financially; reiterates the need for the EU and its Member States to speak with one voice in multilateral forums; calls for EU delegations to play a stronger role in multilateral forums, for which they should be appropriately resourced;
25. Urges all EU Member States, also as States Parties to the UN Charter, the Rome Statute and the European Convention on Human Rights, to fully abide by rulings of the competent international courts; calls for the EU to urge non-EU countries, including its major partners and candidate and potential candidate countries, to become States Parties to the Rome Statute; reiterates its call on the Commission to urgently activate the blocking statute to protect the ICC from the consequences of sanctions and enable its continued operation in full independence; calls on the Member States to apply universal jurisdiction in the fight against impunity;
26. Calls for the systematic creation of humanitarian corridors in regions at war and in combat situations, whenever necessary, in order to allow civilians at risk to escape conflicts, and strongly condemns any attacks on civilians;
27. Calls on the Commission and the EEAS to establish clear indicators and timelines in the post-2027 EU action plan on human rights and democracy to measure success, strengthen coherence between the EU's internal and external actions and specify better connections between priorities as enunciated in the action plan and narrower benchmarks;
28. Calls on the Commission and the EEAS to involve civil society more completely and take better account of the results of consultations when developing and implementing its external human rights policy, including consultations with local voices who are as close as possible to implementation level;

29. Calls for a clear earmarked budget for human rights and democracy in the future MFF; stresses that the EU budget needs to be protected also for external use and that the budget constitutes an important leverage to achieve higher compliance with human rights and democratic standards by partner countries; calls, therefore, for a human rights and democracy conditionality rule to be introduced in the new Global Europe instrument for funding partner non-EU countries;
30. Calls on its EU institutional partners to explore new avenues to improve decision-making, including qualified majority voting, and, when more flexible approaches are employed, such as the Team Europe approach, to ensure that human rights are sufficiently guaranteed;
31. Calls for the human rights dialogues to be reinforced through clear benchmarks and deliverables so that progress can be clearly delineated and assessed during each respective round of dialogues;
32. Calls for enhancing collaboration with the European Parliament in the deliberation process leading up to the dialogues; stresses, in addition, the need for the EU to continue applying pressure for the dialogues to be held at EU headquarters; considers that civil society and national human rights institutions should have a distinct role in monitoring the progress of the implementation of these targets;
33. Calls for the EU to pursue the establishment of European and international instruments to guarantee access to justice and effective remedy for people affected by corporate human rights abuses; calls for the effective and thorough implementation of current EU rules on responsible corporate behaviour regarding human, labour and environmental rights, such as the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive<sup>2</sup> or Regulation (EU) 2024/3015 prohibiting products made with forced labour on the Union market<sup>3</sup>;
34. Reiterates its call on the Council to adopt an ambitious mandate for the EU to engage in the ongoing negotiations on a legally binding UN instrument to hold companies accountable for their human rights violations as soon as possible;
35. Calls for the EU to assess the effectiveness of the toolbox for addressing disinformation campaigns against the EU, particularly in countries that receive significant EU humanitarian and development assistance and in candidate countries for EU membership;
36. Calls for the systematic implementation of *ex ante* and *ex post* human rights assessments and for the inclusion of robust clauses on human rights in agreements between the EU and non-EU countries, supported by a clear set of benchmarks and procedures to be followed in the event of violations; calls on the Commission and the EEAS to ensure that the human rights clauses in current international agreements are actively monitored and effectively enforced and to improve their communication with

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<sup>2</sup> Directive (EU) 2024/1760 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 on corporate sustainability due diligence and amending Directive (EU) 2019/1937 and Regulation (EU) 2023/2859 (OJ L, 2024/1760, 5.7.2024, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2024/1760/oj>).

<sup>3</sup> Regulation (EU) 2024/3015 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 November 2024 on prohibiting products made with forced labour on the Union market and amending Directive (EU) 2019/1937 (OJ L, 2024/3015, 12.12.2024, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/3015/oj>).

Parliament concerning considerations and decisions regarding this enforcement; reiterates that in the event of persistent breaches of human rights clauses by its partner countries, including those in the GSP+ programme, the EU should react swiftly and decisively, including by suspending the agreements in question if other options prove ineffective;

37. Calls for the creation of a complaint-handling portal, within the framework of EU trade and financial instruments, possibly through the adaptation of the Commission's Single Entry Point to allow for complaints to be submitted regarding failures to comply with human rights clauses; stresses that this portal should be accessible, citizen-friendly and transparent, and open to the affected citizens of non-EU countries;
38. Reiterates its call to prioritise the fight against corruption as a factor enabling attacks on human rights and democracy; urges the Council to finally adopt an anti-corruption sanctions regime, which has been a long-standing priority of Parliament;
39. Underscores that to harness the full potential of the EU Guidelines on HRDs, a comprehensive revision is needed to address the increasing level of sophistication in the persecution and harassment of HRDs, including digital threats and transnational repression; calls for the extended use of the EU GHRSR – EU Magnitsky Act to sanction individuals who persecute or harass HRDs, including environmental and land rights defenders;

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40. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the European Union Special Representative for Human Rights, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the United Nations Security Council, the United Nations Secretary-General, the President of the 80th session of the United Nations General Assembly, the President of the United Nations Human Rights Council, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the European Union Heads of Delegation.

## EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

Each year, the European Parliament adopts three annual reports on the EU's foreign, security and defence, and human rights policies.

The three reports are on:

- the implementation of the Common Foreign and Security Policy - annual report 2025 (based on the report of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Policy to the European Parliament on the Common Foreign and Security Policy) - competence of the AFET Committee,
- Human Rights and Democracy in the world and the European Union's policy on the matter - annual report 2025 (based on the EU Annual report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World) - competence of the DROI Subcommittee, and
- the implementation of the Common Security and Defence Policy - annual report 2025 (based on the report of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Policy to the European Parliament on the Common Foreign and Security Policy) - competence of the SEDE Committee.

These reports monitor and assess the implementation of the Common Foreign and Security Policy, including the EU policy on Human Rights and the Common Security and Defence Policy. They are a key component of the European Parliament's contribution to EU foreign policy making, most notably in regard to the strengthened right of scrutiny conferred to the European Parliament by the Treaty of Lisbon. It is essential that the European Parliament respond to the annual reports issued by other institutions as soon as they are published.

This report focuses on the most salient trends in challenges to human rights and democracy, and on an evaluation of the EU external policy tools that aim to ensure that the Union and its Member States promote and protect the universality and the indivisibility of human rights around the world.

This report contributes to the ongoing preparations for a new Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy for the post-2027 period by evaluating the current EU toolbox in the field of human rights and democracy and providing its recommendations to the other EU institutions for further developing it.