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*Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality*  
*The Chair*

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7.11.2019

Ms Maria Arena  
Chair  
Subcommittee on Human Rights  
BRUSSELS

Subject: Opinion on Human rights and democracy in the world and the European Union's policy on the matter – annual report 2018 (2019/2125(INI))

Dear Madam Chair,

Under the procedure referred to above, the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality has been asked to submit an opinion to your committee. At its meeting of 6 November 2019, the committee decided to send the opinion in the form of a letter.

At that meeting<sup>1</sup>, the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality considered the matter and it decided to call on the Subcommittee on Human Rights, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions into its motion for a resolution.

Yours sincerely,

Evelyn Regner

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<sup>1</sup> The following were present for the final vote: Evelyn Regner (Chair), Gwendoline Delbos-Corfield (Vice-Chair), Christine Anderson, Vilija Blinkevičiūtė, Annika Bruna, Belinda De Lucy, Rosa Estaràs Ferragut, Frances Fitzgerald, Cindy Franssen, Helène Fritzon, Jackie Jones, Livia Járóka, Arba Kokalari, Alice Kuhnke, Naomi Long, Andżelika Anna Możdżanowska, Maria Noichl, Pina Picierno, Samira Rafaela, Elżbieta Rafalska, Diana Riba i Giner, Christine Schneider, Irène Tolleret, Isabella Tovaglieri, Ernest Urtasun, Marco Zullo (Full Members) Maria Da Graça Carvalho, Ewa Kopacz, Predrag Fred Matić, Chrysoula Zacharopoulou (Substitute Members) Anne-Sophie Pelletier (pursuant to Rule 209(7))

## SUGGESTIONS

1. Recalls that the Gender Action Plan (GAP II) is one of the fundamental tools of the EU to improve gender equality in third countries; calls on the Commission to assess its overall impact upon expiry, take into account Parliament's resolution of 8 October 2015 on the renewal of the EU Plan of Action on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development and its resolution of 31 May 2018 on the implementation of the Joint Staff Working Document (SWD(2015)0182) – Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Transforming the Lives of Girls and Women through EU External Relations 2016-2020 and following the recommendations contained therein, to deliver a GAP III again containing specific ambitious targets on gender budgeting with the status of a communication on gender equality; recalls in this context Commissioner-designate for International Partnership, Jutta Urpilainen's commitment in her Hearing with the European Parliament on 1 October 2019 to launch a GAP III, highlighting the GAP's outstanding impact for reaching gender equality in international partnerships;
2. Calls attention to the Treaty obligation of the EU to promote gender equality and ensure gender mainstreaming in all of its actions including in external actions; stresses that the 2018 implementation report of the EU Gender Action Plan II assessed that by combining gender mainstreaming and specific measures and actions significant progress had been made, commends the practice of incorporating women's rights and gender equality in the human rights dialogues as well the specific efforts to integrate gender in Common Security and Defence; calls for global initiatives, adequate funding and for a systemic approach to including gender aspects in external policy and action, specifically in trade, employment, education, conflict and peace building, climate and environment, agriculture, poverty, trafficking, migrations and budgeting; stresses the need for the EU Delegations to strengthen their role in gender coordination among other, through gender focal points where they have not yet been established, as well as the EEAS Principle Advisor on Gender in third countries, by ensuring a dedicated budget and by using gender analysis with sex-disaggregated data;
3. Regrets that the Commission's Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World 2018 does not acknowledge explicitly the rising backlash against women's rights on a global scale, in particular when it comes to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and is concerned by the fact that the Commission has not put forward any strategy to counter this phenomenon; emphasizes the requirement for the EU external action including its development policy to work towards the achievements of the health-related SDGs; strongly condemns the reinstatement and expansion of the "Global Gag Rule" by the Trump administration and its damaging impact on women's and girls' access to comprehensive health and sexual and reproductive rights, which are fundamental human rights, reiterates its call on the EU, together with its Member States, to closely examine and consider filling the financing gap left in this area following this action;
4. Stresses the alarming increase of violence against women and calls for further action in order to ratify and implement the Istanbul Convention across Europe; calls on EU Delegations to include violence against women data in drawing up country-specific

recommendations and promote protective and support mechanisms for victims; asks EEAS to improve the implementation of the EU LGBTI Guidelines;

5. Strongly commends the continuation of the EU-UN global Spotlight Initiative and implementation of projects which aim to eliminate violence against women and girls across the world addressing gender-based violence and harmful practices such as female genital mutilation, early and forced marriages and human trafficking; recognizes however that the wide-ranging, wide-spread and deep-rooted violence and harmful practices cannot be dealt with on a project basis only and calls for a systematic, comprehensive plan of action to engage boys and men, address gender norms and stereotypes and instigate change across sectors and on a global level, as prescribed by the UN Convention on Elimination of Discrimination against Women;
6. Calls on the new College of Commissioners under the guidance of the Commissioner for Equality, the Commissioner for International Partnerships and the High Representative to ensure close cooperation and coherence with regard to gender equality and gender mainstreaming, urges the EU to provide support to specialist grassroots organizations working on women's rights and women's rights defenders on a systemic basis as well as to provide protection to the women's rights and LGBTI defenders whose safety might be under risk in their countries.