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*Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality*

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**2014/2216(INI)**

4.2.2015

## **OPINION**

of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality

for the Committee on Foreign Affairs

on the Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World 2013 and  
the European Union's policy on the matter  
(2014/2216(INI))

Rapporteur: Jana Žitňanská

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## SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality calls on the Committee on Foreign Affairs, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions into its motion for a resolution:

- having regard to its resolution of 4 February 2014 on the EU Roadmap against homophobia and discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity<sup>1</sup>,
  - having regard to its resolution of 25 November 2014 on the EU and the global development framework after 2015<sup>2</sup>,
  - having regard to the final declaration of the 4th World Congress Against the Death Penalty calling for the universal abolition of the death penalty, held in Geneva from 24 to 26 February 2010,
- A. whereas the EU has a Special Representative for Human Rights and the holder of this post should serve to assist the Union in coordinating its activities so as to make clearer and heighten the visibility of its work in promoting the observance of human rights throughout the world, and in particular women's rights;
- B. whereas gender-based violence and in particular violence against women and girls constitutes the violation of a woman's right to physical integrity and can have serious permanent consequences for the victim's health;
- C. whereas the consequences of gender-based violence affect the well being of the victims in all spheres of their lives;
- D. whereas the exercise of democracy presupposes that women and men enjoy equal rights and civil status;
- E. whereas, in times of armed conflict, women and children, including female and child refugees, asylum seekers and stateless persons, are among the most vulnerable groups in society, and the risks posed to displaced adolescent girls during humanitarian crises are significantly heightened;
- F. whereas violence and/or discrimination against women cannot be justified on any political, religious or cultural grounds;
- G. whereas violence against women and girls, and in particular domestic violence, is the world's most widespread human rights violation, affects all levels of society, regardless of age, education, income, social position and country of origin or residence, and represents a major barrier to equality between women and men;
- H. whereas gender-based violence is defined as violence that is directed against a person on the basis of that person's gender, gender identity or gender expression or that affects

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<sup>1</sup> Texts adopted, P7\_TA(2014)0062.

<sup>2</sup> Texts adopted, P8\_TA(2014)0059.

persons of a particular gender disproportionately;

- I. whereas women and girls with disabilities are at greater risk of violence, abuse and negligent treatment, especially in institutionalised settings, which often leads to ignorance of the issue;
- J. whereas the promotion of women's rights, gender equality and combating violence against women should be basic and crucial components of the human rights dialogue between the EU and third countries; whereas the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) plays a positive role; whereas in situations in which they engage in cooperation with any country, the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the Commission should identify in a timely manner the priority problems to be addressed, so that funding and resources can be better tailored to objectives;
- K. whereas access to basic health care services and sexual and reproductive health services are fundamental aspects of equality between women and men, and whereas these have not yet been secured in all parts of the world;
- L. whereas sexual and reproductive health and rights are grounded in basic human rights and are essential elements of human dignity<sup>1</sup>;
- M. whereas all types of discrimination and violence against women, including sexual abuse, female genital mutilation, forced marriages, so-called honour crimes, the commercial sexual exploitation of women and domestic violence should never be justified by any political, social, religious or cultural grounds or in relation to any popular or tribal traditions;
  - 1. Stresses the importance for authorities to undertake to develop educational campaigns targeted at men, and in particular at the younger generations, with the aim of preventing and gradually eliminating all types of gender-based violence; emphasises the need to ensure that health professionals, police officers, prosecutors and judges, both within the EU and in third countries, are adequately trained to assist and support victims of violence;
  - 2. Asks the EU and its Member States to support full participation by women in political and economic decision making, particularly in processes of peace building, democratic transition and conflict resolution; encourages the Member States, the Commission and the EEAS to focus on the economic and political emancipation of women in developing countries, promoting their involvement in companies and in the implementation of regional projects and local development projects;
  - 3. Emphasises the particular importance, with respect to the development of viable, democratic societies, of reducing gender inequality, combating gender-based violence and promoting equality and women's rights;
  - 4. Stresses the need to ensure that women in Europe and the rest of the world have the right to be able freely to make their own individual choices, on an equal footing with men,

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<sup>1</sup> See paragraph 7(2) and (3) of the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action.

without any ideological, political or religious impositions;

5. Calls, accordingly, on all Council of Europe member states to sign and ratify the Convention on preventing and combating violence against women; calls, in this connection, for the EU to take steps to accede to the convention in order to ensure coherence between the EU's internal and external actions as regards violence against women;
6. Stresses that in order to effectively combat violence against women, a change of attitude towards women and girls in society is necessary, given that women are all too often represented in subordinate roles and violence against them is all too often tolerated or undermined; stresses that gender stereotypes are among the main causes of violations of women's rights and inequalities between men and women; notes that particular attention must be paid to constitutional, legislative and regulatory provisions which discriminate against women on the basis of their sex, for example with regard to access to justice, property, credit, health care or education; calls on the EEAS and the Commission to emphasise the importance of involvement by men in information and awareness-raising campaigns on women's rights;
7. Is deeply concerned about the rise in the instance of gender-based violence in many parts of the world, which represents one of the symptoms of the global crisis, and especially about the increasing rate of femicide (the homicide of women and girls) in Mexico and other countries in Central and South America, which takes place in the context of generalised violence and structural discrimination; condemns strongly all kinds of gender-based violence, the aberrant crime of femicide and the prevailing impunity for these crimes, which further sets a precedent for and encourages the murderers;
8. Stresses the need to do more to secure the right to education and access thereto, especially for girls; welcomes the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Malala Yousafzai and Kailash Satyarthi for their struggle for children's rights; notes that access to education is, in part, a precondition for the full exercise of other human rights, such as freedom of conscience and religion and participation in political life;
9. Calls on the Commission, the EEAS and the Member States to take specific actions to address the situation of women and guarantee their freedom and respect for their most fundamental rights, and to adopt measures to prevent exploitation and abuse of, and violence against, women and children;
10. Urges the UN, in particular its Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Rashida Manjoo, to make the greatest possible efforts to trace the victims of abuses and violations against girls and women and to investigate and establish the facts and circumstances surrounding such cases, with a view to preventing impunity and ensuring full accountability; supports the work of the United Nations Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Zainab Hawa Bangura;
11. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to address violence against women and the gender-related dimension of human rights violations internationally, in particular in the context of both the bilateral association and international trade agreements that are in force and those that are under negotiation;

12. Welcomes the recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women on conflict prevention and conflict and post-conflict situations, in line with landmark UN Security Council resolutions 1325 and 1820 on women, peace and security; reminds the international community, furthermore, of the necessary safeguards for women and girls, in particular women human rights defenders, who are often the targets of violence, and calls for protection against rape and forced prostitution; stresses that victims of gender-based violence should be assisted in legal proceedings, and points out that statutory and non-statutory organisations can be of real help to victims in this respect;
13. Reiterates that female genital mutilation (FGM) is a grave violation of human rights and a subject to which particular attention must be paid in the EU's dialogue with countries in which the practice is highly prevalent; points out, furthermore, that FGM has serious, long-lasting effects on women's health and hence on their prospects for development; encourages the EEAS and the Member States to continue to address the issue of FGM in their political and policy dialogue with partner countries in which FGM is still practised;
14. Condemns in the strongest possible terms the serious human rights violations perpetrated in armed conflict situations in recent and ongoing crises, and in particular summary executions, rape and other forms of sexual violence, acts of torture and arbitrary arrests and detentions, in particular as regards the situation of women and children, who are particularly vulnerable; calls for the EU to fight against impunity in all of these cases and to support action by national judges and the International Criminal Court (ICC) to bring the perpetrators to justice;
15. Stresses the importance of not undermining the '*acquis*' of the Beijing Platform for Action regarding access to education and health as a basic human right, and the protection of sexual and reproductive rights; emphasises the fact that universal respect for sexual and reproductive health and rights and access to the relevant services contribute to prenatal care and the ability to prevent high-risk births and reduce infant and child mortality; points out that family planning, maternal health and safe abortion services are important elements for saving women's lives and that the denial of lifesaving abortion amounts to a serious breach of human rights; calls for the EU to continue to protect sexual and reproductive health and related rights and highlights the need to place these policies at the core of development cooperation with third countries, and in the future action plan on gender equality and women's empowerment in development for the 2015-2020 period in particular, including by means of political dialogue and specific actions involving local civil society;
16. Emphasises the fact that gender-based violence, including harmful customary and traditional practices, is a violation of basic rights, and especially of human dignity, the right to life and the right to the integrity of the person;
17. Condemns strongly the continued use of sexual violence against women as a weapon of war; stresses that more needs to be done to ensure respect for international law and access to psychological support for women and girls abused in conflicts; welcomes the fact that the 2014 Sakharov Prize was awarded to Dr Denis Mukwege for his commitment to the fight against sexual violence against women and calls for the EU, the Member States,

international organisations and civil society to increase cooperation efforts to raise awareness and combat impunity;

18. Stresses the importance of strengthening the role of women in promoting human rights and democratic reform, in supporting conflict prevention and in consolidating political participation and representation; notes, also, in this regard that the recommendations made in the reports of EU election observation missions concerning full and equal participation by women in the electoral process should be taken into account and acted upon;
19. Calls for an immediate end to all acts of violence, sexual assault and other forms of degrading treatment committed against women who protest for democracy and in defence of their rights, particularly in the Arab Spring countries, and against women's rights activists; calls, also, for serious and impartial investigations into all such cases and for those responsible to be held fully accountable;
20. Points out that the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence is an important and binding international instrument and, therefore, that the accession thereto of more and more countries will contribute significantly to the development of an integrated policy for protecting and empowering victims and for promoting international cooperation in the field;
21. Stresses the need to tackle human trafficking, of which the majority of victims are women, who are exploited for sexual purposes; stresses the need for enhanced cooperation with third countries on the exchange of good practices and the dismantling of international trafficking networks, which also make use of the internet to find new victims;
22. Stresses the importance of conducting information and awareness-raising campaigns in communities in which FGM, the sexual abuse of young girls, early and forced marriages, femicide and other gender-based human rights violations are practised, and of involving human rights defenders who are already fighting for an end to these practices in the preparation and implementation of these campaigns; reiterates the fact that child marriage, early and forced marriage and the failure to enforce a legal minimum age for marriage constitute not only a violation of children's rights, but also an obstacle to women's empowerment;
23. Reiterates the fact that the international community has identified the situation of women with disabilities as a priority; recalls the conclusions of the office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights which stated that policies and programmes to address violence against women and girls with disabilities should be developed in close partnership with those persons who have disabilities, recognising their autonomy, and with disability organisations, including those which provide services for survivors; stresses the need for the regular oversight of institutions and appropriate training for caregivers;
24. Calls on the Commission and the Member States actively to promote non-discrimination on the grounds of sex, race and ethnic origin and on the grounds of religion or belief, disability, age and sexual orientation in its foreign policy, including through the EIDHR;
25. Calls for the EU and the Member States strongly to promote and protect the enjoyment of

all human rights by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons;

26. Calls on the Commission to make more widespread use of gender impact assessments when developing foreign policy, particularly as regards the conclusion of international agreements;
27. Stresses the importance of preventing violations of human rights, with particular emphasis on the situation of Roma women and children, who are often subjected to multiple discrimination; stresses the importance of strengthening the position of Roma women and of putting in place an appropriate housing policy as a starting point to improve their situation;
28. Welcomes and supports the Addis Ababa Declaration on Accelerating the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, adopted in November 2014 during the Ninth African Conference on Women, on women's reproductive health and HIV/AIDS, which called for investment into sexual and reproductive health rights, including by adopting and implementing laws on sexual and reproductive health, awareness raising and information services for teenagers and women, including comprehensive sexual health education, information and services; reiterates its call for the expansion of the provision of family planning services and contraceptives, for access to safe and legal abortion services in accordance with national laws and policies, and for the protection of the reproductive rights of women by authorising medical abortion in the cases of sexual assault, rape and incest, in line with the Maputo Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights;
29. Considers the underrepresentation of women in political decision making to be a question of fundamental rights and democracy that underlines the capacity of governments to devote to the fullest extent their attention to democracy building and maintenance processes; welcomes legislated parity systems and gender quotas and calls for the necessary legislative process thereon to be developed as soon as possible;
30. Calls for the EU and the Member States to ensure a rights-based approach which encompasses all human rights and actively to continue defending a stand-alone goal for women's and girls' empowerment and the promotion, respect and fulfilment of their human rights, including access to comprehensive sexuality education and universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, as well as gender equality, as preconditions to combat gendercide, in the upcoming post-2015 development agenda;
31. Stresses the importance of fighting stereotypes not only by presenting positive images, but also by inspiring real examples of women with disabilities and showing how their compensating abilities allow them to enjoy a rewarding working and private life, and by avoiding the exacerbation of negative stereotypes in the language used, discourse entered into and policies pursued regarding women with disabilities; calls for the EU, together with the Member States, to implement pro-active measures in order to include women with disabilities in the labour market;
32. Reiterates its long-standing opposition to the death penalty under all circumstances, and calls for an immediate moratorium on executions in those countries in which the death penalty is still applied;

33. Urges the Member States, while respecting their own national education systems, to be consistent in implementing the principles of inclusive education in dealing with children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds and children with disabilities;
34. Calls for an ambitious long-term political strategy and plan of action on public health, innovation and access to medicines that, inter alia, explores new incentive schemes for research and development, as outlined in the 2012 report of the World Health Organisation (WHO) Consultative Expert Working Group on Research and Development: Financing and Coordination, to safeguard the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well being of every human being without distinction as to race, religion, political belief or economic and social condition; stresses that women and girls remain at the centre of the HIV pandemic and maintain care for patients in their communities;
35. Finds it regrettable that women's and girls' bodies, specifically with respect to their sexual and reproductive health and rights, still remain an ideological battleground and calls for the EU and its Member States to recognise the inalienable rights of women and girls to bodily integrity and autonomous decision making as regards, inter alia, the right to access voluntary family planning and safe and legal abortion and to be free from violence, including FGM, child, early and forced marriage, and marital rape;
36. Urges the EU and its Member States to come up with an extensive review of the Beijing Platform for Action to mark its 20-year anniversary in 2015;
37. Urges the Commission to include sexual and reproductive health and rights, as basic human rights, in its next EU health strategy to ensure coherence between the EU's internal and external policies;
38. Insists that gender balance must be an integral part of the EEAS overseas missions and that a dedicated girls' and women's rights and gender equality strategy be established for each mission, along with a specific gender equality chapter in the next EEAS human rights action plan;
39. Stresses that the provision of humanitarian aid by the EU and its Member States should not be subject to restrictions imposed by other partner donors as regards necessary medical treatment, including as regards access to safe abortions for women and girls who are victims of rape in armed conflicts.

## RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE

<b>Date adopted</b>	20.1.2015
<b>Result of final vote</b>	+: 20 -: 6 0: 2
<b>Members present for the final vote</b>	Daniela Aiuto, Maria Arena, Beatriz Becerra Basterrechea, Malin Björk, Vilija Blinkevičiūtė, Anna Maria Corazza Bildt, Viorica Dăncilă, Iratxe García Pérez, Anna Hedh, Teresa Jiménez-Becerril Barrio, Agnieszka Kozłowska-Rajewicz, Vicky Maeijer, Angelika Mlinar, Krisztina Morvai, Marijana Petir, Terry Reintke, Liliana Rodrigues, Jordi Sebastià, Michaela Šojdrová, Beatrix von Storch, Jadwiga Wiśniewska, Anna Záborská, Jana Žitňanská
<b>Substitutes present for the final vote</b>	Biljana Borzan, Linnéa Engström, Rosa Estaràs Ferragut, Kostadinka Kuneva, Marc Tarabella