Human rights: MEPs want corruption punished under EU sanctions regime

- Corruption is still not considered a crime that can lead to targeted restrictive measures
- MEPs should be able to propose cases of serious human rights violations
- Qualified majority voting should be introduced when sanctions are adopted
- Call for swift and coordinated EU response to retaliatory sanctions by third countries

Parliament has adopted a resolution welcoming the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime, while calling for corruption to be included as a punishable offence.

Corruption has a devastating impact on the state of human rights, and often undermines the functioning and legitimacy of institutions and the rule of law, the resolution states. But unlike similar schemes around the world, such as the US Global Magnitsky Act, the current EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime (GHRSR), adopted in December 2020, does not include corruption in connection with human rights violations as an offence punishable by restrictive measures. Parliament wants to change that and urges the European Commission to come forward with a legislative proposal that extends the scope of the GHRSR to cover these crimes.

MEPs should also be able to propose cases of serious human rights violations, in order to increase the legitimacy of the sanctions regime. In addition, Members insist on an inclusive process to facilitate input from civil society.

Qualified majority voting should also be introduced when sanctions are adopted under the scope of the GHRSR, the text urges, as this would implement the regime more effectively.

Counter-sanctions aim to deter the EU from defending human rights

In addition, MEPs condemn any counter-sanctions imposed on the EU, its institutions and Members of Parliament, bodies or citizens, solely for upholding human rights, democracy and the rule of law through the GHRSR.

The EU’s response to such retaliatory measures by third countries must be swift and coordinate, they point out, adding that bilateral agreements with these countries must not undermine the
EU’s sanctions framework and its credibility in foreign policy in general.

The text was adopted by 584 votes in favour, 73 against with 33 abstentions.

You can read more about the new framework here.

Quotes

“The EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime adds a direct and tangible way to respond to serious human rights violations and hold those responsible for abuses accountable. It needs to become an essential element of the EU’s broader strategy on human rights and a fundamental part of our external policy toolbox. I welcome the swift implementation of the new instrument and hope that it will support the objectives of the EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy”, said David McAllister (EPP, Germany), Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee.

“By allowing us to target persons and entities responsible for grave human rights violations, wherever these abuses take place, the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime strengthens the EU’s leading role in human rights. The regime needs to also target economic and financial enablers of human rights abusers, and the Parliament and civil society need to be more closely involved to increase its legitimacy”, said Maria Arena (S&D, Belgium), Chair of the Subcommittee on Human Rights.

Further information
Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on Human Rights
Adopted text will be available here (07.07.2021)
Video recording of the debate (06.07.2021)
Procedure file
EP Think Tank briefing: Chinese counter-sanctions on EU targets
EP Multimedia Centre: free photos, video and audio material

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