



EU Annual Report 2014 on Human Rights and Democracy in the World

Rede von Annette Groth, 19. Februar 2016

Debate on the recommendation and report of the Committee on Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid (17th committee) on the draft EU Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World in 2014, Council document 9593/15 Printed Paper 18/5982 No. A.47, 18/7552.

Mr President! Colleagues! Guests in the gallery!

Mr Roth, unfortunately you forgot to mention the European Convention on Human Rights, as the EU is contractually obliged to join this European human rights convention. But the process is being blocked – first by the Member States and now by the European Court. What does this mean? There is currently no individual legal protection against human rights violations by EU bodies, nor will there be in the foreseeable future. This must be corrected as a matter of urgency. I ask you to please get to work on this!

(Applause from the Left Party)

It is nothing new that the EU human rights report

denounces in particular human rights violations outside the EU. In contrast, human rights infringements in the EU Member States continue to be swept under the rug. I call that hypocritical. Poverty, exclusion and unemployment are a reality today for many people in almost all EU countries. In Greece alone over 3.5 million people live with the direct threat of poverty. Over 20 percent of children and elderly people live below the poverty line. That is surely a scandal in rich Europe.

(Applause from the Left Party)

The gap between the rich and the poor is getting wider, because the neoliberal economic system benefits a few - for example banks and large corporations - while others - the majority, such as small farmers, pensioners and workers - are at a great disadvantage. This, too, must change.

(Applause from the Left Party)

Colleagues, the human rights report mentions refugees at many points - we just had that debate - and yet no mention is made of the fact that in 2014 over 3 400 people drowned in the Mediterranean Sea while trying to reach Europe. That is the huge scandal on our own doorstep, which has continually worsened since then. Since the year 2000 at least 25 000 people have died in the Mediterranean Sea. That is appalling. It will continue, unless we create legal ways of entering the EU.

(Applause from the Left Party)

The Dublin system finally needs to be replaced by a refugee policy based on solidarity. Instead, increasing numbers of police and military deployments are used to fight refugees, as if beating the people smugglers or destroying the boats can stop the refugees crossing the sea to reach us. We need legal and safe escape routes and means of entry. The Left Party has

been calling for these for a long time.

(Applause from the Left Party)

Now “hotspots” are being set up at the EU’s external borders. There, those fleeing are divided into “good” and “bad” refugees. The aim of this classification is to stop many people from reaching us at all. But where else should they go? Last week, in my role as rapporteur for the Council of Europe, I was in Lebanon and Jordan. As we are all aware, these two countries have taken in the highest numbers of refugees from Syria. Many refugees are starving due to the insufficient food supply caused by lack of funds. I met many women who were visibly undernourished. In the last two weeks of a month, the money from the international community is only enough for bread. “We are hungry”, many told me.

Colleagues, when it comes to the so-called diverting of refugees, the EU does not appear to be concerned with upholding human rights. This is particularly evident in the unbearable game of tactics with the Turkish President Erdogan. Now the German police are even supposed to work with the Turkish on deterring refugees. This is scandalous! Erdogan is waging a terrible war against his own people, in particular the Kurdish population, and he is even deporting refugees to Syria.

Are you aware that in several Kurdish regions a 24-hour curfew has been in place for weeks? That means people are not getting any medical care, nor can they go shopping. In some cases the water and electricity supply is disrupted. This is a crime that we really need to denounce vocally in the strongest terms!

(Applause from the Left Party)

For those reasons I consider it more than disgraceful

that Turkey has been promised relaxed visa requirements for Turkish citizens and 3 billion euros as a reward for deterring refugees. We should instead be pressurising the Turkish government and urging them to stop, with immediate effect, the combat operations and the extrajudicial executions that are also taking place and to recommence dialogue with the Kurds.

(Applause from the Left Party)

Colleagues, as with Turkey, the human rights infringements carried out by other EU partners are in some cases accepted without comment. For example, the current EU research framework programme Horizon 2020 operates and finances EU security research projects together with Israel, despite the fact that Israel commits huge human rights violations in the Palestinian areas. Israeli arms manufacturers, who profit to a great extent from the occupation and contribute towards it, are supported under Horizon 2020. This means that our European taxpayer's money is also involved in the human rights infringements in this region. Many NGOs and religious organisations have been calling for years for the suspension of the EU-Israel Association Agreement, under Article 2 of which parties are committed to upholding human rights. We make ourselves complicit if we remain silent in the face of these human rights violations in Israel and Palestine. We should do everything in our power to suspend this EU Association Agreement with Israel.

(Steffen Kampeter [CDU/CSU]: That is the entirely wrong signal!)

That would be the right signal! We've already been there with Sri Lanka.

Colleagues, we expressly support the report's statements regarding the death penalty. For years, the Left Party has called upon the Federal

Government to clearly work for the abolition of the death penalty in all dealings with countries who impose it. Yet instead, economic interests appear to be increasingly placed before human rights. The supply of weapons to Saudi Arabia is a particularly striking example of this; this needs to stop immediately.

(Applause from the Left Party)

The use of combat drones to kill people in violation of international law is not mentioned. For years, the USA has infringed upon the sovereignty of other countries and killed people using combat drones, without prosecution, without any court rulings and without giving those concerned the chance to defend themselves. What is particularly scandalous is that American bases in Germany are abused to commit these murders. The US base in Ramstein plays a particularly large role in this respect. And that's not enough: The Federal Government now also wants to purchase weaponised drones. Do they want to take part in these illegal killings, or is there some other reason why we need combat drones at all?

(Steffen Kampeter [CDU/CSU]: That is a nasty allegation you are making here, Ms Groth!)

That is a genuine question that I would like answered.

Colleagues, for a long time now we have been calling on the Federal Government to commit to the fundamental review and development of the EU human rights report, We expect a report of this kind to also clearly mention the human rights violations caused by EU trade and finance policy, as well as by the arms exports by EU Member States. As long as double standards apply, however, and our geopolitical and economic interests come first, human rights will suffer. We need to change this, together.

Thank you.

(Applause from the Left Party)