



## Subcommittee on Human Rights - Newsletter

Issue 29: January - March 2017

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- Angola
- Belarus
- Drones
- International Women's Day

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### Constitutive Meeting - 25 January



Pier Antonio PANZERI (S&D, IT) was elected as new Chair of the European Parliament's Human Rights Subcommittee (DROI) for the next two and a half years.

Four Vice-Chairs, who together with the Chair will form the new DROI Bureau, were also elected: Cristian Dan PREDA (1st Vice-Chair, EPP, RO), Beatriz BECERRA BASTERRECHEA (2nd Vice-Chair ALDE, ES), László TÓKÉS (3rd vice-chair EPP, HU), Barbara LOCHBIHLER (4th Vice-Chair Greens/EFA, DE).



### Exchange of views on the fight against impunity and non-state actors' accountability for human rights violations, 25 January

The invited experts all highlighted the fact that Syria is not a blind spot for justice and accountability and that there is a series of legal tools to help achieve accountability for the human rights violations perpetrated by non-State actors in the country. These include prosecution by the ICC, prosecution by a newly set-up international tribunal, prosecution by national courts of third states under the principle of universal jurisdiction and *ad hoc* trials in Syria.

*Continued ...*



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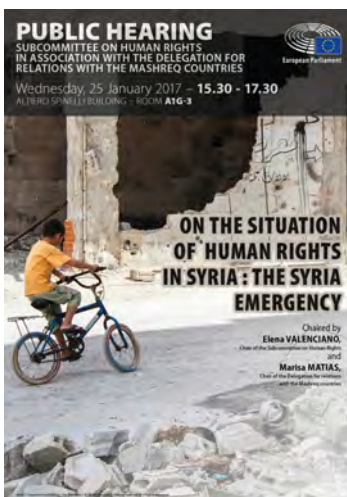
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The EEAS representative emphasised that the EU was one of the strongest promoters of the UN General Assembly resolution adopted in December 2016 and has also contributed €1,5 Million to the Commission for International Justice and Accountability (CIJA).

Speakers included Ms. Laura Passoni, former ISIS recruit, and author of the book “Au coeur de Daesh avec mon fils”, Professor Andrew Clapham, Professor of Public International Law at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva, Mr. Mark Kersten (via Skype), researcher and teacher based at the Munk School of Global Affairs, University of Toronto, Canada, and Stéphanie Maupas, journalist at “Le Monde” and a specialist in international justice.

## *Hearing on the situation of human rights in Syria: Syria Emergency, 25 January*

*In association with the delegation for relations with the Mashreq countries*



The panellists deplored the destruction of Syrian infrastructure and its rich and plurisecular cultural heritage, as well as the state of desolation of the civilian population, faced with a series of abhorrent human rights violations perpetrated by all actors in the conflict.

They also stressed the major role that the EU will have to play in the upcoming peace talks in Geneva to ensure sustainability of the transitional process, which must be led by the Syrians themselves. They also called on the EU to invest in Syrian civil society and help in the reconstruction of the country, in particular in the areas of education and medical care. Finally, they called on the EU and its Member States to share responsibility in the resettling of Syrian refugees, and to live up to their commitments to the UN.

The EEAS reiterated the EU's support for the independent “Commission for International Justice and Accountability” (CIJA), recalling that a conference on Syria will be hosted by the European Union later in spring.

[Programme](#)



**Matthias Behnke,**  
Syria Coordinator at the Office of the  
United Nations High Commissioner for  
Human Rights (UNHCHR)



**Shiyar Khaleal,**  
journalist and human rights activist from  
Afrin-Aleppo



**Bishop Antoine Audo**  
Chaldean bishop of Aleppo and president  
of Caritas Syria



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## *Update on the human rights situation in Angola by Luaty Beirao in the context of the 2015 urgency resolution on Angola , 26 January*



The presence of Luaty Beirão, human rights activist and musician, attracted a lot of media attention mainly from the Portuguese press. He welcomed the EP's urgency resolution on Angola adopted in September 2015 as well as civil society efforts worldwide, both of which exerted the necessary pressure on the Dos Santos regime to obtain his release. With reference to the elections due in Angola this year, the issue of an EU election observation mission was raised, but for which, so far, no invitation from the host government has been received. The Angolan activist was surprised to hear that EU funding totalling millions of Euros is allocated for support for Angolan civil society as no organizations he knows of have received any such support. He also deplored the fact that no EU representative has ever contacted him. As a follow-up DG DEVCO sent DROI a written reply regarding the EU's funding to Angola.

[Urgency resolution on Angola adopted in September 2015](#)

## *Updating on the mid-term evaluation of the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), 6 February*

In this exchange with the European Commission, DROI Members were updated on the mid-term review of the External Financing Instruments (EFIs) and particularly the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR). The EIDHR has already been subjected to the first stage of its midterm evaluation, which is an external evaluation report. It is now due to be opened up for a twelve-week open consultation. The completed external report has shown that the EIDHR is highly relevant, provides great added value and boosts the effectiveness of civil society organizations. Parliament will be invited to engage in the midterm review by presenting its views on the evaluation report, which will subsequently be fed into the final review outcome. This engagement, the Commission confirmed, will not interfere with further consultations on delegated acts and strategic dialogues between the two institutions.

## *Exchange of views on the current human rights situation in Belarus, 6 February*

### *In association with the Delegation for relations with Belarus*

In this exchange of views, Members heard from four speakers: Miklós Haraszti, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus, Lubov Kovaleva, winner of the Human Rights Defender Prize and active in the fight against the death penalty, Andrei Paluda, jurist and also active in the fight against the death penalty in the country, and finally, Valentsin Stefanovich, member of the Human Rights Centre "Viasna". The exchange of views took place a year after the Council lifted most human rights-related sanctions which had been placed on Belarus. The discussion centered around the death penalty but also included the development of a legal framework in support of elections, issues related to freedom of expression, assembly and association, as well as the identification of EU benchmarks connected to the aforementioned areas.



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## *Exchange of views on the occasion of International Women's Day, 9 March*

*Jointly with the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM)*



Hauwa Ibrahim

Lamiya Aji Bashar

Sakharov laureates Hauwa Ibrahim (2005), Nigerian human rights lawyer, and Lamiya Aji Bashar (2016), Yazidi survivor of ISIS /Daesh in Iraq, denounced the extent to which gender-based violence and the general living conditions of women and girls, especially in the context of armed conflict and terrorism, is being endangered nowadays. Both outlined key developments that could improve this appalling situation. In a similar direction, Mara Marinaki, EEAS Principal Adviser on gender issues, highlighted the importance of improving the implementation of the international mechanisms that protect the life of women and girls, among which UN Security Council resolution 1325.

Members of FEMM and DEVE briefly discussed UN resolution 1325 and the possibilities of international prosecution of gender-based violence in the context of armed conflict and terrorism. Members expressed their admiration for the outstanding courage of the laureates and thanked them for their participation.

## *Exchange of views on the human rights situation in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, People's Republic of China, 22 March*

This exchange of views provided MEPs with information about the latest developments in the human right situation in Xinjiang province from Ms. Sophie Richardson, China Director at Human Rights Watch, Ms. Marie Holzman, Sinologist and President of the Association Solidarité Chine, and Dr. Joanne Smith Finley, Senior Lecturer in Chinese Studies at the University of Newcastle. Severe and systemic restrictions on freedom of religion and belief, freedom of movement and expression were highlighted as increasingly common phenomena, including in the context of the recently introduced Chinese counter-terrorism legislation and the progressive securitisation and military deployment. A direct testimony was also given to Members by Dolkun Isa, a Uyghur human rights activist and member of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO).



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## ***Presentation of a DROI draft study on "Shrinking space for civil society: the EU response", 22 March***



The study was presented by its author Dr. Richard Youngs and highlighted how the EU can provide better support and more flexible funding to address the issue of the shrinking space for civil society organizations (CSOs). In this framework, Dr. Youngs stressed the need for the EU to be more proactive in addressing the phenomenon and set out a series of recommendations. One particular proposal is the creation of a European early warning mechanism, which could be useful as an alert to the shrinking space of civil society in a given country and to trigger a proper response by the EU.

[Study](#)

## ***Workshop: Towards an EU common position on the use of armed drones, 22 March***



The workshop presented several proposals for a possible Decision by the EU Council for a common regulation on the use of armed drones. Ms. Jessica Dorsey from the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism in The Hague, presented a draft of her briefing, which contained concrete propositions in that regard, particularly in the light of recent developments in International Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law. Stéphane Kolanowski, legal expert from the ICRC, highlighted how a common EU position could also clarify the existing rules for the use of armed drones and their interpretation at the international level. The EEAS representative underlined the difficulties in reaching such a common position due to limited EU competence and disagreement between Member States, notwithstanding EU's progress on lethal autonomous weapons and the existing rules on arms exports also covering armed drones. Members debated actively and reaffirmed their call for EU action on the matter.

[Programme](#)

## ***Exchange of views on the human rights situation in Bolivia, 22 March***

### ***With the presentation of a study on "Sexual violence against minors in Latin America"***

Jelke Boesten presented her [study](#) on "Sexual violence against minors in Latin America", also with a view to the April DROI mission to Bolivia. Professor Liebel focused on child labour, saying a large proportion of children in Bolivia have to work due to poverty. He welcomed the new law of 2014 and pointed out that working children had been involved in the drafting. The law sets the standards for working children which have to be monitored by commissions set up in accordance with the law. The ILO representative criticized the law as it goes against the idea of compulsory school education and infringes ILO law.

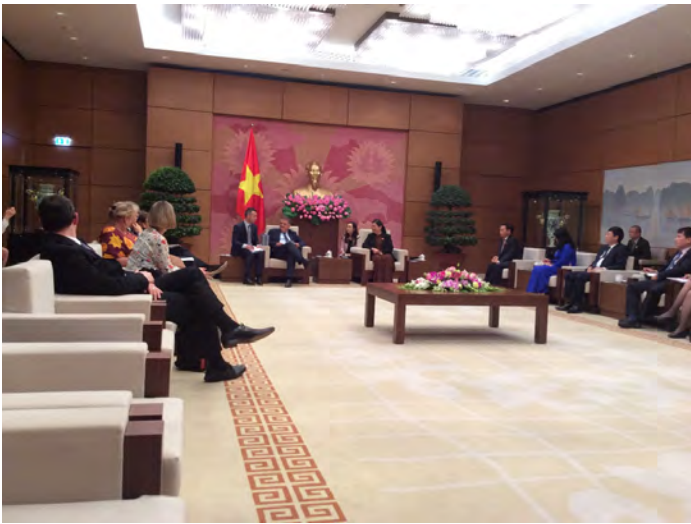
Bolivia is the largest recipient of EU development aid in Latin America, presenting a mixed picture on human rights : development of social and economic rights is positive whereas child labour, corruption and the weakness of the justice system are issues of concern.



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## *DROI Mission to Vietnam, 20-24 February*



The DROI ad-hoc mission to Vietnam, which took place on 20-24 February 2017, was chaired by Pier Antonio PANZERI (S&D, IT), and included members Lars ADAKTUSSON (EPP, SE), Ádám KÓSA (EPP, HU), Soraya POST (S&D, SE), David MARTIN (S&D, UK) and Beatriz BECERRA (ALDE, ES).

The mission took place during the last stages of ratification of the EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement, an issue that was widely covered in the meetings with Vietnamese Ministers and National Assembly Committees. The European Parliament clearly stated that it supports the economic liberalisation of Vietnam, without forgetting, however, the importance of advancing human rights in Vietnam. In this sense, the DROI mission raised different human rights concerns, including freedom of expression and media restrictions, freedom of association, freedom of religion or belief, and arbitrary detentions and harassment against independent bloggers,

activists and human rights defenders.

As a result of the mission and in the light of the common interest in advancing human rights in Vietnam, Mr Panzeri proposed exploring the possibility of setting up a joint parliamentary committee within the European Parliament's Delegation to ASEAN. This committee would monitor the implementation of the EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement from a human rights perspective.

[Press Release](#)

## *DROI mission to the 34th session of the UN Human Rights Council, 20-21 March*

The ad hoc mission to the Human Rights Council (HRC) in Geneva was led by DROI Chair Pier Antonio PANZERI (S&D, IT), and further composed of Cristian Dan PREDA (EPP, RO), Andrzej GRZYB (EPP, PO), Soraya POST (S&D, SE), Petras AUŠTREVICIUS (ALDE, LT), Amjad BASHIR (ECR, UK) and Barbara LOCHBIHLER (Greens/EFA, DE) and took place over two days.

Prior to the meetings with UN high-ranking officials, the DROI mission met with the EU Ambassadors who are members of the HRC. Members met with the High Commissioner for Human Rights, HE Prince Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, the President of the Human Rights Council, HE Mr Joaquín Alexander Maza Martelli, and the UNHCR High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr Filippo Grandi. Meetings with Geneva-based NGOs were also held, in order to get their take on the key concerns of the session.

Discussions focused on the issues covered by the 34th HRC session, such as Freedom of Religion and Belief, the situation in Syria and the Occupied Palestinian Territories as well as matters on which DROI has been working.

DROI Chair Panzeri stated that the current situation of human rights in the world is bleak, and that in the light of such regression, more cooperation with the OHCHR is necessary. Mainstreaming human rights in all EU policy areas is more necessary than ever, as DROI Chair Panzeri pointed out, given that there is a pressing need to increase the EU's human rights leverage in the world, in particular in Africa and Asia, and also within the OHCHR.

[Press release](#)



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## *Current reports and opinions*

### **Statelessness in South and South East Asia ([2016/2220\(INI\)](#))**

**Rapporteur: Mr Amjad BASHIR**

Consideration of draft report in DROI, 28 November 2016  
Deadline for tabling amendments, 8 December 2016 at 12.00  
Consideration of amendments in DROI, 24/25 January 2017  
Vote in AFET, 10/11 April 2017  
Vote in Plenary, June (tbc)

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### **Addressing human rights violations in the context of war crimes and crimes against humanity, including genocide ([2016/2239\(INI\)](#))**

**Rapporteur: Mr Cristian Dan PREDA**

Consideration of draft report in DROI, 9 March 2017  
Deadline for tabling amendments, 20 March at 18.00  
Consideration of amendments in DROI, 11 April 2017  
Vote in AFET, 30 May 2017 am  
Vote in Plenary, July I

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## *Urgency resolutions*

### **January 2017 - Strasbourg**

Indonesia, notably the cases of Hosea Yeimo, Ismael Alua and the Governor of Jakarta; Central African Republic; Situation in Burundi

### **February 2017 - Strasbourg**

Situation of human rights and democracy in Nicaragua, the case of Francisca Ramirez; Executions in Kuwait and Bahrain; Guatemala, notably the situation of human rights defenders

### **March 2017 - Strasbourg**

Zimbabwe, the case of Pastor Evan Mawarire; Ukrainian political prisoners in Russia and situation in Crimea; Philippines, the case of senator Leila M. De Lima

[All resolutions](#)



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## *Forthcoming DROI meetings 2017*

Tuesday, 11 April, pm  
Wednesday, 12 April, am  
Wednesday, 3 May, pm  
Thursday, 4 May, am  
Tuesday, 30 May, pm  
Thursday, 8 June, am  
Wednesday, 21 June, am & pm  
Thursday, 22 June, am

[Calendar of DROI meetings 2017](#)

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