

HRDN Letter to Members of the European Parliament – 2024-2029 Legislature

Brussels, July 22, 2024

Dear Members of the European Parliament,

The [Human Rights and Democracy Network \(HRDN\)](#) and its [68 members](#) congratulate you on your election or re-election in the European Parliament. We look forward to working with you and contributing to parliamentary activities aimed at promoting and protecting human rights and democracy both inside and outside the European Union.

The new legislature is taking office at a time of growing global instability and attacks on the international rules-based order, including human rights institutions.

In Europe and elsewhere, political groups actively pursuing anti-rights agendas are gaining support, often fed by disinformation campaigns, at the expense of migrants and asylum seekers, women's rights, LGBTI+ rights, ethnic and religious minorities, civil society, media freedom, academic freedom, freedom of expression, association and assembly, and the rule of law. Abuse of the unanimity rule and growing divisions among EU member states often prevent the adoption of strong, swift and effective measures to address human rights and international law violations in EU foreign policy, and undermine EU efforts to tackle the climate crisis and address the challenges posed by artificial intelligence and new technologies. In several cases, this has led to perceptions of double standards that risk undermining the EU's credibility, including in international fora.

As atrocity crimes in armed conflicts in Ukraine, Israel and Palestine, Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Myanmar, Haiti and elsewhere multiply, the institutions devoted to documenting, investigating and prosecuting them, including the International Criminal Court (ICC), are actively intimidated, threatened, and at serious risk of sanctions, funding cuts and paralysis. Those on the front lines defending human rights globally continue to face mounting risks for their work, including judicial harassment, arbitrary detention, defamation, physical attacks, and even killings: over 300 human rights defenders were [killed](#) in 2023. The United Nations face a historic [liquidity crisis](#), with significant repercussions also on the work of UN human rights bodies. Two permanent members of the UN Security Council (UNSC), Russia and China, are accused of [war crimes](#) and [crimes against humanity](#), whereas another permanent member, the United States, largely continues to prevent UNSC action to address more meaningfully the conflict in the Middle East and the unfolding humanitarian catastrophe.

Autocratic regimes are increasingly investing in global multilateral fora, such as COP and mega sports events, for greenwashing or sportswashing purposes. "Transnational repression" is also on the rise: repressive governments increasingly target dissidents who live abroad, including in the EU, through threats, violence – at times lethal –, abductions, smear campaigns, abuse of Interpol red notices, and sophisticated spyware.

In this worrying scenario, as negotiations proceed to determine the EU and European Parliament architecture for the next 5 years, we urge you to double down on efforts to ensure the centrality of human rights and international law in the work of the European Parliament.

Here below we would like to offer some concrete recommendations:

- 1) Unequivocally commit to strongly support human rights, international humanitarian law (IHL), international justice mechanisms including the ICC, humanitarian principles, civic space, the rule of law and independent international institutions in all circumstances.** MEPs should take a victim-based approach, condemning all human rights abuses and demanding accountability regardless of the perpetrators. They should use their mandate under the EU Treaties to the fullest to hold EU member states to account for rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms breaches and for insufficient action or double standards in implementing the EU's [Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy](#) and other EU [human rights guidelines](#) to address abuses and IHL violations in foreign policy.
- 2) Engage actively in and promote the work of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE), the Human Rights Subcommittee (DROI), and the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM),** and support their central role in exposing and discussing human rights abuses and democratic backsliding inside and outside the EU and scrutinizing the other EU institutions' action, or lack thereof, to address them;
- 3) Mainstream human rights throughout all committees and delegations.** That includes inviting and facilitating the participation of human rights experts and human rights defenders at hearings, relying on conclusions and recommendations of independent regional and international human rights mechanisms, producing human rights assessments and considering the human rights implications of all EU policies, trade and other bilateral agreements and legislation, **not only in LIBE, DROI, and FEMM, but also in the foreign affairs (AFET), development (DEVE), trade (INTA), Legal Affairs (JURI), budget (BUDG) and other committees and delegations,** as appropriate.
- 4) Scrutinize EU funding** with regard to the adequacy of support for human rights and democracy-related programs (particularly in the future MFF) and to the inclusion of sufficient safeguards to prevent and address human rights concerns, including for migration-related arrangements.
- 5) Make hearings more interactive,** with Q&As with Commission, EEAS and Council officials instead of just their closing remarks, to ensure more effective parliamentary scrutiny of the other EU institutions; ensure substantial commitments by the EU executive in relation to demands and recommendations made in AFET/DROI/LIBE own-initiative reports.
- 6) Continue to adopt strong urgency and other resolutions** denouncing human rights abuses inside and outside the EU, naming as appropriate and supporting civil society groups, human rights defenders, lawyers, journalists and political activists who are unjustly persecuted and prosecuted, and urging the other institutions to take concrete, time-bound and effective action. Although those resolutions are not binding,

committees, delegations and individual MEPs should also monitor and follow up on their implementation by the other institutions and progress in the countries concerned;

- 7) Support the work and the role of civil society organizations, and fight against the spread of repressive legislation and undue restrictions on civil society within and outside the EU.** Engage with the Commission and Member States on tackling transnational repression within the EU and facilitate access to visas for human rights defenders. Parliament should lead by example by continuing to constructively cooperate with civil society, welcoming their input and holding exchanges with civil society actors, including during hearings and events, during the work on reports and on legislative files, and ahead of parliamentary visits or other activities within and outside the EU.
- 8) Bolster action to ensure that human rights, equality and the rule of law are upheld within the EU.** The European Parliament should reappoint a standing Rapporteur on the situation in Hungary and a standing Rapporteur on the situation in Poland to continue monitoring and addressing issues of democratic and rule of law backsliding; renew and expand the mandate of the LIBE Democracy, Rule of Law and Fundamental Rights Monitoring Group (DRFMG), and set up a panel of independent experts to advise the Parliament on compliance with the values under Article 2 TEU in Member States. It should maintain and strengthen the mandate of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM) and renew the mandate of the Anti-Racism and Diversity Intergroup (ARDI) and enhance its resources to address rising racism and far-right narratives.

We hope that the European Parliament will continue to be a vocal supporter of human rights and international law worldwide and a watchdog within the EU to demand respect of articles [2](#) and [21](#) of the Treaty of the European Union. We look forward to contributing to those efforts and to strengthening our cooperation over the upcoming five years to that end.

Yours sincerely,

Human Rights & Democracy Network

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