



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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Dear President,

The European Commission would like to thank the German Bundestag for its continued monitoring of the human rights and democracy situation across the globe. The European Commission takes good note of the Opinion by the German Bundestag adopted on 25 June 2021 on the European Union Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World in 2019.

Human rights and democracy are at the heart of the external action of the European Union. Since 2019, the challenges to human rights, democracy and the rule of law have become more widespread. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated economic and social inequalities, hampered the right to education for many children and led to an increase in domestic violence, shrinking of civic space, flourishing disinformation and growing authoritarian trends. The European Union has advocated for a human rights-based approach that focuses on persons in vulnerable situations in line with the Council conclusions on Team Europe Global Response to COVID-19 adopted on 8 June 2020.

Multilateralism is the only effective format to deal with global challenges. Around the globe, the European Union continues to invest in effective multilateral cooperation including at the level of the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the Council of Europe. The European Union provides leadership in multilateral human rights fora and strongly supports the mandate of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The European Union also supports the International Criminal Court and promotes ratification of the Rome Statute. The European Union leads international efforts on the most pressing issues, from Syria to Colombia, and from digital technologies to climate change.

The European Union Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World presents the progress achieved to date in promoting and protecting human rights and democracy by means of a comprehensive set of actions taken by the European External Action Service, the European Commission and European Union delegations around the world. The report covering 2019 contains thematic chapters in line with the European Union Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy (2015-19) and includes concrete country specific examples.

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The Foreign Affairs Council adopted the most recent European Union Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World covering 2020 on 21 June 2021. The report is a key tool in monitoring the implementation of the European Union Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy (2020-24) adopted by the Foreign Affairs Council in November 2020. The new Action Plan is a roadmap of ambitious and actionable priorities placing human rights front and centre in its external action in the next five years. The Council regularly monitors the implementation of the Action Plan, among others, through regular updates on the implementation of the EU human rights guidelines, the annual human rights country strategies implementation reports, and the preparations and assessment of human rights dialogues.

The European Union Special Representative for Human Rights, Eamon Gilmore, is guiding the implementation of the new Action Plan. In order to increase the visibility and reach of the EU human rights policy, the Special Representative conducted bilateral meetings, dialogues and interactions focusing on a number of key EU thematic priorities. These include human rights defenders and political prisoners, the fight against discrimination, the death penalty, torture and ill-treatment, the full enjoyment of all human rights by women, children and LGBTI persons, freedom of religion or belief, freedom of expression, economic, social and cultural rights, business and human rights, as well as the human rights implications of digital technologies.

One of the highest profile EU actions in 2020 against human rights violations and abuses was the establishment of a dedicated European Union Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime. This is a milestone achievement. It allows targeting individuals, entities and bodies – including state and non-state actors – responsible for, involved in or associated with serious human rights violations and abuses worldwide. With this new sanctions regime, the European Union sent a clear message that human rights abuses will not be tolerated, no matter where they happen.

The European Union remained a major donor in supporting and protection of human rights defenders, most notably under the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR). The instrument has funded the EU Human Rights Defenders mechanism ProtectDefenders.eu (EUR 35 million for 2015-2022). This mechanism has supported around 45 000 human rights defenders at risk and their families since 2015. In 2020, the mechanism consolidated its focus on women human rights defenders. Women Human Rights Defenders or LGBTI Human Rights defenders represent 55% of the beneficiaries.

The Human Rights and Democracy thematic programme, adopted under the new Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) for 2021-2027, is the successor to the EIDHR. The programme inherits all the strengths of its predecessor. It guarantees independence of action without reference to the consent of partner countries' governments or other public authorities; it has a global nature, and can operate in any country outside the EU, including in middle-, upper- and high-income countries; and it is implemented by local, national, regional or international civil society organisations, including non-registered organisations and individuals.

The European Union remained fully committed to its accession to the European Convention on Human Rights. Negotiations resumed in 2020 following the 2014 negative opinion by the Court of Justice of the European Union on the original draft accession agreement. To mark the 70th anniversary of the European Convention on Human Rights, the European Union led a joint communication campaign illustrating the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Convention by recounting real human rights stories from the Court's case law, thus highlighting the benefits of the Convention for victims of human rights violations.

Human rights and democracy will continue to be raised systematically in political dialogue meetings and human rights dialogues and consultations with EU partners from across the world, including the African Union, the Gulf countries, the neighbouring countries of the European Union and the candidate countries and potential candidates for European Union membership.

The European Commission considers the protection and promotion of human rights and democracy to be a priority for candidate countries and potential candidates for European Union membership. In line with the Copenhagen criteria, all partners seeking to accede to the Union must demonstrate a credible commitment to promoting and protecting human rights. The European Commission will continue to closely monitor the situation in accession countries through the annual Enlargement Package reports assessing the implementation of fundamental reforms, as well as through the European Union annual reporting on human rights and democracy.

The European Commission's continued commitment to promoting the universality of human rights is deeply rooted in international law and European values. The European Commission appreciates the support of the German Bundestag in promoting and protecting the respect for human rights and democracy in the world and looks forward to advancing our constructive cooperation in the future.

Yours sincerely,

*Josep Borrell Fontelles
High Representative/Vice-President*

*Maroš Šefčovič
Vice-President*