

2019 report on human rights and democracy

Parliament's July plenary session is scheduled to feature a statement by Josep Borrell, High Representative of the European Union, and a debate on the recently published 'EU Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World 2019'. The report takes stock of all EU action in 2019 in support of democracy and human rights in the world. Parliament will subsequently respond with its own report issuing recommendations for the future.

Background

Council [approved](#) the EU's annual report on human rights and democracy in the world by means of a simplified [written procedure](#) on 15 June. Against the backdrop of the most urgent challenges, the report provides a comprehensive mapping of actions conducted by the Union with regard to human rights and democracy at multilateral, regional and bilateral levels, by means of political and diplomatic tools, EU development instruments, trade conditionality, and other external policies.

Highlights of the 2019 report

The [2019 report](#) marks the final phase in the implementation of the 2015-2019 EU action plan on human rights and democracy, with a [new action plan](#) expected to be adopted soon by the Council of the EU. The report acknowledges that 2019 witnessed a continuation of negative trends, including attacks against the multilateral order, increased pressure on human rights, democratic regress and shrinking space for civil society. In October 2019, in response to these trends, the Council adopted [new conclusions](#) on democracy. Digital technologies have provided new opportunities for political participation but also created dangerous tools for incitement to violence or hatred, disinformation campaigns, and violations of human rights online – all issues requiring the EU's attention.

In 2019, the EU continued to support human rights defenders in difficult situations all over the world, providing those most at risk with legal and financial assistance. In bilateral dialogues and multilateral forums, the EU continued to advocate strongly for freedom of expression and the media, as well as for freedom of religion and belief. It also focused on fighting disinformation and engaging with journalists in local contexts. Equality and anti-discrimination figured high on the EU agenda, in particular gender equality and women's empowerment, the rights of the child, the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex people and the rights of indigenous people. To reinforce and streamline EU policy in the area, in March 2019, the Council [adopted](#) EU human rights guidelines on [non-discrimination in external action](#). It was a breakthrough year for EU support for social and economic rights, with the adoption in June 2019 of EU human rights guidelines on [safe drinking water and sanitation](#) – the first guidelines yet to address such rights. In hindsight, through the lens of the coronavirus crisis, the emphasis on [these rights](#) appears very important. The EU also leveraged its external policies in pursuit of human rights, for instance [initiating](#) the procedure to partially withdraw its trade preferences from Cambodia, because of serious human and labour rights violations.

The report is accompanied by [country updates](#), published by the European External Action Service, setting out the human rights and democracy situation of every country in the world, EU areas of focus and support in 2019 (bilateral engagement and financial assistance), and the situation in multilateral forums.

European Parliament position

Every year, in response to the EU report, the Committee for External Affairs (AFET) drafts a report for adoption by Parliament. Unlike the EU report, Parliament's report makes specific recommendations to guide future EU policy. This report is usually voted during the December plenary session.

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