

**Question for written answer E-001902/2017
to the Commission (Vice-President / High Representative)**
Rule 130
Alyn Smith (Verts/ALE)

Subject: VP/HR - EU-Egypt Association Council: promoting a plural, independent and free civil society

The EU-Egypt Association Council will convene in May 2017, for the first time in years, to start the new EU-Egypt partnership.

I welcome the strong commitment shown by the Vice-President / High Representative to have the promotion of an independent civil society in Egypt featured as one of the EU's top four priorities.

The situation is getting worse. As of March 2017 at least 18 human rights defenders have had a travel ban imposed on them by the Egyptian authorities, according to Egypt's leading human rights organisations. Half of those travel bans were enforced in 2016 while the EU was negotiating our future partnership. In February 2016, Egypt's most respectable centre against torture, the El Nadeem Centre¹, was forced to shut down – something never seen in 30 years under Mubarak's authoritarian rule. These are only a few examples of an ongoing, general crackdown on basic rights and freedoms.

In this context, how does the VP/HR intend to raise the EU's priority of defending and upholding a plural, independent and free civil society in Egypt, in public and in private, with our Egyptian counterparts?

¹ World Organisation Against Torture, press release following the closure of El Nadeem Centre
<http://www.omct.org/human-rights-defenders/urgent-interventions/egypt/2017/02/d24205/>