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TEXTS ADOPTED

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**P10\_TA(2025)0258**

**Addressing transnational repression of human rights defenders**

**European Parliament resolution of 13 November 2025 on addressing transnational repression of human rights defenders (2025/2048(INI))**

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to the UN declaration on human rights defenders (HRDs) and to the UN Human Rights Council Resolution of 4 April 2025 entitled ‘Human rights defenders and new and emerging technologies: protecting human rights defenders, including women human rights defenders, in the digital age’,
- having regard to the Treaty on European Union, in particular Articles 3 and 21 thereof,
- having regard to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union,
- having regard to the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders, adopted in June 2004, and to its resolution of 16 March 2023 on the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders<sup>1</sup>,
- having regard to the Council Conclusions on EU Priorities in UN Human Rights Fora in 2025 of 27 January 2025,
- having regard to the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024, extended until 2027,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on a Single Market For Digital Services and amending Directive 2000/31/EC (Digital Services Act)<sup>2</sup>,
- having regard to Directive (EU) 2024/1760 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 on corporate sustainability due diligence and amending Directive (EU) 2019/1937 and Regulation (EU) 2023/2859<sup>3</sup>,

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<sup>1</sup> OJ C, C/2023/409, 23.11.2023, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2023/409/oj>.

<sup>2</sup> OJ L 277, 27.10.2022, p. 1, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2022/2065/oj>.

<sup>3</sup> OJ L, 2024/1760, 5.7.2024, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2024/1760/oj>.

- having regard to the Commission’s 2024 annual report on human rights and democracy in the world by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy,
  - having regard to its report of the investigation of alleged contraventions and maladministration in the application of Union law in relation to the use of Pegasus and equivalent surveillance spyware,
  - having regard to the G7 Leaders’ statement on transnational repression of 17 June 2025 and the G7 multistakeholder dialogue on transnational repression held in February 2025,
  - having regard to the study of its Directorate-General for External Policies of the Union of June 2025 entitled ‘Transnational repression of human rights defenders: The impacts on civic space and the responsibility of host states’,
  - having regard to Rule 55 of its Rules of Procedure,
  - having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (A10-0206/2025),
- A. whereas transnational repression (TNR) is a well-documented phenomenon, taking place in a global context of deteriorating human rights, shrinking civic space and a growing prevalence of increasingly repressive and assertive authoritarian regimes;
  - B. whereas there is no universally adopted definition of transnational repression and official data is limited, which is an obstacle to the fight against this phenomenon; whereas according to Freedom House, in the period 2014-2024 over 25 % of the world’s governments had engaged in transnational repression, with 1 219 direct physical incidents across 103 target countries; whereas 10 regimes account for nearly 80 % of all transnational repression cases, namely China, Türkiye, Tajikistan, Russia, Egypt, Cambodia, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Iran and Belarus; whereas countries in other regions, such as Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela in Latin America, Saudi Arabia in the Gulf and Eritrea in Africa are also registered as perpetrators of transnational repression;
  - C. whereas the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders defines human rights defenders (HRDs) as individuals or groups who act to promote, protect or strive for the protection and realisation of human rights and fundamental freedoms at national and international level, through peaceful means;
  - D. whereas HRDs are key EU allies in defending and promoting human rights, democracy and the rule of law, as well as in denouncing violations thereof; whereas the implementation of the EU Guidelines on HRDs and related commitments remains uneven;
  - E. whereas HRDs worldwide are at risk of transnational repression, with a growing number of cases registered in recent years; whereas many cases remain unregistered owing to fear of further retaliation;
  - F. whereas transnational repression frequently undermines the security, sovereignty and legal order of host states and poses systemic threats to civic space, democratic institutions and the rule of law both at international level and within the state concerned,

as evidenced by reports from the intelligence services of Member States and like-minded countries;

- G. whereas despite growing awareness of the existence and scale of transnational repression, EU foreign and domestic policy responses to transnational repression remain limited and fragmented, resulting in a concerning gap in protection for HRDs at risk;
- H. whereas new technologies, notably spyware such as Pegasus, are an essential tool of modern transnational repression, which governments use to spy on and surveil HRDs;
- I. whereas social media and other digital platforms provide an enabling environment for transnational repression, including in the form of hacking attacks, online harassment, intimidation and defamation and disinformation campaigns, which are deeply intertwined with traditional methods of transnational repression against HRDs;
- J. whereas digital transnational repression increasingly exploits the dual-use nature of internet technologies, including social media and digital platforms, which serve as essential public spaces for civil society organisations, HRDs, journalists, lawyers, bloggers and other independent voices to expose abuses and advocate for fundamental freedoms; whereas authoritarian actors seek to flood, monitor, manipulate or silence these platforms through harassment, disinformation and surveillance; whereas some technology companies have at times played a passive or even active role in facilitating digital repression, thus becoming significant enablers of transnational repression;
- K. whereas increased transparency is needed on how technology companies respond to government requests to remove content or access user information;
- L. whereas exiled and diaspora women HRDs face gender-specific forms of transnational repression such as gender-based harassment, abuse and intimidation, leading to stigmatisation and social isolation; whereas gender-based digital transnational repression occurs when state and state-affiliated actors deploy digital technologies and weaponise gender and misogyny as tools of repression against women HRDs residing outside their countries of origin;
- M. whereas full respect for harmonised human rights legal frameworks and a secure legal status at national and EU level reduce HRDs' exposure to transnational repression;

### ***Transnational repression against HRDs: growing trends and threats***

1. Proposes defining transnational repression as attacks and threats by states, including authoritarian regimes and their proxies, that aim to defend and advance their interests by reaching across national borders to coerce, control or silence dissidents, political opponents, journalists, activists, HRDs and diaspora members, through a broad range of physical methods, such as targeted killings, abductions, violence, harassment and enforced returns, disappearances and deportations, and the strategic misuse of legal instruments, including abuse of consular services, extradition procedures or red notices, and arrests, as well as non-physical methods, such as digital surveillance, intimidation, blackmail and threats against HRDs' families;
2. Condemns any form of transnational repression as a serious threat to international human rights law and a violation of the sovereignty of host countries through foreign interference tactics; stresses, in this context, the need to adopt a broadly agreed

definition of transnational repression and to step up the common fight against this phenomenon through a well-established legal framework at multilateral, regional and national level;

3. Expresses grave concern about the escalation of transnational repression; notes that the number of transnational repression cases is most likely underestimated, as transnational repression is often conducted in a covert manner;
4. Highlights that state-sponsored transnational repression is taking increasingly insidious forms, including physical harm, torture, deportation, surveillance, legal pressure, defamation campaigns, digital threats, enforced disappearances and abductions, forced repatriation, extradition requests, freezing of assets, threats against family members and unlawful killings;
5. Highlights and condemns the fact that former European Parliament vice-president, Alejo Vidal Quadras, was a victim of TNR perpetrated by Iran through a terrorist attack orchestrated in an EU Member State;
6. Condemns authoritarian regimes and other perpetrators and their proxies worldwide for increasingly resorting to digital transnational repression; notes the use of AI-powered technologies, spyware, hacking and doxing to harass, surveil, discredit and intimidate HRDs and targeted individuals; underscores that digital transnational repression also encompasses content-based censorship, including the use of takedown requests, legal threats, content moderation pressure and the blocking of exile-run media outlets in order to suppress or remove information critical of authoritarian regimes;
7. Condemns tactics of gender-based digital transnational repression, which disproportionately target women HRDs residing outside their countries of origin; is deeply concerned by the rise in sexual abuse and threats by means of digital technologies, aimed at discrediting women HRDs and discouraging them from continuing their activities;
8. Condemns perpetrators for exerting legal and diplomatic pressure, including through politically motivated Interpol red notices and the international institutional counterterrorism architecture, to request the arrest and extradition of exiled HRDs and targeted individuals; condemns, furthermore, the abuse of the 'terrorist' labelling, criminal prosecutions in absentia and other measures of an administrative nature, such as the revocation of citizenship, denial of visa-related documents, travel and entry bans, and the denial of identity documents and consular or banking services;
9. Expresses serious concerns about the role of some host countries, including some EU Member States, and non-state actors, such as digital service providers and other technology intermediaries, the private spyware industry, security contractors, private investigators, criminal organisations and proxies, including diaspora members, in facilitating transnational repression, including through collaboration among states' border and security forces;
10. Highlights, moreover, that transnational repression as a direct threat to the sovereignty and security of states, including the EU Member States, enables foreign state actors to exercise intimidation, coercion and control beyond their borders; recalls that, while national security remains the sole responsibility of the Member States, the scale and

cross-border nature of these practices require a coordinated EU-level response, including cooperation initiatives among national authorities, EU institutions and civil society actors;

11. Expresses serious concerns about shrinking civic space and the silencing of exiles, whose voices are instrumental in documenting human rights situations and abuse by authoritarian states; recalls that defending and supporting free and democratic societies, including in the EU's immediate neighbourhood, is in the EU's own strategic interest;
12. Highlights the lasting psychological toll of transnational repression on the mental health and general well-being of victims and their families, including their sense of safety, psychological integrity, social relationships and their ability to continue public activities, leading in many cases to long-lasting trauma, isolation and exclusion; strongly condemns perpetrators' retaliation against families of HRDs living abroad as a means of transnational repression; notes the particularly chilling effect of transnational repression also among diaspora and civil society living in exile;
13. Highlights the importance of recognising that transnational repression against HRDs disproportionately affects those with vulnerabilities linked to race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexuality, disability or socio-economic status;
14. Underlines that, in some parts of the world, journalists can be exposed to transnational repression patterns, with long-lasting repercussions for their careers and personal safety;

#### ***Mainstreaming transnational repression in EU policies***

15. Calls on the Commission, the Member States and the European External Action Service (EEAS) to systematically address transnational repression in the context of human rights clauses in EU agreements, where relevant, and human rights dialogues with non-EU countries and other forums for bilateral and multilateral cooperation, such as the UN Human Rights Council;
16. Urges the EEAS to assist HRDs and targeted individuals, including dissidents, who are victims of transnational repression in non-EU countries, through dedicated programmes aimed at enabling them to continue their work in exile, while remaining safe from reprisals and aggression;
17. Calls on the Commission and the EEAS to include transnational repression in the post-2027 EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy and in the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders as a growing threat to HRDs and targeted individuals, and to include concrete provisions for the protection and safety of HRDs;
18. Insists on the urgent need to address, both at national and EU level, the protection gaps faced by HRDs when targeted by transnational repression; calls for them to be given fast-track, flexible, accessible and sustained support, including emergency support, temporary relocation and tools and training to enable them to better protect themselves against all kinds of threats and unlawful surveillance that may amount to transnational repression; stresses the need to provide digital and cyber security training, legal assistance and psychosocial support for HRDs affected by transnational repression; considers it paramount that protection policies and programmes be victim-centered, gender-sensitive, intersectional, inclusive and non-discriminatory;

19. Calls for the EU and its Member States to respect their international obligations and stresses that the right to seek asylum is fundamental for the protection of people at risk of persecution under the Geneva Convention;
20. Calls on the Member States to make best use of their national policies and available margins to formulate a more coherent, coordinated and predictable policy for individuals targeted by transnational repression;
21. Expresses concern about the role played by the embassies of states involved in transnational repression; points to the heightened risk for HRDs in need of consular services when forced to engage with those embassies; calls on the Member States to increase pressure on embassies of countries linked with transnational repression hosted on their territories, and not to use their diplomatic outposts to engage in efforts to silence dissent abroad, in line with the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations;

### ***Enhancing coordinated monitoring and data collection***

22. Calls on the EEAS and the Member States, in cooperation with the relevant institutions, such as Europol, to coordinate efforts and set up accessible information, data, tracking and reporting mechanisms to improve the documentation of cases of transnational repression on their territories and facilitate a rapid reaction and investigation where necessary; calls on the EEAS to enhance the network of focal points for targeted HRDs and individuals in EU delegations, who are tasked with raising cases with the authorities in the relevant capital city; believes that such mechanisms should be accessible to civil society, allowing for their input to be duly registered;
23. Calls on the Commission to establish a centralised mapping mechanism to identify, monitor and assess incidents and share alerts of transnational repression against HRDs located in the EU, which will help to identify gaps in EU policy, formulate adequate strategic responses and support coordinated action among Member States;
24. Calls on the Member States to codify transnational repression in their national legislation, with the aim of supporting government institutions in identifying and preventing transnational repression; calls on the Member States to establish national focal points within their governments for potential and actual victims of transnational repression and to provide a toolkit explaining how to report instances thereof;
25. Calls on the Member States, Europol and the EU Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL) to provide training on transnational repression awareness, counterstrategies and specific risk assessment protocols to relevant government agencies, external service providers and their staff, especially cybersecurity, law enforcement and immigration officers and staff tasked with handling visa applications and reviewing extradition requests and other forms of legal cooperation with non-EU countries, with a focus on digital surveillance, retaliation risks and misuse of legal mechanisms;

### ***Addressing the risks posed by digital technologies as enablers of transnational repression***

26. Calls for the EU and its Member States to recognise, prevent and tackle digital forms of transnational repression, including disinformation campaigns targeting HRDs, and to ensure that HRDs are protected against online harassment, intimidation and censorship,

regardless of the origin of the service provider, the location of the digital infrastructure or the tools used; calls on the EU Member States to criminalise foreign intelligence activities targeting dissidents in exile as a form of digital transnational repression;

27. Asks the Member States to apply strict oversight of spyware and surveillance markets and operations, including by applying mandatory human rights due diligence and the EU Dual-Use Regulation<sup>4</sup> for all EU-based technology exporters and to repeal the export of licences for spyware to countries with documented transnational repression and human rights violations, where there is a foreseeable risk that these tools will be used to silence or punish human rights advocacy or dissent; recalls the 2024 Commission Guidelines on the export of cyber-surveillance items, which aim to raise awareness of the risks associated with the misuse of cyber-surveillance technologies and provide exporters with practical tools to evaluate human rights situations;
28. Calls on the Member States to establish easily accessible and safe reporting mechanisms, designed to respect and protect user privacy, to enable HRDs living in exile or in diaspora communities to raise concerns about digital transnational repression with relevant government agencies; stresses the need to recognise the specific challenge of gender-based digital transnational repression and the particular consequences of this type of repression for women HRDs;
29. Calls for the EU and its Member States to ensure that private actors, particularly in the technology sector, are held accountable for their role in cases where they enable digital transnational repression; further calls for the publication of transparency reports and for the establishment of effective grievance mechanisms that are accessible to HRDs and other at-risk individuals;

### ***Ensuring accountability and applying sanctions***

30. Calls for the EU to hold states and regimes committing transnational repression accountable for human rights violations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and to consider imposing targeted sanctions on those states and on perpetrators of transnational repression against HRDs; urges the EU to support victims of transnational repression in seeking redress through strategic litigation before the European Court of Human Rights;
31. Denounces the fact that transnational repression also takes place on EU Member State soil and in some cases with Member State complicity in transnational repression; notes that transnational repression is also enabled through collaboration between governments;
32. Stresses that the EU and its Member States must uphold human rights due diligence in their engagements with governments known to engage in or enable transnational repression against HRDs;

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<sup>4</sup> Regulation (EU) 2021/821 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 setting up a Union regime for the control of exports, brokering, technical assistance, transit and transfer of dual-use items (OJ L 206, 11.6.2021, p. 1, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/821/oj>).

33. Calls for the EU to increase funding for ProtectDefenders.eu, broaden its mandate to include HRDs at risk of transnational repression within the EU and increase funding for civil society organisations active in the protection of HRDs and individuals at risk;
34. Calls on the Commission to proactively engage and further collaborate with Interpol and the UN, including by developing a common security framework for transnational repression in order to put an end to the abusive and politically motivated use of red notices, blue notices, diffusions and extradition requests; calls for Europol's mandate to include transnational repression and the assessment of related incidents and Interpol notices targeting HRDs and other individuals; calls on the Member States to exercise the utmost caution when considering requests for arrest and extradition from regimes that have in the past abused red notices;
35. Calls for the EU and its Member States to use all available tools to protect HRDs and targeted individuals and reinforce national sovereignty and democratic values, including sanctions under the EU global human rights sanctions regime (EU GHRSR/EU Magnitsky Act), visa bans and the expulsion of diplomats known to have engaged in acts of transnational repression; urges the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the Member States to include transnational repression as a sanctionable category under the EU GHRSR and to list individuals found to be perpetrators of transnational repression; warns that failure to prevent and respond to transnational repression risks undermining the EU's credibility as a safe haven for those fleeing persecution and defending human rights;
36. Calls for the EU, its Member States, the Commission and the EEAS to mobilise and coordinate all their instruments to address transnational repression, and intensify diplomatic relations, including through EU delegations, to prevent and deter transnational repression tactics by non-EU countries and to highlight these incidents via public statements, thus increasing public awareness; calls for enhanced coordination with like-minded partner countries, in the context of the G7 and other relevant international forums;
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37. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.