



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

PRESS RELEASE

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Human Rights and Democracy: striving for dignity and equality around the world

Today, the European Commission and the High Representative set out the priorities and way ahead on Human rights and Democracy, adopting a Joint Communication and the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy for 2020-2024. Further, they put forward a joint proposal to the Council to act by qualified majority voting on issues falling under the Action Plan, reflecting the strategic importance of the Action Plan. It aims at fostering faster and more efficient decision-making on human rights and democracy.

Changing geopolitics, transition to the digital age, environmental degradation and climate change pose important challenges, but they are also opportunities to foster positive transformation towards more democratic and inclusive societies. Today's proposal sets out steps for the EU and its Member States to embrace new realities and act together in line with the EU's founding values.

High Representative/Vice-President, Josep **Borrell**, said: *"Crisis situations, as the one we are living with the Coronavirus' pandemic, pose particular challenges to the effective exercise and protection of human rights, and put the functioning of our democracies to the test. This is an opportunity for Europe to stand up for its values and interests. We need the courage and ambition to tackle challenges together. Today, we propose an ambitious plan to defend human rights and democracy all over the world by using all our resources faster and more effectively"*.

Building on the achievements of the previous Action Plans, the new Action Plan identifies the priorities and key actions for the next five years and commits to ensure that the EU plays a greater role in promoting and defending human rights and democracy throughout its external action. The Action Plan has five lines of action:

- Protecting and empowering individuals;
- Building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies;
- Promoting a global system for Human Rights and Democracy;
- Harnessing opportunities and addressing challenges posed by the use of new technologies;
- Delivering by working together.

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These five lines of action will serve as the basis for operational measures to be implemented at country, regional and multilateral level, taking into account local circumstances and specificities. To do this, the EU will use the broad range of policies and tools at its disposal to promote and defend human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

Acting faster

The Communication and the new Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy are accompanied by a joint proposal to the Council reflecting the strategic importance of the Action Plan and aimed at fostering faster and more efficient decision-making. If agreed to, the European Council would – unanimously – adopt the Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy as an EU policy of strategic interest. This would mean that, in the future, the Council could act by qualified majority on issues falling under the new Action Plan. This would be a step towards a more strategic and assertive EU.

Next steps

The Joint Communication, the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy (2020-2024) and its accompanying Joint Proposal will be transmitted to the Council and the European Parliament. It will be for the Council to take the next steps in the adoption of the EU Action Plan, including proposing to the European Council that it adopts it as an EU policy of strategic interest.

Background

While there have been great leaps forward, the pushback against the universality and indivisibility of human rights and backsliding on democracy must be addressed. In addition, new technologies are at the forefront, presenting both opportunities and threats. For instance, digital technologies can advance human rights and democratisation, but the misuse of new technologies carry a risk of increased control, monitoring and repression. Global environmental challenges also affect human rights' protection.

The EU has remained steadfast as a strong defender of human rights and democracy. In 2012, the EU adopted the Strategic Framework on Human Rights and Democracy aimed at setting out principles, objectives and priorities, all designed to improve the effectiveness and consistency of EU policy in these areas. To implement this framework, the EU adopted two Action Plans, in 2012 and in 2015.

Since the adoption of the EU strategic framework on human rights and democracy in 2012, the first two EU action plans on human rights and democracy (2012-2014 and 2015-2019), the appointment of the first EU Special Representative for Human Rights (EUSR) in 2012 and the 2019 Council conclusions on democracy, the EU has become more coordinated, active, visible and effective in its engagement in and with third countries and more prominently engaged at multilateral level.

For more information

[Questions and Answers](#)

Joint Communication EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024

EU Action Plan 2020-2024

Joint Proposal for a recommendation of the Council to the European Council