



Engaging with the European Union on human rights



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Council of the European Union

The Council of the European Union (Council of the EU) represents the Member States' positions and interests at EU level through five key responsibilities:

1. Negotiating and adopting EU legislation, in most cases with the European Parliament;
2. Coordinating Member States' policies, such as economic or agricultural policies;
3. Defining and implementing EU foreign and security policy in coordination with the European External Action Service and on the basis of guidelines set by the European Council;
4. Concluding international agreements between the EU and non-EU countries or international organisations;
5. Approving the EU budget jointly with the European Parliament.

Government ministers from each EU country meet in 10 different configurations, each corresponding to a policy area. During the different Council configuration meetings, ministers from EU countries debate issues and may adopt documents (conclusions and resolutions) and/or issue press statements. These documents adopted by the Council of the EU serve different purposes, such as stating the EU's position regarding a particular event or country, coordinating Member States' actions or inviting a Member State or an EU institution to take action on a specific issue ([example](#)).

High-level discussions and decisions are supported by the preparatory work of their permanent representations in Brussels whose staff (ambassadors, civil servants) meet in specialised working parties and committees. The Presidency of the Council rotates between the Member States every six months.

Examples of relevant Council configurations

- The Foreign Affairs Council, composed of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, is responsible for the EU's external action, covering a wide range of issues, including human rights.
- The Justice and Home Affairs Council, composed of Justice and Home Affairs Ministers, develops cooperation and common policies on various cross-border issues, with the aim of building an EU-wide area of freedom, security and justice.

Examples of specialised working parties and committees

- The Political and Security Committee (PSC) monitors the international situation and examines the EU's options for response during a crisis abroad. It is composed of PSC Ambassadors, based in the Member States' Permanent Representations in Brussels.
- Regional: Mashreq/Maghreb Working Party (MaMa): Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Western Sahara conflict, Palestinian Authority, Syria and Tunisia. It also deals with EU cooperation with countries in North Africa and the Middle East, also known as the Union for the Mediterranean.
- Thematic:
 - Working Party on Human Rights (COHOM): human rights aspects of the external relations of the EU;
 - Working Party on Fundamental Rights, Citizens' Rights and Free Movement of Persons (FREMP): issues related to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and negotiations as regards EU accession to the European Convention on Human Rights;
 - High-Level Working Group on Asylum and Migration: external dimension of the EU's asylum and migration policies; dialogue, cooperation and partnership with origin/transit countries; legal/illegal migration;

- Working Party on Integration, Migration and Expulsion: issues related to entry, exit and integration in the EU;
- Asylum Working Party: issues relating to the Common European Asylum System (CEAS);
- Working Party on Frontiers: measures related to the crossing of external/ internal borders of the Schengen states.

What does it do with regards to human rights and how can civil society organisations (CSOs) engage with it?

The main tool through which the Council of the EU can promote the respect for and protection of human rights inside and outside the EU is the adoption of conclusions, resolutions and press statement ([example](#)). They are adopted through different Council configurations and the preparatory work is undertaken at the level of the working parties and committees which hold regular meetings.

- For issues related to human rights within the EU, it is often done through the Justice and Home Affairs Council, supported by the relevant working group such FREMP;
- For human rights issues outside the EU, it is mainly done through the Foreign Affairs Council , supported by relevant working groups and committees such as COHOM, PSC and the relevant geographical working groups (e.g. for Egypt, it is the MaMa Working Group).

Resolutions, conclusions and statements

Before conclusions or resolutions are adopted, civil society organisations (CSOs) can seek to influence Member State representatives working in the relevant working groups or committees (e.g. meeting the French representative on the MaMa on the human rights situation in Algeria). Their names can often be found on the country’s EU permanent representation website.

Using the aforementioned tool, the Council of the EU has also adopted more specific tools regarding human rights. The protection of human rights within the EU is taken into consideration by all the Council of the EU’s bodies, irrespective of their level or the topics they cover. The Council of the EU is specifically supported by a specialised body dealing with all issues related directly to fundamental rights: FREMP. It may take actions in the following cases:

Adopting legislation

The Council of the EU may use its legislative powers to adopt EU legislation in order to ensure the protection of the rights enshrined in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. For other legislative files, there is also a series of guidelines on checking [fundamental rights compatibility](#). CSOs may adopt a similar approach as the one described under ‘resolutions, conclusions and statements’.

Ensuring the effective implementation of the EU Charter

The EU Commission submits an annual report on the application of the Charter. This report gives the Council of the EU an opportunity to hold its own annual debate on the Charter, resulting in the adoption of its own annual debate on the Charter, resulting in the adoption of its own conclusions on the report ([example](#)).

The Council of the EU declares making the respect and promotion of human rights outside the EU a priority in itself. To that end, it may use the following tools:

Thematic guidelines on human rights

The Council of the EU may develop and adopt [thematic guidelines](#) whose objective is to support EU external action and provide EU officials and Member States with practical information on how to help promote specific rights (examples: [freedom of expression](#) or [human rights defenders](#)). For local and international CSOs, they represent opportunities to hold the EU Delegations and Members State Embassies accountable and to encourage their implementation.

Human rights dialogues

The EU holds regular dialogues with non-EU countries on human rights. The decision to initiate a human rights dialogue with a non-EU country is made by the Council of the EU, where COHOM plays a central role. CSOs may, therefore, seek to influence the Member States' representatives on COHOM, inviting them to suggest the opening of a human rights dialogue with a country.

The Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy

This plan is a list of actions that the EU intends to implement with the aim of ensuring that human rights and democracy are promoted in its external action. CSOs may follow up on the EU's commitments and the progress under the different objectives listed.

EU's annual report on human rights and democracy in the world

This annual report provides a snapshot of the EU's engagement and actions to promote and protect human rights across the globe. The report focuses on thematic issues using country-specific examples (example: [2018 Report](#)). The report is adopted by the Council of the EU once a year. CSOs may use information contained in the EU's annual report as a source of information regarding EU's engagement and actions to promote and protect human rights, and consequently ask probing questions to relevant EU decision-makers.

EU priorities at UN human rights fora

The Council of the EU is in charge of defining the strategic priorities for the EU at UN human rights fora. To this end, it adopts conclusions once a year setting the main lines of action for the EU in the coming months ([example](#)). CSOs may seek to influence Member State representatives working in the relevant working groups or the PSC.

European External Action Service

Formally launched in 2011, the European External Action Service (EEAS) is the European Union's (EU) diplomatic service. It supports the EU's foreign affairs chief – the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy / Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP), [Josep Borrell](#) – in carrying out three types of missions:

1. Conducting the Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP);
2. Managing EU diplomatic relations and strategic partnerships with non-EU countries;
3. Working with the national diplomatic services of EU countries, the United Nations and other international organisations.

The EEAS is based in Brussels but relies on an extensive network of EU diplomatic presence worldwide through more than 140 EU Delegations (see EU Delegations Infosheet). It is divided into both geographical and thematic directorates.

It also works closely with the other EU institutions playing a role in shaping EU foreign policy:

- Foreign policies are steered by the European Council and further defined by the Foreign Affairs Council within the Council of the EU;
- The European Commission and the EEAS cooperate to adopt a comprehensive approach for foreign policy issues;
- The EEAS reports to the European Parliament (EP), answers questions from Members of the EP, and has the annual Common Foreign and Security Policy budget approved by the EP.

1. What does it do with regards to human rights?

The role of the EEAS is to bring coherence to the EU's international role, which includes promoting and protecting human rights, democracy and the rule of law worldwide.

Human rights are said to be promoted through political dialogues with third countries, through the EU's development and trade policy as well as through the EU's participation in multilateral fora such as the United Nations or the Council of Europe.

Additionally, to support the work of the HR/VP in developing a more effective, coherent and visible foreign policy, the EU has also appointed Special Representatives (EUSR), whose role is to promote EU policies on specific regions, countries or thematic. [Eamon Gilmore](#) is the EUSR for Human Rights and [Susanna Terstal](#) for the Middle East Peace Process.

2. What can you expect from the EEAS?

The EEAS uses different processes and has a number of specific tools at its disposal to tackle human rights issues, both short- and long-term. Civil society organisations and human rights defenders can take specific actions and carry out advocacy activities to request for these tools to be used or to influence these processes.

In the following table, the focus is put on the processes and tools whose prerogative or initiatives are steered at the Brussels level. For more information on human rights tools more specifically used at the EU Delegation level, refer to the relevant factsheet.

EEAS human rights tools and actions that civil society organisations can influence

TOOLS AND ACTIONS

Diplomacy, preventive measures and sanctions policy

- Declarations (public statements) (either 'on behalf of the EU' – approved by all Member States, made 'by the HR/VP' or 'by its spokesperson', not requiring prior approval by Member States)
- Diplomatic demarches (agreed in Brussels, confidential and formal responsibility of the HR/VP)
- Sanctions such as arms embargo, asset freeze, visa/travel bans (proposals are initially made by the HR/VP)
- EU Special Representatives, especially the one for human rights whose task is to enhance the effectiveness and visibility of EU human rights policy (e.g. discuss human rights issues when visiting third countries)
- Political dialogues/discussions held with third countries or regional organisations during which the EU should ensure that human rights are included:
 - Association Councils
 - Association Committees
 - Sub-committees on Human Rights
- Human rights dialogues which are dedicated to human rights talks with countries around the globe, mostly held in the country concerned but may often be organised in Brussels
- Election observation missions (observers appointed by the Commission and the EEAS)

Strategies and action plans

- EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy: A five-year action plan with a list of actions that the EU says it would implement to ensure that human rights and democracy are promoted in its external action
- EU Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World, which evaluates the progress of meeting the objectives set out in the Action Plan
- EU Human Rights and Democracy Country Strategies, which are drafted by the EU Delegations, in consultation with the Member States and the EEAS
- European Neighbourhood Policy Partnership Priorities for which the EEAS has the lead for negotiating them and reporting on their implementation
- Technical inputs to Political & Human Rights Dialogues
- Policy positions and agendas ahead of bilateral/multilateral meetings

European Parliament

The European Parliament (EP) represents the citizens of the European Union (EU) and is the only directly elected institution of the EU. In total, there are 705 Members of the EP (MEPs) who serve for five years. It has three main powers:

1. Legislative powers shared with the Council of the EU in adopting and amending legislative proposals;
2. Budgetary powers shared with the Council of the EU;
3. Oversight and scrutiny powers over the work of other EU institutions.

How does it protect and promote human rights?

1. Within the EU

Human rights tools for the protection and promotion of human rights inside the EU

How can civil society organisations engage with them?

Legislative powers

The EP may adopt or amend legislative proposals presented by the European Commission to better ensure the protection of human rights within the EU ([example](#)). Aside from legislative proposals, the EP may adopt reports on the situation of human rights in the EU ([example](#)) and on specific issues concerning the protection of these rights in the EU Member States ([example](#)).

Whenever the EP has a say regarding a legislative proposal or writes a report on a specific issue, you may provide inputs to the process and flag concerns related to, or having an impact on, the issue you are advocating for.

Budgetary powers

The EP has a say regarding the budget and the allocation of funds to financing instruments. It can, therefore, influence their objectives and priorities ([example](#)).

You may seek to influence MEPs during discussions involving budget and allocation of funds to financing instruments in order to impact the priorities, objectives, levels of funding and criteria for these instruments (such as the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme or the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund).

Oversight and scrutiny powers

The EP has the right to be informed and consulted about the situation of human rights in the EU. The EU institutions, notably the European Commission, regularly report to and inform the EP about their activities ([example](#)) and respond to parliamentary questions ([example](#)).

You may sensitise MEPs on your issue and suggest questions that they could put forward in order to get answers on your issue from EU institutions and bodies.

Forum for debate and engagement

Through the work of its relevant committees, the EP organises public hearings ([example](#)) with the presence of stakeholders to put issues on the political agenda, debate and raising awareness.

You can attend hearings or listen to them on the EP's website. You may provide inputs ahead of those public hearings to MEPs participating in them. You may even seek to get invited to be on the panel discussions..

Article 7 of the Treaty on European Union

When there is a "clear risk of a serious breach" of the EU's fundamental values, the EP may vote to trigger a mechanism called Article 7 which foresees a preventative mechanism (warning) and a sanctioning mechanism (sanctions) against an EU member state ([example](#)).

You may nudge MEPs towards discussing the possibility to trigger Article 7 against an EU member state, making the case that the concerned country's policies and actions represent a "clear risk of a serious breach" to the EU's core values.

Other instruments and activities

The EU may speak out about abuses in public statements (letter or social media) ([example](#)).

You may approach MEPs and suggest a public reaction to a human rights issue or the sending of a letter.

2. Outside the EU

The EP has a more limited formal role in foreign policy decision-making. However, it may promote human rights worldwide as follows:

Human rights tools for the protection and promotion of human rights outside the EU

How can civil society organisations engage with them?

Legislative power

Given the fact that most international agreements need the EP's consent to enter into force, the EP can monitor the negotiations and implementation of international agreements. It may propose amendments or even block their ratification on human rights grounds ([example](#)).

You can raise awareness of the human rights impacts of an international agreement among MEPs to get them to scrutinise it, propose amendments or even block it.

Budgetary powers

The EP approves the budget and has a say in the budget allocated to the EU Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), which includes the allocation of funds to financing instruments used for the promotion and protection of human rights. It can, therefore, influence their objectives and priorities ([example](#)).

You can seek to influence MEPs during such processes in order to impact the priorities, objectives, levels of funding and criteria for these instruments (such as the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights 2014-2020).

Oversight and scrutiny powers

On matters related to the CFSP, which includes human rights policy, the EP has the right to be informed and consulted on its main aspects and basic choices. MEPs can ask parliamentary questions to other EU institutions ([example](#)).

You can sensitise MEPs on your issue and suggest questions that they could put forward in order to get answers on your issue from EU institutions & bodies.

Election observation missions are another tool through which the EP can promote democracy, human rights and the rule of law worldwide. Parliamentary delegations are sent to observe elections or referenda in third countries ([example](#)).

Ahead of an election or referendum, you can ask MEPs to support the inclusion of a country on the EEAS list of priority countries for election observation.

Forum for debate and engagement

The EP's various committees, notably the Foreign Affairs Committee (AFET) and its Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI), organise public hearings to encourage greater understanding and a higher profile on a wide range of human rights issues ([example](#)).

You can attend hearings and provide inputs. You may even seek to get invited to be on the panel discussions. A further step is to be able to influence MEPs towards organising a hearing on your issue.

Other instruments and activities

By writing a report, through its relevant committees, the EP can address the other EU institutions and bodies, national governments or third countries, to draw attention to a specific issue and elicit a response ([example](#)).

You can provide inputs to MEPs and political groups, prioritising the rapporteur and shadow rapporteur, and ensure follow-up.

Urgency resolutions follow urgency debates which take place during the EP plenary sessions on Thursdays (once a month). The objective is to highlight flagrant violations of human rights across the world ([example](#)).

You can suggest countries or specific cases of human rights defenders to MEPs and political groups.

Every year, the EP awards the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought to human rights activists around the world ([example](#)).

You can suggest names to MEPs and political groups.

Delegations are official groups of MEPs who develop relations with the parliaments of non-EU countries, regions or organisations. They organise missions ([example](#)), including inter-parliamentary meetings ([example](#)), during which human rights issues may be raised.

You can target the EP delegations that are relevant to your work and provide inputs to their members in view of their meetings or visits to the concerned countries.

Public statements or letters ([example](#)) addressed to the authorities on human rights violations and cases of human rights defenders at risk.

You can approach MEPs and suggest a public reaction to a human rights issue or the sending of a letter.

Annex : EP actors relevant to the Euro-Mediterranean region and human rights

Political groups

The MEPs sit in groups per political affiliation (there are currently seven groups).

Each political group has advisors dealing with one or more committees (e.g. DROI advisor, LIBE advisor).

Committees

To prepare for plenary sittings, MEPs are divided up among specialised committees, which meet once or twice a month. The most relevant ones to the Euro-Mediterranean region and human rights are as follows:

- On external affairs: Foreign Affairs Committee (AFET) and its two sub-committees: one on Human Rights (DROI), one on Security and Defence (SEDE); Committee on International Trade (INTA); Committee on Development (DEVE);
- On internal affairs: Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE);
- Other relevant committees: Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM); Committee on Budget (BUDG), Budgetary Control Committee (CONT).

Intergroups

Intergroups are not official bodies but bring together MEPs on a specific topic (e.g. Intergroup on Children's rights). They hold informal discussions and promote exchanges with civil society.

Interparliamentary delegations

Interparliamentary delegations are groups of MEPs who develop relations with parliaments of non-EU countries, regions or organisations, in relation to democracy, human rights and rule of law. The most relevant ones to the Euro-Mediterranean region are as follows: Delegation for relations with the Mashreq countries (DMAS), Delegation for relations with Maghreb countries (DMAG), Delegation for relations with Israel (D-IL), Delegation for relations with Palestine (DPAL), Delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean (DMED), Delegation to the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee (D-TR).

Delegations of the European Union

The EU Delegations represent the EU in third countries and international organisations (UN organisations, the Council of Europe, etc). Their structure usually comprises a Head of Delegation (HoD), with the rank of Ambassador, sometimes a Deputy Head and several sections. The HoD receives instructions from the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (CFSP), while the European Commission can also issue instructions concerning non-CFSP policies.

The delegations are hybrid administrative constructs that combine diplomatic and operational tasks and are divided into political and operations sections. Therefore, their role can be summarised as follows:

- Diplomatic and political role – EU Delegations defend the EU's interests and ensure the external representation of EU foreign policy with third countries and multilateral organisations (conduct political dialogue, ensure diplomatic representation, coordinate with Member States' diplomatic missions etc).
- Operational role – EU Delegations implement EU common policies (e.g. trade, development cooperation and programmes etc).

1. What do they do with regards to human rights?

On human rights issues, leadership has been attributed to the EU Delegations and their role is central to the EU's human rights policy:

- EU Delegations can carry out human rights diplomacy, notably through their outreach and contacts on the ground. Indeed, every EU Delegation has a human rights focal point, and some have a human rights defenders liaison officer and/or a gender focal point.
- EU Delegations are playing an important role in political analysis and policy-shaping, particularly due to their leadership in drafting the Human Rights and

Democracy Country Strategies. More generally, their analysis and reporting can influence policy-making as they are connected with local actors and gather in-the-field information.

- They also play an important role in implementing a set of policy objectives, such as designing, implementing and monitoring EU-funded programmes and projects.

2. What can you expect from EU Delegations?

EU Delegations have a number of specific tools at their disposal to tackle human rights issues, both short and long term. NGOs can take specific action and carry out advocacy activities to request for these tools to be employed, in order to address the situation in the concerned country. For most of these actions, their point of contact is the human rights focal point or head of the political section. In addition, human rights working groups are often established to bring together EU Delegation and Member States' embassy staff working on human rights. Some of the main common tools at the EU Delegations' disposal are described in the next page.

EU Delegations' human rights tools and actions: how can you engage with them?

TOOLS AND ACTIONS

Diplomacy and preventive measures

- Local statements on human rights issues to condemn ongoing violations or take a stand on an individual case. You may contact the EU Delegation as soon as possible after the incident or violation has taken place.
- Diplomatic demarches are confidential statements or interpellations issued by the EU towards the host country. They are particularly relevant for serious and urgent cases. You can advocate for it and specify which authorities the EU Delegation should address and detail the exact concerns it should raise.
- Trial observation. You can detail your concerns to the EU Delegation, encouraging it to attend the trial and even issue a statement about it.
- Visiting a victim of a human rights violation in detention. You can detail your concerns about the victim's health conditions, e.g. human rights defender (HRD) in prison, and urge the EU Delegation to visit them in prison.

Analysis

You can provide inputs (such as briefing material/recommendations) to influence the processes listed below and advocate for the inclusion of particular topics, or at least get information on their content:

- Human Rights and Democracy Country Strategies (EU Delegations are responsible for the drafting work, in consultation with Member State embassies and EEAS headquarters)
- European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) Partnership Priorities (EU Delegations contribute to the drafting, implementation and reporting; ENP includes commitments on freedom of association, expression, assembly and right to a fair trial; "human rights clause" of Association Agreements)
- Regular reporting to EEAS geographical & thematic desks
- Regular reporting to EU Delegations to international organisations
- Human Rights Dialogues address ongoing and structural issues in a country. The EU and the partner country jointly set the meeting agenda. EU Delegations should hold consultation meetings with civil society ahead of subcommittee meetings as well as debriefings afterwards. You can contact the EU Delegation to ask for information on the meeting, get a specific issue on the agenda and call for consultation or debriefing if they are not organised.

Projects and grants

European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights 2014-2020 (EIDHR): EU Delegations define the thematic priorities for the local calls for proposals (you may wish to contribute to the definition of thematic priorities by providing inputs). They can also provide targeted small grants to HRDs (you can advocate for HRDs at risk to receive funding). However, the EIDHR's period of application will end in December 2020 and its action areas will be transferred to the broader Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI).

Contacts/outreach

You can reach out to the EU Delegation to be invited to the following meetings. Otherwise, you can provide inputs and advocate for the inclusion of topics, or at least get information on the meeting agendas:

- Meetings with civil society in the context of high-level EU officials visits
- Meetings with civil society representatives & HRDs
- Meetings with political actors on human rights issues
- Heads of Mission monthly meetings, to get invited as a guest speaker to highlight specific topics

Coordination/working with EU foreign policy system

You can provide inputs and advocate for the inclusion of topics, or at least get information on the following meetings or related policy content:

- Coordination of Member States' human rights activities
- Coordination with like-minded countries (e.g. Norway, Switzerland, Canada, the United Kingdom).
- Coordination with EU Delegations to international organisations
- The annual meeting of human rights focal points in Brussels
- Regular meetings/consultations with European Parliament representatives, including MEPs

European Commission

The European Commission (EC) is the politically independent executive body of the European Union (EU). It is supposed to represent and uphold the interests of the EU as a whole.

The EC has three main roles:

- Proposes legislation to the Parliament and the Council of the EU, and works with the European Court of Justice to ensure that legislation is enforced;
- Manages and implements EU budgets, policies and programmes adopted by the European Parliament and the Council of the EU;
- Represents the EU externally through the work of its High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR/VP) but also in other areas such as trade policy, development cooperation or humanitarian aid.

It is composed of the President of the Commission and 26 commissioners (one per country), each responsible for a portfolio. The President of the EC is appointed by the European Council and, in turn, he/she nominates Commissioners who must be approved by the Parliament. [The current Commission](#), which took office in December 2019, will stay in office until 2024.

When confirmed, each Commissioner appoints a cabinet, which consists of a small group of counsellors who assist him/her in the policy area/portfolio for the preparation of Commission decisions.

Aside from Commissioners' cabinets, the day-to-day running of the Commission business is performed by its personnel (lawyers, economists, etc.) and is organised into departments known as Directorates-General (DGs), each being under the responsibility of one or several Commissioners.

What does the EC do with regards to Human Rights?

The EU's external policy is mainly conducted through the work of the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy / Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP). It includes the respect for human rights and the rule of law as the foundations for EU's international cooperation. (For more on the role of the HR/VP and EEAS on human rights - see EEAS section).

However, as mentioned in the Annex below, other Commissioners are responsible for policies and instruments that have clear potential impacts on the protection and promotion of human rights in the world. Here are some of those policies and instruments:

- The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), a regional policy - implemented bilaterally – defining the EU's relationships with two regionally defined areas in its neighbourhood: South and East. Through funding, the EU helps promote good governance, the rule of law and the protection of human rights;
- The European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights 2014-2020 (EIDHR), a fund specifically directed towards human rights NGOs and civil society, as well as other thematic funds;
- European Agenda on Migration, which covers all aspects of migration, including the external aspects;
- Human Rights clause in Trade Agreements, which allows the EU to take appropriate measures, such as partially or fully suspend trade with a country in case of serious violations of human rights or democratic principles.

How can civil society organisations engage with the EC?

Outreach to the Commissioners and their cabinets

Identify the relevant Commissioner for the policy area you work on and pinpoint the relevant members of the Commissioner's cabinet in charge of it. Once you have these pieces of information, you may send a letter or email detailing your concerns. Obtaining a meeting with the Commissioner or their cabinet is even better, albeit rather difficult due to their agenda constraints and the numerous appointment requests they receive.

Outreach to relevant staff within the Directorates-General

Identify the relevant Directorate-General, the unit and the staff who have responsibility or influence over the issue you are concerned about. As mentioned above, you may send a letter detailing your concerns or get a meeting with them. You can find their contact details in the [EU Whoiswho](#).

Participation to consultations and initiatives proposed by the European Commission

According to Article 11 of the Treaty on European Union, the Commission has a duty to consult citizens and representative associations in all areas of Union action. Public consultations represent an opportunity to provide information and views. They often occur when the Commission is preparing a policy initiative or evaluating existing interventions.

Commissioners and Directorates-General relevant to the Euro-Mediterranean region

- **Olivér VÁRHELYI, Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement**
DG European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR)
- **Josep BORRELL FONTELLES, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy**
European External Action Service (EEAS) (See pages on EEAS)
- **Ylva JOHANSSON, Commissioner for Home Affairs & Margaritis SCHINAS, Commissioner for Promoting our European Way of Life**
DG Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME)
- **Phil HOGAN, Commissioner for Trade**
DG Trade (DG TRADE)
- **Jutta URPILAINEN, Commissioner for International Partnerships**
DG International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO)
- **Didier REYNERS, Commissioner for Justice**
DG Justice (DG JUST)

European Council

The European Council is a European Union (EU) institution which brings together the top political leaders, i.e. Prime Ministers and Presidents of the EU Member States at least four times a year, along with its President, the President of the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

It sets the EU's general political direction and priorities. The decisions are mostly taken by consensus; traditionally, this is done by adopting conclusions that identify issues of concern and actions to take or goals to reach ([example](#)). The European Council is assisted in its work by the General Secretariat of the Council.

In June 2019, the European Council adopted a new [Strategic Agenda](#) (2019-2024) of priority areas for longer-term EU action and focus.

1. What does it do with regards to human rights?

The European Council does not have specific tools or processes related to human rights. However, during their discussions on a topic, country or region, they may raise issues related to human rights, rule of law, democracy, which can then be reflected in their conclusions with suggestions of actions to take or political positions ([example](#)).

As the European Council sets the EU's general priorities, the new Strategic Agenda 2019-2024 notably focuses on the promotion and protection of human rights and democracy, both inside and outside the EU's borders.

2. What can you expect from the European Council?

The main thing that you can expect from the European Council is that the issues and concerns you advocate for will be taken into account and reflected in its discussion and conclusions.

Given the fact the European Council brings together Prime Ministers and Presidents from the 27 EU countries, the most effective way to influence it is to advocate towards these countries, primarily at capital level (cabinet of Prime Minister/President, their relevant ministers and cabinets, Permanent Representatives to the EU, etc.), for instance by trying to get a meeting with them or sending them a letter ahead of the European Council meeting.



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