

# EU Action Plan on Promotion of Human Rights and Democracy in the World



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## News

**Thomas Wahl**

On 25 March 2020, the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR/VP) presented their plans for the future EU policy on strengthening human rights and democracy in the EU's external actions. The package presented to the public consists of the following:

- [Joint Communication EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024](#);
- [EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024](#);
- [Joint Proposal for a recommendation of the Council to the European Council on the adoption of a decision identifying the strategic objectives of the Union to be pursued through the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024](#);
- [Annex to the Joint Proposal for a recommendation of the Council to the European Council](#).

The Joint Communication notes that past EU policy achieved significant progress in countries and regions where human rights were under strain; however challenges persist. Among the critical trends listed by the Communication:

- Weakening of the rule of law;
- Increased violence and intimidation of human rights defenders (over 2600 reported attacks over the past three years);
- Widespread impunity for human rights violations and attacks on the role of the International Criminal Court.

In addition, new technologies and global environmental problems, e.g., climate change, pose additional threats to human rights. Against this background, a renewed focus on human rights and democracy is necessary to strengthen state and societal resilience. The Joint Communication proposes the following:

- Enhancing EU leadership in promoting and protecting human rights and democracy worldwide;
- Setting out EU ambitions, identifying priorities, and focusing on implementation in view of changing geopolitics, digital transition, environmental challenges, and climate change;
- Maximising the EU's role on the global stage by expanding the human rights toolbox, its key instruments, and its policies;
- Fostering a united and joined-up EU by promoting more efficient and coherent action.

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The EU Action Plan 2020-2024 defines the priorities of the EU and the Member States in their relationship with third countries more concretely. It aims at promoting human rights and democracy consistently and coherently in all areas of EU external action (e.g., trade, environment, development). In operational terms, the Action Plan has five lines of action that will be implemented on the ground in partner countries:

- Protecting and empowering individuals;
- Building resilient, inclusive, and democratic societies;
- Promoting a global system for human rights and democracy;
- New technologies: harnessing opportunities and addressing challenges;
- Delivering results by working together.

The Action Plan 2020-2024 builds on two previous action plans that were adopted in 2012 and 2015 for a four-year period each. It also takes into account the 2012 [EU strategic framework on human rights and democracy](#).

The accompanying Joint Proposal refers to Art. 22 TEU and invites the European Council to adopt the Action Plan – by unanimity – as a strategic interest of the EU. In the affirmative, decisions on actions implementing the Action Plan could then be taken by qualified majority voting in the Council. This procedure would make the EU more assertive.

The documents are now being transmitted to the Council and the European Parliament. The Council is now called on to adopt the Action Plan and to decide on faster and more efficient decision-making in the area of human rights and democracy.

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