

Press release – European values: COVID-19 emergency measures pose a “risk of abuse of power”



On Tuesday, the Civil Liberties Committee approved a draft resolution that takes stock of the state of European values in the context of national measures taken to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic, with 50 votes to 11 and 3 abstentions.

MEPs concluded that national emergency measures pose a “risk of abuse of power” and stressed that any measure affecting [democracy, the rule of law, and fundamental rights](#) must be necessary, proportional and time-limited. They call on governments to consider terminating their “state of emergency” or at least to clearly define the delegation of powers to their executives, and to ensure that appropriate parliamentary and judicial checks and balances are in place.

MEPs urge the Commission to conduct an evaluation of “first wave” measures, in addition to the initial comments included in its [first annual rule of law report](#), and emphasise the need for a permanent, [effective monitoring mechanism](#).

Personal freedoms

EU countries have to “exercise utmost restraint” when restricting the freedom of movement (especially in relation to the right to family life), while the Commission should scrutinise the application of Schengen rules.

MEPs warn against undue restrictions to the freedom of assembly and changes in legislation while citizens are unable to protest. In this context, the need to guarantee free and fair elections becomes even more important, especially with regards to implementing changes to electoral legislation,

ensuring equal rights in campaigning, and alternative forms of voting.

Disinformation and media freedom

Disinformation threatens citizens' health and their trust in public institutions, and has also been used as a pretext to restrict freedom of expression. The best way to tackle this, MEPs say, is by supporting independent journalism and media pluralism (including through transparent allocation of funds to media) as well as by improving journalists' working conditions.

Right to education and protection of vulnerable groups

Member states should guarantee the right to education by ensuring that classes continue and students have access to them. Furthermore, they should find solutions through technology or judicial cooperation to safeguard the rights of defendants, and to protect the rights of all persons in their prisons.

MEPs finally warn that disinformation stigmatises migrants and has increased discrimination, racism, xenophobia, and hate speech against persons with disabilities, asylum seekers and refugees, people of Romani heritage and LGBTI+ persons.

Quote

The rapporteur [Juan Fernando López Aguilar](#) (S&D, ES), commented that "the member states have adopted a vast number of emergency measures, at different times and with different impacts on the right to healthcare, to privacy and data protection, to equality before the law, to non-discrimination or freedom of expression and information. The piecemeal approach has produced an EU patchwork in uncharted territory. Our message is that even in times of crisis, there is no room for trade-offs when it comes democracy, fundamental rights and the rule of law".

Next steps

Parliament is scheduled to vote on this resolution during the 11-13 November plenary session.