

Press release – EU Ombudsman must continue push for more transparency in Council and Commission



The text (approved with 563 in favour, 3 against and 63 abstentions) commends the Ombudsman's role in making the EU legislative process more transparent to the public in order to hold elected officials and governments to account.

According to the 2018 [report](#), the Ombudsman's office opened a total of 490 inquiries and closed 545. 17 996 citizens called on its services for help. 2 180 requests were handled as complaints, among which 880 fell within the EU watchdog's mandate.

Inquiries related to transparency, accountability and public access to information and documents continued to account for the largest number of cases (20.6%) handled by the Ombudsman's services in 2018.

Democratic accountability undermined by Council's secrecy

The submission of the Special Report on the practices of the Council of the EU to the Parliament marked a significant moment in 2018. The EU watchdog's report included several recommendations to increase transparency and public access to documents in the Council, which Parliament fully [endorsed](#) and further expanded.

MEPs again reminded the Council to align its working methods with the standards of a parliamentary democracy, as required by the Treaties, and encouraged the European Ombudsman Emily O'Reilly to continue to follow up on her inquiry.

Better access for citizens

The Ombudsman plays a crucial role in enabling citizens' direct participation in EU policy-making, namely via the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI), MEPs point out. They ask for ECI's usage and the implementation of its [latest provisions to continue to be monitored](#).

MEPs also welcome the redesign of the Ombudsman's website, which offers a new, user-friendly 'Fast-Track' procedure for citizens to access documents.

Shut "revolving doors"

MEPs welcome the new Code of Conduct for Commissioners, which bans former commissioners from lobbying the Commission. However, they believe that further reinforcements are needed and that the Ombudsman should continue to monitor compliance with the Commission's revised rules on 'revolving doors', that came into place as a result of her 2018 inquiry.

Quote

"The Ombudsman is the link between the EU's administration and EU citizens and is therefore an important institution. In the past decades, the EU Ombudsmen worked closely with the Parliament and I hope that will be the case in the decades to come", said the rapporteur [Peter Jahr](#) (EPP, DE).

Background information

On 18 December, [Parliament re-elected Emily O'Reilly](#) for a new five-year term as European Ombudsman.

[Press release – To save biodiversity, MEPs call for binding targets at global and EU level](#)



Parliament adopted its position in view of the 2020 UN biodiversity conference (COP 15), in Kunming (China) in October by show of hands.

To stop the current trajectory of biodiversity loss, the conference needs to agree on legally binding targets with timelines, performance indicators and reporting mechanisms based on common standards, says the resolution.

EU must lead the way

Parliament wants the upcoming EU biodiversity strategy for 2030 to ensure that the EU leads by example

- by ensuring that at least 30 % of EU territory consists of natural areas,
- by restoring degraded ecosystems by 2030,
- by taking biodiversity objectives into account in all EU policies, and
- by earmarking a minimum of 10 % of the 2021-2027 long-term budget for efforts to improve biodiversity.

MEPs also underline the need for more sustainable agricultural and forestry practices, including EU-wide binding reduction targets on pesticide use.

Quote

“For Parliament, the crucial points will be defining European and global objectives for biodiversity that should include better protection of natural ecosystems, reducing pesticide use in Europe and making the agriculture and the fishing sector sustainable. 2020 will be a key year for biodiversity with

the [IUCN](#) in June in Marseille and the COP15 in October in China.”, said [Pascal Canfin \(RE, FR\)](#), Chair of the Environment Committee.

Background

Parliament has consistently prioritised biodiversity, and repeatedly warned of its continuing, unprecedented loss.

[The UN Biodiversity Convention](#) entered into force on 29 December 1993. A delegation from the European Parliament will attend its 15th meeting in Kunming, China, from 19 October to 1 November 2020.

COP 15 is expected to adopt a post-2020 global biodiversity framework setting the global biodiversity course for the next 10 years and beyond.

[Press release – Venezuelan crisis: MEPs reaffirm their support for Juan Guaidó](#)



In a resolution adopted on Wednesday, the European Parliament strongly condemns the attempt by Nicolas Maduro’s regime to install pro-government candidate Luis Parra as new Chairman of the Venezuelan National Assembly on 5 January of this year.

The previous Speaker Juan Guaidó, who is currently recognised as Venezuela’s legitimate interim President by over 50 countries and the [European Parliament](#), was prevented from chairing the opening session by armed forces. Several opposition parliamentarians were also prevented from entering the National Assembly on the same day.

Mr Guaidó has since been sworn in as re-elected President of the legislature, despite further attempts by groups loyal to the Maduro regime to prevent this from happening.

Strong support for Juan Guaidó

In the resolution, the European Parliament reaffirms their support for Juan Guaidó as the legitimate President of the National Assembly and interim President of Venezuela. MEPs deplore the recent grave violations, which are incompatible with legitimate election processes. The National Assembly of Venezuela is the only legitimately elected democratic body in the country, and its powers need to be respected, says the text.

The European Parliament also recalls that the EU stands ready to support a genuine process towards a peaceful and democratic solution to the Venezuelan political crisis. The resolution calls on EU Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell to step up the European Union's response to restore democracy in the country, including through targeted sanctions against individuals responsible for human rights violations, but also by extending these sanctions to their family members.

It further requests that a fact-finding mission be dispatched to the country to assess the situation on the ground.

The text was adopted by 471 votes to 101, with 103 abstentions.

Background

A year ago, Mr Guaidó, in his capacity as parliamentary speaker at the time, declared himself Venezuela's interim President after disputing the 2018 re-election of incumbent authoritarian President Nicolas Maduro. The country has been in political turmoil ever since. The European Union, including 25 member states, also considers Mr Guaidó to be the current legitimate leader of Venezuela.

[Press release – Human rights breaches in Nigeria and Burundi](#)



Nigeria

Following the recent terrorist attacks in the country, the European Parliament strongly condemns the repeated violations of human rights and international and humanitarian law, "whether based on religion or ethnicity". MEPs urge the Nigerian authorities to guarantee respect for human rights and to protect the civilian population from terrorism and violence. The fight against impunity is fundamental to the stability of the country and to building lasting peace, MEPs say.

The situation in Nigeria has significantly deteriorated over the last few years, posing a serious threat to international and regional security. Recent killings are part of a wider series of terrorist acts, including the attack on 24 December 2019 on a village near Chibok that resulted in the death of seven villagers and the kidnapping of a teenage girl.

The text was adopted by show of hands. For more details, the full resolution will be available [here](#) (16.01.2020).

Burundi

MEPs strongly condemn the current restrictions on freedom of expression in Burundi, including the limitations placed on public freedom, large-scale violations of human rights, the intimidation and arbitrary arrests of journalists and broadcast bans. They recall that Burundi is bound by the human rights clause of the Cotonou agreement and therefore urge the country's authorities to immediately revert this abusive trend and to uphold its human rights obligations.

Civil society and journalists play a vital role in a democratic society, MEPs say, particularly in the context of upcoming elections in Burundi. The European Parliament calls on the Burundian authorities to stop intimidating, harassing, and arbitrarily arresting journalists, human rights activists and members of the opposition, including those returning from exile.

The text was adopted by show of hands. For more details, the full resolution will be available [here](#) (16.01.2020).

[Press release – Rule of law in Poland and Hungary has worsened](#)



In a resolution adopted with 446 votes to 178 and 41 abstentions, MEPs note that reports and statements by the Commission, the UN, OSCE and the Council of Europe indicate that “the situation in both Poland and Hungary has deteriorated since the triggering of Article 7(1)”.

MEPs point out that the hearings organised by the Council under [Article 7 of the Treaty](#) are neither regular nor structured. They call on the Council to address concrete recommendations to the countries concerned, including deadlines, to ensure EU law is respected.

“The failure by the Council to make effective use of Article 7 continues to undermine the integrity of common European values, mutual trust and the credibility of the European Union as a whole”, claims the EP.

The text also urges the Commission to use all tools at its disposal to prevent a serious breach of common values, such as expedited infringement procedures and applications for interim measures before the Court of Justice.

EP’s role in Article 7 hearings

MEPs complain that they have not been allowed to participate in the hearings, particularly when it was Parliament that initiated the Article 7 proceedings. They insist that the Parliament should be given the opportunity to formally present its reasoned proposal to the Council.

EU mechanism on democracy, rule of law and fundamental rights

Finally, the resolution underlines the “imminent need” for an EU mechanism on democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights, [as proposed by the Parliament](#). This should be an annual independent review which assesses, on an equal footing, the compliance of all member states with the values stipulated in [Article 2 of the Treaty](#).

Background

In September 2018, [Parliament demanded that the Council act](#) to prevent the Hungarian authorities from breaching the EU’s founding values. MEPs were chiefly concerned about judicial independence, freedom of expression, corruption, rights of minorities, and the situation of migrants and refugees.

In the case of Poland, the [European Commission requested EU action in December 2017](#) in view of the perceived threats to the independence of the judiciary. In a [resolution adopted in March 2018](#), the European Parliament agreed with the Commission on the risks to the rule of law in Poland.

According to [Article 7 of the Treaty](#), following these requests, the Council may determine that there is a clear risk of a serious breach of EU values in the concerned countries. This could eventually lead, at a later stage, to sanctions, such as voting rights being suspended in the Council.

EU ministers have held two hearings with the Hungarian government, in September 2019 and December 2019, while the Polish authorities have defended themselves in front of the Council on three occasions, between June and December 2018.