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33. International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF)
34. International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT)
35. The Conference of European Justice & Peace Commissions
36. International La Strada Association
37. Light for the World International
38. Minority Rights Group International
39. Netherlands Helsinki Committee
40. Open Society European Policy Institute (OSEPI)
41. Oxfam International EU advocacy office
42. Pax for Peace
43. Peace Brigades International
44. Penal Reform International
45. Plan International EU Office
46. Protection International
47. Quaker Council for European Affairs
48. International Institute on Race, Equality and Human Rights (Race & Equality)
49. Reporters without Borders (Reporters sans frontières)
50. Save the Children Europe
51. Search for Common Ground
52. Terre des Hommes International Federation
53. Victim Support Europe
54. World Coalition against the Death Penalty
55. World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)
56. World Vision International

Brussels, January 30, 2023

## RE: Call to Reconsider Decision on 500-Word Limit for Urgency Resolution

Dear President Metsola,

Dear Presidents of the political groups of the European Parliament,

We are writing to follow up on our [December 20 letter](#), where we raised concerns about proposals to freeze all activities of the European Parliament's DROI Subcommittee and to stop all urgency resolutions on human rights abuses in third countries in the wake of the "Qatargate" corruption scandal.

While we appreciate that such proposals and views have not been supported by a majority in the European Parliament, **we regret the recent decision to enforce a strict 500-word limit for all urgency resolutions.** The limit, imposing a 5- to 7-fold reduction in the average length of the texts, has the only effect of undermining the strength of the human rights urgency resolutions, with no appreciable impact on fighting corruption. **We therefore urge you to seriously reconsider this decision, and to change the rules of procedure if and as necessary in that regard.**

We understand that a set of measures are currently under consideration to try and enhance transparency and contain undue interference on the work of the European Parliament. HRDN welcomes any reasonable measures that increase transparency in the European Parliament and across all European Union institutions. We also recognize how the Parliament's reputation and public trust in the institution play an important role in the impactfulness of its human rights work. We can't overemphasize, however, how shrinking the length of the urgency resolutions serves none of these goals, and risks doing more harm than good.

In practice, the word-limit inevitably results in cutting out names of jailed, sentenced or harassed dissidents, journalists, human rights defenders and civil society groups; avoiding references to abusive legislation, policies or practices that should be addressed by the concerned authorities; refraining from urging the EEAS, Commission, Council and member states to take specific action bilaterally or in multilateral fora; and/or formulating generic catch-all paragraphs that may miss very important nuances in trying to do all or part of the above.

Over the years, we have witnessed how mentions in a resolution can help raise the profile of jailed or at-risk individuals, contributing to their protection, release and/or to otherwise safeguarding their rights; references to abusive laws and policies have contributed to putting them in the spotlight, supporting reform efforts and other measures to address them; and calls for action by other EU institutions have triggered discussions and processes at times leading to more persuasive measures to tackle the human rights abuses highlighted in the resolutions. It is also worth noting that European Parliament resolutions are often the only public expression of concern by an EU Institution over a specific situation, making it all the more important that enough space is available to give a comprehensive overview of the situation, scrutinize EU foreign policy action towards it, and formulate relevant policy recommendations.

*The Human Rights and Democracy Network (HRDN) is an informal grouping of NGOs operating at EU level in the broader areas of human rights, democracy and conflict prevention. Participation in the network is open to non-governmental organizations which engage at EU level in the promotion of human rights, democracy and conflict prevention in and outside the EU.*

*The vision of the HRDN is that human rights and democracy are placed at the heart of the EU's internal and external policy agenda. This vision should manifest itself in a EU that effectively protects human rights at home and is a force for positive change in the world. In pursuit of this vision, the network aims to influence EU and member state human rights policies and the programming of their funding instruments to promote democracy, human rights and sustainable peace.*

Enforcing the 500-word limit on urgency resolutions in the name of countering corruption is nothing but a vain sacrifice of their potential positive impact, as there is no appreciable link between corruption and the length of the texts adopted by the European Parliament.

Furthermore, we are concerned about the proposed list of anti-corruption measures singling out the Parliament's human rights work only. We recall that, compared to urgency resolutions, votes on sensitive legislation or lucrative trade and partnership deals are much more likely to trigger heightened interest (and lobbying activities) by foreign governments, businesses and other stakeholders to secure positive outcomes.

Finally, we reiterate our concerns about the context in which these measures are being discussed, with some in the European Parliament indiscriminately putting into question the integrity of NGOs and potentially undermining the importance of the role civil society organizations play in contributing to EU policy-making. It may be worth stressing that all HRDN members are required by the network to be registered in the EU Transparency Register and to have their financial records publicly available. We understand that neither condition was met by Fight Impunity, the NGO mainly involved in the investigations, which was not a HRDN member. Yet, the unregistered group reportedly enjoyed free access to the European Parliament, and no measure was taken to question or address that by those who should have enforced existing rules.

All this said, if the European Parliament really intends to increase transparency, public scrutiny and accountability around the adoption of its urgency resolutions and more broadly around MEPs' interactions with foreign governments' representatives, here are some measures that could be added to the list of those currently under consideration, instead of the 500-word limit for urgencies:

- 1) Publishing the three topics proposed for the urgencies by each group the week before each plenary;
- 2) Indicating only one MEP per group as the lead author of each motion, so that they can take full ownership of the group's motion on the group's behalf; and
- 3) Publishing the lists of all MEPs who have been members of the (now dissolved) "friendship" groups with third governments.

Thank you in advance for your consideration. Hoping that the 500-word limit will soon be reconsidered and that the proposals above will be taken into account, we stand ready to discuss these pressing issues with you any time.

Yours sincerely,  
Human Rights and Democracy Network (HRDN)