



HR/VP SPEECHES

Speech by HR/VP Mogherini on cases of breaches of human rights, democracy and the rule of law – the situation in Cambodia

Speech by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini at the plenary session of the European Parliament on cases of breaches of human rights, democracy and the rule of law – the situation in Cambodia

Check against delivery!

The last year has seen significant steps backwards for Cambodia's fragile democracy: one-party rule, authoritarian tendencies that have gained more ground in the country, and the space for political opposition and civil society has not just shrunk, it has simply closed.

At the [general election in July](#), following the enforced dissolution of the main opposition party [Cambodia National Rescue Party], the ruling party won all seats in the National Assembly.

The election took place in a highly restrictive environment and it was clearly not representative of the democratic will of the Cambodian citizens.

Last February, at the EU Foreign Affairs Council, [we stressed that the Cambodian electoral process could not be considered legitimate](#), after the arbitrary exclusion of the main opposition party. So, we suspended the European Union's financial assistance to the Cambodian National Election Committee and we declined to observe the July elections.

Over the last year, the legal system has increasingly been used by the authorities in the country to suppress critical voices, not only from the opposition but also from civil society and the media.

At the Foreign Affairs Council in February, [we stated that it may consider specific targeted measures if the situation had not improved](#). So, the situation has not improved and we are now considering the possibility of further measures that as you know, would require the Council to take a unanimous decision.

We also recalled that respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including labour rights, is essential for maintaining EU trade preferences.

For this reason, we sent already in July a Fact-Finding Mission to Cambodia to evaluate the situation on the ground. Decisions on any further steps will be based on the information gathered during this mission.

The European Union has been working with and for the people of Cambodia since the end of the war. At first we helped to rebuild the country, we helped clear it from landmines, and restart fundamental economic activities. Today we support job creation and vocational training.

We would like this partnership to continue, in order to continue to benefit the people of Cambodia; but it is clear that Cambodian government has to reverse the current trend, otherwise this would not be possible.

The recent release on bail of opposition leader Kem Sokha is a positive first step, even though he was released under very restrictive conditions. We now expect the dropping of all charges and the removal of all restrictions placed upon him and we invite the Prime Minister [of Cambodia] and the leader of the opposition to start a dialogue on the way forward.

We urge the Cambodian authorities to drop all remaining politically-motivated charges against activists, and lift the ban on political activity of 118 senior opposition members. Local councillors from the opposition who were elected in June last year should be reinstated.

We also call on the Cambodian government to guarantee the safe return of all exiled opposition politicians, civil society activists and human rights defenders who have fled the country to avoid arrest.

The laws and regulations that have been used to restrict opposition and civil society must be reviewed and amended.

In the 1991 Paris Peace Accords, the Cambodian government had agreed to a legally binding obligation to maintain a pluralistic and democratic system. We now expect Cambodian authorities to restore free political debate and competition, and to respect

the space for a free and independent civil society.

If we continue to see this negative trend without any changes - as I said - we are ready, in the Council, to take appropriate measures.

Thank you.

Link to the video:

Press contacts

Maja KOCIJANCIC

[Maja KOCIJANCIC](#)

Spokesperson for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations

+32 (0)2 29 86570

+32 (0)498 984 425

Adam KAZNOWSKI

[Adam KAZNOWSKI](#)

Press Officer for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

+32 (0) 2 29 89359

+32 (0)460 768 088

www.eeas.europa.eu

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