



Ms. Federica Mogherini
High Representative for the Union Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the
European Commission
European Commission
Rue de la Loi /Wetstraat 200
B-1049 Brussels

Brussels, 20 February 2019

Dear High Representative Ms. Federica Mogherini,

The undersigned Members of the European Parliament write to you today regarding the upcoming EU-League of Arab States summit on the 24-25th of February 2019.

Indeed, we do agree that it is a considerable step forward for the European Union in its dialogue with the members of the League of Arab States, since it is the first summit to ever take place between these two regional entities. We believe that creating space for political dialogue brings to more inclusive cooperation, peace, development and prosperity among international actors. However, we would like to highlight the increased and needed importance of bringing human rights issues at the forefront of these agendas. In point of fact, the EU Strategic Framework and Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy clearly states that the *“EU will promote human rights in all areas of its external action without exception.”*

We consider that addressing the widespread and systematic human rights violations occurring in most of the countries of the League of Arab States would ensure more stability in the region and therefore would promote security. It has become essential, especially considering the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 2018, that this Declaration should inspire the EU’s external policies to include human rights dialogues in every bilateral or regional meeting between the European Union and non- EU countries, international institutions and during the negotiation of international agreements. Indeed, this is perfectly in line with the objectives of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

The human rights situation, in most MENA countries, has not stabilized nor has it progressed since the regional pro-democratic protests in 2011. Human rights defenders, political opposition leaders, civil societies and journalists continue to be targeted, arrested, prosecuted and sometimes killed and tortured in intensified government crackdowns. Freedom of expression, freedom of religion and belief, freedom of speech, association and assembly both offline and online continue to be hampered with increased restrictions and punishments. Moreover, even if new laws have been implemented and existing ones were amended for the promotion of gender equality, women continue to be inadequately protected against gender-based violence and there remains systematic legal and social discrimination against them. Furthermore, the death penalty as well as torture and other forms of ill-treatment are

reoccurring practices in most of these states. Moreover, the war in Yemen and the armed conflicts in Libya and Syria have not ceased and rather continue to take a heavy toll on civilians and their livelihoods. Lastly, in the Gulf states, the *Kafala* system is still in place which poses severe restrictions on trade unions and migrant workers, who continue to face exploitation and abuses.

We would like to emphasize that countering migrant smuggling and resolving armed conflicts are directly linked to the political environment of these countries. Hence, in order to close effective trade and cooperation deals with the League of Arab states it is necessary to highlight these human rights issues to guarantee progress not only in the region but also in the broader context of global cooperation. In light of these facts, we call on the European Union to take these important issues into consideration at the EU-League of Arab State summit. Further, we request that all EU's international activities place human rights at the forefront of their agenda and that all agreements are aligned with the EU's entrenched human rights principles.

Sincerely,

Members of the European Parliament

Margaret Auken, Vice Chair DPAL (Greens/EFA)
Petras Austrevicius, Chair D-AF (ALDE)
Brando Benifei (S&D)
Klaus Buchner (Greens/EFA)
Nessa Childers (S&D)
Mark Demesmaeker (ECR)
Pascal Durand (Greens/EFA)
José Inácio Faria (EPP)
Ana Maria Gomes, Vice-Chair PANA (S&D)
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Eva Joly, Vice Chair PANA, D-AF (Greens/EFA)
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Barbara Lochbihler, Vice-Chair DROI (Greens/EFA)
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Alessia Maria Mosca, Vice-Chair DARP (S&D)
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Alyn Smith (Greens/EFA)
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Bart Staes (Greens/EFA)
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