HuMENA and +20 human rights organizations urge the leaders of Belgium, Greece, Italy, and the EU to promote human rights and ensure justice and sustainability in relations with Egypt.

Letter · Egypt · 15 March 2024

To the Prime Ministers of Belgium, Alexander De Croo, Greece, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, and Italy, Giorgia Meloni, and the President of the European Commission, Ursula Von Der Leyen,

We, undersigned civil society organizations, contact you ahead of your visit to his Excellency the President of Egypt, Mr Abdel-Fattah el Sisi, to urge you to take all necessary measures to ensure that human rights, social and environmental sustainability, and equity are mainstreamed in the EU-Egypt bilateral agreement, which your upcoming mission aims at pursuing.

Our concerns regarding the content and scope of this partnership – based on the one the EU signed with Tunisia in 2023 – stem from Egypt's appalling human rights record, including in areas, such as border control and migration management, which the deal covers. We recall it is essential that the EU and Member States tackle Egypt's human rights and accountability crises by including clear benchmarks for reform in the upcoming Partnership, so as to foster the rule of law, accountable governance and stability; if not, EU financial support will risk subsidizing the same unsustainable policies of the Egyptian government that have undermined political and economic rights.

Additionally, there is growing evidence that the EU's hunger for fuels such as LNG (exemplified by the signing of a Trilateral Memorandum with Egypt and Israel in June2022), on the one hand, and its push for outsourcing the control of its external borders (PDF) to neighboring countries, on the other, are at the root of far-reaching processes of fragilization of communities and ecosystems across North Africa and beyond. In the case of Egypt, such impacts have been documented as a consequence of energy deals between the Egyptian authorities and EU companies such as ENI and SACE. Such partnerships fuel human rights violations in multiple ways, particularly by taking advantage of Egypt's crackdown on workers' unions and rights, generating further vulnerability and economic dependence while increasing energy insecurity for the Egyptian population. Egyptian authorities were recently accused of greenwashing their appalling human rights record and increasing poverty through superficial commitments to climate neutrality pursued with the direct support of the EU and its member States through the payment of loans.

The bilateral deal which the EU plans to sign with Egypt seems to go in this direction. Without human rights and accountability benchmarks, it would also provide legitimization to el Sisi's authoritarian, unaccountable and unsustainable rule, under which Egypt's human rights situation has deteriorated steadily since 2014.

Despite this concerning state of affairs, over the past decade the EU and Member States have chosen to increase strategic cooperation with Egyptian authorities in multiple fields, including police and defense cooperation, direct and indirect financial support and investment, sales of arms and surveillance technology, energy production, border management (PDF) and readmission agreements. This has contributed to the entrenchment of unaccountable governance and impunity in Egypt, which in turn, fuel economic inequality, social insecurity and emigration.

Recently, the EU has signed a strategic deal with Tunisia's President Kais Saied, that, among other areas of international policy, included a deeply controversial provision for the management of migration between Tunisia and the EU in spite of the 2023 spike in hate speech, incitement and violations against migrants and refugees by Tunisian authorities. Initially saluted as a foreign policy success in Europe, the deal has failed to produce the effects which its proponents had anticipated, as demonstrated by the steep increase in the number of people who tried to reach Italy by sea in the aftermath of the deal's signing. The case of Tunisia exemplifies how authoritarian governance and the EU's securitarian approach to migration management are not only ineffective in regulating phenomena which are structural in nature, but that they generate tragic consequences in terms of suffering, injustice, and loss of lives that could and should be avoided.

We urge you to adopt a more holistic approach to sustainability, energy security, development, and migration in the negotiation of bilateral agreements with Egypt, by acknowledging the centrality of human rights and accountability for all people, notably the rights to mobility and to seek asylum, workers' rights, socio-economic rights in the field of energy security, freedom of expression and information and civil liberties more broadly. The upcoming new EU-Egypt Partnership must include clear human rights conditionality and benchmarks to assess implementation and tangible progress of this Partnership and the rule of law (PDF), democratic governance and human rights implementation in the country, in order to promote accountable and sustainable governance of Egypt in the future. This is the only means to build true stability in the country and help Egypt end its cycle of repeated crises.

Signatures:

- A Buon Diritto Onlus
- ARCI
- Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)
- Center of Legal Aid "Voice in Bulgaria"
- CNCD-11.11.11
- Egyptian Front for Human Rights (EFHR)
- Egyptian Human Rights Forum (EHRF)
- Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR)
- EgyptWide for Human Rights
- EuroMed Rights

- Greek Council for Refugees (GCR)
- Greek Forum of Refugees
- HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement
- Inter Alia
- International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
- Legal Centre Lesvos
- Mobile Info Team
- ReCommon
- Refugee Legal Support (RLS)
- Sinai Foundation for Human Rights
- Un Ponte Per
- Yoga and Sport with Refugees

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