

Maria ARENA  
*Chair of the Subcommittee on Human Rights*  
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Bruxelles, October 19th 2020

**Ms Ursula von der Leyen**  
President of the European Commission  
Rue de la Loi / Wetstraat 200  
1049 Brussels

**Mr Charles Michel**  
President of the European Council  
Rue de la Loi/Wetstraat 175  
1048 Brussels

**Re: The European Union's participation in the G20 summit 2020**

Dears Ms Ursula von der Leyen and Mr Charles Michel,

We, the undersigned members of the European Parliament, are writing to you following the second anniversary of the assassination of Jamal Khashoggi on 2 October and the adoption of Resolution 2020/2815(RSP) on 8 October last when the European Parliament, with a large majority from all political groups called for the European Union to downgrade institutional and diplomatic representation at the G20 Leader's Summit<sup>1</sup>, to avoid legitimising impunity for human rights violations and ongoing illegal and arbitrary detentions in Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia currently holds the rotating presidency of the Group of 20 largest world economies (G20), which includes the heads of the European institutions and whose next leaders' summit is scheduled to take place on 21-22 November 2020.

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<sup>1</sup> [2020/2815\(RSP\)](#), 8 October 2020

We, as Members of the European Parliament, have concerns about continuing human rights violations occurring inside Saudi Arabia. The elevation of Mohamed bin Salman to the position of Crown Prince started with the promise of reform and indications that the Kingdom would align itself with internationally accepted human rights standards and practices. Many of us hoped that his appointment would start a new chapter for Saudi Arabia. However, numerous events have undermined this initial hope.

Despite the authorities still portraying the country as striving for reform, invoking its economic Vision 2030 and prestigious projects such as the Neom megacity scheme, the Saudi authorities continue to violate a variety of the most basic human rights, including the right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly and the right to liberty and security of person, as well as the right to freedom from torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and the right to life, not to mention Saudi Arabia's ongoing involvement in the conflict in Yemen.

Within Saudi Arabia, specific ongoing human rights abuses include the detention of human rights advocates and senior Saudi Royals such as Prince Turki bin Abdullah, Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, Princess Basmah bint Saud and Prince Salman bin Abdulaziz bin Salman. Despite lifting the driving ban, Loujain al-Hathloul and four other women human rights defenders remain in custody for campaigning for women's rights. Given the fate of Mr Khashoggi, and the death of pioneering human rights defender Abdullah al-Hamid due to medical neglect and of Major General Ali al-Qahtani in custody, we are understandably worried about the treatment of all those still in detention, underscored by the fact we are still waiting for justice for Jamal Khashoggi's murder.

Even prior to the adoption of Resolution 2020/2815(RSP), the European Parliament has spoken on several of these issues, including on the killing of Jamal Khashoggi,<sup>2</sup> highlighting also the widespread crackdown against human rights defenders, women activists, lawyers, journalists, writers and bloggers; and women's rights defenders in Saudi Arabia,<sup>3</sup> strongly condemning the detention of leading female human rights activists and the repression and torture of human rights defenders, including women's rights defenders, in Saudi Arabia, which clearly undermines the credibility of the reform process in the country. Indeed, the Saudi government has a long record of silencing the very voices that are necessary for a meaningful global conversation regarding the challenges we collectively face, which challenges the appropriateness of their hosting the 2020 G20 summit.

By contrast, the European Union has a long and proud track record of supporting human rights and the rule of law across the world. We are a union of values. The European Union's fundamental values are respect for human dignity and human rights, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law. These core values should guide your policies within the Union and beyond its borders and we should not hesitate to stand up for them in our dealings with third states.

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<sup>2</sup> [2018/2885\(RSP\)](#), 24 October 2018.

<sup>3</sup> [2019/2564\(RSP\)](#), 14 February 2019.

We also call on the Commission to consider the wider context of Europe's economic interaction with Saudi Arabia. Despite ambitions to open the Kingdom up to international markets as set out in Vision 2030, we remain gravely concerned about the overall direction of the Kingdom – especially its deteriorating human rights record. Without progress on this important front, the European Union should not seek closer economic links with Saudi Arabia. Our strong view is that unless Saudi Arabia makes progress on the issues included herein the EU should not consider formalising deeper relations on trade, investment or foreign affairs with the Kingdom.

Above all, we should not legitimise a government committing egregious human rights violations as host of one of the most important summit meetings in the world. We firmly believe that without a resolution to ongoing illegal detentions, a clear commitment to end human rights abuses from Saudi Arabia and demonstrated steps towards accountability for those who commit those abuses, our participation in the upcoming G20 in Saudi Arabia would not only compromise our values, but also contradict the very resolutions passed in our parliament. Given the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the upcoming G20, we urge the Commission to look at these issues as a matter of urgency.

It is against this background that we ask you to re-evaluate your participation in this year's G20 summit and consider not attending, but instead downgrading the level of the European Union participation to a senior official level.

Should you decide to engage with Saudi Arabia in the course of the summit, we urge you to place human rights at the centre of all G20 discussions. In particular, we urge you to use the opportunity to highlight the plight and demand the release of all prisoners of conscience, particularly women human rights defenders; to insist on meaningful steps being taken towards real accountability for the murder of Jamal Khashoggi; and to call for an immediate end to the war in Yemen. Human rights should be a red line in any negotiation with the European Union.

Sincerely

**Maria Arena**

*European Parliament*

*Chair of the Subcommittee on Human Rights*

Annex: 65 signatories

CASTALDO Fabio Massimo - *EP Vice President*

HAUTALA Heidi - *EP Vice President*

*and the following Members*

AUKEN Margrete

BENIFEI Brando

BJÖRK Malin

BOESELAGER Damian

BRGLEZ Milan

BRICMONT Saskia

BUSCHMANN Martin

BÜTIKOFER Reinhard

CARÊME Damien

CORRAO Ignazio

COZZOLINO Andrea

DURAND Pascal

EVI Eleonora

FAJON Tanja

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GIEGOLD Sven

GLUCKSMANN Raphaël

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KONEČNÁ Kateřina

KÖSTER Dietmar

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MAUREL Emmanuel

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NIINISTÖ Ville  
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PICIERNO Giuseppina  
PICULA Tonino  
PISAPIA Giuliano  
PONSATI OBIOLS Clara  
RAFAELA Samira  
REINTKE Terry  
RIBA I GINER Diana  
ROOKMAKER Dorien  
SANTOS Isabel  
SATOURI Mounir  
SCHIEDER Andreas  
SCHOLZ Helmut  
SINČIĆ Vilibor Ivan  
SOLE' Jordi  
STRIK Tineke  
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URTASUN Ernest  
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VERHOFSTADT Guy  
VILLUMSEN Nikolaj  
YENBOU Salima  
ZDANOKA Tatjana