

Intercultural Dialogue Platform's Statement Following the 2024 European Elections: Expectations from Policymakers and the European Parliament

Introduction

As a civil society organisation dedicated to promoting human rights, social inclusion, and democratic values, IDP holds a fundamental interest in the outcome of the 2024 European Parliament elections. The European Parliament serves as a crucial body for shaping policies and legislation that directly impact the lives of millions across the continent. In this position paper, we outline our expectations from policymakers in seven key areas that are central to our mission.

1. Democracy

The European Parliament must uphold the democratic principles and processes essential to its legitimacy and effectiveness. This includes safeguarding the rule of law, ensuring free and fair elections, and promoting democratic values such as pluralism, tolerance, and respect for minority rights. Deliberative practices stemming from the Conference on the Future of Europe, in particular, should be further supported and multiplied so that democracy becomes an everyday exercise for European citizens and that they actively participate in policy-making. If genuine democracy is to flourish, innovative and meaningful ways must emerge to build trust and reduce the distance between citizens and political decision-makers.

Our Asks

Safeguard the Rule of Law: The European Parliament should actively monitor and address threats to the rule of law within the EU. It should establish and maintain mechanisms to promptly investigate instances of government overreach, erosion of judicial independence, or violations of fundamental rights in Member states. Concrete actions include issuing resolutions, conducting hearings, regular reporting, and proposing comprehensive legislative measures to address the rule of law challenges.

Ensure Transparency and Accountability: Ensuring transparency and accountability in governance is essential for building trust and confidence in democratic institutions. The European Parliament should pursue measures to enhance transparency, such as the online publication of legislative documents, minutes of meetings and voting results for public scrutiny. The European Parliament should establish and maintain accountability mechanisms, such as parliamentary oversight committees and independent watchdog bodies, to monitor policy implementation and hold political decision-makers accountable for their actions. Concrete actions include strengthening whistleblower protection laws, carrying

out regular audits of public spending and implementing measures to prevent conflicts of interest among elected representatives.

Ensure Free and Fair Elections: The European Parliament plays a key role in monitoring elections across the EU to ensure they meet international standards of fairness and transparency. This includes deploying election observation missions, combating disinformation, issuing reports on electoral processes, and providing recommendations for improvement. The European Parliament should continuously support initiatives to combat disinformation and safeguard the integrity of electoral systems.

Promote Democratic Values: The European Parliament must relentlessly promote democratic values through its legislative agenda and advocacy efforts. It should champion legislation that strengthens protections for freedom of speech, assembly, and association and supports initiatives that foster intercultural dialogue and tolerance. Moreover, the European Parliament should use its platform to firmly condemn instances of discrimination, hate speech, and violations of minority rights.

Support Deliberative Practices: The Conference on the Future of Europe provides an opportunity to deepen democratic engagement by involving citizens in shaping the EU's future policies and priorities. The European Parliament should support and expand deliberative practices stemming from this conference, such as citizens' assemblies, participatory forums, and online consultations. These initiatives enable direct input from citizens, enhance transparency, and build trust in the EU's decision-making processes.

Reduce the Citizen-Politician Gap: To bridge the gap between citizens and political decision-makers, the European Parliament should envision innovative mechanisms for citizen engagement and participation. This may include digital platforms for direct communication with elected representatives, town hall meetings, and constituency outreach programs. Moreover, the European Parliament should prioritise policies that address citizens' concerns and priorities, thereby demonstrating responsiveness to public needs. The European Parliament is expected to demonstrate responsiveness and ensure proper follow-up to European Citizens' Initiatives.

Educate and Raise Awareness: Promoting civic education and raising awareness about democratic principles are essential for fostering a culture of active citizenship. The European Parliament should continually support educational initiatives that teach citizens about their rights, responsibilities, and the functioning of democratic institutions.

2. Human Rights

Respect for human rights is non-negotiable. The European Parliament must uphold and defend the fundamental rights and freedoms of all individuals within its jurisdiction. This includes protecting the rights of refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants, as well as combating human trafficking and ensuring the right to privacy and freedom of expression.

Our asks

Protect Refugees, Asylum Seekers, and Migrants: The European Parliament must relentlessly work towards creating and enforcing laws that protect the rights of refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants. This includes ensuring access to fair and efficient asylum procedures, providing adequate living conditions, and preventing discrimination based on nationality or immigration status. While it is essential to clearly articulate a common implementation plan for the newly adopted Pact on Asylum and Migration, it is equally vital to continually propose amendments and improvements to the adopted document to ensure consistent and humane treatment of asylum seekers across EU member states.

Promote Freedom of Expression: Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right that the European Parliament must uphold. This involves ensuring that individuals can freely express their opinions, beliefs, and ideas without fear of censorship or retaliation. Concretely, this includes supporting independent media outlets, condemning censorship and internet restrictions, advocating for the release of imprisoned journalists and activists, supporting legal protections for freedom of expression, and promoting media pluralism and diversity.

Address Discrimination and Inequality: We expect the European Parliament to work continuously to eliminate discrimination, promoting equality for all individuals while prioritising the fight against intolerance in all its forms. This includes ensuring a comprehensive legislative agenda capable of effectively combating discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability or other characteristics. It also means tackling extremism, racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia through legislative measures, awareness-raising campaigns and the promotion of intercultural understanding. Political decision-makers should work tirelessly to create a more inclusive and tolerant society where diversity is celebrated, and discrimination is vehemently opposed.

3. Gender Equality

Gender equality remains an ongoing struggle in many spheres of European society. We expect the European Parliament to champion initiatives that promote gender equality in political representation, employment, education, and healthcare. Measures to address gender-based violence and discrimination must be prioritised.

Our Asks

Ensure Political Representation: The European Parliament must relentlessly advocate for measures to increase the representation of women in political decision-making bodies. This includes promoting gender quotas or targets for political parties and electoral lists, as well as supporting initiatives to encourage women's participation in politics, such as leadership training programs and mentorship schemes. Concrete actions involve selecting women to chair parliamentary committees and working groups, funding campaigns to raise awareness about the importance of women's political participation, and supporting initiatives to dismantle barriers that prevent women from entering politics.

Ensure Equal Employment: Closing the gender pay gap and promoting equal opportunities in the workplace are essential for achieving gender equality. The European Parliament should continuously support policies that mandate pay transparency, prohibit discrimination based on gender, and promote work-life balance initiatives such as parental leave and flexible working arrangements. Additionally, promoting women's entrepreneurship and providing access to financing and business support can help overcome barriers to women's economic empowerment.

Ensure Equal Education: Ensuring equal access to education and promoting gender equality in schools are fundamental for challenging gender stereotypes and empowering girls and women. The European Parliament must actively support initiatives that promote gender-sensitive curriculum development, teacher training on gender equality issues, and initiatives to encourage girls' participation in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields. Concrete actions involve funding educational programs that aim to challenge gender norms and stereotypes and supporting initiatives to address the underrepresentation of women in certain fields of study.

Ensure Access to Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare: Access to quality healthcare services that are responsive to the needs of women and girls is essential for promoting gender equality. The European Parliament should actively advocate for policies that ensure access to sexual and reproductive health services as well as initiatives to address gender-specific health issues. Concrete actions involve funding research on women's health issues and supporting initiatives to improve access to healthcare for marginalised groups of women.

Address Gender-based Violence and Discrimination: Combating gender-based violence and discrimination is paramount for promoting gender equality. The European Parliament must continuously support initiatives to strengthen legal frameworks aimed at preventing and addressing gender-based violence. This includes ratifying and implementing international conventions such as the Istanbul Convention and ensuring that all its Member States ratify and enforce these conventions. Additionally, funding support services for survivors of gender-based violence, raising awareness about the issue, and providing training for law enforcement and judicial personnel can contribute to a comprehensive response to gender-based violence and discrimination.

4. Social Inclusion and Social Cohesion

Social inclusion is vital for creating a cohesive and equitable society. Social inclusion should be a cornerstone of the European Parliament's agenda. Policies aimed at reducing inequality, poverty, and marginalisation are imperative. This includes ensuring access to quality education, healthcare, employment opportunities, and social services for all individuals, regardless of their background or circumstances.

Our Asks

Ensure Access to Quality Education: The European Parliament must continuously support policies that ensure access to quality education for all individuals, regardless of their socioeconomic background. This includes investing in early childhood education, providing resources for disadvantaged students and students with disabilities or special needs, and promoting lifelong learning opportunities. Concrete actions include funding educational programs in disadvantaged communities and supporting inclusive teaching practices.

Ensure an Inclusive Healthcare System: Ensuring access to healthcare is essential for promoting social inclusion. The European Parliament should persistently advocate for policies that guarantee affordable and accessible healthcare services for everyone, including marginalised groups such as refugees, migrants, and people experiencing homelessness. Allocating resources to improving healthcare infrastructure, expanding health coverage, tackling health disparities, raising awareness of mental health and destigmatizing mental illness can all contribute to a more inclusive healthcare system.

Ensure Equal Employment Opportunities: Combating inequality in the labour market is crucial for promoting social inclusion. The European Parliament should further support initiatives that aim to reduce unemployment rates among vulnerable populations, such as young and older people, ethnic minorities, and individuals with disabilities. This includes implementing job training programs, incentivizing companies to hire from diverse backgrounds, and enforcing anti-discrimination laws in the workplace. Additionally, promoting flexible work arrangements and work-life balance can help create more inclusive employment opportunities.

Establish Social Services and Welfare Support: Access to social services and welfare support is essential for addressing poverty and marginalisation. The European Parliament should steadily work towards establishing robust social safety nets that provide assistance to individuals and families in need. This involves implementing measures such as income support programs, affordable housing initiatives, and food assistance programs. Additionally, investing in community-based services, such as childcare centres and homeless shelters, can help prevent social exclusion and support individuals in need.

Promote Diversity and Inclusion: Embracing diversity and promoting inclusion in all aspects of society is essential for fostering social cohesion. The European Parliament should actively support policies and initiatives that celebrate cultural diversity, promote tolerance and understanding, and combat discrimination and prejudice. This includes funding multicultural events and festivals, supporting integration programs for migrants and refugees, and promoting intercultural dialogue in schools and communities.

5. Combating Intolerance

Regardless of ethnic origin, religion or belief, gender or sexual orientation, everyone living in the European Union should have a fundamental right to be treated equally, to be respected and to be protected from violence. Certain groups still lack full respect and protection for their fundamental rights. With antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred on the rise, it is crucial to implement concrete and effective policies to combat all forms of intolerance,

including hate speech and hate crimes. This includes combatting racism, antisemitism, anti-muslim hatred, xenophobia, and hate speech and hate crime.

Our Asks

Combat Racism and Xenophobia: People of different racial and ethnic backgrounds continue to experience racism in its varied manifestations across the EU. The European Parliament should promote policies and initiatives to counter individual acts of racism. Concrete actions include implementing robust anti-discrimination policies and policies against hate crimes, promoting public awareness and education campaigns, and funding cross-cultural and intercultural dialogue programs. The European Parliament should also promote actions and policies against structural racism in the member states. Concrete actions include supporting independent bodies to monitor structural racism across member states, and monitoring and enforcing the implementation of the EU framework decisions and Directives combating Racism and Xenophobia across EU member states.

Combat Anti-Semitism: Antisemitism remains a serious concern that needs to be systematically addressed by the European Parliament. The European Parliament should actively develop and support policies promoting Jewish Identity and way of life in Europe as well as supporting interfaith and intercultural dialogue initiatives. Additionally, the European Parliament needs to enhance reporting mechanisms and improve the recording of antisemitic incidents to effectively counter antisemitism. It should also strengthen and enforce existing anti-discrimination laws and promote antisemitism awareness campaigns.

Combat Anti-Muslim Hatred: Muslim communities are the targets of rhetoric that seeks to stigmatize them, devalue their contributions and deny their membership in society. If left unchecked, this climate of intolerance can lead to anti-Muslim hate crimes. Countering this requires action from the European Parliament. Concrete actions include improving reporting mechanisms, public awareness campaigns and training for law enforcement, and strengthening and enforcing anti-discrimination laws. The European Parliament also needs to promote interfaith and intercultural dialogue programs.

Combat Hate Speech and Hate Crime: The EU has seen an amplification of hate speech and hate crime, undermining the core values of the European Union founded on the principles of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights. The European Parliament should actively promote counter-hate speech and hate crimes. This includes measures such as establishing a uniform definition of hate speech and hate crimes, creating or supporting independent bodies to monitor hate speech and hate crimes across the EU, implementing policies to promote hate crime reporting, strengthening victims' access to justice, and promoting policies that enhance social inclusion. The European Parliament should also actively promote policies countering this online, including policies regulating big online social media platforms on content moderation, algorithm transparency, accountability, and supporting media literacy programs.

6. Civic Engagement

Active participation in civic life is essential for a vibrant democracy. The European Parliament should actively engage with civil society organisations, promote citizen participation in decision-making processes, and ensure transparency and accountability in governance. Special attention should be given to enhancing the participation of youth and empowering vulnerable groups, such as migrants, in the political process.

Our Asks

Collaborate with Civil Society Organizations: The European Parliament should constantly engage with civil society organisations (CSOs) by providing platforms for dialogue, consultation, and collaboration. This includes organising public hearings, roundtable discussions, and consultations to gather input from CSOs on policy issues. Establishing and maintaining formal channels for regular communication between CSOs and policymakers, providing resources for capacity-building initiatives, and recognizing the key role of CSOs in the democratic process are of paramount importance.

Promote Citizen Participation: The European Parliament must continue to take proactive measures to promote citizen participation in decision-making processes. This includes organising public forums and online consultations to gather input from citizens on legislative proposals and policy initiatives. The European Parliament should relentlessly support initiatives that promote civic education and engagement, such as civics classes in schools, youth leadership programs, and public awareness campaigns. Providing resources and support for grassroots organisations working to increase civic engagement, as well as adopting mechanisms for direct citizen participation are essential to foster active participation of the European citizens in the decision-making.

Empower Youth: Empowering youth and promoting their active participation in the political process is crucial for ensuring the long-term health of democracy. The European Parliament must fully support initiatives that engage young people in politics and further facilitate real and tangible opportunities for youth participation. In particular, building the capacity of young people to engage in politics is essential for ensuring their meaningful participation. The European Parliament should invest in youth leadership development programs, civic education initiatives, and skills-building workshops to empower young people with the knowledge, confidence, and tools they need to become effective advocates and leaders. Furthermore, concrete actions encompass lowering the voting age, providing civics education in schools, and creating opportunities for youth representation in decision-making bodies as well as engaging with youth representative bodies.

Empower Vulnerable Groups: Special attention should be given to empowering vulnerable groups, such as migrants, refugees, and marginalised communities, in the political process. The European Parliament should actively support initiatives that promote the inclusion and participation of these groups, such as providing language assistance, cultural sensitivity training, and accessible voting options. The European Parliament should continuously advocate for policies that address the unique needs and challenges faced by vulnerable groups, such as combating discrimination, promoting integration, and ensuring access to essential services.

7. Intercultural Dialogue

Promoting intercultural dialogue is essential for building cohesive and resilient societies. The European Parliament should support initiatives that facilitate cross-cultural exchange, promote mutual respect and empathy, and counter divisive narratives. Advocating for policies that promote multiculturalism and interfaith harmony is crucial in combating prejudice and fostering social cohesion. In an era marked by polarisation and populism, where certain groups are constantly stigmatised, it is all the more important to foster a culture of dialogue and sharing. As a civil society organisation specialising in intercultural dialogue, we firmly believe that community resilience can be strengthened through constant efforts to build dialogue between different communities, focusing on shared values and getting to know others.

Our Asks

Support Cross-Cultural Exchange Programs: The European Parliament should actively support initiatives that facilitate cross-cultural exchange among individuals and communities from diverse backgrounds. This includes funding exchange programs for students, artists, professionals, and community leaders to interact with counterparts from different cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. Concrete actions encompass providing grants and scholarships for exchange activities, organising cultural festivals and events, and further supporting cultural exchange networks and platforms.

Promote Mutual Respect and Empathy: The European Parliament should always advocate for policies and campaigns that promote mutual respect, empathy, and understanding among different cultural and religious groups. This involves supporting initiatives that challenge stereotypes, combat discrimination, and promote positive representations of diverse communities in media, education, and public discourse. Concrete actions include funding public awareness campaigns, educational programs on intercultural competence, and initiatives that promote cross-cultural dialogue and collaboration.

Counter Divisive Narratives: The European Parliament should take proactive measures to counter divisive narratives and constantly promote a narrative of unity, inclusion, and solidarity. This involves supporting initiatives that challenge hate speech, xenophobia, and extremism, both online and offline. Concrete actions include funding research on the drivers of divisive narratives, supporting civil society organisations that promote counter-narratives, and advocating for policies that promote social cohesion and intercultural understanding.

Advocate for Multiculturalism and Interfaith Harmony: The European Parliament should advocate for policies that promote multiculturalism, diversity, and interfaith harmony within EU member states and beyond. This involves supporting initiatives that promote inclusive policies on immigration, integration, and cultural diversity, as well as initiatives that promote dialogue and cooperation among different religious communities. Concrete actions include advocating for legislative measures that protect the rights of minority communities, supporting interfaith dialogue initiatives, and fostering partnerships between religious and secular organisations.

Support Community-Based Dialogue Initiatives: The European Parliament should actively support community-based dialogue initiatives that bring together individuals and groups from different cultural and religious backgrounds to discuss common challenges, shared values, and opportunities for cooperation. This involves funding grassroots organisations that specialise in intercultural dialogue and conflict resolution, providing training and resources for community leaders and facilitators, and promoting dialogue-based approaches to addressing social tensions and building trust among diverse communities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, as a civil society organisation, we expect the European Parliament to demonstrate a strong commitment to promoting human rights, social inclusion, and democratic values. By prioritising the combatting of intolerance, fostering social inclusion, advancing gender equality, upholding human rights, promoting civic engagement, safeguarding democracy, and advocating for intercultural dialogue and understanding, policymakers can contribute substantially to building a more just, equitable, and inclusive Europe for all its citizens. We stand ready to collaborate with the European Parliament to achieve these shared objectives.

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