



**Valdis DOMBROVSKIS**  
*Executive Vice-President of  
the European Commission*

**Josep BORRELL FONTELLES**  
*High Representative  
Vice-President of the European  
Commission*

Ms Heidi Hautala, MEP  
Ms Marie Arena, MEP  
European Parliament  
60 Rue Wiertz  
1047 Brussels

E-mail: [heidi.hautala@europarl.europa.eu](mailto:heidi.hautala@europarl.europa.eu)  
[maria.arena@europarl.europa.eu](mailto:maria.arena@europarl.europa.eu)

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Dear Honourable Members,

Thank you for your letter of 12 November 2021 regarding the human rights situation in Sri Lanka. In your letter, you raise serious concerns, some of which were also highlighted in the resolution of the European Parliament of 10 June 2021, in particular in relation to the use of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) and the freedom of operation of civil society organisations, including human rights defenders, victims of the civil war and journalists. You also raise concerns regarding the 'political victimization' commission and the freedom of trade unions to operate.

We also follow the evolution of the situation in Sri Lanka with concern, in particular regarding human and labour rights, and use all institutional channels to engage with the Sri Lankan government with the goal of improving the situation on the ground. These efforts were conducted by correspondence, through video discussions and the work of EU Delegation in Colombo throughout the COVID pandemic. In addition, in the end of September 2021, a team of officials from the Commission and the European External Action Service travelled to Sri Lanka for a GSP+ monitoring mission and to convene the Working Group on Good Governance, Rule of Law and Human Rights. This was the first, and so far only, GSP+ monitoring mission since the beginning of the pandemic, which was authorised as an essential one because of the importance of the message to be delivered to the Sri Lankan government, which accepted to host the EU delegation despite the severe pandemic restrictions.

The government of Sri Lanka engaged seriously and in the spirit of transparency with the representatives of the EU, both at the level of politicians and of civil servants. Thanks to the breadth of the discussion, engagement was not limited to human rights and labour rights, but also addressed issues regarding environmental protection and good governance, including under the prism of the sensitive national reconciliation agenda.

On many of the issues brought forward by the EU, the response of the Sri Lankan government was on balance positive in tone. Specifically on the Prevention of Terrorism Act, all interlocutors agreed that the PTA required amendment in line with international standards, including the President, who expressed his reform commitment publicly to the Sri Lankan media. After the departure of the mission, the Foreign Minister also addressed international community representatives in Colombo, delivering a promise to amend the Act in meaningful ways. As regards the treatment of civil society, the NGO secretariat has been moved from the Ministry of Defence to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a symbolic but positive change.

On the other hand, we share the view that promises are not sufficient and that tangible change and reform must take place. What we have seen so far is limited. For this purpose, we are organising additional meetings with Sri Lanka early in 2022, including a Working Group on Trade and Economic Cooperation Issues, a Working Group on Development Cooperation, and a Joint Commission meeting planned for early February 2022. These meetings will represent an opportunity to follow-up on progress in the areas that were already raised during the monitoring mission. Based on the outcome of these meetings, we will take stock and reassess our approach should that be needed.

We hope that the European Parliament can also continue to engage constructively with the Sri Lankan government and highlight the importance of human and labour rights considerations in our bilateral relations.

Yours faithfully,



Valdis DOMBROVSKIS  
Executive Vice-President



Josep BORRELL FONTELLES  
High Representative