

No rights? No business. Change is necessary in relations between Egypt and Europe.

The facts: on 3 November, 13 Western diplomats including 9 ambassadors visited the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) for a briefing on the situation for human rights and civil society in Egypt. A few days later, three EIPR executives were arrested: Muhammad Bashir, administrative director, Karim Ennarah, director of the Working Group on Justice, and Ghasser Abdel Razak, the executive director. Everyone, like Patrick Zaki, must answer for charges such as "terrorism" and "spreading false news" which are clearly designed to harass. Finally, on November 22, yet another extension of the preventive prison for Patrick Zaky, the Egyptian student [enrolled at Bologna University who formerly worked for EIPR] who since February has been one of the tens of thousands of people imprisoned for crimes of conscience.

Was this just a coincidence? It cannot be overlooked that this wave of arrests coincides with the publication of the EU's *Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy* for the four-year period 2020-24. Coincidence or not, the facts show that the European choice to make dictators like Sisi 'unavoidable partners' is wrong: timid requests certainly do not transform dictatorships into democracies.

Europe has long been proclaiming – as it did in the wake of the arrests of EIPR executives – that human rights are 'fundamental values'. But when it comes to sanctioning the authoritarian regimes of the Middle East, the European Union falls silent. Yet, as the most important partner to the countries of the 'Southern Shore' of the Mediterranean, a severe reaction would carry a significant weight of its own.

The media report a phone call between the Italian Prime Minister and the Egyptian President concerning the Regeni case [last Saturday] – a case regarding which the Egyptian authorities have never seriously cooperated – but it seems that no mention of the EIPR case was made. France just carried out joint naval manoeuvres with Egypt. When the 'great powers' of the European Union behave in such a fashion in the face of blatant violations of human rights, Europe's credibility lies in tatters.

All this is justified in the name of pragmatism and national interest. Yet it is clear to everyone that this is a strategy that does not work. The 'restoration' in the wake of the Arab Uprisings has further increased the social inequalities, to which the regimes respond with the cancellation of civil and political rights. The attitude of both the European Union and of the individual [Member] States is short-sighted: it would be wiser – and more just – to act by taking courageous political and diplomatic decisions, promoting rights and freedoms, protecting individuals and the local associations defending them. Such as, for example, EIPR.

We therefore invite the Italian Government to concretely support the protection of human rights in Egypt and to demonstrate that harassment against Egyptian civil society is unacceptable.

Signed,

- Danilo De Biasio, Director of the Human Rights Festival
- Andrea Teti, Associate Professor, University of Aberdeen, Scotland
- Riccardo Noury, Spokesperson for Amnesty International Italy
- Hon. Erasmo Palazzotto, President of the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry into the death of Giulio Regeni
- Beppe Giulietti, President of the National Press Federation (Federazione Nazionale della Stampa)
- Gianluca Costantini (Channeldraw)
- Elly Schlein, Deputy President of the Emilia-Romagna Region
- Pippo Civati, Founder of the *People* publishing house

- Mara Filippi Morrione, Spokesperson of the Friends of Roberto Morrione association (Fondazione Amici di Roberto Morrione)
- Vincenzo Vita, President of the Audiovisual Archive Foundation of the Workers and Democratic Movement (Fondazione archivio audiovisivo del movimento operaio e democratico)
- Fabiana Martini, Journalist, Article 21 Coordinator of Friuli Venezia Giulia
- Antonella Napoli, Director of the Focus on Africa newspaper
- Cristina Perozzi, lawyer
- Donato Ungaro, Article 21 Spokesman for Emilia Romagna
- Désirée Klain, Articolo21 Campania and *Imbavagliati*, Festival Internazionale di Giornalismo Civile
- Fabiana Pacella, Article 21 Puglia and councillor for Assostampa Lecce
- Gianmario Gillio, Nev-Fcei Press Agency (Federation of Evangelical Churches in Italy)
- Tiziana Ciavardini, Journalist
- Rocco Cerone, Secretary of the Trentino Alto Adige Journalists' Union
- Lorenzo Basso, Journalist
- Monica Andolfatto, Secretary of the Veneto journalists union
- Nicola Chiarini, journalist, Veneto Journalists' Union
- Prof. Gennaro Gervasio, Associate Professor, University of Rome III
- *The following sign both in an individual capacity and as the Board of Directors of the Italian Society for Middle East Studies (SeSaMO):*
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