

Hong Kong

European committee chairs jointly condemn China over Hong Kong

Chairs of eight parliamentary foreign affairs committees say new security law infringes human rights



Riot police secure a shopping mall after protesters gathered there on Tuesday. The joint statement says China is infringing 'basic human rights'.

Photograph: Dale de la Rey/AFP/Getty Images

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The chairs of eight parliamentary foreign affairs committees from across Europe have written to the Chinese government in opposition to Hong Kong's new security law, saying it infringes on "basic human rights" in their countries.

The joint statement by the committee chairs – from countries including Germany, the UK, Belgium, Latvia, Norway and the European parliament itself – shows a network of parliamentarians is being constructed to shift European governments towards a harder stance on China’s abuse of human rights.

The politicians claim European public opinion has lost faith in China due to the way in which it has intervened to impose a new security law, which gives Beijing unprecedented powers, without consulting the people of Hong Kong.

The law, which came into effect at the end of June, says secession, subversion, terrorism and collusion with foreign forces are punishable with a maximum sentence of life in prison, and allows mainland security agents to operate in Hong Kong for the first time.

The parliamentarians, including the chair of the UK foreign affairs select committee, Tom Tugendhat, and the chair of the German Bundestag foreign affairs committee, Norbert Röttgen, said “the law is not a product of the city’s own institutions but is imposed by Beijing, and as such constitutes a breach of the 1984 Sino-British joint declaration, which is lodged with the United Nations”.

They added: “The law raises significant concern that judicial independence is being undermined by empowering Hong Kong’s chief executive rather than its chief justice to appoint judges to hear national security cases. This threatens civil rights and commercial stability.

“Hong Kong’s autonomy and independent judiciary have guaranteed the personal rights and freedoms of its people for decades and made the territory an important keystone in the international trading system. Given their rights and the importance of Hong Kong, this cannot be seen as a purely domestic affair. In breaching a legally binding agreement and undermining the rule of law, this also undermines the good faith among nations who enter into international agreements”.

The authors defended their right to take an interest in Hong Kong by pointing out that article 38 of the new law “seeks to violate the sovereignty of other nations”. The article says the law applies to acts committed “outside the region” by foreigners who are not residents of Hong Kong or China.

“In claiming extraterritorial jurisdiction it infringes freedom of speech in countries like ours that place a high value on civil rights. It is hard to see how an extradition treaty with either Hong Kong or China could be agreed when the demands of Beijing infringe so directly on basic human rights in our nations”.

China’s good faith will only be restored with European nations if China withdraws the new law, the parliamentarians say.

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