

Message from the Chair

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the January edition of the LIBE newsletter.

The beginning of a new year is an opportunity to look ahead and reaffirm our shared commitment to the European Union's fundamental values. As 2026 gets underway, the LIBE Committee continues its work in a demanding environment, shaped by security challenges and rapid technological change. These developments call for EU action that is both effective and firmly grounded in fundamental rights.



January's work illustrated the wide scope of the Committee's responsibilities. We welcomed the Cypriot Presidency of the Council of the European Union, which presented its priorities for the months ahead. These include the fight against organised crime and child sexual abuse, counter-terrorism efforts, and work on the mandates of Europol and Frontex. The upcoming entry into application of the Pact on Migration and Asylum will be a key moment in 2026 and will require close parliamentary attention. Migration and return policies were also high on the agenda. The Committee reviewed the state of EU cooperation on readmission, stressing the importance of an effective and coherent approach that fully respects fundamental rights.

Discussions on the updated Rule of Law Checklist of the Venice Commission highlighted its value for EU monitoring and for addressing new challenges, including those linked to digital and technological developments. The Committee also made progress on equality and non-discrimination. A complementary impact assessment on the horizontal Equal Treatment Directive confirmed the clear benefits of EU action in this area. In parallel, exchanges on

the Digital Omnibus simplification packages showed the importance of supporting innovation and competitiveness while maintaining strong safeguards for data protection and artificial intelligence.

In addition, recent discussions reaffirmed the central role of civil society organisations in democratic life. Strengthening their participation in EU policymaking, protecting them from growing pressures and ensuring an open civic space across the Union remain key priorities for our Committee.

Finally, debates on the security of the EU's external borders underlined the need to respond to hybrid threats and new risks, while fully respecting EU law and fundamental rights.

As we move forward, the LIBE Committee will continue to play a key role in promoting security, protecting fundamental rights and upholding the rule of law across the European Union.

Javier Zarzalejos

The priorities of the Cypriot Presidency of the Council of the European Union



On 27 January, the Committee welcomed the Cyprus Presidency of the Council for a presentation and exchange of views on the programme and priorities in the area of Justice and Home Affairs

The Minister for Justice and Public Order, Constantinos Fitiris, laid out plans related to fighting terrorism, organised crime and drug trafficking, combating child sexual abuse, revising the mandates of Europol and

Frontex, delivering on the interoperability goals, and finalising the negotiations on the digital travel application.

The Deputy Minister of Migration and International Protection, Nicholas Ioannides, focussed on the implementation of the Pact (which is due to enter into application in the first half of June, during the Cyprus Presidency), the proposal for a Regulation on returns, judicial and police cooperation and the fight against human trafficking, and advancing work on preparedness.

The Deputy Minister for European Affairs, Marilena Raouna stressed the critical importance of respect for the rule of law and EU values and principles, referencing the annual rule of law

cycle, and outlined the next steps on the Article 7 procedure regarding Hungary. She also noted that the Presidency would work to progress the simplification agenda, including on the Omnibus proposals for which LIBE is in the lead.

State of play of negotiations on readmission agreements and arrangements

On 26 January, the LIBE Committee held an exchange of views on the state of play of negotiations on readmission agreements and arrangements.



Representing the European Commission, Deputy Director-General Johannes Luchner outlined the EU's approach to return and readmission, stressing that cooperation with third countries is essential for an effective return policy and part of broader migration partnerships.

The Commission has opened readmission discussions with 25 third countries and concluded arrangements with 18, through legally binding agreements, informal arrangements and technical working groups. Cooperation includes countries such as Guinea, Ethiopia, Côte d'Ivoire, Armenia and Pakistan, while cooperation with the Western Balkans was assessed as satisfactory. Some processes were discontinued due to insufficient progress, while others show positive developments.

Visa policy under Article 25a was highlighted as a key leverage tool, to be used only where cooperation remains insufficient. Members raised questions on low return rates, visa leverage and country-specific situations. DDG Luchner underlined broad Member State support for a common EU approach, confirmed that humanitarian aid is excluded from conditionality, and stressed the importance of digital systems, including the Entry/Exit System, to strengthen monitoring.

The Updated Rule of Law Checklist of the European Commission for Democracy through Law of the Council of Europe

On 26 January, Professor Rafael Bustos Gisbert, Member of the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, presented the [Updated Rule of Law Checklist](#)

, adopted at the Venice Commission's Plenary Session on 12-13 December 2025.

Building on the original 2016 Checklist, which has served as a key reference for assessing the state of the rule of law in 46 Council of Europe countries, the updated Checklist reflects new challenges, particularly those arising from technological changes, Rule of law regression and growing private sector influence. It includes two new chapters, on checks and balances and constitutional review, in addition to the five existing chapters on legality, security, abuse of power, equality before the law and access to justice.

During the debate, Members focused on the role of the checklist in rule of law monitoring by the EU institutions and cooperation with the Venice Commission, its relevance for emerging challenges such as artificial intelligence, the powers of digital companies and civic education.

EPRS Study: Proposal for a horizontal equal treatment directive: complementary impact assessment

Draft EU rules on equal treatment uphold core legislative principles and offer social and economic benefits far exceeding their costs, experts told the LIBE Committee at its meeting on 26 January.

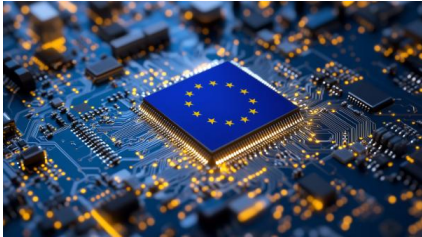


MEPs discussed a complementary impact assessment of the proposed horizontal equal treatment directive, prepared by EPRS at LIBE's request. The study noted that national measures alone are insufficient to ensure effective protection against discrimination and greater inclusion. It concluded that the proposal respects subsidiarity and proportionality, reflecting uneven protection of fundamental rights across Member States. Estimated implementation costs are €329 million over five years, while socio-economic benefits could reach €1.23 billion, particularly in education, housing, and access to goods and services.

Members emphasized the importance of advancing the proposal, welcoming the findings. They agreed it respects national competences while offering clear EU added value by improving access to services, supporting economic activity, and reducing discrimination-related costs, including litigation. Several MEPs warned that delays could undermine free movement, legal certainty, and confidence in EU action.

First proposed by the Commission in 2008, the directive aims to extend protection against discrimination beyond the labour market. The EPRS study supports ongoing discussions with the Council and Member States and address outstanding concerns related to competences, costs and implementation.

Digital Omnibus Simplification Package



On 26 January the European Commission, represented by Renate Nikolai from DG CONNECT and Ana Gallego from DG JUST, presented to the LIBE Committee Members two simplification packages on digital rules and AI.

The initiatives are introducing targeted adjustments to the GDPR and the AI Act to ease administrative burdens, clarify key definitions, and address fragmented implementation across the EU. The Commission framed the effort within the broader competitiveness agenda and argued that the changes respond to practical challenges raised by businesses and authorities. They underlined the urgency of the amendments to be brought particularly to the AI Act to postpone the entry into force of a number of its provisions, given that several standards needed for highrisk AI systems will not be ready by August 2026.

On the targeted amendments to GDPR, some members warned that relying selectively on the European Court of Justice case law to redefine personal data could compromise privacy standards. Concerns were also expressed about the new exceptions allowing AI systems to process sensitive data, which could erode established protections. The perceived weakening of transparency obligations within the AI Act further contributed to apprehension, with worries that high-risk AI systems might face under-classification, affecting oversight and accountability. Other members highlighted the importance of European competitiveness and innovation.

The EU Strategy for Civil Society

On 27 January 2026, the LIBE Committee hosted a presentation of the EU Strategy for Civil Society. The exchange featured Irena Moozova, Deputy Director-General for Justice Policies, Rule of Law and Equality in DG JUST.

Ms Moozova presented the newly adopted Strategy, developed following the exchange of

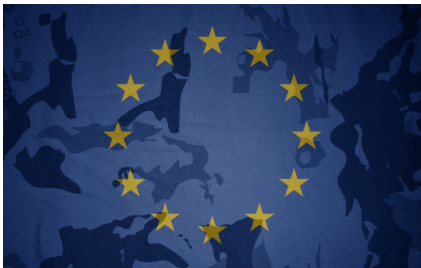


views in LIBE in September 2025 and published alongside the EU Democracy Shield and the EU Democracy Package. The Strategy recognises the central role of civil society organisations (CSOs) in democratic systems and aims to strengthen their engagement in EU policymaking, protect them from threats, and promote an enabling civic space across the Union.

Key measures include the creation of a Civil Society Platform, ten guiding principles for engagement, reinforced legal and financial support, cooperation between public and private donors, national-level dialogues, and monitoring through tools such as the Rule of Law Report.

During the discussion, Members raised questions on Member State involvement, access to funding for grassroots organisations, early warning mechanisms and the need for inclusive and transparent consultation with CSOs.

The measures to strengthen the protection of the EU's external borders and border areas in view of the growing threats



On 27 January, Members of the LIBE Committee exchanged views with the Commission, with the Lithuanian Minister of the Interior, Mr. Vladislav Kondratovi, and with the Commander of Lithuania's State Border Guard Service, General Rustamas Liubajevas, on the security of the Union's external borders.

The Commission emphasised the work undertaken to modernise and update the protection of the external borders, highlighting the roll-out of the smart border systems and the work of Frontex. Several tools are being used by the Union to combat the threat of drones: the EU hybrid toolbox and significant funding available for the Member States, as well as the Action Plan on Drones and Counter-Drone Security that will be presented in the coming months. He also stressed the importance of the Union rules on the protection of critical infrastructure and the cooperation with third countries to counter human smuggling.

Mr Kondratovi and General Liubajevas explained how smuggling balloons launched from Belarus present a threat to the security at Lithuania's external border and border areas. They stressed that those balloons, which Belarusian authorities do not launch themselves but allow criminal organisations to launch, form part of a system of hybrid attacks.

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