



Draft

Title: **The Right to Protest**

Tabled by: Federation of Young European Greens

Draft text

1 An essential component of democracy is that it is active: it is not just the
2 right to vote but the right to constantly influence government decisions. A
3 functioning democracy allows citizens the freedom of thought, expression,
4 assembly and association. If people disagree with the actions of the government,
5 or other forms of governance, it is within their democratic right to demonstrate
6 this in peaceful ways.

7 Our right to protest is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
8 (UDHR) and also in the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR), created by
9 the Council of Europe and ratified in 47 countries. Articles 9-11 of the
10 Convention declare that every person in Europe has the right to freedom of
11 thought, the right to freedom of expression, and the right to freedom of
12 assembly and association. These rights together allow the participation of
13 peaceful demonstration.

14 However, in Europe and around the world this right is often exploited by
15 governments, endangering citizens who want to voice their frustrations at
16 injustice, or by blocking citizen's right to demonstrate through threat of force
17 against theirs and their loved ones' safety. Too often, the right to protest is
18 squashed by the state through police brutality and unjust detention. This forces
19 many protesters into dangerous and vulnerable situations, even losing their
20 lives at the hands of the State.

21 2020 has been a pivotal year for freedom of assembly. While we saw the climate
22 movement go virtual through online strikes, other movements took to the streets

23 in protest against the brutality faced by communities. Black Lives Matter
24 protests erupted in the wake of the murder of George Floyd. In Belarus, since
25 August 2020 citizens have protested against the dictator and a rigged election.
26 Protestors are calling for the fundamental human rights every person is
27 guaranteed through the UDHR, however they have been faced with state violence
28 and murder. This is unacceptable.

29 In February 2020, protesters in the Greek islands of Lesbos and Chios were met
30 with teargas and fires as they tried to prevent the police from forcibly
31 evicting migrants from camps. In July, people of Serbia also took to the streets
32 to ask for fair elections and the protestors were dispersed using excessive
33 force and tear gas, while many of them, mostly young people were unlawfully
34 detained and sentenced without the right to a lawyer. In France, demonstrations
35 are often met with police violence - recent examples including crackdowns on
36 firefighters' demands for better working conditions and the Gilet Jaune
37 movement. Protesters in Poland also face increasing risk: those demonstrating
38 for gender equality, for LGBTQIA+ rights, or against racism and xenophobia are
39 met with excessive police force and a lack of accountability for police actions.
40 Elsewhere in the world, Hong Kong protesters have also encountered police
41 brutality and in Latin America environmental defenders, often Indigenous people,
42 are at risk of violence and murder and without protection. In Nigeria, the
43 police open fired onto demonstrators who took to the streets to protest against
44 the police unit SARS, known for its extra-judicial killings and use of torture.

45 As Greens, we stand in solidarity with marginalised groups whose freedom of
46 expression is often blocked by oppressing governments. We recognise the violence
47 inflicted on women*, trans people, genderqueer, BIPOC and racialised
48 communities, migrants, people from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and LGBTQIA+
49 people and commit to empower activists in their fights. We condemn the
50 disproportionate state violence against these marginalised groups. We see the
51 different ways to organise across Europe, and commit to support each method of
52 protest and civil disobedience that is peaceful.

53 It is not enough to voice solidarity with people and movements. The European
54 Greens must commit to action. As European Greens, we call for:

- 55 • Governments to respect the UDHR and ECHR in their laws and allow peaceful
56 demonstration with police protection against fascist attacks;

- 57 • The condemnation of all police brutality and state violence against
58 peaceful demonstrators when it occurs and call for fair trials against
59 perpetrators and to hold the police force to account. This includes but is
60 not limited to: arbitrary detention, tear gas, rubber bullets, use of
61 weapons; use of vehicles; intimidation.

- 62 • Independent supervisory bodies for police;

- 63 • Demilitarisation of the police force, end of the use of tear gas, rubber
64 bullets and other forms of excessive violence especially in the context of
65 demonstrations;

- 66 • More investment in social work to take the non-violent, non-criminal work
67 from police forces

- 68 • Commit to work with movements fighting for climate and social justice,
69 economic, gender, racial and ethnic equality, through backing not fronting
70 these movements

- 71 • Encouraging Green MEPs to act as political observers during protests and
72 acts of civil disobedience using their parliamentary immunity;

Background

2020 has seen protests erupt for Black Lives Matter, Belarus, and the climate strike has gone virtual. The right to freedom of assembly is defined in the European Convention on Human Rights, and yet peaceful protestors are often met with police brutality and arbitrary detention. This resolution commits to supporting peaceful protesting and every citizen's right to freedom of assembly (that does not endanger others). It calls for active support for protestors, and those faced with persecution.