The EU and many EU Member States cooperated with CSOs promoting the human rights of LGBTI persons and participated, including at ambassadorial level, in the Seoul LGBTI Pride festival.

The Domestic Advisory Group (DAG) formed under the Sustainable Development chapter of the EU-Korea FTA included Korean and European human rights defenders. The DAG reported its discussion on environmental and labour matters to the government-level Committee on Trade and Sustainable Development.

The EU worked with human rights defenders involved in issues connected to human rights in North Korea. The Delegation maintained close contact with CSOs working on this issue and continued cooperation with the OHCHR Seoul Office.

The EU Partnership Instrument was used to fund a comparative study on the implementation of International Labour Organisation Convention 111. The project was initiated by the Domestic Advisory Group to the Committee on Trade and Sustainable Development. It has facilitated exchanges between Korean and EU stakeholders on the implementation of the convention in both regions and its contribution to avoiding discrimination in the workplace

The Republic of Korea was praised for its effective chairing of the UN Human Rights Council during 2016. At both the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly the Republic of Korea exhibited similar values to the EU, with a voting record closer than any other non-European partner.

In Korea, the government cooperated closely with the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, the UN Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes, and the UN Working Group on business and human rights.

The third annual EU-Republic of Korea Human Rights Consultations took place in Seoul for the first time in 2016. The bilateral dialogue reaffirmed the commonality of views regarding multilateral and thematic issues and the joint will to enhance cooperation on a range of human rights initiatives.

Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)

In 2016 the overall human rights situation in the country remained characterised by grave and systematic violations, with no credible accountability mechanism for past and current abuses. The DPRK continued to refuse all cooperation with UN human rights Special Procedures.

The EU's priority is securing improvements on the ground in all possible areas. The restricted contacts of the EU and Member States with DPRK officials have had the effect of limiting the areas that can be positively addressed in cooperation with the country's government. The EU has insisted on accountability (including via referral of the situation in the DPRK by the UN Security Council to the ICC) and respect for international law (non-refoulement) regarding DPRK citizens seeking asylum abroad.

There are multiple, structural problems in all areas pertaining to human rights and democracy, as documented by the final report of the UN Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in the

DPRK in 2014. According to the report, some of the abuses may amount to crimes against humanity.

Still, there were some positive steps in 2016: the DPRK submitted reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child and to the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and it ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Due to unfavourable political circumstances the last (14th) round of the EU-DPRK political dialogue where human rights issues were raised was held in May 2015.

A limited number of national organisations deal with issues of human rights in the country, but they are an integral part of the governmental structure. Some of them have obtained support from abroad for activities that benefit the most vulnerable groups within society. The EU maintained close contact with CSOs based in the Republic of Korea working on human rights in the DPRK and continued cooperation with the OHCHR Seoul Office.

The EU is funding some projects in the DPRK, mostly focused on food security, health, water and sanitation. Human rights are raised indirectly under this assistance (e.g. people's right to food, livelihood). Some of the EU funded projects also support DPRK organisations addressing the social inclusion of persons with disabilities and older persons. EU-funded projects are targeting the most vulnerable people in society (children, older persons, vulnerable farming communities or groups, etc.). EU-funded humanitarian aid via ECHO has also been provided in response to severe floods.

The situation of human rights in the DPRK was once again the object of a Human Rights Council Resolution (A/HRC/31/L.25; co-initiated by Japan and the EU) and a UNGA Resolution (A/RES/71/202; co-initiated by the EU and Japan), both of which underlined the major structural deficiencies encountered in the DPRK. The UN Security Council addressed the issue of human rights in the DPRK in December 2016.

There is no Delegation of the EU to the DPRK. EU Member States with embassies there take turns every six months to represent the EU at local level (CZ and SE in 2016).

Lao People's Democratic Republic

While the overall human rights situation remained challenging in 2016 Laos's gradual economic and political transition continued under a renewed leadership. In 2016 Laos continued to work on key legislation of relevance to human rights. Laos was the chair of ASEAN in 2016.

The EU continued to assist Laos towards its declared objective of becoming a rule of law society by 2020. In 2016 Laos engaged in a substantial campaign to fight corruption at all levels.

There are a number of problems, including the limited space for civil society to operate. Self-censorship and indeed fear are palpable among civil society members since the disappearance of the social rights campaigner Sombath Somphone in December 2012. Substantial restrictions on freedom of expression and freedom of assembly remain, and criticism of government is risky, as illustrated by the arrest of three young people in March 2016 for 'anti-government propaganda'. Other problems include the risk of impunity given weaknesses in the judicial system.