

Brussels, 11 November 2020

Open letter to Mr Johannes Hahn, Commissioner in charge of Budget and Human Resources

Subject: Are the cameras and scanners used at the entrances of the Commission and EP buildings supplied by a company indicted for involvement in human rights violations in China?

We have been particularly struck by an article published on Deutsche Welle (DW) ([*Exclusive: EU taps Chinese technology linked to Muslim internment camps in Xinjiang*](#)) taken up by Politico ([*Chinese tech companies could face trouble in Europe*](#) ; [*Rule of law — Digital exile — Don't forget Hong Kong*](#)) stating that in the fight against coronaviruses, the Commission as well as the European Parliament would be using thermal cameras produced by the Chinese technological giant Hikvision.

The Chinese company has been accused of being linked to the oppression of Uighurs and other Muslim minorities in China's Xinjiang province, including providing surveillance equipment used in internment camps.

Having read these articles, a number of colleagues immediately expressed their concerns to us, asking for clear answers and guarantees from our institution.

Recall of facts

In particular, in September 2019, the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) ([*About the China Cables Investigation*](#)) stated to have taken knowledge of documents showing that the Chinese regime would exercise absolute control over its huge detention camps in the predominantly Muslim region of Xinjiang, where more than a million people are interned, mainly of Uighur ethnicity. More than 75 journalists from ICIJ and 17 media partner organizations in 14 countries joined together to report on the documents and their significance.

In these detention fields, **full video surveillance** would have been set up everywhere, without blind spots, so that the guards could exercise total surveillance. The same Hikvision firm allegedly provided them with the necessary equipment.

Chinese authorities have denied the authenticity of the published documents, dismissing them as "pure falsification" and "false information".

As mentioned in the DW article, the Chinese government holds a 40% controlling stake in Hikvision through the state-owned China Electronics Technology Group Corporation and Hikvision, which has its European headquarters in the Netherlands, has not been subject to any sanctions or blacklisting measures by the EU.

However, it should be noted that the US listed Hikvision as a national security threat on the register of companies considering that the company was *"involved in the implementation of China's campaign of repression, mass arbitrary detention and high-tech surveillance against Uighurs, Kazakhs and other members of Muslim minority groups"*. The United States also accuses the company of being linked to the Chinese military, an accusation that the technology giant denies.

A Hikvision spokesperson, has confirmed to DW that : *"Hikvision takes all reports of human rights very seriously and recognizes our responsibility for protecting people. We have been engaging with governments globally to clarify misunderstandings about the company and address their concerns."* Hikvision, however, did not comment on DW's specific questions on the company's reported connection to the detention centers and other security contracts with authorities in Xinjiang.

We have been delighted to see that the European institutions have been very firm in defending human rights

Our President said in Beijing at an EU-China summit in June that *"human rights and fundamental freedoms are non-negotiable"*.

The European Parliament awarded its annual human rights prize to Uighur activist Ilham Tohti in 2019, who has been jailed for life.

The President of the European Council, Charles Michel, also criticised Chinese repression, confirming *"We will not stop promoting respect for universal human rights, including those of minorities such as the Uighurs"* in his speech to the UN General Assembly last month.

On one hand, it is important that, with the greatest respect for the procedures in force, European institution confirms at all times and through all its decisions that, as our President has stated, *"human rights and fundamental freedoms are non-negotiable"*.

On the other hand, as neither Hikvision nor its European subsidiaries have been blacklisted by the EU at this stage, the article confirms that there is no evidence to suggest any illegality in the awarding of these contracts. On our side, it is understood that we have full confidence in the services who have carried out these procedures.

Nevertheless, very strong political reactions have already been expressed and it is expected that others will follow

By way of example, German MEP Reinhard Bütikofer, head of the European Parliament delegation to China, denounced that *"the use of Hikvision technology by the European institutions is "extremely worrying" since "Hikvision is a technology company which is deeply complicit in the terrible oppression of the Uighur people in Xinjiang which borders on genocide"* and that the European institutions should *"immediately create transparency and draw the adequate consequences: i.e. sever any direct or indirect business relationship with Hikvision."* ([link](#)).

Charlie Weimers, another Swedish MEP from the European Conservatives and Reformists group, said in turn that: *"The EU should have no dealings whatsoever with a Chinese firm that is alleged to be involved in some of the most abhorrent human rights abuses in the world."* and that *"Nobel Prize winners should adhere to a higher standard."* ([link](#)).

Svenja Hahn, another MEP from the Renew Europe group addressed a letter to President Sassoli ([link](#)) affirming that she found it *"it outrageous that European tax payers' money has been used to purchase monitoring equipment from a company that with their products enables mass surveillance, oppression of minorities and massive breaches of human rights"*.

The use of Hikvision technology by the European institutions has provoked strong reactions from staff as well

Indeed, anyone entering the buildings is asked to briefly look to one of the Hikvision cameras. In reading the article on DW, many colleagues have expressed their discontent at having to come face to face with a company accused of contributing to human rights violations in China.

Concerning the management of personal data, we have taken note of the assurances given by a spokesperson of the European Parliament confirming that *"the equipment is neither connected to the Parliament's computer network nor records any data"*.

Thus, there is an urgent need for the same guarantees from the Commission regarding the management of these data.

Cristiano Sebastiani,
President

CC.:

Mrs U. von der Leyen, President of the European Commission

Mr D. Sassoli, President of the European Parliament

Mr C. Michel, President of the Council of the European Union

Mrs I. Juhansone, Secretary-General of the European Commission

Mrs G. Ingestad, Director-General, DG HR

Mrs S. Hahn, MM R. Bütikofer, C. Weimers, MEPs

Staff of the institutions