



No Democracy without Accountability

IDD Report

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Accountability is the cornerstone of a well-functioning democracy. Accountability refers to all the different ways that citizens, political parties, parliaments and other democratic actors can provide feedback to, reward or sanction elected officials in charge of setting up and enforcing public policies. Proper accountability mechanisms provide incentives for governments to work in the best interest of their citizens.

The public conference “**No Democracy without Accountability**” took place on **17th September 2019** to mark the International Day of Democracy bringing together citizens, government officials and elected politicians. The speakers explored ways to improve accountability, and participated in four workshops as follows:

- **WS 1: New methods for a traditional form of democratic accountability – the importance of civic courage to counter corruption**, organised by the European Endowment for Democracy (EED)
- **WS 2: Digital accountability: social media platforms and digital political advertising**, organised by the European Partnership for Democracy (EPD)
- **WS 3: Accountability Initiatives and opportunities in shrinking space context**, organised by the European Network of Political Foundations (ENoP)
- **WS 4: Using ICTs for transparency and accountability in political finance**, organised by International IDEA

Welcome note

Marjeta Jager, Deputy Director General for International Cooperation and Development, European Commission

Franco Iacop, Member of the Committee of the Regions (CoR) and CIVEX coordinator, Party of European Socialists in the European Committee of the Regions

The event commenced with welcoming remarks by Marieta Jager, Deputy Director General of DG DEVCO and Franco Iacop, member of the CoR, who both acknowledged the global challenges faced by democracy today that need to be addressed and overcome by our joint efforts. They reconfirmed the EU's strong commitment to democracy support, building trust, transparency and accountability.

This conference is funded by the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR)





Keynote address

Maina Kiai, *Former UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association*
“No matter how bad it is, people will always resist, because people enjoy being free” - Maina Kiai.

Maina Kiai delivered a powerful keynote speech in which he addressed the issues of raising intolerance and xenophobia around the world. He expressed his concern over the decline of democracy in recent years and highlighted the importance of civil society in staying strong, united and resistant in upholding democratic values.

In his intervention, the Former UN Special rapporteur on freedom of assembly and association made a strong statement on how elections alone cannot serve as a unique barometer of democratic development. Democracy is not what happens only on the ballot day, but most importantly what happens in-between elections. As election results can be manipulated, it is important that Election Observation Missions focus not only on the ballot day, but develop a pre- and post-election evaluation mechanisms, that more accurately reflect the reality.

During his inspirational speech, Kiai also brought the attention of the audience to rethinking electoral models, especially the first past the post, winner take all model, that often results in fragile majorities and instead of bringing stability and peace, could provoke cleavages in society.

Panel discussion “Holding elected representatives accountable”

Speakers:

Jessica Musila, *Former Executive Director, Mzalendo, Parliamentary Oversight Organisation, Kenya*

Caoilfhionn Gallagher, *Barrister specialising in human rights and civil liberties at Doughty Street Chamber*

Karim Vera, *Member of the National Assembly of Venezuela*

Tundu Lissu, *Member of Parliament, CHADEMA, Tanzania*

Maina Kiai, *Former UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association (honourable guest)*

Facilitator:

Ilya Lozovsky, *Journalist and Managing Editor, Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP)*

The event’s plenary session brought together speakers with diverse professional backgrounds to share insights from their experiences in holding elected representatives accountable. The speakers emphasised the need to work collaboratively, across borders and professions to ensure that accountability is addressed effectively.

Jessica Musila offered an insight into the situation of democratic accountability in Kenya. She described the national context as challenging, given that the trust in political parties is very low and parties are perceived as “briefcases”, simply absorbing funds. In order to be perceived differently, political parties need to become more responsive to the needs of their citizens and be accountable to citizens rather than to party leaders.

Musila also expressed her wish to have more policy debates in the Kenyan parliament, as well as to promote civic education for voters so they can better understand politics and be more aware of their civic rights and obligations. In order to hold elected representatives accountable, it is important to have a well-educated and strong civil society, as well as an active media, one that points out negative examples, but is also solution-oriented.



“If a state acts with impunity, the state has to be held accountable” - Caoilfhionn Gallagher.

Caoilfhionn Gallagher expressed her concern over the increasing media censorship and persecution of investigative journalists across the globe, highlighting cases from different countries, including the EU. She pointed to existing shortcomings in legislation that need to be fixed in order to ensure political accountability. Gallagher also underlined the role of political leaders and warned of the damage they inflict on public confidence when they renounce journalists in their pursuit of the truth.

“We need to get this information out to the world; we need to make sure support reaches our people” – Vera Karim

Vera Karim introduced her vision of democracy as a system that protects human rights, human lives, and individual freedoms, which respects pluralism and free elections, and above all promotes peace. She stated that none of these values are respected in Venezuela under the current political regime. Venezuela is in a humanitarian crisis and Vera described the state of democracy as “democratic suicide”. She expressed her concern over democratic backsliding in other countries around the world, where “autocratic solidarity” among authoritarian political leaders is on the rise.

She sent out a strong appeal to the international community to react to events in Venezuela and help the people of Venezuela hold their representatives accountable for the crisis.

“Support governments if they are behaving and supporting the rule of democracy. Don’t give them assistance if they don’t. Our governments should be held to account” - Tundu Lissu

Tundu Lissu, former member of the opposition party in the Tanzania parliament, was violently attacked and shot two years ago following his exposure of corruption mechanisms in government. His seat in Parliament was taken away from him during his recovery under the pretext that he neglected his duty in Parliament.

Lissu drew a sombre picture of the political situation in Tanzania, shedding light on the difficulties that journalists and media face when trying to hold political leaders accountable. He stressed the issue of election manipulations in countries like Tanzania, as the final result depends not on the voters, but on those who count the votes.

He appealed to the EU to be consistent in its battle for democracy and to sanction corrupt and non-democratic leaders. Lissu also appealed to civil society to be more active and to act with resistance and solidarity.

WORKSHOPS

Workshop 1: New methods for a traditional form of democratic accountability – the importance of civic courage to counter corruption

Organised by the European Endowment for Democracy (EED)

Panellists:

Ilya Lozovsky, Managing editor, Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP)

Elena Varta, Director, Centre for Policies and Reforms (CPR), Moldova

Facilitator:

Kristina Vaiciunaite, Senior Programme manager, European Endowment for Democracy (EED)

Lozovsky and Varta shared some innovative methods they have used in their work to counter corruption in weak democratic contexts.



Ilya Lozovsky began by stressing the importance of cross-border initiatives in identifying cases of corruption. He views a global network of investigative journalists like OCCRP, who expose high-level corruption through their stories, as the “natural enemy” to politicians engaged in financial crimes.

OCCRP’s stories have lifted the veil on a number of such cases. They reported on the authoritarian President of Tajikistan whose unchecked political power led him to build an empire that stretches across the country. They also reported on the “Troika Laundromat”, a complex system for moving money which has allowed Russian, Azerbaijani politicians and others to secretly invest their ill-gotten millions, launder money and evade taxes.

Lozovsky noted that while OCCRP are not activists, they do insist on presenting themselves as journalists engaged in “anti-corruption” activities. To retain their independence as journalists they partner with advocacy organisations like Transparency International to ensure that there are actionable follow-ups on their stories.

Elena Varta shared how CPR Moldova has seen some success on this front. The organization decided that presenting their findings in roundtable discussions was highly ineffective and opted to take a more “visual” approach. When Moldovan banks were defrauded of a total of 1 billion dollars (12% of Moldova’s GDP), CPR Moldova created the “Billion Panel,” an online visual that monitors how much of the money has been recovered by the Ministry of Finance. They involved the public through crowdsourcing platforms where citizens can report cases of corruption in a secure manner.

The extent of the impact investigative journalists have on accountability was a point of discussion among participants. Lozovsky pointed out that public discussion on corruption has improved in the past 10 years when it was rarely addressed saying that “governments are under more pressure to clean up”. He also noted that the “Unexplained Wealth Order” (UWO), a new court order being used by the UK to battle cases of “dirty money”, is a positive development which he attributes in part to the work of investigative journalists working on corruption.

Workshop 2: Digital accountability: social media platforms and digital political advertising

Organised by the European Partnership for Democracy (EPD)

Panellists:

Pavel Havlicek, Research Fellow, AMO Research Center

Marie-Hélène Boulanger, Head of Unit, Union Citizenship Rights and Free Movement, DG Justice, European Commission

Patrick Costello, Head of Division, Democracy and Electoral Observation, European External Action Service

Faciliator:

Louis Knight-Webb, Co-founder of “Who targets me”

This workshop explored the accountability of social media platforms, specifically in relation to digital political advertising. As shown by the Cambridge Analytica scandal, foreign interference through political advertising on social media platforms has become an increasing threat to democracy.



Ms **Marie-Hélène Boulanger**, the head of the Union Citizenship Rights and Free Movement Unit at the European Commission's DG Justice, stressed the importance of democracy as founding value of the European Union, and that the European Commission recognized the seriousness of the problem detailing the measures of the elections package issued by the Commission in 2018.

Pavel Havlicek shared his insights into the issue in the Czech Republic. He highlighted a number of blind spots in the current regulatory framework, and called for the Commission to go beyond self-regulation by the platforms in the upcoming European Democracy Action Plan.

Mr **Patrick Costello** stressed that this is an issue that all countries across the globe share. He highlighted that in countries where levels of trust in institutions is lower, political advertising and disinformation are capable of causing even more harm to democratic institutions, making it all the more important to support partner countries in facing the same threats. At the same time, the EU can build on the experience of other countries – such as Mexico – for the development of measures to strengthen electoral integrity within Europe.

The panel discussed different approaches to dealing with the issue, including the Code of Practice against Disinformation, the upcoming European Democracy Action Plan, the Election Package of DG Justice and other countries' approaches. Greater transparency is critical, argued the moderator, Knight-Webb, explaining how his organisation Who Targets Me are demanding more transparency through their browser extension which tracks digital political adverts.

Costello also stressed that, while the complexity and fast pace of this particular issue makes it hard to develop regulations and solutions for, we cannot afford to wait for the issue to go away. Allowing the complexity to inhibit regulators from taking action could eventually cause a democratic crisis, he stated.

Workshop 3: Accountability Initiatives and opportunities in shrinking space context

Organised by the European Network of Political Foundations (ENoP)

Panellists:

Nitai Mehta, Managing Trustee, Praja Foundation, India

Preap Kol, Executive Director of TI, Cambodia

Karim Vera, Member of the National Assembly of Venezuela

Chiara Adamo, Head of Unit, Gender Equality, Human Rights and Democratic Governance, DG DEVCO, European Commission

Facilitator:

Cornelia Hoffmann, ENoP Network Coordinator

This workshop explored the challenges and opportunities that civil society face in a context of shrinking space around the world.

Nitai Mehta started by giving an insight into the state of democracy in India. Although it is the world's largest democracy, India still faces many democratic gaps on local level and in terms of minority rights. Thanks to initiatives by civil society, such as those by the Praja foundation, things are slowly changing. Recently India has passed legislation that will make more government data publicly accessible, and ensure citizens are better informed. The Praja foundation also launched the initiative on "Transforming Urban Governance" that brings



the voice of citizens to the local mayors and works for more transparency and efficiency in governance. Mehta highlighted the importance of civic education as a counteraction against the phenomenon of shrinking space. Civic education also helps improve democratic governance and holding elected representatives accountable.

Preap Kol gave a historical overview of the situation of democracy developments in Cambodia. As has been widely reported and discussed within the last two years, we observe a deterioration in democracy in the country. In the 2017 local elections, a grassroots support for the opposition party has significantly increased, comparable with the one of the ruling party. Subsequently, the ruling party has filed treason allegations for an attempted overthrow of the government, which has led to numerous arrests and imprisonments of opposition party members including the party president and activists. Following the arrests, the opposition party was dissolved by the Supreme Court and the seats of the opposition party were re-distributed to other political parties with those majority seats distributed to the ruling party. Therefore, the 2018 national election was held without credible opposition party, and as a result, the ruling party claimed to win 100% of the National Assembly seats.

Despite these negative trends, Kol explained that there is also a positive development in the economic aspect. There is also a noticeable shift in mentality among citizens, especially among the youth, thanks to civic education initiatives and social media which has made people become more intolerant to corruption and more resilient in seeking democratic change. Nevertheless, with the intensive influence of China, Cambodia needs more support from the EU in its democratic endeavour.

The Venezuelan perspective of the shrinking space debate was delivered by **Karim Vera**. Vera explained that since 2016, Nicolas Maduro has been using the national court as the highest tool of his power, infringing its independence and the balance between powers. At present, the country is in a humanitarian crisis where the basic needs of food, medications and electricity of the citizens are barely provided. People are fleeing the country to find shelter elsewhere. The citizens of Venezuela claim change and demand the international community to help them oppose the “new autocracy”.

Chiara Adamo, provided the perspective of the European Institutions on the way ahead and support for civil society. She acknowledged that undemocratic governments are using innovative ways to attack civil society, which is why we also need to be creative in our response to protect it. “Artivism” is a new method that combines civic activism with art that helps bring accessible messages to people around the world through artistic expression. Chiara also highlighted the importance of media, the gender-perspective, building networks and making use of diaspora in building democratic and pluralistic societies.

The EU is committed to its support to democracy worldwide and it has developed country roadmaps and other tools that help evaluate the situation on the ground and create political responses. Practice has shown that we need to be innovative, flexible and rely on a mix of different approaches when working in challenging contexts.

Workshop 4: Using ICTs for transparency and accountability in political finance

Organised by International IDEA

Panellists:

Pavel Cabacenco, Head of the Centre for Continuous Electoral Training, (CICDE), Moldova

Vita Dumanska, Representative of Ukrainian CSO Chesno/Gold of Parties, Ukraine

Raghav Chadha, National Spokesperson, Aam Aadmi Party, India

Facilitator:

Nana Kalandadze, Programme Officer, Regional Europe Programme, International IDEA

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Panellists presented innovative new technologies designed to give the public greater access to information on how much money circulates in electoral campaigns, where resources are coming from, how they are spent and ultimately, how the rules for political finance are being enforced. Each panellist presented a different vision of how ICTs can be utilised to enhance transparency and accountability in political and campaign finance: from Moldova, through a government-led online system for political parties to report and disclose their income and expenditures, ; from Ukraine – a CSO-led platform enabling citizens to know who funds whom and which candidates and parties spend how much on various aspects of campaigns, and from India, a political party-led initiative making all donations public as well as their ongoing efforts to increase citizen engagement in their work through securing small, even if minimal financial donations from regular citizens.

The session underscored the following key principles: to counter the influence of large donors on democratic politics, political parties should reach out and engage the citizenry not only in consulting on party positions and programmes, but also in stepping up efforts to mobilize small, even if minimal, donations from citizens. Based on the example of India’s Aam Aadmi Party, this fundraising can result in more meaningful citizen participation in political parties

The ability of the public and CSOs to scrutinize and analyse electoral campaign donations and expenditures has multiple positive effects, particularly for public knowledge and transparency on who funds whom. Equally important, it also generates critical analytical knowledge about the functioning of electoral process. Ukraine’s Chesno initiative for disclosure and reporting on campaign finances revealed that approximately 80-90% of campaign expenditures by parties are spent on television advertisements, raising questions whether certain limits should be introduced in TV advertisement to create a level playing field for parties and candidates that often cannot afford costs of a very expensive air-time.

Moldova’s ongoing effort to build an online reporting system for political parties showcases the benefits that the system can bring to the oversight system. Once operational, the online system will detect and control for arithmetical errors and ensure dynamic connection to other state databases to check the information across other data sets such as a tax database, a database of asset declarations by public officials, etc, thus freeing up much needed human resources within the oversight body to focus on more strategic functions such as verifying suspicious information and following up on necessary investigations to keep parties and candidates accountable.

These and other examples of methods for ensuring inclusive and transparent political funding by parties and promoting transparency and accountability through the IT-enabled reporting and disclosure systems are presented in International IDEA’s two recent publications: [“Political Party Innovation Primer on Online Political Funding”](#) and [“Digital Solutions for Political Finance Reporting and Disclosure: A Practical Guide”](#).