



JOINT STATEMENT ON PROGRAMMING FOR THE NEIGHBOURHOOD, DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION INSTRUMENT (NDICI)

The Council Conclusions on Democracy adopted in October 2019 sent an important political message about the **European Union's ambition on democracy in its external relations**. (1) The Joint Communication on the Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy from 25 March 2020 matches the commitments of the Council into clear and operational guidelines for actions on the ground. (2)

The European Partnership for Democracy (EPD), the European Network of Political Foundations (ENoP), and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) call on EU staff in Brussels and in Delegations worldwide to translate these strategic and operational ambitions into democracy support programmes to achieve the objectives of the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI). (3)

Around the world, countries are confronted with growing discontent over the functioning of politics. Citizens increasingly lament governments' ability to deal with societal challenges such as inequality, corruption, security, globalisation or public emergencies. This has resulted in support for populist leaders, who dismantle civic space and free media in an attempt to stifle opposition. The current crisis caused by **the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to exacerbate such trends further**, and a number of leaders are taking advantage of the situation to monopolize power and limit liberal freedoms in a disproportionate way. It will be essential to ensure oversight rules are restored, emergency powers are limited and electoral processes are restored as soon as this is responsible from a health perspective. The anticipated socio-economic implications of the pandemic, moreover, are likely to prompt new social contracts between governments and citizens, for which democratic systems are best apt to deliver. The crisis thus highlights the need for free speech, democratic governance and multilateralism.

The EU has a strategic interest to support its member states and partner countries in opting for democratic solutions to the above mentioned challenges, while respecting its core values of human dignity and human rights protection, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law. Democracy assistance focuses on supporting crucial actors in democracy such as parliaments, political parties, civil society, independent media, local authorities, trade unions and human rights and democracy activists.

Strong democratic institutions and sound democratic processes help to enhance democratic delivery on the five key areas for external action set by the European Commission (4):

1. Council Conclusions on Democracy. October 2019. Available [here](#).

2. Joint Communication on the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy. 2020. Available [here](#).

3. Without human rights there can be no democracy worthy of the name. In turn, only in a democratic environment can human rights be protected and realised effectively. Both should hence be equally supported in external action. This statement focuses exclusively on EU programming in support of democracy as part of the thematic pillar on Human Rights and Democracy of the NDICI. It reflects the recommendations and expertise of the signatories on democracy, while acknowledging the importance of human rights..

Sustainable growth – Comparative research shows that democracy provides better conditions for sustainable development than hybrid regimes or non-democracies and has an instrumental value as an enabler of sustainable development (5). Democracies demonstrate more basic welfare, less corruption, more gender equality and are better for doing business.

Climate action - Addressing climate and environment emergencies will involve unprecedented changes to society, politics and businesses. Research shows that low corruption democracies outperform autocracies on the environment, and that harmful environmental policies may lead to human rights abuses.(6) Democracies also score higher averages on the Environmental Performance Index.(7)

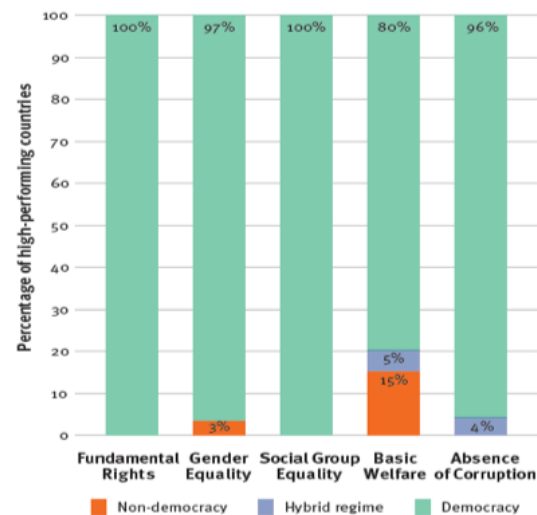
Peace and governance – Democracies are more peaceful. (8) Democratic institutions and multilevel and inclusive governance provide peaceful mechanisms for resolving political and societal conflicts. Organized crime and violent extremists flourish in countries with failing political systems, calling for addressing them at the roots and helping to tackle marginalization, discrimination and human rights abuses.

Migration - War and ethnic, tribal and religious violence are leading causes of refugees fleeing their countries, alongside state fragility and human rights abuses.(9) Supporting democracy is critical for tackling the root causes of migration.

Digital development – Digital technologies have completely altered the public sphere, citizens' expectations of governments and the relationship between citizens. This has both positive consequences for democracy – like enhanced government service delivery, access to information, and monitoring by civil society – and negative consequences – including data protection risks, foreign online interference, and the use of digital tools for citizen surveillance.

EU democracy support is an investment in the global rules-based order, as multilateral cooperation is far easier and more effective with like-minded partners than with autocratic states. As multilateralism is critical to effective cooperation on migration and climate action, democracy support is a necessary first step.

High performance levels by regime type



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), (<http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>).

International and local democracy support actors stand ready to support the EU in helping partner countries to reinforce legislative frameworks, state institutions and their democratic environment.

We therefore call upon the European Commission and European External Action Service staff to give democracy a central place in the NDICI programming for the next years and enhance democracy awareness and capacity in EU Delegations worldwide. It is our vision that democracy support should not be considered an isolated theme but it deserves to be integrated as a cross-cutting priority in all thematic and geographic programmes. **This paper provides recommendations for the EU on how to operationalise this vision.**

4. Joint Communication: Towards a comprehensive strategy with Africa. 2020. Available [here](#).

5. See The Global State of Democracy 2019, International IDEA, 2019, p.10-13.

6. Povitkina, M. 2018. The limits of democracy in tackling climate change. Available [here](#). European Court of Human Rights, 2020: The Environment and the European Convention on Human Rights. Available [here](#).

7. See the Environmental Performance Index for the latest data and analysis, [here](#).

8. See amongst others: Kant, I. 1991, Kant's political writings; Doyle, M. W. 2011, Liberal Peace: Selected Essays.

9. Joint Research Council, 2018. International Migration Drivers: A quantitative assessment of the structural factors shaping migration. Available [here](#).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THEMATIC PROGRAMMING ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY

To achieve its ambition to be a global leader on democracy and human rights, the EU should make full use of the available instruments and give democracy and human rights equal weight in this thematic programme.

Key Recommendations:

- Allocate 50% of the thematic programme budget for Human Rights and Democracy to democracy support, considering the strong interdependence and mutually reinforcing relations between both components.
- With the help of international democracy partners, raise awareness and build the capacity of EU Delegations on democracy support, including on the variety of target areas and stakeholders and how to conduct a political economy assessment.
- Opt for grants rather than service contracts, and long-term funding to ensure local ownership and access to funding, and improve the sustainability and effectiveness of projects.
- Create possibilities to support sudden democratic breakthroughs and enhance the capacity of EU delegations to capture early warnings. Increase transparency on the planning and conception of funding opportunities for democracy support and human rights, and multiply exchanges with partners and stakeholders throughout the process.

1. Level of funding

The thematic programme for human rights and democracy supplements geographic programming, particularly in contexts where the conditions of geographic programming are not met (ie. absence of government consent, support to unregistered actors, etc).

Democracy is interdependent with human rights. Democracy is the system of governance that best protects and promotes universal human rights, from economic, social and cultural rights to political and civil rights. Democratic institutions and processes constitute the infrastructure that creates an enabling environment for the promotion and protection of human rights. **While human rights and democracy are intrinsically linked and mutually reinforcing, they have different operating modalities and translate into different types of actions.**

Therefore, we call on the EU to allocate 50% of the thematic programme budget for Human Rights and Democracy to democracy support, considering that both are equally important and complementary. This is necessary to meet global challenges to democracy and rectify the underfunding of democracy support. Greater emphasis on democracy would not only be an important signal of EU ambition on democracy, but also a cost-efficient investment in the prevention of human rights abuses.

2. Priority areas: themes

Each region and each country has different needs, with different entry points for democracy support and human rights protection. To ensure evidence-based programming, programming decisions need to be rooted in a solid democracy and political economy analysis, identifying legal, procedural or practical pitfalls, change agents and obstacles to democratic change. Traditionally, the EU's democracy action has been strongly anchored in election observation and its follow-up. **We encourage the EU to continue its strong track record related to election observation, but insist that the EU to goes beyond that.**

We identify the following target areas for effective democracy support:

- **Accountable, transparent and inclusive institutions**, including national and local authorities, parliaments and independent oversight bodies like electoral commissions and anti-corruption bodies (the fight against corruption remaining a core priority in several regions worldwide);
- **Adequate constitutional, legal and enforcement frameworks** to allow for inclusive and transparent democratic procedures and decision-making at all levels of governance;
- **Democratic space** for contestation, including civic space, a level political playing field and an independent judiciary. Democratic space needs to be supported and protected as a fundamental element of development in general;
- **Support the integrity of elections**, allowing for safe, inclusive, accountable and fair electoral processes;
- **Participatory decision-making processes** that are inclusive of underrepresented groups, particularly women, youth and minorities, going well beyond election observation and the follow-up to recommendations;
- **Inclusive and transparent political parties** that empower and represent citizens in political and decision-making processes;
- Pluralistic and independent oversight and accountability actors, particularly **media and civil society organisations**;
- Robust, **independent and accessible judicial systems** with high professional standards, capable of ensuring the rule of law;
- **Well-informed citizens** with access to civic education and digital literacy programmes, particularly at the local level.

The Commission should expand funding to successfully piloted themes from its previous funding cycle: political party support, support to civil society and media, political finance oversight, digital democracy and parliamentary support are some of the themes in which, during the previous funding cycle, the EU has demonstrated significant impact and built up a clear niche to promote EU-values.

When supporting development processes and peace the target stakeholders are similar to those in democracy support, these include: governments and public institutions, local authorities, parliaments, political parties and foundations, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), Inter-Governmental Organisations, NGOs, independent media, trade unions, Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) and activists.

3. From democracy assessment to implementation of support projects

To allow for democracy sensitive and evidence-based EU programming, development officers in EU delegations across the world should be empowered to carry out democracy analyses^[10] and be aware of the broader benefits of democracy support, e.g. as an enabler of sustainable development. International democracy support partners could be engaged as key partners in this awareness and capacity raising exercise. EU development officers could also function as important early warning points for shrinking civic space and democratic backsliding for the EU.

Through training and experience sharing, awareness could be raised on:

- the added value of democracy support to sustainable development and the protection of human rights;
- the need for contextual analysis, democratic progress tracking, and the identification of flaws, and the availability of frameworks and tools to this end;
- the development of project support and roadmaps for action that are based on high-quality comparative research of democracy support. The Commission can borrow from successful frameworks used under Rule of Law;
- the variety of democracy programmes available to address the most urgent challenges and modalities of support;
- the possibility to connect with local and international democracy (support) actors present in the country;
- the available EU instruments and cooperation with other donors to create sustainable impact.

4. Funding modalities

Based on experiences with supporting democracy across the world, there is evidence that certain modalities of support to actors on inclusive, representative and accountable governance provide more sustainable results:

- **Long-term funding is necessary for supporting democratic change**, which is a lengthy, non-linear process by nature. Experience and research show that for civil society in particular, long-term funding is essential to allow them to hold those in power to account. As such, EU programming will be more effective if it dedicates funding for multiple years towards particular democracy and governance priorities.
- **Grants should be preferred to service contracts**: In the sensitive field of democracy support, it is crucial that projects are based on the initiative and be owned by local organisations and beneficiaries. Grants are more accessible for local CSOs and allow for more local ownership. Democracy support deals with values, political pluralism and trust, for which inclusive, bottom-up approaches are necessary. Moreover, projects are often implemented in difficult and volatile political environments. Local knowledge and access to local decision-makers (formal and informal) are crucial to ensure a sustainable outcome and to avoid adverse effects.

10. Examples of questions for such analyses are: How free and balanced has the media been in the years before elections? How are the candidates for elections selected and positioned? Do political parties have clear manifestos so that the voters can make meaningful choices? How will elected representatives be monitored and held accountable following the elections? What possibilities do citizens have to participate in political processes and to influence political decisions outside elections? How inclusive are political processes – including in political parties and parliaments – of women, people with disabilities, LGBTQI and minorities? What opportunities do women have for political participation, and what barriers exist? What capacity do elected representatives have to control the actions and decisions of the executive arm of the government? Is the judiciary truly independent? Is the rule of law effective? How much room for manoeuvre does civil society have? Are its freedoms of expression, assembly and association respected and truly implemented? Do party regulations impose transparency systems and related enforcement structures?

- **Maintain the CBSS:** The practice of country-based support schemes (CBSS) under EIDHR has proven effective and should be maintained at least at its current level in the framework of the thematic programme “Human Rights and Democracy”. Only this thematic programme and the programme on Civil Society are exempt from the need of consent of the governments of the third countries concerned. Sensitive issues related to democracy and human rights on national level can therefore be best addressed via these thematic programmes. In view of maintaining the possibility to address country-specific matters, it is recommended to at least uphold the current practice of CBSS with clear financial allocations per year and per country. This would also allow organisations active in the field of democracy and human rights to better anticipate funding opportunities.
- **Rapid response mechanism for democratic openings:** When political events and processes trigger democratic transition in partner countries, they can bring about a momentum for democratic breakthrough. The EU should be able to respond swiftly and support the building or reinforcement of democratic institutions and processes, based on the early warning capacity of EU delegations.
- **Continuation of the current evaluation of capacity of applicants practice:** Small, local organisations lacking the administrative and financial capacities and resources to take the lead can join as co-applicants/co-beneficiaries. We welcome and recommend the continuation of the modality that in the evaluation grid, the financial capacity of the co-applicant is not taken into account. This allows for grassroots organisations to play a central role in projects supported by the EU.
- **Maintain level of co-funding:** The current level of comparative low co-funding requirements in the field of Human Rights and Democracy should be maintained to allow a large variety of actors to implement projects and not to exclude too many organisations on the basis of their financial capacities.
- **Support to unregistered actors:** Delegations should be encouraged to make full use of the operating modalities unique to the Human Rights and Democracy thematic programme, including support to unregistered actors.

5. Procedural recommendations

Local and country-based actors, and networks representing them are best placed to identify entry points and priority areas for supporting democracy and related space for reform. Therefore, we encourage the European Commission to enhance the practice of meaningfully consulting with actors on the ground as well as international civil society and inter-governmental organisations.

Consultations involving written inputs and group discussions with a multitude of stakeholders, complemented by a select number of bilateral meetings with key stakeholders, deliver the best results. Considering the new global constraints resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, we encourage the EU institutions to build on past experiences with online consultations - written consultations and video calls. In addition to this, EU delegations could make efforts to reach out to those who are not digitally connected.

There is a need for enhanced transparency as regards the timelines and geographic focus of global and local calls for proposals under the thematic programme of human rights and democracy. In addition, a democracy assessment and democracy strategy should be included as a reporting requirement for the Annual Human Rights and Democracy Country Strategy Implementation Reports, based on a single democracy measurement instrument across all countries.