



## ENoP STATEMENT | EU ACTION PLAN ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY 2020-2024

### INTRODUCTION

The Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2015-2019 strongly prioritised human rights issues, with democracy mentioned only as a secondary issue in a few of listed actions. However, human rights and democracy are linked intrinsically. Human rights are the core values through which the central political principle of the EU, the respect for human dignity, is implemented. Democracy is a mechanism to organise and manage society built on fundamental freedoms including freedom of expression and information, of assembly and association. In societies where the democratic concept is not used as a basis for the development of structures and procedures of government and political decision-making, there is little chance that basic human rights will be respected.

***Democracy is therefore not just a secondary mechanism, which follows on from the existence of basic human rights, but also a precondition for effectively securing basic rights in a society.***

Therefore, we call on the EU to highlight the strong linkages between human rights and democracy in its next generation Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy (2020-2024) and to accord democracy support with at least the same importance as the protection of human rights receives. This would be a basis for more effective and sustainable securing of human rights in most countries.

### ENoP RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE NEW ACTION PLAN 2020 - 2024

#### 1. Include a standalone chapter on 'democracy support'

Democracy is a complex mechanism, not just a broad idea of the 'rule of the people' achieved through free and fair elections and a representative parliament. ***The Action Plan should illustrate in a standalone chapter how the EU will promote democratic participation and accountability mechanisms, and their linkages to the sustainable protection of human rights.*** This should be separate from chapters on human rights institutions, justice systems, good governance mechanisms and civil society.

#### 2. Ensure in a section of the 'democracy support' chapter that the concept of 'democratic rule', as promoted by the EU, will be upgraded to 'inclusive and effective democracy' in order to underscore the protection of human rights for all citizens

In a section of the 'democracy support' chapter the concept of the 'rule of the people' should be defined as ***an inclusive and effective democracy, in which minorities, disadvantaged and marginalised groups receive full protection of their human rights, and in which the authority of the democratic institutions serves the citizens.***

***The democratic institutions should remain transparent and independent from economically powerful structures that go after private/power-related interests.***

### **3. How the EU will support authentic political parties and pluralistic political party systems as centrepieces of inclusive and effective democracies needs should be described in section of the 'democracy support' chapter**

A further section of the 'democracy support' chapter, should describe how the EU will promote the development of legal and financial frameworks to underpin pluralistic political party systems and authentic democratic political parties. Competition between political parties, based on clear manifestos and on their internal democratic structures, controlled by their members, is the core of democratic systems.

Without political parties, citizens cannot participate in political decision-making and there will be no effective check on political power between elections. European Union or EU member state support for democratic systems and the different participating parties is a sensitive issue in most countries because it is directly connected to the key instruments in the competition for political power. However, there are numerous examples of the transition from authoritarian structures to democracy, such as in South Africa and Chile and, more recently, in countries in Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America. These show that local developments under strong local ownership can be successfully supported through:

- Provision of general support for the framework conditions that underpin party systems
- Support for democratic structures and the professional work of political parties in these systems, including peer-to-peer partnerships with political foundations connected to democratic parties in the EU.

### **4. Strengthen informative, pluralistic and independent media and build the capacities of citizens so they can better understand, verify and use the information that comes from various communication channels**

For the active exercise of political rights and for the protection of all other basic human rights it is crucial that sufficient and trustworthy information on facts, events and developments is available to all citizens. The Action Plan should highlight the promotion of informative, pluralistic and independent media as a core element of inclusive and effective democracy.

One major problem hampering effective democratic participation and leading to violation of human rights (especially of minorities and disadvantaged groups) is related to our capacity to interpret, analyse and react to information that comes from various communication sources.

***Therefore, systematic support for civic and political education has to become an important aspect of EU Human Rights and Democracy support.***

### **5. In a separate chapter, the Action Plan should identify approaches to dealing with increasing dangers for democracy and human rights from populism, the misuse and weakening of media, the destruction of the independence and authority of justice systems, the undermining of democratic processes by the unrestricted use of money**

Populist politicians are using increasingly non-reliable social media sources to feed their propaganda machinery, and thus manipulating the public opinion of the less informed citizens. Some populists tend to build their success on systematic disinformation, creation and dissemination of fake news that

undermines the substance of democracy in many countries – even those with long democratic traditions.

The independence and professional quality of the media and judicial systems are being systematically undermined and destroyed in a number of countries – again, even those with long democratic traditions.

Furthermore, electoral processes and political parties as key players at the centre of democratic governance are being undermined through the unrestricted and unregulated use of funding, transforming them more and more into willing instruments of the real economic powers behind formally-democratic state structures.

#### **6. The areas of ‘rule of law’ and ‘justice systems’ as core elements of inclusive and effective democracies should be given more attention**

The rule of law and the independence of the judiciary are other core aspects of inclusive and effective democracies, beyond the direct political processes of elections and political decision-making.

***If basic human rights are enshrined in the constitution of a country but are not accompanied by implementing legislation, or if the legislation exists but is not enforced by public administrations, the protection of human rights, especially those of disadvantaged or marginalised groups, is not secured.***

If vested interests or those with power based on potential use of violence do not adhere to the law, there is no real protection of human rights. This is the case in many countries that claim to be democracies. A systematically developed rule of law and a politically, legally and financially independent judiciary, with high professional standards and transparent procedures, and which is easily accessible for all citizens and is not undermined by corruption, are the only effective protections for human rights, especially for disadvantaged citizens, in such countries. This must be supported through the policies, programmes and actions of the EU.

#### **7. The capacity for civil society organisations to work with and strengthen authentic democratic parties and legitimate bodies of representative democracy in their policy participation and monitoring functions has to be strengthened**

Civil society has emerged for many reasons as a trusted partner of the EU in the promotion of human rights, especially in countries where the safeguarding of human rights by governments or elected parliaments is weak.

By promoting specific group interests, civil society organisations fight for – among other things – the rights and needs of underprivileged and marginalised groups, and for common-good issues.

EU cooperation with civil society is therefore very important and should be prioritised. Civil society organisations play an important role in the development of political decisions and in holding government and public institutions accountable. Therefore, whenever representative democratic structures with formal legitimacy exist in a country – especially when they are not well-established, under attack or undermined by corruption and manipulation – civil society organisations are needed to contribute to the improvement of the democratic quality and effective work of such representative structures through critical monitoring and cooperation.

## ABOUT ENoP

Established in 2006, the European Network of Political Foundations (ENoP) brings together 51 member foundations and three affiliated entities, coming from 22 countries within the EU and serves a platform for these political foundations to exchange with the EU institutions, civil society organisations (CSOs) and research institutes about democracy support, development cooperation and political dialogue.

The members are ideologically close to six party families – ALDE, ECR, EPP, Greens/EFA, GUE/NGL, S&D – represented in the European Parliament and belonging to the democratic spectrum, but independent in their decision making and financing of international projects.

The activities of political foundations members of ENoP in the fields of democracy support and development cooperation include civic education, public campaigning and awareness building, advocacy directed towards institutions as well as decision-makers in their respective home countries. ENoP members work actively in over 100 countries across the world, where they implement projects, aimed at enhancing democratic grassroots structures, strengthening civic participation, consolidating political institutions, and bridge existing gaps between civil society and political actors.

In 2016, ENoP has signed a Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA) with the European Commission, acknowledging the important role of the Network in the fields of development cooperation and democracy support. This FPA marks the set of common interests and objectives of a Strategic Partnership to:

1. Promote an enabling environment for political foundations, civil society and political parties
2. Encourage participation in policy making processes through political foundations, their partner organizations and political parties
3. Strengthen the capabilities of political foundations in promoting democracy and developing pluralistic societies

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