



Joint Communication on the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020 – 2024



INTRODUCTION

The European Network of Political Foundations (ENoP) welcomes the Joint Communication of the European Commission and High Representative to the Council on the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020–2024.

With the adoption of the Council Conclusions on Democracy in October 2019, the European Union delivered a strong political message about its ambitions for democracy in external relations.

We therefore believe that the new EU Action Plan should operationalize these ambitions both by emphasizing *democracy and human rights* equally in the document and by including the relevant civic and political actors in the process of implementation.

The joint communication on the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020–2024, five chapters in all, contains detailed descriptions of actions for the protection of human rights recommended to a number of European stakeholders, including EU Delegations and Member State Embassies around the world.

The Action Plan delineates recommendations for “*protecting and empowering individuals*”, “*building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies*”, “*promoting a global system for human rights and democracy*”, and “*new technologies: harnessing opportunities and addressing challenges*.” The logical path for implementation, the means of which are included in the first four chapters, indicates collaboration and “*delivering by working together*.”

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE THEMATIC SUB-CHAPTERS

01

While the problems, challenges, and options for effective actions in the field of human rights are described in a comprehensive and convincing manner, **we firmly believe that there is still a need to improve the sections related to the field of *Democracy*. The introduction of the document itself fails to mention democracy at all, merely stating that “the action plan sets out overarching priorities and objectives of EU human rights policy for the next 5 years.”**

The protection and promotion of human rights includes the basic political rights of freedom of opinion, expression, and assembly, as well as the rights of self-determination, co-determination and political participation in a society. Together, these rights make up the fundamentals of democracy.

However, decades of experience show that without democratic order, the effective protection of human rights is not possible. Therefore, in EU foreign policy, the protection of human rights and the promotion of democracy must go hand in hand. The inextricable nature of these two values is, after all, at the core of the joint EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020–2024.

The document frequently mentions the importance of civil society and its joint cooperation with EU-Stakeholders, emphasizing the subsequent need to promote it.

02

We support the importance of civil society and its crucial role in the promotion and protection of human rights, as well as in supporting people’s participation – the core mechanism of democracy.

At the same time, we would also like to **highlight the central role of democratic political parties, as they are the key legitimate institutions that allow for people’s participation in representative democracies**. It is political parties that provide citizens with the opportunity to select suitable candidates for the election of their representatives in parliaments. In local, regional and national parliaments, these representatives not only hold key roles in legislation and government oversight, but they also provide citizens with opportunities to hold political decision makers accountable between elections. In order to enable them to do so, all political actions require transparency.

In the first four chapters of the Action Plan, the enumeration of the “means of implementation” includes the creation of a “dialogue with civil society and other non-state actors.” We advocate for the inclusion of regular dialogue with representatives of local, regional and national parliaments, including political forces from outside government parties.

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GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition, we consider important the inclusion of the following elements across the entire document and specifically in the following headings of the Action Plan:

INTRODUCTION

In the penultimate bullet point, “**democratically elected parliaments and political parties**” should be included as critical dialogue partners.

HEADING I: Protecting and empowering individuals

Under **Section C**, the provision of a safe and enabling environment should be extended not only to civil society actors, but also to political actors. Any attempts to restrict the open space for both civil society and political parties should be monitored and opposed. Further, violations of the freedom of peaceful assembly and association should not only be prevented where civil society organizations and workers are affected, but also where political parties are affected.

HEADING II: Building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies

In the second bullet point under **Section A**, it should be mentioned that fair democratic procedures must be observed and improved in the time between elections.

HEADING III: Promoting a global system for human rights and democracy

In this chapter, regular dialogue and cooperation with the Inter-parliamentary Union and with Regional Inter-parliamentary Assemblies should be included.

HEADING IV: New technologies: harnessing opportunities and addressing challenges should be included.

In the first bullet point under **Section A**, parliaments and political parties should be included among the necessary groups with which to engage.

Due to the central role that political parties play in national power structures and public participation, the dialogue with them should also be explicitly mentioned. It is also important to include democracy dialogue next to the discussion on human rights dialogue.

03

In the sub-chapter II.B: “Promoting responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision making”, some **key approaches for the promotion of democracy** are described. However, these recommended actions should include more details. We suggest the following:

Support the adoption of electoral laws which provide political parties with the power to select qualified candidates for positions in national, regional and local parliaments, preventing local dynasties and powerful single personalities from dominating elections in constituencies.

Assist in developing and implementing statutes and internal organization guidelines in national, regional and local parliaments which assign political party groups the responsibility to coordinate and set agendas in order to support and monitor the respective government (majority parties) and thematic alternative options (opposition parties) through effective government oversight. These guidelines should also promote clear rules for the protection of minority rights in the operation and decision-making of parliaments.

Encourage binding legal regulations on the establishment, management, and activities of political parties, ensuring accessibility for all citizens who agree with their programs. Additionally, internal, democratic decision-making should be encouraged in both thematic orientation and the selection of candidates for democratic elections.

Assist in developing and implementing binding party financing rules, enforcing complete transparency of their operations. This should include maximum limits for single donations as well as a minimum of independence from big donors through state subsidies and membership dues.

Increase the meaningful participation of women, youth, and other less-represented groups of citizens in all spheres of public life. This extends to increasing their active membership in political parties and building their capacity to be included on electoral lists for winnable seats.

Prohibit excessively strict requirements for the formation of political parties and their participation in elections.

Promote a level-playing field for all political parties, including those opposing the government, as well as the freedom of assembly, association, expression of opinions and judgments. Furthermore, promote open and non-discriminatory access to media, information, and an independent judiciary for political parties.

Support the development of cross-party codes of conduct aimed at preventing electoral fraud and electoral violence.

Increase the operational capacity of political parties, with a focus on their elected representatives in local, regional and national parliaments.

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HEADING V:

Delivering by working together

Under **Section A**, the sixth bullet point should include the regular engagement with parliaments and political parties. Under **Section B**, the last bullet point should mention positive democracy development in addition to the improvement of human rights.

Along with the above-mentioned recommendations, ENoP urges the institutions of the European Union to review the new EU Action Plan and include *democracy next to human rights* across the document in order to show equal commitment to democratic values that are core to the EU and that distinguish us from other global actors.

Equip parties to arrange regular and open communication with their electorate, conferring the interests and concerns of citizens to the work of the parliaments.

Improve the capacity of political parties to present their key objectives and programs effectively to the media and the broader public.

Foster the ability of political parties and civil society to fulfil oversight and accountability responsibilities in both the public and private sector, encouraging the use of online technology.

Encourage active citizenship and participation in public and political life, including active membership in political parties. Civic education, including distance learning and online media literacy programs, should particularly target women, youth, persons with disabilities, persons belonging to minorities, indigenous peoples, and other marginalized groups.

Increase cooperation between political parties and civil society groups and organizations, including intensive dialogue and joint campaigning for common good issues at the parliament and within the government. Political parties and civil society groups should create alliances in order to effectively advocate for joint legislative and political objectives, organizing a meaningful and collaborative division of work.

ABOUT ENoP

The European Network of Political Foundations (ENoP) serves as a platform for dialogue and exchange between the European political foundations, civil society organisations, active in the fields of democracy support and sustainable development, and the institutions of the European Union.

ENoP brings together 55 member foundations from 22 EU Member States and the United Kingdom. The members are affiliated to 6 political party families represented in the European Parliament, namely: ECR, EPP, Greens/EFA, GUE/NGL, Renew Europe and S&D. Our members are active in over 100 countries around the world, where they bring civic education, support democratic processes and sustainable development through work with 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 a set of common objectives of a Strategic Partnership to:



Promote an enabling environment for political foundations, civil society and political parties;



Encourage participation in policy-making processes through political foundations, their partner organizations and political parties;



Strengthen the capabilities of political foundations in promoting democracy and developing pluralistic societies.

ENoP

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