Supporting Democracy Through Geographic Global Europe Programmes

INTRODUCTION

In view of the public consultation on the Delegated Regulation on Global Europe programming, and in order to make the geographic Global Europe programmes deliver on sustainable development, with a focus on democracy, the European Partnership for Democracy (EPD), the European Network of Political Foundations (ENoP), and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) make the following recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE DELEGATED REGULATION SUPPLEMENTING THE NDICI

01   **Establish a 20% target for human rights and democracy in geographic programming.**

02   **Reflect the EU's strategic interest in supporting democracy in geographic programming priorities.**

03   **Support democracy as a priority in all regions.**

04   **Support democratic digitalisation for sustainable and inclusive growth.**

05   **Support elections as hook for broader engagement in democratic and peaceful governance.**

06   **Make geographic support conditional on democratic governance.**

1. ESTABLISH A 20% TARGET FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY IN GEOGRAPHIC PROGRAMMING

Geographic programming must reflect EU key priorities as outlined in the proposed NDICI regulation, which includes good governance, democracy, rule of law and human rights (NDICI- Annex II A.1). Considering the enabling role of democracy for sustainable development, peace and security, it is essential that democracy plays a central role in all geographic programmes.

To this end, we support the introduction of a **funding target on human rights and democracy** within the geographic budget lines (Article 3, Delegated Act), including democracy support (NDICI - Annex II A.1: governance, democracy, rule of law and human rights). In order to reflect the strategic interest and high prioritisation of human rights and democracy in EU foreign policy, we recommend increasing this **funding target to 20%** in the Delegated Act.

The thematic programme for human rights and democracy only supplements geographic programming, particularly in contexts where the conditions of geographic programming are not met (i.e. absence of govern-

ment consent, support to unregistered actors, etc.). Thematic programming is vital. However, it does not allow the EU to meet its ambition on democratic values and governance as pointed out in the Council Conclusions on democracy and the Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, due to the limited budget and scope of actions. Thematic programming can thus not be seen as a substitute for geographic funding on democracy and human rights. Geographic funding needs to complement thematic funding with programmes that tap into the needs and opportunities of a particular country context.

More broadly, the EU has a strategic interest to support its member states and partner countries in opting for democratic solutions to the challenges of the global pandemic, autocratisation and the ensuing socio-economic crisis. **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:**

- **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. Democracies demonstrate more basic welfare, less corruption, more gender equality and score higher on business indices.

- **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. Democracies also score higher averages on the Environmental Performance Index.

- **Peace and governance –** Democracies are more peaceful. 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, which calls for an approach that addresses them at the roots and helps 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. 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.

In line with the acknowledgement of the interdependence between democracy and human rights in the Council Conclusions and Action Plan, research shows that democracies have higher levels of fundamental rights. The COVID-19 pandemic illustrates how transparent and effective democratic governance can save lives. 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.

> " *To allow the EU to meet its global ambition on democratic values and governance, we recommend to include at least 20% for human rights, democracy and good governance as a thematic target for geographic programmes.*

2. REFLECT THE EU'S STRATEGIC INTEREST IN SUPPORTING DEMOCRACY IN GEOGRAPHIC PROGRAMMING PRIORITIES

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.** 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.

The current draft of the Delegated Act does not reflect these policy commitments, with only limited reference to democracy support across geographic areas and no details on the kinds of support. It is essential that the priorities of EU geographic programmes reflect the priorities of the Action Plan and Council Conclusions.

To meet the EU's strategic ambition, we recommend:

- Mainstreaming support to democratic governance as a cross-cutting priority in the Delegated Regulation;

- To include supporting democratic transitions in the regional priorities list; for Southern Africa and Indian Ocean, to add promoting peace and security through democratic transition and consolidation; for South Asia, to add supporting democratic transition and consolidation.

3. SUPPORT DEMOCRACY AS A PRIORITY IN ALL REGIONS

The Annex of the Delegated Regulation specifies the objectives and priorities per sub-region, which shows that democracy is insufficiently represented in the priorities list-making it unlikely to meet the 20% target. Particularly in the priority lists of Latin America and Asia, the absence of democracy support stands in sharp contrast with the deepening trend of democratic backsliding in both regions. To support democratic and good governance, the EU programming should take into account the many threats democracies are currently facing.

We therefore call for strengthening democracy as a priority across the globe. It is important to promote a holistic concept of democracy support, including strengthening democracy and inclusive democratic processes, supporting democratic awareness, increasing citizens' engagement, particularly among young people, especially with and through supporting democratic reforms. One of the key players is an empowered thriving civil society and a free and independent media landscape.

Democracies need enabling space to flourish. We question the current approach of grouping stability and democracy together, rather than treating them as areas of work in their own right. While we acknowledge the importance of stability, we suggest understanding democracy independently and to ensure that stability is not used as a smokescreen to shrink democratic spaces. Similarly, while governance is a priority mentioned in all regions, the Annex does not specify the kind of governance it will support. In order for such support to be sustainable, the Annex should commit to supporting democratic governance.

4. SUPPORT DEMOCRATIC DIGITALISATION FOR SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE GROWTH

Digitalisation is well represented across the various regional priorities. While digitalisation provides many opportunities for economic growth, transparent governments, inclusiveness and fundamental freedoms, it also provides new methods of exclusion, inequality and repression, as well as threats to fair elections, democratic debate, and privacy. EU programming on the digital revolution thus needs to place democratic principles front and center. This means mainstreaming participatory and inclusive decision-making and democratic oversight across all digitalisation programmes.

In its recent Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024, the EU committed to promoting human rights and democracy in the use of digital technologies, including artificial intelligence, across the world. **The planned digitalisation efforts in EU programming should be inclusive of enhancing election integrity and security in the face of misinformation, trust, and transparency of election technologies as well as promoting participation and representation through ICTs.** We call on the EU to deliver on its promise, captured in the Action Plan, to support the development of policy frameworks that apply offline rules on democratic processes to the online context and assist to build capacities to implement them.

5. SUPPORT ELECTIONS AS HOOK FOR BROADER ENGAGEMENT IN DEMOCRATIC AND PEACEFUL GOVERNANCE

Credible elections that are organised with integrity are the cornerstone of democratic governance and political stability. Political stability and accountability are essential to successful development action. The EU therefore has an interest in continuing its long-standing track record on electoral support, ensuring fair and effective legal and institutional election frameworks in partner countries. This is particularly relevant in countries transitioning from authoritarian regimes to democratic government.

The EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024 includes priorities to improve the integrity and inclusive participation of electoral processes, especially in follow up of the recommendations of election observation missions and in the digital context. The follow-up of election observation missions is a key enabler of complementarity between EU efforts in the field of development, democracy support and human rights. Against this backdrop, **it is problematic that the Annex of the NDICI Delegated Regulation omitted any reference to elections.**

To ensure the EU meets its 20% funding target for democracy and human rights, we recommend:

- Including democracy as a priority in all geographic regions, including Latin America and Asia;

- Supporting good and democratic governance – more specifically we recommend:

- for West-Africa: supporting democratic governance;

- for Southern Africa and Indian Ocean: fostering democratic governance and inclusiveness in decision-making processes;

- for South Asia: strengthening good governance and oversight;

- for the Americas: strengthening democratic governance; and

- for the Middle East: supporting democratic governance.

To this end, we recommend including for all regions (under digital transformation):

- Placing democratic principles front and centre of digitalisation support;

- Supporting regulatory issues linked to digital transformation, and fostering and defending democracy in the online sphere.

To allow the EU to achieve its objectives and enable the implementation of the EU Action Plan, we recommend for all sub-regions (under good governance):

- Supporting fair and inclusive elections;

- Strengthening public and democratic institutions;

- Ensuring systematic follow-up on the recommendations of electoral observation missions.

6. MAKE GEOGRAPHIC SUPPORT CONDITIONAL ON DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

In order for EU support to contribute to its global goals of democracy and human rights, it is essential to ensure that EU support does not inadvertently strengthen autocratic governments. To this end, conditionality is at times a good tool to deter deteriorations in democratic space. Just like budget support contracts include conditionality clauses on democratic governance, the contracts of geographic programmes should therefore include a clause making the financial support conditional on democratic rule. This conditionality should be based on independent indicators of democratic principles and processes, such as the Varieties of Democracy or the Global State of Democracy indicators.

To ensure EU support does not inadvertently strengthen autocratic regimes, we call on the EU:

- To incorporate democratic conditionality clauses in its geographic programme contracts;

- To create pooled regional funds that can be accessed by reformers in order to provide incentives for reform as well as costs.

Endnotes

<?>   The Action Plan points out that respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms is an essential element of democratic societies, and democratic institutions and processes create an enabling environment for the protection of these rights and freedoms.

<?>   The Global State of Democracy 2019, International IDEA, 2019, p.10.

<?>   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.

<?>   See the Environmental Performance Index for the latest data and analysis, here.

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

<?>   Joint Research Council, 2018. International Migration Drivers: A quantitative assessment of the structural factors shaping migration. Available here.

<?>   The Action Plan points out that respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms is an essential element of democratic societies, and democratic institutions and processes create an enabling environment for the protection of these rights and freedoms.

<?>   The Global State of Democracy 2019, International IDEA, 2019, p.10.

<?>   Council Conclusions on Democracy. October 2019. Available here.

<?>   Joint Communication on the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy. 2020. Available here.

<?>   V-Dem Institute (2021): Autocratisation turns viral. Democracy Report 2021. Available here.

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.

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Co-funded by the European Union