



JOINT STATEMENT ON THE EU ACTION PLAN ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY 2020-2024

The European Partnership for Democracy (EPD), the European Network of Political Foundations (ENoP), and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) would like to jointly reiterate the need for ambition on democracy in EU external action in order to stand up for democracy at a time of increasing challenges worldwide. The upcoming EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy (Action Plan hereafter) provides a critical opportunity for asserting such ambition in EU external action.

The Council Conclusions on Democracy adopted in October 2019 send an important political message about the EU and EU Member States' ambition on democracy in their external relations. The Action Plan needs to match the commitments of the Council Conclusions to a common and practical approach to democracy, with clear and operational guidance for actions on the ground. We recommend the following:

1. Democracy and human rights should be accorded equal weight throughout the Action Plan

The Action Plan should reflect the interdependence between democracy and human rights, as emphasised in the Council Conclusions on Democracy. Democratic governance is a strong enabler of the protection of human rights, and democratic participation is a human right in and of itself. The previous Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2015-2019 placed insufficient emphasis on democracy actions and several headings contained little to no reference to democracy support. This reflects the sharp contrast between the well-developed policy framework and tools to support human rights in external action and the lack of a clear policy framework on democracy. The Action Plan should concretise the higher EU ambition for democracy in external action, of which the new leadership and main EU institutions have become strong promoters, and provide leads to put the political commitments of the Council Conclusions on Democracy into action.

Separate chapters on democracy are needed to ensure clarity on the key actions to support democracy worldwide, including the essential modalities of such support that contribute to improving the quality of democracy worldwide. Greater emphasis on democracy would not only be an important signal of the higher EU ambition on democracy, but also a cost-efficient investment considering its enabling link with the prevention of human rights abuses. It would also serve as key guidance to EU MS, EU Delegations and partners in their programming decisions.

Recommendation: Democracy and human rights should be accorded equal weight throughout the Action Plan. This includes:

- *Pointing out the strong interdependence and the enabling link between democracy and human rights in the general chapters of the Action Plan;*
- *Reinforce support to civil and political rights in the human rights chapter, with specific references to international conventions such as the ICCPR;*
- *Include separate chapters with action points on EU democracy support, as they are needed to reflect the different operating modalities of democracy support and human rights protection and related promotion;*
- *Refer to international democracy actors in a chapter detailing strategic partnerships for advancing democracy and human rights.*

2. Ensure meaningful participation from all stakeholders in the development of the Action Plan

Given the importance of the Action Plan it is essential to ensure meaningful involvement of key stakeholders at all stages of the policy process, from drafting to monitoring to evaluation. Such engagement allows the Action Plan to build on the thematic expertise of civil society and EU Member States and serves to mitigate the risks of misunderstandings in terms of the content within the Action Plan.

Recommendation: *Hold thematic discussions in small groups of civil society representatives focused around specific sections of the Action Plan. Closely involve EU Member States in similar discussions.*

3. Include an action on developing global comparative knowledge on democratic reform and democracy support.

Global comparative knowledge forms the basis for well-informed and evidence-based democracy support. Analytical tools and data on the state of democracy and analysis of democracy building and democratic reform processes would form the basis for high-quality EU democracy support. Given the context in which democracy takes place, specific assessments of the impact of EU external action, in particular development policy, on democratic governance and human rights will also be greatly beneficial. Global comparative knowledge on good practices in democracy support and the impact of EU actions on democracy would allow the EU to enhance the effectiveness of its democracy support programmes.

Recommendation: *The Action Plan should contain a specific action mandating global comparative knowledge development on good practices in democratic reform and democracy support as well as on the impact of EU external action, in particular development policy, on human rights and democratic governance, in order to facilitate evidence-based programming and increased awareness. Such comparative knowledge would include not only research to measure democratic progress, but also the practical tools that are needed to build democratic capacity and provide technical assistance at country level.*

4. Monitor results for transparency, effectiveness and coherence of EU actions

Transparency is fundamental to accountable governance. Tracking progress on democracy support and the entire Action Plan is important for enhancing accountability and effectiveness

of implementation. As democracy is an enabler for the whole 2030 Agenda, monitoring the implementation of the Action Plan will also enable the monitoring of efforts made to achieve SDGs 5, 10 and 16. The mid-term review of the 2015-2019 Action Plan provided insufficient information for EU Member States, citizens and civil society organisations to assess the progress made on the previous Action Plan and this needs to be addressed.

Recommendation: We recommend the following actions to enable close monitoring and progress tracking of the implementation of the Action Plan:

- *Clear targets to track the implementation of EU democracy action should be agreed, allowing the EU institutions and stakeholders to track progress on the Action Plan. In this vein, the EU is encouraged to more pro-actively refer to and use existing democracy indices that monitor democratic progress in order to limit workload. This would also include indices that monitor progress on SDGs 5 and 16. The development of global comparative knowledge would strengthen the capacity to monitor and improve results.*
- *Follow the structure of the 2015-2019 Action Plan with a table that details which stakeholders are responsible for implementing which actions.*

5. Include separate action points for all stakeholders on essential areas of democracy support

Based on the previous Action Plan and the Council Conclusions on Democracy, as well as the changed geopolitical context and new challenges to democracy, we recommend the new Action Plan to include the following thematic action points.

- **Include separate action points for all key stakeholders in the area of democracy support**, including governments and public institutions, local authorities, parliaments, political parties and foundations, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), Inter-Governmental Organisations, NGOs and other organisations working in democracy support, independent media, trade unions, Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) and democracy activists.
- In supporting democratic accountability, **give proper balance to supporting government oversight institutions and civil society**, recognising the essential role of oversight institutions for overseeing key democratic functions, such as political finance, elections, or anti-corruption oversight bodies. Their role can be complemented but never replaced by civil society.
- **Devote attention to traditionally under supported sectors**, with detailed action points on parliamentary actors, political parties and independent media, as well as the related legal framework and democratic oversight of these actors.
- Place special focus on **inclusiveness in decision-making**, particularly the inclusion of women, youth, minorities, disadvantaged groups and under-represented groups, as a goal in itself and throughout the whole spectrum of democracy support programmes.
- Support all key stakeholders in promoting and building democratic processes and accountable democratic institutions **going beyond election observation**, so as to enhance local ownership and rebalance towards other impact areas.

- Ensure follow-up to EOM recommendations has strong links to existing democracy support efforts, tapping into the existing expertise, networks and long-standing efforts of democracy assistance actors on the ground.
- Develop a set of indicators and compendium of best practices on how to **monitor and respond to threats to democratic space**, based on an understanding that the closing of civic space is one of the tactics of a wider trend of closing democratic space.
- Include specific actions on **leveraging digital technologies to strengthen democracy**, and supporting the development of measures regulating the online public sphere, AI and other emerging technologies in a way that safeguards democratic principles, keeping in mind the way digital technologies interfere with human rights and democratic processes.

The European Partnership for Democracy (EPD), the European Network of Political Foundations (ENoP), and the Office of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) to the European Union reiterate our commitment to collaborate with EU Institutions and EU Member States on the EU Action Plan for Democracy and Human Rights to ensure ambitious, effective and accountable EU democracy policy and external democracy support.

Brussels, February 2020

European Partnership for Democracy (EPD)

The European Partnership for Democracy (EPD) is a non-profit organisation supporting democracy and good governance worldwide. The EPD network brings together 15 organisations from around the European Union (EU) that specialise on different sectors of democracy support, including support for political parties, parliaments, elections, media development, local democracy, human rights, executive leadership and ICT.

The EPD network collaborates on programmes and shares experiences and lessons learned, in order to contribute more effectively to democratisation around the world. In addition, EPD contributes to improving democracy support policies through its advocacy efforts in Brussels.

Our members are: Agence Française de Coopération medias (CFI), Article 19, Club de Madrid, Danish Institute for Parties and Democracy (DIPD), Eastern European Studies Centre (EESC), Elbarlament, European Association of Local Democracy (ALDA), European Centre for Electoral Support (ECES), Netherlands Helsinki Committee (NHC), Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD), Oslo Center, People in Need, Political Parties of Finland for Democracy (Demo Finland), Universidade Católica Portuguesa, and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD).

www.epd.eu

International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA)

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) is an intergovernmental organization with the mission to advance democracy worldwide, as a universal human aspiration and enabler of sustainable development. We do this by supporting the building, strengthening and safeguarding of democratic political institutions and processes at all levels. Our vision is a world in which democratic processes, actors and institutions are inclusive and accountable and deliver sustainable development to all.

What do we do? In our work we focus on three main impact areas: electoral processes; constitution-building processes; and political participation and representation. The themes of gender and inclusion, conflict sensitivity and sustainable development are mainstreamed across all our areas of work. International IDEA provides analysis of global and regional democratic trends; produces comparative knowledge of good international democratic practices; offers technical assistance and capacity-building on democratic reform to actors engaged in democratic processes; and convenes dialogue on issues relevant to the public debate on democracy and democracy building.

Where do we work? Our headquarters are located in Stockholm, with regional and country offices in Africa, the Asia-Pacific, Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean. International IDEA is a Permanent Observer to the United Nations and is accredited to European Union institutions.

<http://idea.int>

European Network of Political Foundations (ENoP)

The European Network of Political Foundations (ENoP) consists of 53 member foundations and three affiliated entities, coming from 23 countries within the EU. The members are ideologically close to six party families – ECR, EPP, Greens/EFA, GUE/NGL, Renew Europe and S&D – represented in the European Parliament and belonging to the democratic spectrum.

The Network also serves as a platform for political foundations in Europe to exchange with the EU institutions, civil society organisations (CSOs) and research institutes about democracy support, development cooperation and political dialogue.

The activities of political foundations 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, aimed at enhancing the cooperation between the two actors in: 1) promoting enabling environment for political foundations, CSOs and political parties; 2) encouraging participation in policy-making through political foundations, their partner-organisations and political parties; and 3) strengthening the capabilities of political foundations in supporting democracy and developing pluralistic societies.

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