



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.

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 civil society organisations of the NDICI. It reflects the recommendations and expertise of the signatories on democracy, while acknowledging the importance of human rights.

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. **In this statement we provide practical guidance for staff in EU Delegations to engage on supporting democracy effectively.**



Development efforts are more sustainable when channeled through democratic processes and inclusive and accountable institutions in partner countries. Evidence shows that democratic governance fosters greater equality, inclusiveness, peaceful dialogue and facilitates political and social renewal. **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.**

An empowered civil society with an inclusive, democracy and human rights agenda, is an intrinsic component of any democratic system. It represents and fosters pluralism, contributes to more inclusive and effective policies and thereby helps to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As a voice for citizens' concerns, civil society organisations (CSOs) are active players in the public arena, engaging on participation and oversight and furthering participatory democracy. They embody and satisfy demands for transparent and accountable governance, thus endowing democratic systems with legitimacy and inducing them to improve on a continuous basis.

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.

The EU should enhance its efforts against shrinking civic space and in support of free media as cornerstones of democracy. CSOs play an overarching role in enabling inclusive, participatory and empowered citizenship. In the context of EU democracy support, CSOs are both development and governance actors in their own right.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THEMATIC PROGRAMMING ON CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

Key Recommendations:

- **Empower civil society** in fulfilling their function in democracies by supporting them in their oversight and agenda-setting role; fostering cooperation, dialogue and capacity building for CSOs in partner countries; supporting an enabling environment for CSOs; and through civic education.
- **Raise awareness and build the capacity of EU Delegations** on the variety of target areas and stakeholders for effectively empowering civil society and identifying early warning signs of closing democratic space.
- **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.
- **Increase transparency** on the planning and conception of funding opportunities for democracy support and multiply exchanges with partners and stakeholders throughout the process.

1. Priority areas: themes

Each region and each country has different needs, with different entry points for civil society support. To ensure evidence-based programming, programming decisions need to be rooted in a solid democracy and political economy analysis, identifying change agents and obstacles to an empowered civil society. **For support to CSOs, key areas to focus on are:**

- **Create an enabling environment for CSOs:** It is crucial to create and consolidate an enabling environment for civil society in partner countries. Geographic programmes, in cooperation with governments in partner countries, should complement this key priority of the thematic programme.
- **Build capacity and foster cooperation between CSOs in partner countries:** Capacities of CSOs should be further supported in order to improve their ability to become key players in the democratic transition or consolidation in partner countries.
- **Ensure support goes to CSOs** who are working towards inclusive and liberal democratic and human rights values.
- **Facilitate experience sharing and dialogue:** Supporting experience sharing among CSOs from different backgrounds, countries and regions, will enable them to fulfill their respective roles more effectively. Dialogue between CSOs and local and national authorities could lead to more sustainable outcomes and should therefore be supported.

- **Empower citizens in partner countries through civic education:** Given its central importance in creating inclusive democratic societies, efforts to enhance civic education in partner countries should be a key priority. CSOs play a key role in this context and can make valuable contributions in bringing about empowered citizens.
- **Create possibilities to support sudden democratic breakthroughs and enhance the capacity of EU delegations to capture early warnings:** Democratic transitions in partner countries can occur faster than expected or, in certain contexts, rather suddenly. It is important to make full use of existing possibilities within the NDICI to support CSOs on the ground and citizen empowerment. This will foster processes of democratic consolidation and avoid backsliding.
- **Support civil society in their oversight and political agenda-setting role:** Civil society plays a crucial role in agenda-setting and advocating for inclusive policies in all sectors. They also play a critical oversight role, thereby stimulating effective and inclusive decision-making and implementation. This includes governments' use of budget support. Recent years have seen a decrease in such support to civil society. For effective action on all 5 commission priorities, civil society oversight will be essential.

2. Funding modalities

Based on experience of supporting democracy all across the world, there is evidence that certain modalities are more effective in assisting actors in promoting representative and accountable governance.



- **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.** Grants are more accessible for local CSOs, have more local ownership and can be more adapted to local needs. The formal requirements for applications as well as for implementation of projects vary significantly depending on the applicable procedure for grants and service contracts. Both types of support – grants and service contracts – are relevant and important. However, it should be underlined that democracy support differs from 'traditional' technical assistance matters, in that it deals with values, political pluralism and trust, for which a sense of ownership and inclusive, bottom-up approaches are necessary.

- **Move beyond siloed approach:** Although CSOs should be the central beneficiaries of the programme, it may be beneficial to move beyond this siloed approach and support synergies between CSOs and other actors to achieve the best results, within the overall objective to support civil society. When this is considered relevant and appropriate to the context, calls for proposals should e.g. allow a joint implementation by CSOs together with public bodies (including local authorities), stakeholders from the private sector, and others as co-applicants. Only through a holistic, multi-actor approach can an enabling environment be achieved and synergies maximised.

3. Procedural recommendations

- **Adopt a holistic approach creating links between all programmes:** It is crucial to create and consolidate an enabling environment for civil society in partner countries. This can only be achieved through a holistic approach. In this regard, adequately linking and coordinating this programme to the other thematic and also geographic programmes is essential given that civil society can only thrive if governments ensure a functioning legal and judicial framework.
- **Create regular, structured and constructive dialogue formats:** CSOs provide an essential link between the processes and actors involved in policy-making on the one hand, and policy implementation on the other. In order to optimally align the creation of development policies with their implementation it is important to hold regular constructive consultations between CSOs and EU decision makers.
- **Engage in inclusive (online) consultation and coordination:** CSOs should be involved in wider consultations and activities of coordination among various actors in development policy-making. CSOs should thereby be more effectively integrated into the network of stakeholders that includes EU institutions, Member States, and other relevant actors.
- **Hold effective consultations:** Dialogue formats should be designed in an inclusive manner and such that CSOs have the opportunity to make contributions according to their respective areas of expertise. This will ensure that the consultations with EU decision makers are as effective as possible.