

April 2019

European democracy support in Zimbabwe

*A case study reviewing European
democracy support.*

Executive Summary

The politics of Zimbabwe remain unpredictable yet highly constrained by the continued dominance of one party on the structures of political power. The Zimbabwe African National Union - Patriotic Front (Zanu PF) have ruled Zimbabwe since independence in 1980. While Robert Mugabe was removed from power in 2017 and President Mnangagwa was confirmed as the winner of the 2018 election, the fundamental problems related to democratic governance have not changed. It seems that in one way or another, things change so that they may remain the same. But that is not all of the story.

On the plus side, there have been improvements since the violent election run-off in 2008, which are sometimes overlooked. Despite the fact that many laws still need to be aligned to the new constitution, the constitution itself can be seen as an important milestone not only in the past decade, but also in the history of the country. Moreover, the general environment for civil society and the opposition is less repressive than it was around 2008, with fewer arrests and less use of repressive legislation. At the same time, the past decade has been characterised by political and economic paralysis, which meant the re-engagement efforts of the EU and its member states never really took off.

The paper outlines a series of recommendations for updating and improving European efforts to support democracy in Zimbabwe. It was commissioned by the European Partnership for Democracy in the context of a 'Review of European democracy support'. Zimbabwe was chosen among a series of country cases because of the presence of European sanctions and the general lack of democratic progress (in order to balance with other country cases). The recommendations from the paper are split into five thematic areas each containing specific recommendations. These are:

- **European engagement and priorities**

Both political and economic development in Zimbabwe has been severely hampered by the politics of the country in the last decade. The international community must be firm in their commitment to comprehensive reforms in their engagement with the government. While there is a need for greater clarity on the often-used term of 'engagement' with the government of Zimbabwe, there is also a need to ensure not all European eggs are put in the same basket.

- **Coordination and communication**

The position of the EU in Zimbabwe has been complicated by the issue of sanctions and a lack of understanding of EU policy among citizens and Zimbabwean civil society. A concerted and sustained communication effort should be prioritised. In addition, the EU and its member states would be greatly aided by the creation of a donor matrix per sector in order to share information and avoid overlap.

- **Funding mechanisms**

Democracy support organisations would benefit greatly from institutional support that is long-term in scope in order to adapt to changing political circumstances. Flexibility would also help in this regard. Donors should also consider relaxing some of the administrative burden on organisations while maintaining effective accountability and transparency measures. Long-term institutional support to some human rights organisations enabled them to act decisively in times of crisis, as could be witnessed in the January crackdown for example.

- **Sectors of support**

While the EU provided important assistance to the 2018 election, support for electoral processes should occur throughout the electoral cycle rather than in the year running up to elections. The recommendations from the EU Election Observation Mission provide a key entry point for working on elections and democracy support more generally in the coming years. Given the intertwining of the state and the ruling party, there is likely to be a need to work with other parties to ensure a more equitable balance in the political system.

- **Knowledge & learning**

Three recommendations on knowledge and learning emerged from the paper. Firstly, the EU and EU member states should undertake a review of sanctions policy in Zimbabwe (and arguably elsewhere) in order to assess effectiveness and look at possible exit-strategies. Secondly, analysis of which instruments, programmes and strategies have been successful or not would benefit from more systematic data collection. Finally, there is a need to assess the unintended outcomes of EU support on the development of democracy in the country.

What is clear from these recommendations, and the report in general, is that the Zimbabwean context is complex and unpredictable, which means shaping future European democracy support programmes will be a complicated exercise that requires careful analysis. In doing so, one of the key lessons of the past period seems the necessity to avoid too singular an orientation and approach. As the international context shifts, European actors still have a key role to play in supporting domestic reform efforts, particularly at a time of major socio-economic stress in the country due in large part to the failures of democratic governance over the last 2 decades.

Report written by **Hugo Knoppert** - Coordinator Zimbabwe Europe Network

EPD publications are independent of specific national or political interests.

© 2019 European Partnership for Democracy (EPD)

This publication can be downloaded at www.epd.eu

EUROPEAN PARTNERSHIP FOR DEMOCRACY (EPD)

The European democracy support network

Rue Froissart 123-133

1040 Bruxelles

+32 2 733 2282

info@epd.eu

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	6
1. COUNTRY CONTEXT	7
a. Major trends and democracy events in Zimbabwe	7
b. European support & engagement with Zimbabwe	13
c. Challenges for European democracy support programmes	15
2. RELEVANCE	19
a. Complexities of dealing with authoritarian regimes	19
b. Measures or sanctions? Implications of measures on European democracy support	20
c. Complexity of defining red lines	24
d. The EDF in Zimbabwe	25
3. COMPLEMENTARITY	27
a. Donor coordination	27
b. Civil society coordination & inclusion	29
c. Bilateral interests vs complementarity & coherence	30
4. CONSISTENCY	33
a. From 'regime-change' to re-engagement	33
b. Funding mechanisms	34
c. Agenda setting	36
d. EU Communication strategy	37
5. IMPACT	40
a. Contribution of European democracy support	40
b. Outlook for European democracy support	44
6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	47
a. Conclusions	47
b. Recommendations	48



Introduction

In the last decade, Zimbabwe went from an extremely violent election, to a (first) coalition government, to an adjusting authoritarian regime characterised by intense factional battles and continued economic hardships, to a coup that led to the historical departure of President Mugabe after his 37-year rule. Despite the occurrence of these major developments, Zimbabwe's government has to a large extent been characterised by an authoritarian leadership style.

This study on European democracy support in Zimbabwe is part of a wider assessment of European democracy support in the past decade. Analysing European democracy support programmes in Zimbabwe allows for an exploration of possible strategies to use when dealing with authoritarian regimes. In doing so, this paper explores the continued balancing act of European actors in their engagement with Zimbabwe, and the implications for European democracy support programmes. This is especially relevant as there have been a number of significant shifts in European engagement with Zimbabwe in the past decade.

In order to assess European democracy support it is important to highlight the political and socio-economic context in Zimbabwe, which has influenced the nature, volume and priorities of European support programmes. The first section will therefore list a number of key democracy related events and turning points of the past decade. The paper then looks at the relevance, complementarity, consistency and impact of European democracy support in separate chapters. It ends by offering up conclusions and recommendations for the future of European efforts to support democratic governance in Zimbabwe.



1.

Country context

a. Major trends and democracy events in Zimbabwe

Pre-2008 period

This report covers a period of ten years, which in the case of Zimbabwe starts with the 2008 elections. It is however important to include a number of democracy related events and challenges of the pre-2008 period, as these played an important factor in the formulation of European policy on Zimbabwe in the period examined. Moreover, in order to understand some of the shifts that occurred in Zimbabwe, it is important to be aware of the country's political history.

Most notably the period from 1999 to 2008 was marred by state repression, violence, and a deteriorating economic crisis. This was to a significant part a response to the formation of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) by a wide range of civil society groups in 1999, which became the first opposition party to pose a serious threat to the rule of the Zimbabwe African National Union - Patriotic Front (Zanu PF) led by President Robert Mugabe since Zimbabwe's independence in 1980. Not only did the MDC manage to win a significant number of seats in the Parliamentary Elections of 2000, it also managed to successfully mobilise a 'no' vote during a referendum around proposed constitutional changes earlier that year.

The outcomes of successive elections during the period from 2000 to 2008, including the presidential elections of 2002 and 2008, were highly contested, while the elections themselves were marked by gross human rights violations and election irregularities. In general, Zimbabwean opposition and civil society experienced severe challenges with regards to freedom of opinion and freedom of association and assembly, which were affected by repressive legislation such as the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) and the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA). During this period activists and

opposition figures experienced acts of violence, torture, arrest and intimidation committed by Zimbabwe's security apparatus. Especially around elections Zimbabwe's wider population also had to endure widespread and systematic acts of state sponsored violence.

It is important to note that as a result of these serious human rights violations by the Government of Zimbabwe the EU imposed appropriate and restrictive measures (i.e. sanctions) against Zimbabwe in 2002, which limited the engagement and support of the EU and its member states with the country in the period afterwards. These measures and their impact on Europe - Zimbabwe relations are described in more detail in section 2.2.

Another important heritage from this period that continues to play an important factor in European policy discussions was the Fast-Track Land-Reform Program which Zanu PF initiated shortly after the defeat in the constitutional referendum in 2000. A large number of white farmers, including several European farmers, were forced off their land together with their workers. These evictions were often violent and occurred without any form of compensation. The issue of compensation continues to influence engagement between European countries and Zimbabwe.

The 2008 elections

The harmonised elections of 2008 took place during the height of Zimbabwe's economic crisis, which was characterised by hyperinflation and shortages of almost all commodities. After election day, the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) took five weeks to announce the results, which many believed was an indication Morgan Tsvangirai's MDC-T had won. ZEC did indeed announce MDC-T had won, but stated Tsvangirai had received 47,9% of the vote (against Mugabe's 43,2%), which was not enough to secure an outright first-round victory.

The resulting run-off was marred by violence against opposition leaders and supporters, who were beaten, tortured, kidnapped and killed. As a result, MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai decided to withdraw from the run-off, to avoid further violence against his supporters. The campaigns of violence of Zimbabwe's security forces installed fear in Zimbabwe's citizens, which continues to influence their political participation to this day.

A Government of National Unity (GNU)

The blocking of an apparent MDC-T victory changed the nature of politics in Zimbabwe. Following the refusal of the international community to accept the election result proclaimed by Zanu PF, a Global Political Agreement (GPA) was negotiated under the mediation of South Africa, which led to the formation of a coalition government. The resulting Government of National Unity (GNU) was an important shift in Zimbabwe's history, as it forced political parties to engage and jointly govern the country, forming the first coalition government since its independence. Although the power dynamics in the GNU were

in Zanu PF's favour, the coalition government certainly improved interparty dialogue in Zimbabwe.

During these years the GNU managed to ensure political and economic stability. One of the other major gains of the GNU was the formulation of a new constitution. After years of negotiations and a constitutional outreach program, the constitution was overwhelmingly approved in a referendum in 2013 after both Zanu PF and opposition parties campaigned for a 'yes' vote.

Zanu PF's landslide victory in 2013

One of the key aims of the GPA was that it outlined the conditions for a free and fair election in 2013. However, through its prolonged control over the 'hard sectors of government', such as the security and military sectors, Zanu PF constrained the opening up of key democratic spaces. Furthermore, on the political level, key electoral reforms were not implemented. As such, the 2013 elections took place in an environment where many of the concerns about the electoral process, including the electoral laws and the functioning of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), had not been addressed.¹

Although a number of political analysts predicted a Zanu PF win, it was the scale of their victory that shocked most observers and the international community. Mugabe scored 61% of the vote (compared with 44% in 2008), while Tsvangirai only managed to secure 33% (compared to 48% in 2008) Moreover, Zanu PF went from a parliamentary minority to a resounding majority (from 99 to 160 of 210 seats). Although these outcomes were questioned and contested, both the opposition and civil society were not able to successfully prove systematic rigging or irregularities. Most observers believe that the 2013 elections did not meet international standards on free and fair elections, but at the same time agree that Zanu PF's strategies and structures were better than those of the opposition parties.

The 2013 election was an illustration of Zanu PF's effective system of political control, as well as its ability to adjust. The overt and visible violence that characterised the 2008 elections, was substituted by forms of subtle intimidation and violence. These included the politicisation of food aid and the use of traditional leaders and Zanu PF candidates to remind rural constituencies about the wave of violence in 2008. This phenomenon is locally known as "shaking the matchbox", referring to the fact that once you have burned down someone's house, the next time shaking a matchbox will be enough to incite fear.

This "shaking the matchbox" phenomenon is representative of the violent political history of

¹ ICG Briefing, Zimbabwe waiting for the future

Zimbabwe, which also shows why seemingly singular cases of violence or more subtle forms of intimidations can still be so powerful. It explains, for example, why the abduction and disappearance of journalist Itai Dzamara in 2015 was more than a singular case, as it sent a strong signal to other journalists and activists.

Post 2013 elections: a period of reorientation

The 2013 elections were seen by many as another important turning point in Zimbabwe, as it marked the end of the coalition government. Furthermore, Zanu PF's parliamentary majority presented a new political reality. Both civil society and opposition had to come to terms with this new political reality, and it took quite some time for them to adjust and re-strategize.

In the years after the 2013 elections, the political landscape was mostly dominated by intense factionalism within Zanu PF between the so-called G40 faction (named after a generation of younger politicians in Zanu PF) which had the support of the wife of the President, Grace Mugabe, and Team Lacoste (named after the nickname of the perceived leader of the faction, Emmerson Mnangagwa). Although factionalism has always been present in Zanu PF, the post-2013 factional fights took place in the public domain more than ever before. As a result, these years were to a large extent characterised by a political and economic paralysis, which prevented any serious reforms.

The historical departure of Mugabe

The factionalism described above ultimately culminated in a military intervention named 'operation restore legacy', initiated in November 2017. Following Mugabe's initial refusal to depart, massive street protests were organised, and Mugabe was further pressured with an impeachment procedure in Parliament. The pressure ultimately led Mugabe to resign after 37 years in power.

Mugabe's removal brought Zimbabwe back on the agenda of many international actors, with several high-level delegations from European countries visiting Zimbabwe in the months after Mugabe's departure. There was a clear sense of hope Mnangagwa could change the course of history of the country, and a willingness to assist Zimbabwe in its envisaged transition. This hope was fed by Mnangagwa's public remarks in which he outlined his vision for Zimbabwe, describing his new government as 'the new dispensation', which was 'open for business' and promoting democracy.

The 2018 elections

The elections in 2018 were seen as historic elections. Not only were they the first elections in which Mugabe did not participate, the same applied to his long-time rival Morgan

Tsvangirai who passed away earlier in the year. As such, the main contenders during the elections were President Mnangagwa (Zanu PF) and Nelson Chamisa (MDC), who was appointed as Tsvangirai's successor shortly after his death. Although there was criticism on the manner in which he was elected as the new MDC-T leader, Chamisa did manage to unite most of the different MDC groups in the MDC-Alliance, as there had been various splits in the MDC throughout its history.

The international community regarded the 2018 elections as an important test, and the EU and others insisted that the elections would have to meet international standards on free and fair elections. The run-up to the elections was characterised by a peaceful environment as noted by most election observers, who also pointed at the opening of space and the ability of the opposition to campaign freely. This more open environment was also acknowledged by Zimbabwean civil society organisations. The fact that the EU was invited to send an Election Observation Mission (EOM) for the first time in sixteen years further testified to this change.

The pre-election period and election day were largely peaceful, and the opposition was able to campaign in areas it previously could not access. Despite the more open environment and a number of other positive developments, most international EOMs concluded the elections were not in accordance with international standards. They indicated there was no level playing field, and highlighted the partisan role of ZEC, the biased state media, the use of state resources by Zanu PF, and subtle forms of intimidation described earlier as the main reasons for this.

As outlined by an Afrobarometer research shortly before the elections the politics of fear still played a role. The survey found that 40% of people believed the security forces would not be willing to accept the results if the opposition won, and 40% feared there would be violence after the polls.²

The post-election period was marred by the deployment of the army on August 1 in response to protestors demanding for the election results to be announced. Soldiers opened fire resulting in six fatalities in what was widely believed to be a highly disproportional response. This led to disappointment and dashed hopes of imminent change, complicating further engagement of the EU and its member states.

Despite a refusal of the main opposition party to accept the result of the Presidential elections, Zanu PF Mnangagwa's was sworn in as President and he soon elected a new Cabinet. The reduction of the cabinet size was seen as a positive development, as was the

² Afrobarometer, Findings from a pre-election baseline survey in Zimbabwe: April/May 2018

inclusion of certain technocrats. Some of Zanu PF's 'old guard' were not given Ministerial roles, but positions within Zanu PF headquarters, which has led to party tension. In the coming period the power balance between the cabinet and Zanu PF's politburo will be important to monitor, as some analysts have argued Mnangagwa and Zanu PF have opted for a Chinese model of governance.

Although there were major differences with the 2013 elections, clear similarities could be witnessed that should be looked at when designing future democracy support programmes. These include the clear urban-rural divide, the unlevel playing field, and the inability of the opposition and civil society to provide solid legal evidence of systematic rigging and intimidation.

Elections aftermath: another period of reorientation?

The developments described above took place against the background of a severe economic crisis, which has deteriorated rapidly in the past year. Throughout the period described, the deteriorating economic situation continued to inform domestic and international policies and priorities. With a huge debt overhang and a liquidity crisis, there is a sense of urgency among the international community to engage. At the same time, there is also a sense the international community now has more leverage to insist on reforms. Other factors that will inform re-engagement policies include the discussions with International Financial Institutions, the government's willingness and ability to implement political and economic reforms, the current polarisation among political actors in Zimbabwe and the response of the government to the post-election violence.

The first months after the elections seemed to mark another period of reorientation in which relations between various actors are being redefined. The EU and individual member states are considering the level and nature of their engagement with the Zimbabwean government, which to a certain extent resembles the 2013 'wait and see' approach.

Zimbabwe's opposition and civil society also pointed at the increased militarisation of the State, with a number of army generals being appointed to Government positions, such as the Vice President as well as the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Lands, Agriculture and Rural Settlements. The increased presence of military elements also leads to new frictions within Zanu PF, as there are reports about new factionalism in the party between these hard-line elements and the more civilian elements of the party which some believe to be more reform-minded.

The risks of the militarisation of the state became clear in January 2019 when Zimbabwe's security forces used disproportionate violence in response to widespread protests linked to the continued economic crisis. The massive human rights violations were believed to be the

worst in a decade. The violent crackdown on both opposition and civil society was also a major setback in European re-engagement efforts.

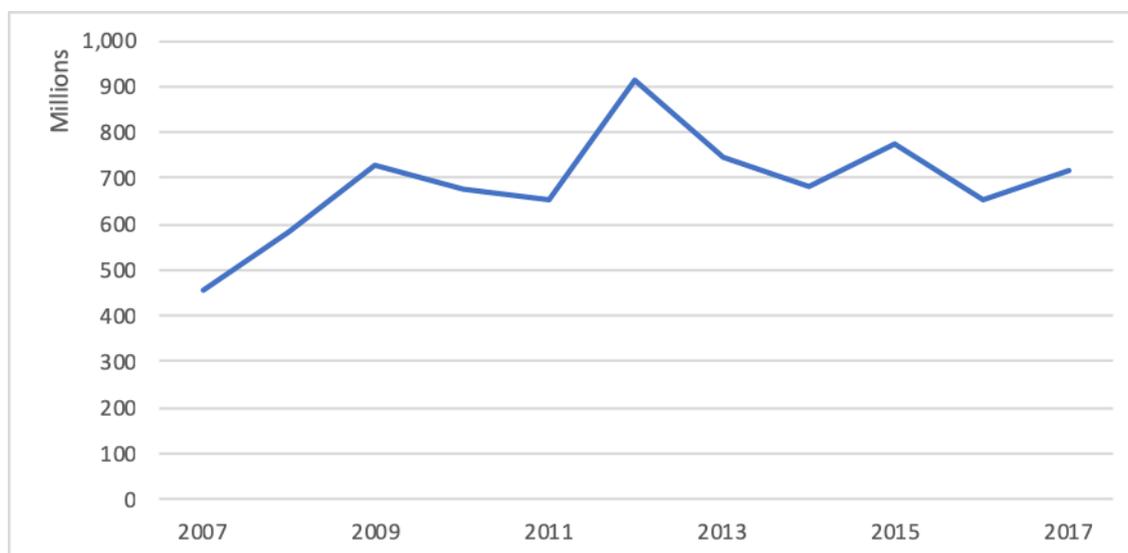
b. European support & engagement with Zimbabwe

Ever since Zimbabwe's independence in 1980, the EU and its member states have been providing development assistance to Zimbabwe. Since 2009, the EU and its member states have provided over \$1 billion in development assistance focused mostly on the provision of social services and food security, reinforcing democratic institutions, and fostering economic recovery.³ The adoption of European restrictive measures in 2002 meant EU assistance was reoriented to programmes which were believed to be in direct support of the population in Zimbabwe. As a result, European support programmes mainly focused on social sectors such as education and health, and on civil society support. When looking at the Official Development Aid (ODA) support to Zimbabwe, of which European donors provided the majority, it is apparent Zimbabwe received significant support in the past decade.

It should be noted that it is difficult to obtain comprehensive data on European democracy support provided. The EU, its member states, and other donors are using different definitions of democracy-related support, which makes it difficult to provide comprehensive and comparable data. Categories used include governance, human rights, civil society, democracy, and rule of law. Furthermore, the sensitive nature of some of the support influences the level of public accountability. However, based on available data on Official Development Aid (ODA), figures from individual countries, and oral submissions from European diplomats and policy makers a number of observations can be made with regards to European democracy support to Zimbabwe. Throughout the past decade the EU and the UK have been the largest donors, also providing significant democracy support. The Swedish government contributed around \$170 million to democracy support programmes, while Norway contributed \$60 million over the last 10 years. Other European states that provided significant democracy support include the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Denmark.

³ https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/countries/zimbabwe_en

Figure 1. Net official development assistance (ODA) and official aid received (current US\$) 2007-2017 (Data from World Bank)



Furthermore, throughout most of the period examined the EU was Zimbabwe's second largest trade partner after South Africa. During the GNU, the EU and Zimbabwe also signed an interim European Partnership Agreement (EPA) to facilitate and promote trade relations.

Focus on election cycles

As outlined above, European democracy support programmes took place in a context that was rather fluid. Some of the changes were overshadowed by the lack of political and economic reforms, and a sense of an unclear, yet continued, status quo. Although major political events occurred, European actors mostly opted to first see how these events would unfold, before increasing potential support and engagement.

European engagement followed the political context in Zimbabwe to a significant extent. With the gradual normalisation of relations, the EU and other European actors also based some of their support on national political developments. A large part of democracy support programmes in turn followed election cycles in Zimbabwe - around elections support for democracy programmes increased significantly. When looking at the official ODA figures of key donors to Zimbabwe for example, this trend can be witnessed. Ahead of the 2013 elections, there was a major rise in development assistance which to a significant extent was believed to be related to the elections. Examples include projects in support of the reforms contained in the Global Political Agreement and assistance for the writing and implementation of a new constitution.

A period of reorientation

The most significant shift in Europe's approach and positioning towards Zimbabwe came after the 2013 elections. The outcomes of the elections and the resulting dissolution of the GNU led to a period of reorientation of European policy and support, which many respondents indicated resulted in a key turning point in European relations with Zimbabwe. The reorientation of European engagement with Zimbabwe followed both global and national developments and considerations. These global developments also led a number of European member states to leave Zimbabwe, with Denmark and Norway being the most notable ones. The number of donors in Zimbabwe shrank, as did the budgets and portfolio of most remaining European donors. A number of respondents also mentioned that there appeared to be some kind of 'Zimbabwe fatigue' among the international community, with a perceived narrative the country had dominated the agenda of international bodies for too long without any meaningful changes.

As will be elaborated on later, this reorientation initiated a period of re-engagement in which the EU and its member states aimed to normalise relations with the government of Zimbabwe. Among European diplomats there appeared to be a sense that given the political context, change in Zimbabwe could best be achieved by working with reform-minded elements in the ruling Zanu PF party. This marked a significant shift from the earlier approach in which engagement and support was mostly focused on civil society and the opposition. From a European perspective, the relatively peaceful conduct of the 2013 elections was seen as a considerable improvement compared to the 2008 elections. This was believed to justify an attempt to normalise relations. Among many Zimbabwean actors there was a sense that the international community, including the EU, opted for stability over democracy. This reorientation and reengagement with the Zimbabwean government is explained in further detail below (section 4 a).

c. Challenges for European democracy support programmes

The democracy related events described in the first section influenced the volume and nature of European support programmes. A number of other challenges need be taken into account when assessing these programmes as well as in the design of future support.

Democracy support in an authoritarian regime

The nature of the regime in Zimbabwe is a challenge in itself when it comes to democracy support. As outlined by former Zanu PF Minister Jonathan Moyo: 'Zanu PF will never reform itself out of power.'⁴ As such, throughout the period examined, key reforms, as agreed in the GPA and highlighted by the opposition, civil society and the international community, have not been implemented. During most of this period there was a lack of political will

⁴ Bulawayo24, 6 September 2016, <https://bulawayo24.com/index-id-news-sc-national-byo-95824.html>

among Zimbabwe's leadership to do so, and they were selective in the reforms they wanted to discuss and implement.

Furthermore, Zimbabwe's regime can be described as a learning authoritarian system, which according to most political analysts is very strong strategically. The visible violence that was witnessed in 2008, was replaced by more sophisticated forms of violence and intimidation in 2013, to ensure the legitimisation of an election victory. As such, there are also differences in what Zanu PF says it will do and what the party actually does. From a European perspective, it can be difficult to properly assess these discrepancies, as they can be subject to different explanations.

Intertwinement of (ruling) party and state & the role of factionalism

The intertwining between the state and ruling party Zanu PF complicated the engagement of European actors with Zimbabwe. Especially since the factionalism within Zanu PF intensified in the three years ahead of the November 2017 events, which effectively led to a political and economic paralysis in the governance of the country. The different factions worked against each other, which meant there were policy inconsistencies and different narratives within government.

This factionalism influenced European democracy support programmes as well. As expressed by both diplomats and development practitioners: 'you get promises, but then they brake these promises because they don't trust each other within the party, this means they are internally not coherent.'⁵ It is important to note that the factionalism within Zanu PF is not a new phenomenon, it has been there for a long time albeit in different forms and between different factions.

Internal disagreement in Zanu PF on nature of engagement with EU

There has also been heterogeneous positioning within Zanu PF towards the re-engagement trajectory with the EU. This contradictory positioning of Zanu PF has sometimes been believed to be deliberate, but it also seems the party contains hardliners and reformers when it comes to dealing with Europe. This has complicated manoeuvring and dealing with Zanu PF during the past decade, and it will continue to be a factor in future European engagement with Zimbabwe.

On a programmatic level, there have been a number of initiatives aimed at improving inter-party dialogues, which were complicated by disagreements within parties. In recent years, these disagreements were not limited to Zanu PF, but have also increasingly occurred within

⁵ Interviews Harare, November 2018

the MDC, complicating efforts for dialogue between parties.

Challenges with electoral processes

The way elections are conducted is often seen as an important marker of the state of democracy in a country. For the first time in over fifteen years the EU was invited to send an Election Observation Mission (EOM) to the country. The final report of the EU EOM highlights a number of challenges that are to a large extent applicable to the whole period examined. The recommendations of the EU EOM addressed four key areas, which are also applicable to previous electoral periods.

The need to strengthen the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) was one of the key recommendations of the EU EOM. The independence of ZEC has been questioned at all previous elections, and is also representative of how key institutions in Zimbabwe are believed to be partisan. This influences the level playing field, which was highlighted as another area of concern by the EU EOM. In this regard, the report highlighted the role of the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC), which has been very partial in its coverage, mostly focusing on Zanu PF. The unlevel playing field was further exacerbated by the use of state resources by Zanu PF.

The need to improve the legal framework was also highlighted by the EU EOM, and echoed calls Zimbabwean civil society and opposition have made in the past five years to align legislation with the 2013 constitution. In the past five years, a lack of political will meant alignment of key legislation did not occur. Lastly, the need for a more inclusive electoral process was mentioned as a key recommendation. This area covers complicated issues as it touches upon some of the subtler forms of voter manipulation, such as the over- and under registration of certain areas.

Weakening of pro-democracy actors in Zimbabwe

Another challenge has been the weakening of pro-democracy actors in Zimbabwe. The main opposition party MDC has weakened - the decrease in funding weakened their structures while the party also experienced various splits since 2005. Furthermore, both political analysts and diplomats indicate there is limited introspection happening within the MDC. It appears they only refer to rigging as the cause of lost elections in 2013 and 2018, overlooking internal weaknesses and strategic errors.⁶

There is also general agreement that Zimbabwe's civil society is currently weaker than it was in the first decade of this century. The decrease in funding for civil society has played

⁶ Expert meeting Brussels, October 2018

an important role, but brain drains, leadership challenges, and misuse of funding also contributed to this. The structures of civil society have severely weakened as a result, which also leads to questions about the extent to which they are still representative of their constituencies.

The weakening of civil society has also been the result of the economic crisis in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe's trade unions, under the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) have traditionally been a very strong actor able to mobilise its membership. However, the rapid economic deterioration and resulting unemployment figure of over 90%, also severely affected the membership of ZCTU.

Intertwinement of civil society and the opposition

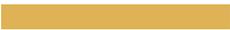
One of the major challenges for (European) donors in Zimbabwe is the intertwining of Zimbabwe's opposition and civil society actors. Many diplomats indicate they find it difficult to understand the exact nature of these relations, as these often remain quite opaque. Zimbabwean civil society has seemingly not been able to find the right balance between supporting a movement and engaging in constructive criticism of that movement.

A wide group of civil society organisations was involved in the formation of the MDC, which has made it more difficult for them to hold the opposition party to account. Furthermore, some of the splits that occurred in the MDC, also tended to divide civil society actors who chose sides. The above has undoubtedly affected the credibility of Zimbabwean civil society.

Moreover, whereas opposition and civil society were historically seen as the guardians of democracy, recent behaviour has cast doubt about respect for their internal democratic processes. The intraparty violence in the MDC as well as increased factionalism for example, has damaged its reputation as the democratic alternative.

Continued and deteriorating economic crisis

Although Zimbabwe's economy stabilised during the GNU and recovered from the years of hyperinflation, the past ten years have been characterised by a deteriorating economic crisis. This also affected the political participation of Zimbabwe's population, as the crisis weakens the support base of (mainly opposition) parties with people more focused on individual survival strategies. Furthermore, the crisis also influences the focus of discussions between Europe and Zimbabwe, as the severity of the economic deterioration tends to dominate discussions.



2.

Relevance

a. Complexities of dealing with an authoritarian regime

In its positioning and approach over the last decade, the EU had to manoeuvre between principled value-based positioning and a more pragmatic approach, and between a confrontational and constructive approach. The emphasis and balance in using the ‘carrot’ and the ‘stick’ has shifted a number of times, with a mixture of hard and soft conditionalities.

The fact that there were appropriate and restrictive measures in place restricted the nature of European democracy support to Zimbabwe, as Zimbabwe was not eligible for a number of EU funding instruments. As described earlier, support focused mostly on civil society organisations in Zimbabwe, which naturally led to frictions with the Zimbabwean government, especially given the volume of support. European democracy support programmes were not discussed with the government of Zimbabwe. As a result, the government accused the EU and its member states of pursuing a regime change agenda, by supporting the opposition and civil society.

The Zanu PF regime highlighted this in the state media and in various international platforms, using an anti-imperialistic narrative which spoke out against ‘the West’ and emphasised Zimbabwe’s colonial history. President Mugabe for example, often stated ‘Zimbabwe will never be a colony again.’⁷ This rhetoric gained him quite some popularity in the region, for daring to speak out against Western countries and institutions, but of course complicated relations with the EU and its member states. Several former European ambassadors narrated how they were being shouted at by Zimbabwean Ministers during meetings.

⁷ See for example: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-un-assembly-mugabe/shame-shame-shame-mugabe-tells-u-s-and-britain-idUSBRE98P12A20130926>

As such, it can be said that relations between Europe and Zimbabwe were characterised by a high level of mutual distrust. This was also one of the reasons why the government of Zimbabwe refused to have a political dialogue with the EU as agreed in Article 8 of the Cotonou Agreement, the ACP-EU partnership agreement that guides relations between African countries and the EU. Zimbabwe's failure to pay its arrears at various international financial institutions, meant it could not access new funding from these institutions, adding to the country's isolation.

One of the complexities of Zimbabwe's system of governance, and of providing development assistance, is that almost everything appears to be political. In recent elections in Zimbabwe for example, there were several reports on how the distribution of food aid was politicised. This provides serious challenges to European donors providing food aid. While engaging an authoritarian government is understandable for various humanitarian, social and economic reasons and the EU Delegation in Harare made a concerted effort to ensure that funds were not misused, there is an inherent danger that providing support to a government allows it to consolidate power. Given the intertwinement of the state and Zanu PF this is the case in Zimbabwe, as support directed to the government is almost automatically strengthening Zanu PF and thus reinforcing an authoritarian regime.

Lastly, European policy makers sometimes tended to be too focused on the realities of the day, for example when it came to the factionalism within Zanu PF. In doing so, it appeared they sometimes lost sight of the longer term, as well as some of the continuous issues that remained unchanged.

b. Measures or sanctions? Implications of measures on European democracy support

Since the beginning of this century discussions and relations between Europe and Zimbabwe have been dominated to a large extent by the 'sanctions' debate. European restrictive measures also influenced the nature of European democracy support to Zimbabwe.

The highly contested parliamentary elections in 2000 and presidential elections in 2002 led to a new low in Europe - Zimbabwe relations. The state repression and violence that characterised Zimbabwe in the early 2000s, was widely condemned by the EU and its member states. Following the expulsion of the Head of the EU Election Observation Mission and reports about the deteriorating human rights situation in Zimbabwe, the Council of the European Union concluded the Government of Zimbabwe continued to "*engage in serious violations of human rights and the freedom of opinion, of association and of peaceful*

assembly”, and imposed restrictive measures in a council decision in 2002.⁸

These measures were targeted against individuals and entities that were considered responsible for the human rights violations, and included travel bans and the freezing of assets. The measures affected hundreds of Zanu PF Ministers, party members, military personnel, and business entities linked to the state apparatus. Furthermore, an arms embargo banned the sales of arms and military technology to the Zimbabwe Defence Industries. Interestingly though, the EU and its member states have never disclosed the scale of assets seized and by whom. To the knowledge of this author, it also appears that the EU has not conducted a systematic examination of the effectiveness of the measures.

Next to the restrictive measures, the Council adopted so-called appropriate measures under Article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement, which entailed the suspension of all direct development cooperation with the government of Zimbabwe. This prevented the payment of aid through government structures, which therefore also implied a reorientation of European support. Consequently, the focus shifted to direct support to the Zimbabwean population in the social sectors and the areas of democratisation, human rights and the rule of law, mostly through civil society organisations and multilateral agencies. The EU measures did not result in the reduction of EU development assistance, it rather changed the way this support was channelled.

The measures clearly had an impact when enacted, as pro-democracy actors in Zimbabwe welcomed the measures as a clear sign of solidarity in their struggle. It is important not to underestimate the symbolic value of this when assessing the effectiveness of the measures. However, when Zimbabwe’s political landscape and the analysis of European policy makers gradually shifted throughout the years, the EU measures became a complicating factor in shaping European policy and engagement with Zimbabwe. There was not a real dialogue with the government of Zimbabwe between 2008 and 2014, and the EU and its member states mostly engaged with civil society and multilateral institutions.

Since the measures were subject to an annual review, the EU and its member states spent many meetings discussing their possible continuation. As stated in a Chatham House report on international re-engagement with Zimbabwe, ‘Western sanctions have been one of the most polarizing and contentious issues in the Zimbabwe discourse.’⁹ There were clear differences of opinion between and within European member states, as well as among Zimbabwean political actors and civil society representatives, depending on whether they had a more principled or pragmatic position.

⁸ 2002/754/CFSP: Council decision of 13 September 2002 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dec/2002/754/oj>)

⁹ Knox Chitiyo and Steve Kibble, Zimbabwe’s international re-engagement: the long haul to recovery, Chatham House Report, 2014

What made the EU measures against Zimbabwe different than EU measures against other countries, was the way the ‘sanction debate’ was used in national media discourses. The Zanu PF regime managed to consistently instrumentalise the sanctions in an ideological way, in line with its anti-imperialistic and anti-colonialist discourse. This is something that has not happened in other countries where EU measures were imposed, such as Togo and Guinea. As stated by a former European diplomat: ‘the sanctions turned out to be a trump card for Zanu PF, as they used it in anti-imperialist rhetoric.’¹⁰ Not only did Zanu PF’s sanction rhetoric find considerable resonance in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and wider Africa, it also managed to portray the opposition as ‘part of a Western intervention strategy in Zimbabwe designed to undermine the sovereignty of the country and the goals of the liberation struggle.’¹¹ An important aspect here is that Zanu PF has used the sanction rhetoric as one of the means to divert attention from other issues, such as the lack of reforms, economic mismanagement, and human rights violations. It is therefore no surprise that Zanu PF has resorted to the sanction rhetoric again in recent months, as it diverts attention from the role of the state and Zanu PF in the January crackdown and the economic crisis.

In an analysis of Western sanctions in 2014, Professor Brian Raftopoulos concluded: “it is clear that whatever the merits of the sanctions up to the mid 2000’s, once the GPA was signed, they became counter-productive. In the face of the agreed GPA position on the removal of sanctions and the SADC and AU opposition to the measures, the continued Western insistence on the latter gave the appearance of yet another example of Western arrogance towards an African initiative.”¹²

The formation of the GNU and the following shift towards re-engagement led the EU to gradually remove the restrictive measures. The adoption of the new constitution and the improvement of the human rights situation, further fuelled this process. In this regard, successive Council conclusions were important, as they highlighted the aim to normalise relations based on improvements and a reform agenda. After the 2013 elections the EU eventually removed almost all the names from the targeted measures list, only Mugabe and his wife remained under sanctions and the measures against a number of military generals were not removed but suspended.

In terms of the re-engagement agenda the lifting of the appropriate measures in 2014 was important. The lifting of Art. 96 meant a direct dialogue between the EU and the

¹⁰ Interview Brussels, November 2018

¹¹ Brian Raftopoulos, *The sanctions debate in Zimbabwe*, Heinrich Boell Foundation, 2014

¹² Ibid

Government of Zimbabwe around policy issues became possible, while Zimbabwe also became eligible for various EU support instruments, most notably the European Development Fund (EDF). Although the EU was mostly focused on its re-engagement trajectory since 2013, there are measures in place until this day. Despite the limited number of people remaining on the EU sanctions list, the measures continued to evoke discussions in European policy circles. In the past years domestic considerations increasingly played a role in the positioning of certain member states, who feared potential media coverage in their own country when all measures would be lifted. Interestingly, it appeared that in recent years most European diplomats didn't believe in the effectiveness of the measures. The most recent discussions on the EU measures once again highlight the dichotomy between a more principled value driven approach and a more pragmatic interest driven one.

Some key European policy makers interviewed for this research believed Art. 96 was interpreted too restrictively. In hindsight, they believe that although the funding would go via multilateral institutions, INGOs and Zimbabwean civil society, it should not have restrained the EU from dialogue. At the same time, it should be noted that there was no real willingness under the Mugabe regime to enter into such a dialogue with the EU.

There is general consensus in Zimbabwe that the EU didn't manage to explain the nature of their measures. As explained by an EU diplomat: 'we didn't manage to make people believe our sanctions were directed at individuals and not hurting the economy.'¹³ This was further complicated by the fact that there was no common sanction regime by Western actors. The US had more wide-ranging sanctions under the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act (ZDERA) of 2001, which affected Zimbabwe's economy and people directly. Partly informed by state media propaganda, many actors in Zimbabwe failed to make the distinction between EU and US measures.

Based on the above, a point for future consideration would be to think more about a possible exit strategy following EU measures. Ever since the GNU the EU struggled to find an appropriate way out of the measures, which has manoeuvred the EU (MS) in a 'lose-lose' situation. If the remaining measures are kept in place the EU continues to be vulnerable to Zanu PF propaganda, but if the measures are lifted the EU is likely to be subject to criticism in European media. Moreover, in light of the wider context of issues and challenges in Zimbabwe, one could argue that the EU and its member states spent too much time discussing something that, especially in the last few years, was mainly an internal EU issue.

¹³ Interview Harare, September 2018

c. Complexity of defining red lines

Although the terms were not clearly outlined, during the re-engagement period there was a ‘carrot and stick’ approach by the EU and its member states. This was partly deliberate, also stemming from the realisation about the complexity of defining red lines. Based on the experience of the past decade the EU and its member states have been quite reserved about working with conditionalities in their engagement with the Zanu PF government. There seems to be a sense among the majority of European policy makers working on Zimbabwe that imposing conditionalities would not be the best strategy to ensure the envisaged reforms for further engagement are implemented. As explained by a European diplomat: ‘Zanu PF are masters in doing just enough, so it is very tricky to draw up five points as they will play around those.’¹⁴

Furthermore, the EU also had to deal with a lot of contradictory signalling that came out of the Zimbabwe government, for example when it came to the indigenisation policy. The implementation of the Indigenisation Act (in place since 2008), which states that foreign companies with a minimum asset value of \$500,000 should give up 51% of their ownership to indigenous Zimbabweans, was characterised by a lack of clarity and mixed signalling. This different positioning was partly the result of the factionalism in Zanu PF described earlier, but also believed to be a deliberate attempt to manipulate the EU.

Although most European diplomats are able to list a number of concrete policy implementations and reforms they would like to see, it is also clear that commitment itself from the Zimbabwean side has been a clear policy goal. There is a sense among a number of respondents that in the majority of cases the government of Zimbabwe accepted talks about democratic reforms as part of wider engagement discussions, not because of genuine interest or will to improve. It can therefore be said that international actors do, to a certain extent, have the leverage to push for such discussions.

Respondents from various backgrounds believe that European engagement should be shaped around a dual approach combining political engagement and leverage with democracy support programmes and activities. The difficulty for European actors has been, and will be, finding the right balance between the two. Furthermore, it seems wise to invest more in having discussions with both European donors and practitioners to have a shared analysis on which instruments, programmes, and strategies have been successful or not. It currently seems this shared analysis is not always there, which is also complicating buy-in in future programming.

¹⁴ Expert meeting Brussels, October 2019

d. The EDF in Zimbabwe

The lifting of the appropriate measures in 2014 enabled the EU to further engage with the Zimbabwean government and progress on the programming of the 11th European Development Fund (EDF), meaning the EU would work directly with the government in creating and implementing joint development programmes. Under the 11th EDF, €234 million was allocated to Zimbabwe.

Ahead of the expiration of the measures, the EU and the government of Zimbabwe had started the process of drafting a Country Strategy Paper (CSP), the strategic document that would guide the allocation of the EDF funds to Zimbabwe. Following the CSP the EU and Zimbabwe drafted a National Indicative Program (NIP), outlining the strategy and priorities for EU aid programmes. The NIP is drafted in close cooperation with the partner country to ensure that the NIP supports national priorities and reflects the local context. The EU in Zimbabwe focused its support on three sectors: health, agriculture-based economic development, and governance and institution building.¹⁵

Financial Overview 11th EDF Zimbabwe, allocated amounts per sector

Focus Area	Allocated amount	%
Focal sector 1 - Health	€88 million	37.6%
Focal sector 2 - Agriculture-based economic development	€88 million	37,6%
Focal sector 3 - Governance and Institution Building	€45 million	19,3%
Cross-cutting - Support measures and Support to NAO Office	€7 million	3%
Measures in favour of civil society	€6 million	2,5%
Total	€ 234 million	100%

The set-up of the EDF had implications for the documents drafted and agreed, as these have to be jointly adopted by the EU and the host government. In the case of Zimbabwe this meant the NIP is a very depoliticised document that does not necessarily reflect the very politicised nature of the Zimbabwean context. Furthermore, there was a disconnect, as the CSP was drafted before the 2013 elections, while the NIP was drafted afterwards.

¹⁵ 11th European Development Fund National Indicative Programme (2014-2020) for co-operation between the Republic of Zimbabwe and the European Union

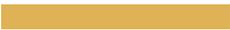
Political Dialogue

The lifting of the measures under Article 96 of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement (CPA) also meant the resumption of ‘normal political dialogue’ under Article 8 of the CPA. Article 8 outlines the specific modalities for a regular, comprehensive, balanced and deep political dialogue between the EU and ACP countries.¹⁶ The political dialogue is envisaged to cover a broad range of topics, which includes respect for human rights, democratic principles, the rule of law, and good governance, which are identified in Article 9 of the CPA.

However, a study by the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (*IOB*) of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs presented in 2014 outlined how opinions on the quality and forcefulness of the political dialogue differ, with some saying it was weak or non-existent in quite a number of countries. At the same time, there has been little systematic research on what the Article 8 political dialogue has meant in practice and what the results have been. In Zimbabwe, the forcefulness of this dialogue was relatively limited in the beginning, given the reluctance of the Zimbabwean government to engage in such a dialogue. Only a few meetings took place, which were mostly with lower level officials. Although more meetings took place in recent years, it appears the EU made a political decision to not push strongly for the intensification of this dialogue, and opted for other platforms to raise issues of reforms and human rights. Furthermore, Article 8 states that ‘representatives of civil society organisations shall be associated with this dialogue’¹⁷, which appears not to have happened.

¹⁶ Bossuyt, J., Rocca, C., Lein, B. 2014. Political dialogue on human rights under article 8 of the Cotonou Agreement. (Study realised for the Directorate-General for External Policies of the Union). Brussels: European Parliament.

¹⁷ Official text Cotonou Partnership Agreement <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:22000A1215%2801%29>



3.

Complementarity

a. Donor coordination

In terms of European donor coordination, those European member states with a presence in Zimbabwe meet every two weeks in a Heads of Mission (HoM) meeting under the coordination of the EU delegation in Zimbabwe. The member states also have thematic coordination groups, for example on human rights, elections and development assistance. In these thematic groups, they sometimes also cooperate with other international donors. Besides these formal platforms there have also been a number of informal donor groups, such as the Fishmonger group (named after a restaurant) and the ‘Arden group’ (named after the road where the initiating Dutch Embassy is located), which sometimes also include non-European donors. As is the case anywhere, the effectiveness of coordination also depended on personalities, and their ability to get along. Examples were mentioned where there was a good dynamic between certain responsible people at cooperating donors, but also where personal relations complicated effective cooperation.

The nature of coordination meetings that do take place also differs. Some donors indicated they sometimes found it difficult to get insight into what other donors were planning and doing. A number of key donors in Zimbabwe were believed to share less information on their planning and programmes, this was especially the case in the governance and democracy support sectors. In other sectors, for example health and education, there has been quite consistent coordination, which also included government officials. In these sectors the majority of development partners have short-term strategies that are generally aligned to national development priorities.

In manoeuvring through the first months of the post-Mugabe era, the EU managed to have its member states rally around the EU EOM as a guideline for engagement. There was an acknowledgement that it was important to maintain unity at a crucial moment. In light of the different views among member states on the pace of the re-engagement agenda in the post-Mugabe era, the cohesion at this time was quite significant.

A number of challenges with regards to coordination are quite general, but there were also some Zimbabwe-specific challenges identified. After 2013, it became clear that different donors had different notions and forms of engagement with the government. There were differences among European member states about the nature, depth, and pace of engagement with, and support to, the Zimbabwean government. Moreover, some European member states and/or donors were hesitant to coordinate with countries that were in a different stage of engagement.

Furthermore, the sensitivities of certain topics also complicated coordination in some cases. The coordination in the health sector in Zimbabwe was believed to be better than the coordination on land reform for example. As explained by a European diplomat: ‘everybody wants a leadership role when it comes to the land issue, which makes donor coordination far more complicated.’¹⁸ Coordination in these more sensitive sectors was further complicated by the geopolitical relations between the EU and Zimbabwe, which made effective donor coordination with the government of Zimbabwe more difficult. As elaborated upon elsewhere, there was no coordinated approach with other Western countries that had imposed sanctions on Zimbabwe, with the US sanctions being the most important one in this regard.

Some European policy makers also referred to the problematic role of the UN in terms of coordinating donor efforts. As outlined by a European diplomat: ‘They have a conflict of interest. They are implementing programmes, but also dependant on funding and the willingness of the government of Zimbabwe to cooperate and be allowed to work.’¹⁹ As such, it was believed this made it more difficult for the UN to discuss certain sensitive topics, while their search for funding might lead to a less long-term oriented focus.

Lastly, next to assessing the coordination in Zimbabwe, it is also relevant to look at coordination among the various EU institutions and between embassies and their Ministries of Foreign Affairs. The political engagement and discussions under the re-engagement agenda did not always seem to correspond with the programmatic support provided. Sometimes, there also seemed to be different opinions between embassies and their headquarters, with the latter making decisions that did not necessarily always reflect the thinking within the diplomatic corps.

In general, it can be said that there was quite a mixed picture in terms of donor coordination. It is clear though that there was not an all-encompassing structured

¹⁸ Interview Brussels, November 2018

¹⁹ Interview Harare, November 2018

coordination. It therefore seems there is room for improvement, especially since there are relatively few donors in Zimbabwe compared to other countries.

b. Civil society coordination & inclusion

In order to strengthen cooperation and coordination among civil society, a number of donors opted to increasingly channel their funding through consortia of civil society organisations. The underlying notion was this would avoid duplication and strengthen cohesion and cooperation among civil society. However, many beneficiaries perceived these consortia as donor driven and prescriptive. Furthermore, the context of decreased donor funding affected intra-civil society relations and their ability and willingness to coordinate their work. Competition has intensified, which complicated efforts to coordinate. The decrease in funding for civil society, the reorientation of donor support, the changing political context in Zimbabwe, and the departure of leading civil society figures, led to a variety of challenges that affected the operations of Zimbabwean civil society organisations working on democracy and governance issues. It seems civil society found it difficult to effectively deal with this combination of challenges they encountered in the post 2013 period of reorientation.

The substantial donor support Zimbabwe's civil society received during the 2000s is widely believed to have contributed to a thriving civil society, especially between 2005 and 2013. During this period, civil society had created a number of coalition and networks that coordinated the efforts of wider civil society on specific topics. Examples of such membership-based coalitions include the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (focusing on democratisation), the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum (a network of human rights organisations) and the Zimbabwe Electoral Support Network (ZESN, focusing on elections).

EU Country Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society

In terms of dialogue between the EU and civil society working in the area of democratisation, it can be said that there have been various initiatives and attempts, but no effective set-up was found to ensure a structural engagement with wider civil society. The EU did continuously engage with civil society, especially those organisations that it funded, but for various reasons it did not get beyond that in terms of a more structured dialogue. These reasons included the lack of capacity and will on the European side to invest time, and the perceived absence of an inclusive civil society counterpart.

In 2012 it was decided the EU and its member states should develop country roadmaps for engagement with civil society, 'to improve the impact, predictability and visibility of EU

actions, ensuring consistency and synergy throughout the various sectors covered by EU external relations.²⁰ In an EU info note looking at the implementation of these EU country roadmaps, one of the improvements highlighted was the fact that there was a more inclusive dialogue in which EU delegations engaged with a wider range of CSO actors beyond their usual contacts.²¹

In Zimbabwe this certainly was the case as the EU Delegation initiated quite an extensive consultation process, and made serious effort to engage civil society countrywide to get input for the roadmap, organising fifteen consultative meetings with regional and thematic specificities.²² However, it should be noted that the context of decreased funding highlighted above, influenced the input of civil society representatives provided at these meetings. One of the challenges of the EU and the member states is that many civil society representatives view them first and foremost as a potential donor, and therefore tend to provide appeasing input. More importantly though, there has been no real follow up on the roadmap after its adoption in 2014, which contradicted the objective to mainstream civil society support work in the wider governance work.

c. Bilateral interests vs complementarity & coherence

Bilateral interests also played a role in the engagement between Europe and Zimbabwe, and consequently influenced coordination among European donors, which in turn had an effect on European democracy support programmes. Given the (colonial) history of the UK in Zimbabwe, it was obviously the member state with the strongest ties and overt interest in Zimbabwe. In the past ten years, the UK has consistently been one of the key donors in Zimbabwe, providing substantial support in different sectors in Zimbabwe. The role of the UK in Zimbabwe has been questioned, and at various moments in time the British government has been severely criticised by the government, opposition, and civil society. This criticism focused on motivations, strategies, as well as the non-transparent nature of some of the dealings of the UK embassy. The former UK Ambassador to Zimbabwe for example, has been fiercely criticised by both opposition figures and civil society representatives, for allegedly being too close and supportive of Zanu PF's Mnangagwa.

Most other European countries have positions and priorities with regards to their policies on Zimbabwe, but are often not willing to engage in a diplomatic battle for a country that is of relatively limited interest. However, it should be mentioned that there have been a number

²⁰ Communication 2012-492, "The roots of democracy and sustainable development: Europe's engagement with Civil Society in external relations", Brussels, DEVCO European Union

²¹ Roadmap Facility, 2017, "EU Country Roadmaps for Engagement with Civil Society", Brussels, European Union

²² EU Country Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society, <https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/public-governance-civilsociety/document/zimbabwe-roadmap-engagement-civil-society>

of issues in the past decade that were of clear national interest to different European member states, which led to more firm positioning. A number of European member states for example, have been quite firm on the need for Zimbabwe to compensate farmers from their country who were evicted during the land reform program. This issue has informed the positioning of a number of member states, and also influenced European decision making on Zimbabwe.

The influence of bilateral interest in European positioning could also be witnessed following the discovery of massive diamond deposits at the beginning of this decade. Because of gross human rights violations in these diamond fields, Zimbabwe dominated discussions in the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme; an international body that regulates trade in rough diamonds and includes governments, diamond industry, and civil society. Given Belgium's interest in the diamond trade, it also became interested in Zimbabwe and took quite firm positions in the annual discussions on the renewal of EU measures. Belgium's involvement played an important role in the lifting of the measures against the Zimbabwe Mining Development Cooperation.

In these annual discussions on the renewal of the measures, other domestic considerations also played an important role. Many European countries, in particular the UK, were considerate and fearful of how media in their own country would portray possible EU decisions. As outlined by a European diplomat at the time: 'if we would lift all measures, the picture of Mugabe shopping in a European capital would not look good'.²³

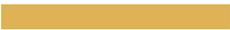
Most European countries are creditors to Zimbabwe and as such are also engaged in the discussions between Zimbabwe and the International Financial Institutions (IFI's) with regards to Zimbabwe's debt situation. Zimbabwe's total debt has risen to around \$17 billion and the country has outstanding arrears to the World Bank, IMF and African Development Bank. The re-engagement agenda has also led to renewed talks between Zimbabwe and the IFI's, which have been ongoing in the past years. However, for Zimbabwe to be eligible for new IMF loans, arrears need to be cleared first and the implementation of serious economic reforms agreed upon.

Lastly, an area that has been underexamined because of its sensitive nature, has been the financial support provided by European actors to certain opposition parties. The consequences of this, which is said to have included 'unofficial' support and supposedly was provided in the first decade of this century, has never been properly examined. Not only did Zanu PF instrumentalise this by referring to the opposition as 'puppets of the West', there were also a lot of transparency and accountability issues.

²³ Interview Harare, December 2018

Conclusions

This section showed how there have been various formal and informal coordination structures among European democracy support donors in the past decade. However, a number of factors influenced the nature and effectiveness of this coordination, such as the sector, as well as the people involved. The complementarity of European democracy support programmes could be improved if there is more structured coordination which should also increase the linkages between different programmes.



4.

Consistency

a. From ‘regime change’ to re-engagement

In the past decade, the EU has been consistent on the need for political and economic reforms. As such, it can be said that the reform agenda has been quite a consistent element of European engagement with Zimbabwe, although the approach to achieve these reforms has been subject to significant changes. The shift from a focus on (large scale) support to civil society and multilateral institutions towards an agenda of re-engagement with the Zimbabwean government after the 2013 elections being the most notable one.

In the first decade of this century many European donors supported the human rights and democracy agenda in Zimbabwe. The EU and its member states, as well as international foundations and NGOs, had significant budgets for democracy support programmes. There was an emphasis on governance and human rights funding during this period, with shifts in funding mainly happening around elections. Most civil society representatives felt European donors had a clear political agenda of supporting pro-democracy actors in Zimbabwe, which was often referred to by Zanu PF as a ‘regime change’ agenda. As mentioned earlier, funding was mostly channelled through civil society, which contributed to a vibrant civil society during this period. As a result, this section has a marked focus on civil society as a key actor for democracy support in the country.

The most significant shift in European policy on Zimbabwe happened after the 2013 elections, when the EU moved towards an agenda of re-engagement with the Zimbabwean government. The shift towards re-engagement was to a large extent based on the adoption of a new constitution of 2013. However, other factors also played a role. As mentioned earlier, from a European perspective the relatively peaceful conduct of the 2013 elections was considered a big improvement compared to the 2008 elections. Furthermore, the changed political reality after the elections, with a two-thirds Zanu PF parliamentary majority, led to a line of thought that change had to come from within Zanu PF. Anticipating a post-Mugabe Zimbabwe, it was believed working with reform-minded

elements within Zanu PF might achieve more in the longer term. There was a growing sentiment that the government needed to take a leading role in order to achieve political reforms, or as explained by a European diplomat: ‘if the system is not reforming, the impact of your support programmes remains limited.’²⁴ Although hard to substantiate, this line of thought might have been strengthened by what some called ‘Zimbabwe fatigue’ among the international community.

The shift towards re-engagement by the EU was important as it became the dominating narrative in Zimbabwe. International donor agencies mostly followed this line, adopting a focus on co-creation aimed at working with government institutions. It took some of the beneficiaries of European democracy support programmes quite a while to come to terms with this shift and the reorientation of priorities.

b. Funding mechanisms

The (in)consistency of the nature of European democracy support was also influenced by significant shifts in the way European development assistance was structured. In the last ten years, more negative perceptions on development aid arose throughout Europe. This more critical look, in combination with budget cuts in most European countries, resulted in significant changes in European development assistance policies and programmes. Besides a general reduction in development budgets in most European countries, many European member states shifted from being a traditional donor towards having a development agenda based increasingly on self-interest and set priorities.

The shift towards a re-engagement agenda in Zimbabwe coincided with this reorientation of support and budget cuts. Some European member states closed their Embassies and programmes in Zimbabwe, while most other donors had significantly less funding available. Given their long history in democracy support programmes the departure of Norway and Denmark was seen as a particular loss in this regard. The changes in Europe also had a significant impact on the beneficiaries of European democracy support programmes in Zimbabwe. Most civil society organisations working in the governance and human rights sector experienced severe reductions in their budgets.

Besides the impact of the budget cuts, the way European support is structured has undergone major shifts in the past decade, which in turn had significant impact in Zimbabwe and also influenced how European donors were being perceived as a development partner by their Zimbabwean beneficiaries. While the budget cuts led to a decrease in capacity of most civil society organisations, the demands from donors increased

²⁴ Interview Brussels, January 2019

significantly. Most notably, there was an increased focus on the need to measure the results of donor interventions. This result-based approach led to an increased focus on compliance, due diligence, and reporting, increasing the administrative burden of the beneficiaries of European democracy support programmes.

Among Zimbabwean beneficiaries there is a strong sense that the more result-based approach to development, often used in humanitarian work, does not really work in the democracy and governance sector. The majority of beneficiaries indicated many donors shifted towards a focus on quick gains, which they felt did not match the authoritarian context of Zimbabwe. In a recent study on donor - civil society relations in Zimbabwe a civil society activist stated: 'you deal with very complex issues, that are being boxed into two to three-year cycles.'²⁵ The overview of democracy related events in the first chapter clearly shows Zimbabwe's fluctuating context. With an unpredictable political terrain, democracy support programmes need to maintain a certain level of flexibility in order to adequately respond to these changes. Many European and Zimbabwean civil society representatives believe the current funding structures do not provide enough room for flexible, innovative interventions. A key challenge for donors and beneficiaries in Zimbabwe will be to find the right balance between the need for accountability and the ability to effectively implement programmes.

From institutional support to project-based support

The result-based approach was accompanied by a shift from longer term institutional support to short term activity-based funding. The severe reduction in core funding provided major challenges for civil society organisations working on democracy issues, especially in terms of organisational sustainability. As described above, the short time-frames used to measure results do not match the complex context of Zimbabwe. Moreover, many Zimbabwean civil society organisations experience challenges as a result of the shift towards project-based funding, as explained by a civil society director: 'we have funding, but it is tied to a certain activity. So, when things went bad in January, we couldn't do all the things we wanted to do because our money was tied.'²⁶

The increased pressure on development assistance in Europe, and the resulting focus on accountability and compliance, also changed funding application procedures in Zimbabwe. The criteria have become more demanding and the procedures much stricter. Although the need for more accountability was widely acknowledged by actors involved, a shared concern by beneficiaries was that the longer application procedures decreased the flexibility of their

²⁵ Hugo Knoppert and Lloyd Sachikonye, *Shifting priorities, changing relations: civil society, donors and the funding of governance and human rights in Zimbabwe*, 2018

²⁶ Phone Interview, February 2019

organisations and affected their ability to be relevant and respond to actual issues and the changing context of Zimbabwe.

Risk aversion also seems to play a role here, as explained by a European diplomat: ‘we have spent more money in recent years, but we have also faced more criticism in our own newspapers, which has led to more risk aversion from our side as our programmes could undermine political support at home.’²⁷ This means donors increasingly opt to support organisations that are able to comply with their procedures and reporting mechanisms, which are usually more established organisations.

c. Agenda setting

The changes in European development assistance priorities and funding mechanisms, developments in Zimbabwe, and the changed nature of Europe - Zimbabwe relations, also influenced the nature of agenda setting and the relations between European democracy support donors and practitioners.

A prescriptive focus on ‘constructive engagement’

The EU and its member states designed development policies with more streamlined global priorities, which effectively meant their support in partner countries had to be in line with these priorities. As a result, calls for proposals from donors became more prescriptive and influenced the agenda of Zimbabwean civil society. While this was a shift that could be witnessed elsewhere too, a specific element in the case of Zimbabwe was the friction between donors and civil society resulting from the re-engagement strategy of the EU. The EU and other European donors increasingly opted to support civil society programmes in which cooperation with government institutions was included. As highlighted by a number of Zimbabwean civil society representatives, calls for proposals increasingly included a condition organisations needed to work with a government institution.

There was a strong sense among civil society that more confrontational forms of engagement were discouraged, as donors increasingly opted to stay away from politically sensitive issues. Moreover, there were different notions of what engagement entailed, whereby Zimbabwean civil society felt the concept of engagement used by European donors and diplomats was too narrow and limited to ‘constructive engagement.’ Since there were less donors and decreased availability of funding, many civil society organisations interviewed for this paper felt they were compelled to embrace the concept of constructive

²⁷ Interview Harare, October 2018

engagement.²⁸

A reactive civil society

In the current context of decreased donor funding, the majority of civil society organisations in Zimbabwe are afraid to speak out for fear of missing out on funding. This ‘fear of victimisation’ meant most civil society actors decided not to be too critical towards donors in recent years, which influences the relations between donors and civil society.

The departure of leading figures in civil society, and a weakened capacity of most civil society organisations, also contributed to the more reactive nature of civil society. There is quite a general sentiment that the vibrancy of civil society has gone down, and questions are asked on the extent civil society is able to adjust to the new realities and come up with creative new strategies. In this regard, it is important for civil society to try and formulate their own agenda and narratives despite the challenges they are currently experiencing. It would improve their credibility if they are critical towards both donors and the opposition, especially as civil society might actually be best placed to address some of the challenges within opposition parties.

d. EU communication strategy

When assessing the way European member states communicated externally it is clear that the EU has been quite consistent in speaking out against human rights violations. The EU has issued statements at key moments described in the first section, which were endorsed and echoed by the member states, especially those with presence on the ground. These statements usually referred to the need to respect the constitution, and uphold democratic values and human rights.

After the disappearance of Itai Dzamara, the EU, mostly through the EU Delegation in Harare, released several strong statements urging the authorities to investigate his abduction and establish his whereabouts. Around successive elections, the EU also issued statements highlighting the need for free and fair elections and respect for the constitution.

However, there were some areas of friction with local democracy practitioners in the country. The EU and its member states chose not to call the events that resulted in the removal of Mugabe a coup, instead they mostly used the phrase ‘military assisted transition.’ Some civil society respondents mentioned meetings where a European diplomat urged them strongly not to call the events a coup. Furthermore, when discussing the shift

²⁸ Interviews Harare, October & November 2018

towards re-engagement, many civil society actors refer to the statements made by a former EU Head of Delegation at a civil society conference, where he stated that Zimbabwean NGOs were ‘anchored in the past’ and being perceived as ‘anti-government organisations (AGOs).’²⁹ There are more of these stories about statements of diplomats in certain meetings. It seems they are not always aware of the impact of their statements, and how long these are being remembered by their counterparts. Furthermore, current diplomats are not always aware of the statements their predecessors made, and the impact some of these statements had on civil society representatives.

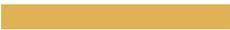
Moreover, it seems there were certain disconnects between European policy makers and Zimbabwean democracy practitioners. Although attempts have been made by European diplomats to inform key stakeholders, attempts have mostly remained quite singular, in the sense that there were statements and in some cases meetings, but not a coherent communication strategy on some of the key sensitivities. Although it should be noted that different Zimbabwean actors did not always make use of the opportunities presented to them to listen and input, it can be said that despite efforts of the EU to explain and communicate their motivations, they did not sufficiently manage to explain their policies and the variety of support instruments the EU has. Renewed cooperation under the EDF for example, coincided with a period in which funding for Zimbabwean civil society decreased significantly, which made many civil society actors believe the Zimbabwean government received support at their expense. The way the EU did not manage to communicate their sanction strategy is another example of this.

In the past year one EU member states effectively blocked statements by the EU delegation in Harare, allegedly as a result of a shift at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the member state. Moreover, a number of member states have become increasingly reluctant to make firm statements on human rights issues. The EU and its member states need to discuss the implications of such positioning, and make a proper assessment on what this means for the ability for EU delegations and European embassies to be relevant and credible. If the EU is not able to speak out at important democracy related events and/or human rights violations, this is certain to undermine the credibility of the EU.

This section has shown how European support and engagement has undergone some significant shifts in the past decade. In terms of focus the shift towards a re-engagement agenda was very substantial, but there were also noteworthy changes in the funding mechanisms. The reduction in long-term support programmes, combined with more stringent donor requirements, means most funding mechanisms currently lack the flexibility to allow beneficiaries to adequately respond to the unforeseen. As such, they might not

²⁹ Harare24, 19 June 2014, <http://www.harare24.com/index-id-news-zk-21149.html>

match the unpredictable and fluctuating context in Zimbabwe. In designing future democracy support programmes, it will therefore be important to be realistic in the objectives and expectations of what can be achieved in such a context.



5.

Impact

a. Contributions of European democracy support

Although it is difficult to establish the impact of European democracy support programmes, respondents identified several areas where European support clearly contributed to the promotion of a culture of democracy in Zimbabwe.

Elections & electoral environment

As European engagement followed the political context in Zimbabwe a large part of democracy support programmes in turn followed election cycles in the country. There has been continued criticism over the past decade in this regard towards the EU and other European donors amongst pro-democracy actors in the country. A number of people interviewed for this paper believed that the majority of electoral support programmes tended to start too close towards the elections, reducing the possible impact given the short-term outlook.

At the same time, despite the shortcomings in both the electoral process as well as the set-up of European electoral support, there were clear contributions to improvements of the electoral process. The EU provided technical support to the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), which for example contributed to a more robust voters roll. Contrary to previous elections political parties also received an electronic copy of this roll, which is likely to serve as a better foundation for future elections. Furthermore, European support contributed to the fact that large numbers of, especially young, people managed to register to vote. Moreover, the technical support provided by the EU was a good example of how democracy support programmes and political engagement were synchronized, as the necessary improvements were also highlighted in various platforms and engagements.

Civil society support

With regards to civil society support it can be said that European assistance to Zimbabwean NGOs during the 2000s contributed to a thriving civil society that managed to mobilise support around important issues. Interestingly though, it seems the achievements of pro-democracy actors (and European support for them) in the period between 2002 and 2013 is sometimes underestimated now. There appears to be a narrative of failure, that stems from the evaluation of support in the aftermath of the 2013 elections. Many Zimbabwean civil society representatives refer to statements of European diplomats in this period which they felt were ‘blaming civil society for not delivering around the 2013 elections.’

In light of the decreased funding for civil society, there have been serious efforts by the EU and some member states to ensure key human rights organisations were able to continue their work. European support effectively kept these organisations operational, and the significance of enabling these organisations to keep their structures and systems in place became apparent during the recent crackdown by security forces in Zimbabwe in January 2019. Some of Zimbabwe’s key human rights organisations that received continued support from the EU and member states played crucial roles in reporting and documenting human rights violations, as well as assisting victims of violence. This is a very good illustration of the importance and necessity of longer term, institutional support.

Rule of law

The contribution of the EU to the promotion of the rule of law in Zimbabwe was another area that was highlighted. Significant support was provided under the 11th EDF to strengthen Zimbabwe’s judiciary and other justice sectors, focusing on institutional reforms and ensuring justice for all. A total of €18,7 million was earmarked for the justice sector, parliamentary support and support to constitutional alignment following the adoption of the 2013 Constitution.³⁰

Despite the fact that the assessments here are quite positive, the complexities of dealing with an authoritarian regime described earlier in this report also leads to challenges in assessing the impact of interventions like this. A key question here is to what extent European democracy support programmes have sufficiently been protected from the political pressures and realities in Zimbabwe. The court cases following the recent protests in Zimbabwe could make one question the support for the judiciary provided by the EU. It is probably too early to properly assess the impact of this support.

Constitution & Commissions

The support to some of Zimbabwe’s Commissions also provides a mixed picture. During the recent crackdown in Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission condemned the

³⁰ https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/zimbabwe/39027/eu-supports-strengthening-rule-law-and-access-justice-all_en

violence and released a critical independent report. This was a positive development, although the fact that the Commission was then reprimanded by President Mnangagwa, again raises the question to what extent democracy support programmes can withstand political pressure in an authoritarian regime.

Media support

When looking at Zimbabwe's media landscape it will be difficult to argue that the bias of state media has decreased or that the quality of journalism in Zimbabwe has increased. With regards to the latter, the context of Zimbabwe should be taken into account, as it is difficult to build institutional capacity when the economic constraints are such that it is difficult to maintain independent journalism.

At the same time though, the nature of European media support programmes should not be ignored. Most of the support was rather ad-hoc and activity based, and some argue even dependent on the preferences of responsible diplomats at various times. Whereas the EU EOM report has media as a stand-alone issue, beneficiaries felt this was not the case in democracy support programs. A number of beneficiaries believed media was not always seen as a stakeholder, but rather a tool in programming. As explained by a civil society representative working on media: 'media often came in at the implementation level as a tool in other programmes, rather than at the concept level as a stand-alone sector or stakeholder.'³¹ As a result, there was not really a structural, strategic long-term approach to address and improve media laws and regulations, as well as the quality of journalism. The fact that support was rather ad-hoc, and often a sequence of activities rather than a strategic long-term process, also applied to other areas of support such as governance and human rights and programmes with the Parliament of Zimbabwe.

In terms of the media environment, Zimbabwe's refusal to allow independent community radio stations remains a key challenge in terms of the democratic space. From an educational perspective (civic, health, voter education) this is also important. Zimbabwe is one of the few countries that still has no community radio. In other countries, the opening up of radio was made a political conditionality, which could be considered in the case of Zimbabwe.

Unintended outcomes of European Democracy Support

The channelling of large amounts of funding to Zimbabwean civil society led to the mushrooming of NGOs in Zimbabwe. During a time of economic crisis and high unemployment, the civil society sector also became an interesting opportunity for many.

³¹ Phone interview, March 2019

The resulting ‘industrialisation’ of civil society also had negative implications for the sector.

Furthermore, the lack of accountability during the period before 2013 led to corruption in the civil society sector, where abuse of funding occurred. Not only did the sensitive and repressive context contribute to weak accountability systems, it also meant that when donors detected misuse of funding they often opted not to take legal action against the recipient nor publicly communicated the corruption.

Although the decision of European member states not to fund opposition parties is understandable, it partly contributed to the weakening of their structures (among a number of other factors) which in effect also weakened the democratic processes in Zimbabwe. Given the intertwining of Zanu PF and the state in Zimbabwe, cooperating and strengthening government also strengthens Zanu PF as a party, and as such contributes to a non-level playing field in Zimbabwe. In the Zimbabwean context of limited funding possibilities for the opposition, this affects the democratic culture and processes in Zimbabwe. This doesn’t mean European donors should directly fund the opposition, but it should be considered as donors move the re-engagement trajectory forward and shape support programmes.

Parliamentary support

The EU and other European donors also supported the Parliament of Zimbabwe in various ways, mostly channelling their funding through multilateral and international organisations. A number of respondents indicated that the focus on carrying out ‘activities’ in programming affected the structural impact of support. Furthermore, the way European democracy support funding was channelled at times had an effect on local organisations. Zimbabwean CSOs experienced that since most of them were not able to compete with the per diems offered by the UNDP for example, they were not prioritised in the parliamentary calendar for engagements with Members of Parliament. As explained by a civil society director ‘MPs and parliamentary staff will not choose an activity of a lower resourced program over a higher resourced one, regardless of the qualitative importance.’³²

In this case, European support negatively affected the position of Zimbabwean organisations and as a consequence weakened their ability to influence Parliament. Some respondents argued strengthening institutions was in some ways reduced to resourcing these institutions, whereas they believed it should also mean ensuring citizens have the opportunity and capacity to meaningfully engage that institution and its respective processes. They also believed the changed focus of the strategic plan of parliament, from a focus on law-making

³² Interview Harare, September 2018

to a focus on oversight, partly resulted from the fact that the parliament failed to deliver on law making despite the large resources allocated to them.

b. Outlook for European democracy support

In the past year various actors looked at Zimbabwe as a country in transition, although the analysis and prediction of where this transition was heading differed. It is important to note that before the events of January 2019 there were already a number of actors arguing ‘reorientation’ might be a more fitting term than ‘transition’, as they believed Zanu PF was in the process of reorienting itself. At the same time a number of policy makers also point at the risk of wanting change too quickly. It is clear that there are many vested interests in Zanu PF, which makes change difficult. Like former Zanu PF Minister Chinamasa said: ‘you don’t run when you are in a minefield.’

In the current period of reorientation, it is clear that future engagement with the Government of Zimbabwe will again require a balancing act from the EU and its member states. The recent elections, and the hope of getting international support and legitimacy, have pushed Zanu PF further than ever. As a European diplomat outlined at the end of 2018: ‘we want to raise the bar and raise the cost of failure.’³³ This might require more firm positioning from the European side.

In shaping European policies there seems to be a sense that it would be good to find a ‘set of hooks’ that enable European actors to get a foot in the door. In doing so it is important to again strike a balance between being supportive, but not being subordinate, while at the same time ensuring the door remains open. There seems to be a shared sense that it is key to link political engagement and democracy support.

It is clear though that the events of January 2019 will complicate relations between Europe and Zimbabwe, and are likely to slow down the process of re-engagement, also because these efforts will increasingly be under a magnifying glass in Europe. Moreover, given the violent crackdown and the lack of respect for human rights and Zimbabwe’s constitution, one can question to what extent the Zanu PF government will be sincere in its engagement with European states.

Despite the massive setback in the months leading up to this publication, it is important not to forget there have been improvements since 2008. Moreover, the 2018 elections, and the quest for legitimacy, pushed Zanu PF further than ever in the opening of democratic spaces. Future democracy support should therefore try to protect some of the gains of this past

³³ Expert meeting Brussels, October 2018

period. In order to preserve some of the progress made and ensure further reforms are implemented, various stakeholders agree it would need pressure from above and from below. This would in turn require careful balancing between building trust and applying political pressure, which given the fact that anti-imperialistic sentiments and ‘sanctions’ propaganda resurrected in recent months, will require careful manoeuvring.

Before the events of January 2019, it was already clear that there was need for a national dialogue, in order to move Zimbabwe out of the political and economic crisis and the polarised context that marked the post-election environment. This polarised context provides challenges for the democratic processes in Zimbabwe and will likely complicate efforts for such a dialogue, as there are different ideas of the focus, possible pre-conditions, participants and lead convener of such a dialogue process. This polarisation poses serious challenges for European democracy support initiatives, while at the same time showing the need for these programmes. The EU and its member states can play a role, although it should be clear that this should first and foremost be a Zimbabwean process. Possible assistance, if accepted by all parties, could focus on the set-up of such a dialogue process, highlighting best practices of cases where such dialogues have been successful.

From a European perspective, the recommendations of the EU EOM provide a good entry point to shape future democracy support programmes. These are mostly in line with the reform agenda described by civil society for the past decade, and in essence also with the provisions in the GPA and the constitution adopted in 2013. The majority of the recommendations, however, imply actions on the part of the government of Zimbabwe. It remains to be seen whether the political will to do so will be there in the short-term. Historically, the follow up of EU EOMs elsewhere has often been limited - although there have been recent efforts to improve this.

There are no specific conditionalities or consequences if EOM recommendations are not implemented, although the implementation of past EOM recommendations are increasingly considered in the decision to deploy a new EOM. Indeed, the recommendations in themselves are not enough, as this is just an entry point for further engagement and programmes in support of democracy. It is clear that the implementation of these recommendations would require a holistic approach aimed at various levels and actors. For example, the need for a more inclusive electoral process was mentioned as a key recommendation. This area covers complicated issues as it touches upon some of the subtler forms of voter manipulation, such as the over- and under registration of certain areas. As such, this observation and recommendation is indeed key, but it would certainly require strategic thinking on how to best ensure improvements in this area. Furthermore, in anticipation of the next elections it is important to look at women’s political participation as the current constitutional provision promoting women’s representation will cease to be

applicable.

After Mugabe's departure there has been a tendency in some circles to simplify the context of the 'new' Zimbabwe and its leadership. This was in line with a problem of European policy in recent years, in which analysis has sometimes been based on the notion of 'hope'. After the removal of Mugabe, the narrative that President Mnangagwa wanted to change his legacy was quite dominant. Although the violent history of Mnangagwa was not ignored, it seemed the possibility of repressive leadership was not sufficiently taken into account, despite warnings from activists about the increased militarisation of the state. It is important to avoid such simplification of the context and be aware of the complexities of Zimbabwe's political terrain. For future programming, it will also be important to realise that both Zanu PF and MDC are heterogenous.



6.

Conclusions and Recommendations

a. Conclusions

This country study has provided an overview of European democracy support to Zimbabwe in the past decade. In doing so, it is clear that European support took place in a fluctuating political context. The study has highlighted a number of challenges with regards to European democracy support to Zimbabwe. Some of these challenges dealt with the set-up and structure of the funding mechanisms, which to a large extent resemble critiques of international aid raised elsewhere. Other challenges focused more on the complexities of providing democracy support in an authoritarian context, while Zimbabwe raised further country specific issues.

The way the funding mechanisms of the EU and other European donors are structured does not necessarily match the realities of Zimbabwean beneficiaries, who were not always able to sufficiently respond to the rapidly fluctuating context. Despite the support provided by European democracy support donors, and the positive impact of certain interventions, there is general agreement there is still a lot that needs to be done in terms of improving the democratic culture and processes in Zimbabwe.

Given the developments in Zimbabwe in January 2019, with the violent crackdown of Zimbabwe's security forces and the massive human rights violations, it seems likely that another period of reorientation of engagement and support lies ahead. It is clear that the authoritarian system of governance that characterised the Mugabe era is still mostly in place, and the increased militarisation of the state apparatus is worrying.

In manoeuvring in this unpredictable environment, it will be important for European engagement and support to be strategic, but also value-driven. This will require a careful

balancing act of European actors. If respect for democracy is not at the core of European engagement, there is serious risk further engagement and cooperation will undermine the credibility of the EU and its member states and further entrench authoritarianism. At the same time, it is clear that democracy support can't be detached from issues of political engagement. Still, Zimbabwe provides a very clear-cut example of the problems of poor accountability, limited participation, restrictions on human rights and endemic state capture over the past 20 years. The social and economic situation in the country has deteriorated to a depressing and distressing degree as a result of the authoritarian system that has been constructed by Mugabe and Zanu PF.

b. Recommendations

The points below are an attempt at addressing some of the challenges highlighted in this report by providing ideas for improving the quality of European democracy support in Zimbabwe.

1. On European engagement & priorities

European engagement with Zimbabwe must be value-driven and insist on reforms, including in democratic governance

In balancing its engagement with the Zimbabwean government, the EU should be firm in its positioning and insist that long-term support hinges on comprehensive reforms. Positions that are too cautious towards the Zimbabwe government would undermine the credibility of the EU, as well as its democracy support programmes. If the system of governance does not change, the impact of European democracy support remains limited. As such, more thinking should be initiated on how to link political engagement with European democracy support programmes.

There should be more attention for alternative scenarios in European policy and programmes

European democracy support has sometimes been too focused on the re-engagement agenda, while this trajectory was far from certain. There was too little attention for a plan B in case this course would derail. Future programmes should (partly) be informed by the question of whether, in case of a setback (such as the crackdown in January), pro-democracy actors are sufficiently equipped to challenge and counter a backlash.

The concept of engagement with the state should be further discussed

There appears to be no consensus between European policy makers, donors and Zimbabwean beneficiaries on what constitutes 'engagement' with the state. There seems a need to redefine the concept of engagement and agree on a model that will be acceptable to both

donors, donor agencies, international organisations and CSOs. It could be useful if support to civil society and cooperation with government are more detached.

2. On coordination & communication

There should be a more holistic vision on donor coordination

The EU and its member states should explore possibilities of a more holistic vision on donor coordination. A donor matrix showing donors per sector could be helpful, and based on such a matrix a joint decision could be made on who leads in which sector. Such an exercise could start with the EU and EUMS, but be expanded with other international donors and INGOs.

The EU needs to improve its communication strategy

The EU should better explain EU policy considerations and motivations to various actors in Zimbabwe. This is likely to lead to increased understanding of European policy and help to avoid misunderstandings. In doing so, the EU should think beyond statements and explore ways to set up more structural dialogues with civil society, media, and other relevant actors.

3. On sectors of support

European electoral support should follow the full electoral cycle and use the 2018 EU EOM recommendations

In previous elections in Zimbabwe a large part of European electoral support, especially that to civil society, was released the year before the elections. Given the challenging electoral environment in Zimbabwe, longer term strategic support is needed before the next elections in 2023. The EU EOM recommendations provide European actors with an opportunity to monitor the implementation of democratic reforms. Increased European engagement and support should be linked to reforms, and the EU should set up a mechanism to systematically monitor the implementation of reforms. Ideally, this should also be linked to the more political engagements.

There needs to be a (re)assessment of European positioning on political party support

The position of the EU (and EUMS) not to provide support to political parties is understandable. However, given the intertwining of the State and Zanu PF there is currently one party benefiting (indirectly) from European support programmes, which might contribute to an unlevel playing field. Alternative means of supporting the party system without preference to Zanu PF must be explored.

4. On funding mechanisms

Donors should explore possibilities of providing more institutional support that is long-term in nature

During the recent crackdown in Zimbabwe in 2019, a number of key civil society organisations demonstrated the added value of their work. To a significant extent these organisations were kept operational through institutional support grants of the EU and member states. The increased dependency on activity funding seems to affect the operations of CSOs in Zimbabwe, and decrease long(er) term impact. To provide organisational stability and ensure work that is continuously relevant and needed can be done, donors should explore possibilities to provide more institutional support that is long-term.

More flexibility for beneficiaries of European democracy support should be allowed

In addition, alternative ways should be explored that will enable beneficiaries of European democracy support to be more flexible, allowing them to respond adequately to the changing political context of Zimbabwe.

The administrative burden for beneficiaries of European democracy support should be decreased

The combination of stringent donor requirements and the decreased capacity of CSOs led to an increased administrative burden on civil society, affecting their operations and agenda setting abilities. Ways to decrease this burden, while at the same time maintaining effective accountability measures, should be explored.

5. On knowledge and learning

There is need for a review of EU policies on sanctions

The EU targeted measures have been dominating European policy discussions on Zimbabwe, while their effectiveness can be questioned, especially in recent years. A review of sanction policy should look beyond Zimbabwe and include an assessment of European sanctions elsewhere, while also looking at possible exit-strategies.

Systematic data collection and analysis should guide joint discussions on future programming

There should be more systematic data collection and analysis to review which instruments, programmes, and strategies have been successful or not. This should inform joint discussions between European donors and beneficiaries and increase buy-in in future programming. Moreover, there should be a continued (informal) dialogue where donors and beneficiaries can exchange views on a regular basis. Increased trust should lead to more open discussions, which could be on the parameters of engagement, (the implications of) donor policies, and

the challenges of civil society.

An assessment should be made on negative effects of European (democracy) support

The way European development funding has been channelled has at times negatively impacted democratic processes and actors in Zimbabwe. Given the intertwining of Zanu PF and the state in Zimbabwe, cooperating with the government also strengthens Zanu PF as a party, contributing to a non-level playing field in Zimbabwe. In designing future programmes more consideration should be given to these unintended outcomes of European democracy support.

The European Partnership for Democracy (EPD) was created in 2008 by EU member states and non-profit organisations keen to solidify European support for democracy abroad. Yet much has changed since the late 2000s both in terms of the policy environment inside Europe and the changing nature of political systems around the world.

As a result, EPD and its members are conducting a participatory review of European democracy support over the course of 2018-2019. The research is designed to take stock of European democracy support by focusing on the policies of practitioner organisations, the European Union and European governments in order to draw lessons for the future.

This paper forms part of a series of research papers by EPD that informs this review process.
