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European democracy support in Honduras

A case study reviewing European democracy support.

Executive Summary

The 2009 coup d'état was a watershed moment for Honduran politics that sowed the seeds for several challenges in the years to follow. The relative stability of the two-party system has been replaced by a more diverse political landscape but, paradoxically, a more polarised society. This polarisation plays out in government, political parties, civil society and in the media. The serious violence after the most recent elections in 2017 bear witness to the profound difficulties of dealing with these divisions but also of the lack of trust in state institutions. It should come as no surprise that the weakness of the rule of law has been a major concern for Honduran citizens for many years.

While European states play a much smaller geopolitical role in Honduras compared to the United States, they remain important donors and supporters of political reform. The temporary halt to cooperation efforts after the 2009 coup was an important political signal from European actors (and others) regarding the political situation. Generally speaking, the analysis and designation of resources and areas associated to EU support is perceived as balanced and coherent by Honduran actors. As a result of a good interpretation of the country context, support is well prioritised, with varying opinions about the real and practical effectiveness of each intervention - particularly in the justice sector.

The paper outlines a series of recommendations for updating and improving European efforts to support democracy in Honduras. It was commissioned by the European Partnership for Democracy in the context of a 'Review of European democracy support'. Honduras was chosen among a series of country cases because of the general lack of democratic progress (in order to balance with other country cases), the lower influence of the EU (in Latin America more generally) and EU support to Honduran elections. The recommendations from the paper are split into four broad thematic areas each containing specific recommendations. These are:

- **On European positioning & priorities**

In order to combat the current dispersion of different efforts to strengthen democracy, the EU should use support for democratic governance as a priority guiding theme. The position of credibility enjoyed by the EU could be used to give greater prominence to democracy in the programmatic roundtables within the group of international cooperating partners in the country (G16) and help incentivise reform. The EU and EUMS also have a role to play in combating polarisation and helping bridge government and civil society. This could be done by using the SDGs to develop a better shared understanding of common objectives.

- **On funding and technical work mechanisms**

The positive contribution of EU financial support (such as in election observation) could be reinforced through changes in four specific areas: a) increase support to areas which have not received adequate assistance, such as support to the Congress, media actors, academia, political parties and new movements b) ensure flexible resources to make the most of specific unforeseen opportunities for reform, and c) improve the working modalities of the EU and EUMS staff.

- **On monitoring and learning**

Considering the fact that the main challenges in the country are likely to retain major significance in the medium-term, European states should make better use of lessons learned in recent years. Given the lack of progress (or outright decline) in some sectors which have received significant support, it will be necessary to set clear targets for reform or, failing that, end support.

- **On coordination & communication**

In the last decade, European participation, leadership and collaboration within the G16 has been significant. Cooperation on joint programming should continue and be high on the agenda considering the likely reduction in funding from some donors in the coming years. European actors should consider joint European messages on specific reform areas, through official channels or public statements, on a more frequent basis. The EU should also engage expertise to help bring about dialogue between the government, opposition and civil society.

Many European states do not explicitly refer to democracy in their priorities in Honduras, yet still support the various components of a democratic system (e.g. the rule of law, oversight of the executive etc.). This discrepancy deserves to be rectified under new policy and programming priorities in order to improve conceptual clarity. A clearer overarching message would also pave the way for increased coordination within the EU, between European governments and with other international partners in the coming years.

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ACRONYMS

AECID	Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation
ALBA	Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas
COSUDE	Swiss Cooperation for Development
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EU	European Union
EU-EOM	European Union Electoral Observation Mission
EUHIPC	Heavily Indebted Poor Countries
EUMS	European Union Member States
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IHSS	Honduran Social Security Institute
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INE	National Statistical Institute (of Honduras)
LGBTIQ	Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Transgender/transsexual, Intersex and Queer/Questioning.
MACCIH	Mission to Support the Fight against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras
MADIGEP	Measures to Support Institutional Development and Public Management
MIP	Multiannual Indicative Programme
OAS	Organisation of American States
OBF	Faith-Based Organisations
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PRS	Poverty Reduction Strategy
RNP	National Registry of Persons
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SICA	Secretariat for Central American Integration
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
TSC	Superior Court of Auditors
TSE	Superior Electoral Court
UNAT	Technical Support Unit
UNHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner of the United Nations for Human Rights
WB	World Bank

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Introduction

Support to democracy in Honduras faces challenges that are common to many other states around the world, particularly the progressive weakening of the rule of law and the fragility of state institutions. Much of the structure of government administration, with its natural counterparts in the executive, in the judicial bodies, human rights defenders and anticorruption entities is affected. This has an impact on the effectiveness and sustainability of any assistance provided as well as on the credibility of cooperation efforts.

The prevailing influence of the United States in the internal politics of the country is combined with a democratic culture permeated by uncertainty, corruption and nepotism, a lack of credibility and trust in the institutions and their authorities. High levels of insecurity and the diffusion of organised crime (drug trafficking) have co-existed with cyclical political and social crises. Since the 2009 coup d'état three elections have been held (2009, 2013 and 2017), without leading to increased stability. After the November 2017 elections, post-electoral violence that occurred as a result of the lack of credibility in the electoral institution showed the need for reforms to the traditional political system based on a bipartisan model. In addition, the de facto groups of power apparently do not associate the prevailing (exclusionary) economic model with the current deficient state of the rule of law and linked political consequences.

During the 2009-2019 period, important social and economic conditions - poverty, inequality, unemployment, impunity and foreign indebtedness - for the most part have remained negative, while occurrences of criminality, violence, corruption, and illegal networks have increased and reached critical levels. These new challenges often go beyond the state's administrative and delivery capacities. In recent years, a weakened civil society has been unable to engage with the government in order to help ensure a better use of national resources. Different regions of the country have seen the emergence of citizens' protests, demanding profound changes which would allow the country to tackle corruption and abuses of power.

These initiatives have inspired European cooperation agencies and other countries to continue their efforts to strengthen Honduran rule of law and its civil society. European actors have a large degree

of credibility in the country and could play a key role if they maintain a critical and vigilant stand on political developments in the country.

In order to assess European efforts to support democracy, the paper provides a detailed background of the political trajectory of the country and the evolution of EU-Honduras relations, including cooperation on democratic development. The paper follows this by looking at the relevance of European support, how well these European efforts were coordinated, how consistent support has been and to which extent the EU and EU member states (EUMS) contributed to democratic reforms. It concludes with a number of ideas for what can be done to further democratic reforms in the country.



1.

Country Context

1.1 Major trends and democracy events in Honduras

The support provided by European states to improve democracy in Honduras during the last decade (2009-2019) is characterised by the political, economic, and social context prevailing in the country during those same years. The analysis begins in 1982, the year when Honduras returned to an electoral system, to briefly summarise the conditions that led to the 2009 political crisis and coup d'état. The predominance and implosion of the bipartisan system explain, respectively, the lack of consolidation of the democratic institutional framework and its progressive weakening in the last decade. This section presents and analyses the most relevant trends and events for democracy in the country in the last 10 years.

1982-2008: Stability and democracy with poor results

Surrounded by countries experiencing civil wars at the beginning of the 1980's, Honduras has been able to escape the social unrest typical of the Central American region, thanks to a complex mix of political and social peculiarities, in a delicate balance with its economic and geopolitical importance for US interests in the region. The approval of the Constitution of 1982 and the general elections held that year generated the opportunity for the long-standing Liberal and National parties to begin a new and stable phase of electoral cycles. Until 2005 seven general elections were held. In these processes, the Liberal Party (majority Party) and the National Party alternated in being in control of the Executive Branch with a 2:1 ratio, that is, the Liberal Party governed two periods (of four years each) and were succeeded by the National Party, who throughout all of that period only won two elections to govern a total of eight years. The party which won the general elections for the presidency would

usually win most of the mayoral offices in the municipalities and the majority of legislative branch seats as well (no mid-term elections, a party patronage system, and well-established chiefdoms). Thus this enabled their control over the powers of government (the legislative branch also selected the members of the Supreme Court of Justice for four years).

In 1998, a tropical storm and hurricane Mitch devastated 70% of the country, seriously affecting its infrastructure and economy. At that particular moment, Honduras had a GDP per capita of only \$840.15¹ and its foreign debt was practicably unpayable (\$3,824.7 million). The impact of the hurricane and the modification of the additional debt relief parameters² for countries under the framework of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) in 1999, allowed Honduras to qualify within the initiative and obtain some debt relief, based on their compliance with an economic adjustment programme, with a set of taxation, policy, and justice sector reforms (planned for 2002). These requirements coincided with a demand for greater citizen participation, which was supported by the international community of donors. In 2001, all of the political parties (5) signed the 'Declaration of Political Parties to the Honduran People', which in 2003-2004 led to a new Electoral and Political Organisations Law, a new electoral body (the Supreme Electoral Tribunal), and the approval of mechanisms for increased participation (plebiscites and referendums), among others, to be applied in the 2005 general elections.

Some delays regarding compliance with the economic programme pushed back the completion date agreed to with the IMF and WB to 2005. Nevertheless, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) were established in 2000-2001, 'as a condition to receive temporary relief from foreign debt in the context of the HIPC Initiative'.³ The PRSP would have a long-term outlook (2001-2015) and be the basis for international aid in the application of the 'ownership' and 'partnership' principles of the Paris Declaration on Effectiveness of Development Aid. It was therefore meant to help in changing the relations and mechanisms of aid among donors, aligning them under the leadership of government (Social Cabinet), an Advisory Board of the PRSP (with participation by government, civil society and the international community) and a Technical Support Unit (UNAT), for its strategic development and application. The G-16 (community of cooperating partners)⁴, through the Group of Ambassadors and Representatives, arranged to meet with stakeholders from the Executive and Legislative Branches, to create 'Sectoral Roundtables', which operated as spaces for dialogue to streamline an efficient and effective execution of the sectoral programmes, plans, and resources, providing for better follow-up

¹ World Bank

² Official Development Assistance

³ Sierra Fonseca and Muñoz Maribel. Final Report. Amounts and uses of international cooperation funds in Honduras. Fourth Report on the State of the Region. September, 2010. p.8.

⁴ Group of international cooperating partners present in the country. The following countries were made up the group: United States, Canada, Germany, Spain, Japan, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Norway, France, Switzerland, United Kingdom, Italy, Holland, European Union, United Nations (UN), World Bank (WB), Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), Organisation of American States (OAS), mainly.

and assessment, through enhanced coordination among the cooperating partners and their focus on national priorities.

A political agreement ('Gran Acuerdo por Honduras') to continue with the political, institutional and socio-economic reforms of 2001, failed in the wake of the 2005 elections, which were controversially won by the candidate of the Liberal Party, Manuel Zelaya. The 'pact-based' relations⁵ that had created stability in the Honduran political system since 1982, had suffered their first big setback.⁶

Zelaya's government was characterised by the lack of internal cohesion and by a reiterative confrontation with other leaders of his own party (Liberal). With growing problems of violence and insecurity produced by organised crime and gangs, Zelaya gave the armed forces a leading role in security affairs and other areas (electrical energy). He would later try to capitalise on this dynamic with the armed forces politically. In 2006 he created an institutional structure called 'Red Solidaria' (Network of Solidarity) as a tool to facilitate interinstitutional and inter-sectoral coordination in the implementation of the PRSP to fight against extreme poverty. However, civil society organisations and different spokespersons on behalf of international cooperation groups expressed (in 2007) their concerns that PRSP resources were being diverted to other programmes with a welfare focus (bonuses and subsidies) and current spending (payment of salaries), to satisfy sectoral demands and campaign offers affecting the programmes' continuity and modifying its original priority goal of poverty reduction.⁷

In 2008, Zelaya led his government towards a 'Socialism of the 21st Century' approach - as sponsored by Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and the block of member countries of the ALBA (Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas) - distancing himself from the political, economic and social elites in Honduras and thus sparking polarised reactions. In 2009, he promoted the implementation of a popular consultation to call for a National Constituent Assembly, which would favour his future re-election. While this was against the opinions of the judicial branch and the political opposition, he had the support of the armed forces. However, the morning of June 28, 2009, members of the Armed Forces captured Zelaya and transferred him by airplane to Costa Rica; in the afternoon of that same day, the National Congress, which was controlled by members of his own party, completed the coup d'état by naming the head of the National Congress as the new President of Honduras.

⁵ 'That stability has a lot to do with the ability of the political elites in both parties to negotiate political and electoral reforms, make agreements during times of crisis, and deal with intra-party disputes, which have occurred very frequently. A type of peaceful negotiation, but very elitist, which was used to resolve the conflicts without affecting the status quo'. Otero, Patricia. The political party system in Honduras after the political crisis of 2009. The end of the two-party system?. Colombia International 79, Sept-Dec 2013, p. 251.

⁶ 'Gran Acuerdo por Honduras' included, among its most relevant proposals, the following: in political-institutional terms, aspects of 1. Ethics and integrity: combating corruption and including mechanisms for social auditing with in the poverty reduction strategy (PRSP); 2. Modernisation and democratisation of the government: electoral and constitutional reforms, a Comprehensive National Security Policy, and the creation of a Constitutional Court, among others. 3. Central American Integration and Political Union: strengthening regional institutions (SICA, Central American Court of Justice, Central American Parliament, and others); in both social and economic aspects: 1. Maintain macro-economic equilibrium, fiscal discipline, and modernise the taxation system; 2. Improve the performance of the economy, creating a positive environment for investment and business ;. 3. Strengthen the role of the government in social development.

⁷ Sierra Fonseca and Muñoz Maribel. Op. cit. p. 12

The 2009 coup d'état: The turning point of the political system

There is unanimous agreement that the coup d'état of June 28, 2009, represented a turning point in the political history of the country. The inability of the political, economic and social elites to resolve their differences had several consequences on the Honduran political party system and social context more generally. These were:

- a) It produced an isolation of Honduras from the international community and the freezing or suspension of loans or payments executed by government: exclusion from the Organisation of American States (OAS), the Central American Integration System (SICA), and the suspension of disbursements (\$31.2 million in grants and \$87 million of disbursements) from G16 members (multi-lateral and bilateral cooperation agencies)⁸. This access to cooperation funds and disbursements slowly returned to normal up until the Cartagena Agreement, in May, 2011, allowed for the return of former President Zelaya to Honduras, but did not recover the levels that existed prior to this event⁹;
- b) The contrast between violent protests against the coup d'état and the broad support from different sectors of the population in favour of this measure of force polarised society, coinciding with overall low levels of respect for democratic values by citizens.¹⁰
- c) The unrest experienced during 2009 and the resulting isolation had a negative impact on the country's economy, which was additionally facing the effects of the global financial crisis of 2009, placing it in an imbalance which produced higher levels of foreign debt;
- d) Sectoral budgets for 'education, health, food security, decentralisation, social and economic infrastructure, citizen security, and the environment'¹¹ were affected, because foreign funding represented 16.4% of the central administration budget and 56% of the government's public investment funds.
- e) A serious deterioration of respect for human rights resulted from the institutional deterioration of the Honduran State.

⁸ The G-16 is made up of European countries including Germany, Spain, France, Italy, and Sweden, among others, along with Canada, the United States of America, and organisations such as the European Union (EU), United Nations (UN), World Bank (WB), Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), and the Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI).

⁹ The European Union resumed its work in March 2010 and their ambassadors slowly returned to the country, while bilateral cooperation agencies gradually resumed their efforts.
https://www.bbc.com/mundo/america_latina/2010/03/100322_1440_honduras_europa_relaciones_wbm

¹⁰ Studies from the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) at Vanderbilt University were showing very low levels of support by the Honduran population for democratic institutions and a tendency to support authoritarian power in the country, dating back to before 2008.

¹¹ Sierra, Fonseca and Muñoz, Maribel. Op. cit. p. 13.

National unity to overcome the coup d'état, but not the end of bipartisanship

The long-standing bipartisan system broke down with the elections of November 2009, and the National Party returned to power. With an exceptional and comfortable majority in the National Congress, the new President, Porfirio Lobo, decided to establish a government of national unity, to facilitate national reconciliation. Facing protests throughout the entire country by the National Popular Resistance Front (FNRP) which claimed for the return of former President Zelaya, Lobo signed the Cartagena Convention which allowed former president Zelaya to return to the country. This situation favoured the creation of new political parties, among them 'Libertad y Refundación' or simply 'Libre', consisting of Zelaya's liberal followers and members of the FNRP, and the readmission of Honduras in the Organisation of American States (OAS).

With the return of Honduras to the OAS and the SICA, international donors resumed support programmes in the country. In 2010, President Lobo put together the so-called Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) to investigate the causes and consequences of the 2009 coup d'état. The TRC received financial support from key international cooperation partners - among them the United States and EUMS - who were all interested in seeing the situation return to normal. Among the different recommendations, the TRC proposed deep political, electoral, institutional, and human rights protection reforms in the country (most of which were never put into practice).

Meanwhile, the security and justice system clearly demonstrated its fragility: violence and insecurity rates reached historic highs (in 2012), amidst desperate efforts to cleanse the security institutions, internal power struggles, and accusations of murder-for-hire killings and the infiltration of drug traffickers within the police force. By the end of 2012, the Legislative Branch dismissed four magistrates of the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court of Justice, without the required constitutional authority to do so, using the delay in a decision regarding a complaint about the constitutionality of a police cleansing procedure as an excuse; this action by itself demonstrated the growing precariousness of the country's rule of law.

Before Lobo was sworn into office, the objectives and targets of the ill-fated PRSP had been included within the 'Country Vision', a guiding framework for the country's long-term development planning process (until 2038), which required the consistent implementation of National Plans by alternating governments.¹² A 'Plan for the Nation' covers 12 years and is made up of a set of strategic pillars for public-sector action. Lobo's government began the 2010-2022 'Plan for the Nation', which was used as an action framework with the cooperation community. A newly created Ministry of Technical

¹² The Vision for the Country incorporates a wide variety of planning efforts for development carried out between the years 1998 and 2009, among them, the Master Plan for National Reconstruction and Transformation, the Strategy for Poverty Reduction, the results of the Comprehensive National Dialogue, the Millennium Development Goals and a variety of sector specific plans.

Planning and Foreign Corporation (SEPLAN) coordinated actions with the G16 and its different structures.

Something new that occurred in the 2013 elections was the expansion of the number of political parties. Nine parties participated,¹³ including Libre, and another - the Anticorruption Party (PAC), led by a political outsider, Salvador Nasralla, a well-known sports journalist. Thanks to several measures to fight insecurity, such as the creation of a special security tax (Tasa de Seguridad) and a new Military Police Force, the President of the National Congress, Juan Orlando Hernández, won the elections with a comfortable 8% margin (36.89%) against the candidate of Libre, Xiomara de Zelaya - wife of former president Manuel Zelaya (28.78%). Zelaya subsequently did not accept her defeat and alleged electoral fraud. Nasralla used this same argument (13.43%) to declare himself winner and did not accept the results which favoured Hernández. The Liberal Party was left relegated to an unprecedented third place at both the presidential and the congressional levels, although it remained as the second largest party in terms of local governments. The EU Election Observation Mission (EU-EOM) prepared a report which recognised the official result, although it did provide recommendations to push for electoral reforms to improve the confidence in the electoral institutional framework, to favour the acceptance of the results and to strengthen the inclusion of politically underrepresented groups (mainly women).

Corruption and Drug Trafficking: the fragility of Honduran democracy and the response of the Honduran population.

Left with a complicated economic situation and the obligation to achieve certain goals regarding security and the fight against organised crime, in 2014, Hernández requested the National Congress to approve the extradition of Honduran citizens to foreign countries. As a result of this, during his presidential period, US judicial and antinarcotics authorities coordinated activities with Honduran authorities to capture or hand over important members of the cartels who had controlled drug trafficking and money laundering activities in different areas of the country (North and West) along with their high level political, financial, and police collaborators. The legal actions against them in the United States of America have revealed the extent to which narcotics-related activities penetrate Honduran politics and the economy, compromising national and regional security. To complement this work, the 'Official Secrets Act' (2104) was passed to classify all documents related to Defence and Security.

The presence in the country of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) since 2012, reveals the existence of important challenges in that area. The murder of environmentalist leader, Berta Cáceres, made evident the serious risks for defenders of human rights. Moreover, there are high levels of unrest in regions where large-scale investment projects are being

¹³ Up until 2009, there were only five (5) political parties in the country.

developed, especially those related to the use of natural resources and where collective rights are compromised. A mechanism for the protection of human rights defenders and journalists, supported by international cooperation agencies, was established by the government to respond to low human rights levels.

The high degree of public corruption slowly turned into a widespread concern in the country (Honduras has a score of 29/100 in Transparency International Corruption Perception Index and is ranked 126th of 174 countries)¹⁴. The notorious scandal of corruption at the Honduran Social Security Institute (IHSS), through which funds from this entity were used to finance political activities of the party in power, became an important challenge for the stability of the new administration. Numerous protests were held in the principal cities of the country, which demanded the resignation of the President and the Attorney General and the installation of an International Commission against Impunity (CICI), similar to the Guatemalan International Commission against Impunity (CICIG). In response to this pressure, the government gave in to the creation of a similar office - although with a more limited mandate than the one assigned to the CICIG - which would be led by the OAS. The Mission to Support the Fight against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras (MACCIH) began its work in 2016 and in coordination with the Prosecutor's Office and its special units to investigate and prosecute emblematic cases of corruption. As part of its efforts, MACCIH has demanded - among other measures - the derogation of certain laws (such as the Law on Secrecy) and the approval of new legal tools (such as the Law on Plea Bargaining) to overcome obstacles in accountability from governmental institutions and to strengthen the prosecution of individuals who perpetrate acts of corruption.

2017 Elections: re-election and more problems

Despite the recommendations of the electoral observation missions in 2013, no important political-electoral reforms were produced in subsequent years to guarantee greater confidence in the electoral institutions and in the 2017 elections. The pretensions of President Hernández to be re-elected even when there was an express constitutional prohibition, added an additional element of conflict. Hernández competed again for the Presidency of the country in the November 2017 elections, after having been authorised by a controversial decision by the Supreme Court of Justice; in this electoral process all the opposition forces participated with the aim of making use of the opportunity of the growing rejection to Hernández's candidature. Nevertheless, he was re-elected for a new period in questionable elections with a very close margin (42.95% to 41.42%) over his closest opponent Salvador Nasralla, the candidate representing an alliance of opposition forces. The protests against the result - considered fraudulent by a great number of voters - became violent and resulted in more than 20 casualties in different areas of the country. The EU-EOM and a significant number of observers on behalf of Honduran civil society, verified the recounts of suspicious votes, without any modifications to the results which had been certified by the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE); the EU-EOM was

¹⁴ Corruption Perception Index 2014: Results: <https://www.transparency.org/cpi2014/results>

insistent on the need to promote electoral reforms to restore institutional confidence. In other words, it was not surprising that the diplomatic recognition of the electoral results by the international community was granted, but was accompanied by explicit demands for deep political reforms.

Hernández's second term began in 2018 amidst a clear polarisation of the population. Several former presidential candidates asked the United Nations to facilitate a dialogue to agree on reforms, but it did not have the support of all of the political forces in the country. Nevertheless, the National Congress served as a space to bring together the main political parties and with the technical support of the OAS, an agreement was reached to reform the National Registry of Persons (RNP), the TSE, and to publish a new Electoral Law. As of now, the EU has expressed its interest in collaborating with the process to reform the RNP. These developments within the political dialogue, supported by the National Party, contrast with the difficulties it faces in 2018 due to anticorruption legal actions against President Lobo's ex-wife, several Congressmen, and former civil servants, promoted by MACCIH and a special prosecutor's unit. Perhaps more serious still, towards the end of 2018, former Congressman Juan Antonio Hernández (Tony), the President's brother, turned himself in to US authorities to face charges related to large-scale cocaine trafficking to the United States. At the beginning of 2019, several caravans of irregular immigrants were making their way to Mexico and United States, highlighting the desperate social and economic conditions experienced by most of the population.¹⁵

Conclusions

During the period under analysis, the country has continued to live the consequences of the 2009 coup d'état, among them, the polarisation and progressive weakening of key democratic institutions, including political parties, parliament, electoral and legal bodies, and the entities responsible for the defence of human rights and the fight against corruption. This has increased distrust in those entities and their work. After the three most recent electoral processes (2009, 2013, and 2017), the bipartisan political system has transformed into a situation with one dominant party in need of substantial electoral reforms.

After ten years, many of the most significant and negative social and economic indicators of the country (poverty, inequality, unemployment, impunity, foreign debt) remain at high levels. Other indicators, such as criminality, violence, corruption, and illegal networks, have worsened and represent new challenges for Honduran society, overwhelming the government's administrative and delivery capacities. As a consequence, amidst expressions of intolerance and collective exasperation, with political stakeholders who demonstrates insufficient capacity for dialogue and a weakened civil society with no proposed solutions, citizens' manifestations of outrage have emerged against the

¹⁵ Honduras has a per capita GDP level (nominal 2018) of \$2,851 (Source: IMF), with a human development index (HDI) of 0.617 points. According to the official figures issued by the National Statistical Institute (INE-2018), 68% of the population lives in poverty, with 44% of this group in extreme poverty. The country has 56% underemployment and out of the total number of wage earners, 75% receives a remuneration which is below the subsistence level.

corruption and abuses of power in different regions of the country. These manifestations demand profound change and have motivated international cooperation partners to continue with their efforts to strengthen the rule of law in Honduras.

1.2 European support to Honduras

Honduras has a long tradition of international cooperation with Europe, going back to the 1980's. In 2006, Honduras was the second biggest recipient of EU aid in Latin America, due to the high level of poverty and EU's interest in consolidating stability and democracy in the country¹⁶. EU cooperation with Honduras is guided by the Framework Agreement signed in 1999 between the European Union and the Central American States, which defines the procedures for aid in relation to programmes, projects and technical and financial cooperation. The priorities of the political dialogue and the main challenges of the EU-Honduran relations were highlighted in the new Political and Co-operation Agreement (multilateral) signed in December 2003, which came into force in 2014 after years of bilateral and multilateral negotiations with the Central American countries. This agreement put emphasis on regional integration, with a view to the negotiation of an Association Agreement, which was finally signed on 29 June 2012 by the EU and Central America countries (Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panamá), and approved by the European Parliament on 11 December 2012. The Association Agreement has three pillars: dialogue, trade, and cooperation, and with its principles of democracy and fundamental human rights, it reinforces the rule of law and good governance.

Honduras Country Strategy Paper 2007-2013: from the PRSP to the Country Vision, through a coup d'état.

The EU Honduras Country Strategy Paper 2007-2013, reflected optimism for favourable conditions in the country '...relative political stability, a growing domestic demand for a long-term anti-poverty strategy, macro-economic consolidation and recent debt alleviation initiatives', and they were deemed to present a 'window of opportunity'. Considering the country's 'high social and environmental vulnerability', the proposals of the strategy concentrated on efforts to 'foster social cohesion' through: a) investing in Human Capital (Health and Education) and making the PRSP framework more effective; b) fostering sustainable management of natural resources (focus on forestry); c) developing a comprehensive public security and justice policy.¹⁷

¹⁶Between 2000 and 2010, the EU and EUMS disbursed at least \$622.3 million in non-reimbursable cooperation funding.

¹⁷ European Commission. Honduras. Country Strategy Paper. 2007-2013 (E/2007/478). All quotes in the paragraph are taken from p. 4. '...relative political stability, a growing domestic demand for a long-term anti-poverty strategy, macro-economic consolidation and recent debt alleviation initiatives' 'window of opportunity' 'high social and environmental vulnerability' 'foster social cohesion'

As indicated above, the discontinued PRSP and the 2009 coup d'état, represented a setback for the optimism of the strategy, whose execution was temporarily suspended after the political crisis.¹⁸ When the cooperating partners resumed their activities (2011-2013) the emphasis was maintained in those same sectors, although now with reference to the framework of the 2010-2013 Country Vision and its corresponding on-going (2010-2022) National Plan. In the meantime, several European countries that had been important cooperating partners after Hurricane Mitch (such as Sweden, Denmark and Finland) ended their programmes in the country and others, while still present, such as Spain, reduced the amount of their cooperation for internal reasons, affecting the sustainability of a number of initiatives that depended on their resources (and the fact that the Honduran government did not fully account for the impact of their departure). The upgrading of the EU Delegation to Honduras to a full-fledged diplomatic representation in 2013 - as a consequence of the Lisbon Treaty - coincides with a greater leadership by European cooperation agencies (coping with the exits of several other EUMS) and helped to consolidate political dialogue and advocacy efforts with the Honduran government.

Multiannual Indicative Programme 2014-2020: experience and lessons learned

The current technical and financial cooperation projects are based on the Multiannual Indicative Programme (MIP) 2014-2020, which was developed on the basis of the 'lessons learned' of an evaluation of cooperation between the EU and Honduras from 2002 to 2009 (among them, the coup d'état and the resulting situation). Its main topics are food security, employment and the rule of law. The MIP states that 'serious sector analysis is key to success, and there is a particular need for real policies and clear demands'; in addition, it refers to the fact 'that a cross cutting approach to human rights will be incorporated into all sectors, with an appropriate emphasis on economic, social, cultural, and gender equality rights, as well as the reduction of risks resulting from natural disasters or the environment'.¹⁹

In the analysis of each prioritised sector, the experience that the EU had gained thanks to its previous track record is evident. For example, since the EU is a key player in food security and nutrition, its focus has benefited from its fifteen-year experience of continuous work, including work on a food security and nutrition policy (2006), then on an Implementation Strategy (2009), and then on a law creating the institutional framework for dialogue, coordination and monitoring (2011).

In the rule of law sector, the EU recognises that 'securing human rights, access to justice, and increased democratic participation by civil society and particularly by women, young people and other vulnerable groups remain as key challenges'. It is necessary therefore to 'reform the security and

¹⁸ In addition to blocking its cooperation funding, Brussels suspended negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement with Central America, avoided any and all contacts with the de facto government, and EUMS recalled their ambassadors.

¹⁹ Multiannual Indicative Programme 2014-2020 (MIP). p.3.

justice sector, strengthen human rights, promote stronger and more independent public institutions, and improve transparency in public administration and policy'.²⁰ The agenda of rule of law is still a work in progress, despite the policies drafted on citizen security, national justice and security, decentralisation, human rights and anticorruption. The recommendations of the TRC, from the United Nations' Universal Periodic Review, as well as the EU Electoral Observation Mission to Honduras in 2013, are seen as opportunities to pursue the EU's objective of ensuring the universal application of the law, the protection of human rights, and to support the democratic system, including by increasing citizens' participation, through a clear strategy, extensive work with civil society, and an improved division of labour.²¹

The implementation of bilateral cooperation under the rule of law (Sector 3 of the MIP) for the period 2014-2020 has permitted, for the time being, the strengthening of the national system of human rights protection (ProDerechos), an increase in transparency, the support of anti-corruption efforts through the mechanism of the MACCIH, civil society, communications media, and the political parties (EuroACT), as well as the provision of technical assistance to the National Registry of Persons (RNP) for the implementations of the EU-EOM.

It is important to highlight that in order to achieve proper coordination and implementation of the three sectors with government counterparts, the Delegation has put together a technical structure called MADIGEP (Medidas de Apoyo al Desarrollo Institucional y la Gestión de Políticas Públicas), which provides operational support and promotes standardisation with other cooperation efforts.

Besides the MIP (known as bilateral funding) there are thematic funds to assign resources to civil society projects framed under two instruments: Support to Civil Society Organisations and Local Authorities (CSOLA) and the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR).²² Between 2009 and 2018, projects totalling €10.7 million were implemented out of a total of €15.4 million which was contracted through the CSO-LA mechanism; for the 2018-2020 period, there is a total of €3.77 million designated for the budget. In terms of the EIDHR, between 2009 and 2018 €6.5 million out of a total of €7.8 million was implemented, with a budget amount designated for 2018-2020 of €2.7 million.

These funds are channelled locally through the EU Delegation in Honduras and awarded to specific civil society organisations for topics including the environment, health and human rights. The emphasis in supporting these sectors and themes is a direct consequence of a change in the approach starting with the new reality of the country after the coup d'état.

²⁰ Rule of law: universal accountability to the law and citizens' democratic participation. MIP, p. 5.

²¹ MIP, p. 5-6.

²² CSO-LAs (Civil Society Organisations and Local Authorities) and the EIDHR (European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights)

European support for democracy (and related areas) from Member States (EUMS)

As was previously indicated, EUMS governments suspended their cooperation programmes with the central government in 2009 as a result of the coup d'état. Programmes related to other government levels (especially local programmes with the municipalities) continued, although with some difficulties resulting from the polarisation which affected the opportunities for dialogue among political adversaries. A number of EUMS governments, whose contributions targeted democracy, such as Sweden and Spain, significantly reduced their presence in the country beginning in 2010-2011 for a variety of reasons.

Sweden, present in Honduras - along with other Scandinavian countries - since the reconstruction phase following hurricane Mitch, no longer included Honduras among its priority countries for cooperation and left the country in 2011. In addition to some projects tied to infrastructure, water, and sanitation, their primary areas of activity included human rights, gender equity, transparency, and the fight against corruption, providing some specific support for political/electoral reforms and the strengthening of political parties. In 2017, Sweden resumed its cooperation to Honduras through the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) in Guatemala for critical areas such as the fight against corruption and the protection of human rights: between 2017 and 2019 they donated \$9 million to OAS-MACCHI and \$9 million to UNHCHR (for a total of \$18 million, approximately €15.9 million).

Upon restarting cooperation in 2010 after the coup d'état of 2009, Spain reduced its flow of assistance, reaching its lowest point in 2012, primarily as a result of the economic crisis in Spain at the same time. Spain had been providing significant resources for local authorities, decentralisation programmes, women's rights, gender equity, access to justice for vulnerable groups, transparency and the fight against corruption. Spain also supported strengthening social auditing, oversight for organisations responsible for the administration of justice, the National Registry of Persons (RNP) and the Honduran Congress.

Among the strategic objectives in the Framework for Country Assistance 2014-2018 (MAP 2014-2018)²³ the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation for Development (AECID) included 'promoting human rights and gender equity'²⁴, through its position as an 'active donor in the area of governability and the rule of law'²⁵. Spain has fulfilled this commitment, establishing a specific line of action for the 'promotion of plurality and quality of democracy'²⁶, strengthening the work of civil society

²³ https://www.cooperacionespanola.es/sites/default/files/map_espana_honduras_2014_2018_cooperacion_espanola.pdf

²⁴ Marco de Asociación País (MAP) 2014-2018. Spanish Agency for International Cooperation for Development, p. 28.

²⁵ Ibid. p. 31.

²⁶ Ibid. p. 32.

organisations working in defence of human rights, and in lobbying efforts (national and local) for the development of public policies and citizen oversight. In addition, a specific item for ‘strengthening the structure and systems of management in the public sector’²⁷ has contributed to improving institutional oversight regarding access to public information and has continued with efforts from the previous decade in the processes of decentralisation and strengthening of local government. Finally, and no less important, Spanish efforts in the areas of the ‘rule of law and guarantees for human rights’²⁸, in addition to the reform and modernisation of the justice sector, contributed to the consolidation of the national system for the protection of human rights. Spain also provided funding in order to reduce violence in the area of security and to promote of a culture of peace.

These activities have been carried out primarily through direct grants from different funding sources, a budget focused on specific territories and through the cooperation of the Delegate Office with funds from the EU. The total amount of cooperation in the years 2014-2018 was €150.8 million, of which 8-13% of the ODA was targeted to the three different lines of action listed above (corresponding to strategic Objective ‘1. Consolidate democratic processes and the rule of law’).²⁹ It should be mentioned that during the same period, AECID implemented cooperation activities with funds from the European Union (PIT Program) strengthening the structure and systems for public sector management and the rule of law as well as the guarantee of human rights for a total amount of €8.7 million, of which €0.5 million corresponded to the AECID budget.

The aid from Germany during last decade was concentrated in two priority sectors: education and environment/climate, and was able to contribute to reforms and improved governance in both sectors. The amounts of cooperation between 2011 and 2018 ascended to approximately €136 million, fluctuating during each two-year cycle between the amounts of €30 million and €40 million. The funds were distributed equally between the two priority areas, based on planning for medium term results each year. Since 2015, a total of 6-8% is assigned to a fund for ‘Reforms’, which is focused on strengthening governance and which is used to make flexible contributions to the themes of democracy, rule of law, and governance. Thanks to this fund, it has been possible to support projects for civil society organisations working in the fight against impunity, and promote transparency, and human rights (with a maximum amount for each project of €250 000).³⁰ This budget allocation does not include the resources for German cooperation which have been assigned directly to MACCIH, to German NGOs, and to political party foundations, the resources for which come from other funds and sections of the German Ministry of Cooperation.

²⁷ Ibid. p. 33.

²⁸ Ibid. p. 34.

²⁹ ODA: Official Development Assistance.

³⁰ Interview with an officer of the German Cooperation in Honduras (20/06/19).

The Swiss Development Cooperation Organisation (COSUDE) has been working in the country for 40 years, and has a local cooperation office which reports to the regional office in Managua. Switzerland provides assistance in the country in a variety of areas: economic development, adaptation to climate change, humanitarian assistance, and Governance and rule of law. In this last category, Switzerland provides specific assistance for efforts working to fight impunity and corruption which are carried out by MACCIH-OAS, the government initiative for police reform and local governments, as well as access to electricity, water and sanitation, and local roads. Switzerland makes a very important contribution in working with civil society organisations in the area of human rights to improve the protection for economic, social, and cultural rights. Between 2012 and 2017, Swiss Cooperation assistance reached approximately €84.7 million. The current strategy for cooperation with Honduras and Nicaragua is for the period from 2018 to 2021 and the total amount of the budget is 169.1 million Swiss Francs (CHF) of which 38% is assigned to Honduras (CHF 64.7 million; or approximately €58 million), of which CHF 17.3 million (approximately €15.5 million) are dedicated to the area of improved Governance and the rule of law.³¹

Joint Programming established by the European Union, its Member States, and Switzerland began this year for the period 2019-2022. This programming was prepared under a joint approach towards the development policies agreed to in 2017³², and it represents an opportunity for more effective and harmonised coordination of the programming cycles of the EU, EUMS and Switzerland. With this initiative, all of the countries aim to achieve better results in complying with the objectives of their own programmes, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and the 2030 Agenda.

1.3 Challenges for European democracy support programmes

It is important to emphasise that the coup d'état and the lack of continuity in the government's planning framework had an important influence on the approach to implementing European cooperation programmes. The analysis of the country context conducted under both key EU documents in the last decade (the Honduras Country Strategy Paper 2007-2013 and the Multiannual Indicative Programme 2014-2020) indicated a need to focus on democratic support within this cooperation. Between 2007-2013 this concentrated on support to the security and justice sectors and between 2014-2020 on support to the rule of law. Ten years after the coup d'état and close to the end of the 2014-2020 MIP, it is important to consider that several of the challenges still remain and must be considered when conducting any new analysis as well as the design of the new multiannual programme.

³¹ Interview with officer of the Swiss Cooperation in Honduras (08/04/19); <https://www.eda.admin.ch/deza/en/home/countries/central-america.html> and https://www.eda.admin.ch/dam/deza/en/documents/laender/cooperation-strategy-central-america-2018-2021_EN.pdf

³² European Consensus for Development, 8 June 2017. https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/new-european-consensus-development-our-world-our-dignity-our-future_en

The understanding of support to democracy

When one speaks of ‘support for democracy’, it is important to note that the different initiatives from the various cooperating agencies generally do not use this specific terminology in their sectoral support initiatives or programmes. The exceptions to this are the Spanish Cooperation Agency - which recently included in their framework a strategic objective with a specific line item for action, and individual mention of the ‘consolidation of democratic processes’³³ or ‘promotion of plurality and the quality of democracy’³⁴ - and the EIDHR focused on democracy and human rights. The remainder of the initiatives between 2009 and 2019 have made concrete references to the ideas of governance and/or rule of law, and to strengthening the justice sector and the promotion of inclusion and gender equality (as a cross cutting issue).

This study has taken a broad definition which includes those cooperation initiatives which directly or indirectly incorporate support for democracy. This includes electoral processes, parliament, political parties and the political party system, freedom of the press, local government, support for civil society, civil and political rights, and the rule of law. It also includes the area commonly referred to as good governance. This approach was taken in order to capture the various dynamics at work and to reflect the lack of a clear definition of *democracy support* by the EU and EUMS in their programming.

The current electoral model

The low confidence in the electoral system due to its lack of independence and transparency is an instability and risk factor within a weak democratic structure in Honduras. Hence, it was necessary for foreign participants to observe and assess the 2017 elections. The most serious consequences of this institutional weakness is the lack of credibility in the electoral bodies and their work as well as the questioned legitimacy of elected authorities because of their procedures. The need to achieve political-electoral reforms that provide for new rules and more trustworthy institutions is evident, as has been recommended by the European Electoral Observation Missions (EOMs) in 2013 and 2017. Nevertheless, the ability of the EU to press for the adoption of EU recommendations is still small compared to the influence of the United States in terms of political weight.

During 2019, the main political forces have demonstrated the political will to promote some reforms, however, this should be complemented with permanent, specialised, technical advice in the area of electoral reform. At the time of writing, the paper reform process of the National Registry of Persons was begun (with the support of the EU), and the division of the current TSE into two bodies has been

³³ Marco de Asociación País (MAP) 2014-2018. Spanish Agency for International Cooperation for Development (AECID). See above footnote 24 to 28.

³⁴ Ibid

approved, which would include a new electoral tribunal and an elections administration body (with technical assistance of experts of the Organisation of American States, OAS). Nevertheless, political calculations still exist and the changes seem to be a simple distribution of positions among the main political forces. The lack of acceptance of the results of the 2013 and 2017 elections (the latter violent and tragic) require sustained technical support and the proper selection of personnel and authorities to increase confidence in the electoral and democratic institutional framework. Under the current circumstances, pressure from civil society, citizens movements, and broad groups or sectors of the population is insufficient to achieve the necessary changes.

A polarisation and weakening of civil society and opposition stakeholders

As mentioned above, in the description of the context, the 2009 political crisis polarised Honduran society, and eight year later, the 2017 elections escalated the unrest and intolerance. Polarisation affects both the followers of the political parties and civil society in general, including the churches, with their positioning in the conflict. Civil society had been experiencing a process of progressive weakening in terms of their leadership role and their ability to advocate, mainly due to the loss of constituents from the union and farm sectors, the dependency of CSOs on foreign funding, and the political positioning taken on by many of their leaders in the context of the 2009 political crisis. During the 2010-2014 period, many CSOs did not to participate in coordination opportunities with government stakeholders as a way of protesting. This was not strategic, since it applied to processes that had started in the Post-Hurricane Mitch period, in which the participation of both government and CSO members was essential. The political aspirations of some CSO leaders through various political parties has affected the environment for dialogue. Given the polarised environment, it hinders dialogue on political and sectoral reforms, and the identification of credible and acceptable implementation counterparts for officials and the cooperating partners.

Identity politics and polarisation have had a counterproductive impact on the feminist human rights movement and on other excluded groups (LGBTIQ, indigenous people, and Afro-descendants). When representatives of such social groups engage with political opposition actors, their claims are met harshly, in a context of impunity for human rights violations and a shrinking civil society space. As a result such groups are severely limited in their ability to participate politically. Moreover, the withdrawal and absence of CSO leaders from opportunities for multi-sectoral dialogue has opened possibilities for Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs) and church members to engage in lobbying and advocacy on key governance issues (for example, transparency and accountability). This includes conservative agendas in the exercise of rights, especially in political participation rights (women and LGBTIQ) and in the sexual and reproductive rights, to the detriment of public freedoms and the principle of the secular's nature of the state.

European cooperation has supported inclusive dialogues to promote good governance in the sectors in which it has worked (for example, the forestry and educational sectors, just to mention a few), an aspect that is necessary in order to overcome the prevailing polarisation and lack of engagement.

Weak rule of law

There is agreement among the interviewed informants and country experts that the weak rule of law is still one of the primary challenges in the country. The separation and independence of powers, usually compromised by the politicisation of its representatives, was undermined even further during the 2009 political crisis. It has left a group of political forces that favours the imposition of majorities who, from the National Congress, back the positions of the executive branch. A good example was the dismissal of the magistrates of the Constitutional Chamber in 2012, and the ruling issued by the new Chamber which authorised the presidential re-election in 2015. Citizens' confidence in the principle of legality as reflected in the Constitution was severely affected, producing a delegitimising effect in the actions executed by the government's senior officials. Consequently, questions have arisen not only regarding the lack of independence of the Supreme Court of Justice, but also regarding the National Congress, because accountability (checks and balances) is not working between them, as a result of the control exercised by the political and economic elites over their functions.

An unexpected effect of this weakness of powers is the institutional deficiency of the judicial branch as the guarantor of rights, especially the right of access to justice, but also the effectiveness in its fight against impunity and corruption. Citizens' demands to appoint a CICIH and the existence of the MACCHI demonstrates the distrust citizens have in justice sector officials and the Superior Court of Auditors.

The institutional fragility of the public administration

The politicisation of the public administration, the political patronage system, and the lack of political will for reform have hindered the establishment of a career-based administrative service. Instead, each new government and change of authorities has come with changes in the structure of the personnel of the different government entities. This occurred even when the change of government happened within the same party and for those institutions whose civil servants or officers are appointed by the National Congress, for which a partisan quota is agreed to. This weakness has resulted in a loss of accumulated knowledge and has greatly compromised the ability and quality of service delivery and public asset management, as well as the sustainability of the implementation of the programmes and projects sponsored by cooperation agencies.

The fragility of public administration is also made evident in the discontinuity of the PRSP. The PRSP was altered during the 2006-2010 period, and was later substituted by the Country Plan and Vision, amidst changes in the structures responsible for its monitoring and the coordination of efforts with

cooperation agencies. Before 2009, the entity responsible for monitoring the PRSP was the Technical Secretariat (SETCO). In 2010, this was transformed into a so-called Directorate of the Ministry of Planning (SEPLAN), before it became the Foreign Cooperation Sub-Secretariat within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2014. Each of these institutional changes in combination with the changes of government and authorities lead to contradictions in the execution of the agreed planning and commitments.

Insecurity and the penetration of drug trafficking within the State

Since the 1990's the country has faced a deteriorating landscape of public security, where the actions of organised crime (gangs) and the link to large-scale drug trafficking (cartels) prevail. Criminality levels have increased steadily, while the security and justice systems collapsed due to serious problems of corruption and co-optation by drug trafficking groups. The system was unable to provide an adequate response, which resulted in a high rate of impunity in the main cities of the country. Since 2012, a variety of government measures have been established to counteract these problems, and the rate of violent deaths has reduced, with better coordination between the security and justice system participants and the constant cleansing of those institutions. Nevertheless, the phenomenon still exists at high levels. Measures that were supposed to be temporary, such as a Special Commission to purge and reform the police force (2016), are still being implemented today and their lifetime has been extended, making evident how serious these problems are.

The capture and hand-over of members of drug cartels to US authorities has demonstrated their economic importance and political power in the country. The confessions of the drug lords in US courts have involved powerful figures from the business and political worlds, and from the principal political parties, who are currently in prison and/or awaiting trial in the United States. Among them were several congressmen, police officers, the Minister of the Presidency during the Zelaya administration, one of President Lobo's sons, and the younger brother of the current President, Juan O. Hernández. In this complicated context, the EU, together with other cooperating partners, has supported the government of Honduras, specifically during the past decade, by combining activities for prevention and institutional strengthening for the security and justice systems (for example, Eurojusticia), in particular through legislative reforms, new regulations and greater transparency in management.

A persistent economic and social gap

Besides the social debt represented in its indicators of poverty and exclusion, unemployment, underemployment, and deficits in responding to basic needs (health, education, water, and other basic services), the Honduran government has accumulated a foreign public and private debt of \$8,686.7 million, equal to 29.6% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Although the country grew 4.8% in 2017 and 3.5% in 2018, Honduras is susceptible to phenomena such as droughts and hurricanes as a result of its geographic position and is vulnerable to the fluctuations of agricultural product prices

(coffee, bananas). Economic inequality in Honduras is still one of the highest in Latin America (68% of the population living in poverty) and in the world.

The migration crisis towards the end of 2018 showed in a few days the reality that has been experienced for the last decade, with a desperate population, who migrate to find better living conditions. As proof of this, it suffices to consider that remittances still represent 18% of the GDP (\$4,800 million per year). It is a challenge for cooperation agencies to help overcome this paternalistic and exclusive development model, with little transparency and in which political patronage and assistance prevail.

The influence of the United States on internal policy

US influence in Honduras is an important factor to consider in order to understand the country, its important historical events and future prospects. The leading role in regional geopolitics that Honduras has played and still plays is widely recognised, both because of its geographic location (in the centre of Central America, sharing borders with Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua, coastal access to both the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean) and because of its conservative political tradition mirroring American interests in the region. Both in terms of imports and exports, the United States is the largest commercial partner for Honduras; it is also the principal bilateral international cooperating partner in the areas of democracy, security, governance, and the most important provider of military aid. The US recently also supported security measures tackling the drug trade, as Honduras is a place of transit for drug trafficking going towards North America.

These aspects make the United States a stakeholder with a dominant influence in both domestic and foreign political decision-making. While the US' influence is well acknowledged by the Honduran authorities, American diplomatic, military and foreign assistance officers do not misuse this powerful position. In fact, the acceptance of the US as an 'authentic power' has allowed for the US to assume an important mediation role and help overcome serious internal problems such as the 2005, 2009 and 2017 political crises. Nevertheless, the significant reductions in assistance from the United States to the Northern Triangle countries (Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador) that have recently been announced by the US Administration, may significantly undermine the impact of their efforts.

Given this reality, it is always a challenge for cooperation from Europe and other states to standardise their common positions within the G16, because the United States has established the standard practice of frequently communicating their positions on different topics in an individual matter, and often with less diplomatic subtlety.



2.

Relevance

2.1 A proper reading of the context and making use of specific circumstances

In general, the experts that were consulted agreed that the priorities and areas identified by EU and EUMS donors and practitioners during the period of analysis (2009-2019) represent an adequate reading of the main challenges of the country and the public landscape. This was a balanced way to address the strategic priorities identified by the government, even when these were at times not so clear or precise, due to the interests of the elites, political disagreements among the different branches of government, or the lack of identification with collective needs. In general, the actions of donors and practitioners have emerged out of their own analysis and strategies, along the cooperation agencies' own objectives as established in programming documents and previous assessments. The programming generally happens with few conditions, although needs are always identified in consultation with government representatives (from the national and local levels), and civil society stakeholders.³⁵

The total amount of EU cooperation in both years covered by the study period being analysed are very similar: in 2007-2013 it totalled €223 million, and between 2014-2020 it totalled €225 million. Out of these amounts, the themes that may be considered as 'Cooperation in Support for Democracy' had very few variations: the security and justice sectors totalled €44 million for 2007-2013 and support to the rule of law was close to €39 million in 2014-2020.

³⁵ In each programme document there is an express mention of the different modalities of prior assessments and analysis performed, detailing the stakeholders consulted (governmental, civil society, and others).

During the 2009-2019 period, an important emphasis was placed on areas which are key for the country's governance and democratic development, as explained in the previous chapter. From 2007 to 2013, 19.7% was earmarked for security and justice out of all of the resources assigned through bilateral cooperation, during a time of moderate enthusiasm due to judicial reforms (interrupted by the 2009 political crisis). Then between 2014 and 2020, cooperation was prioritised towards the rule of law sector, representing 17.33% of all of the amounts assigned.³⁶ Certain aspects such as insecurity, impunity, and corruption in the development of the country, transcended one strategy to another.

Other EUMS provided support during the same period (2009-2019) with resources of more than €300 million, while Switzerland carried out their own programmes with amounts greater than €100 million. It has not been possible to identify the specific amounts assigned to the area of support for democracy, but for those which were related to similar topics such as the rule of law and governance, the amounts fluctuate between 8-13% (Spain), 17% (EU), and 26% (Switzerland) of total ODA to Honduras.³⁷

European cooperation for democracy has been very specific and focused on concrete topics, as we have seen with the aforementioned list of priorities. Both during the 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 periods, resources have been dedicated primarily to the justice sector. This prioritisation has not been without criticism. Observers note that the specific results seem to dissipate due to a number of factors: a) the lack of interest and difficulty of coordinating with government counterparts, b) the gravity of the problems, c) the judiciary's lack of independence for political reasons, d) the lack of strict implementation of the reforms aimed at improving the judicial system, e) the high rate of impunity, and f) insufficient guarantees of access to justice.

A number of different sources consulted for this research questioned the absence of the necessary conditions, achievements and milestones for the continuity of cooperation in the justice sector, even for the new cycle (2014- 2020) which includes the 'Eurojusticia' programme. Observers also recognise that the amounts are usually insufficient for the prevailing institutional culture and the dimension of the problems being faced, thereby mitigating potential impact. Furthermore, European representatives do not always have the necessary degree of political influence or the required relationships to directly advocate with the primary stakeholders (despite the coordinated efforts made under the G16 harmonised initiatives).

Another area of support that stands out during the 2014-2020 period, in addition to judicial development, is the support provided under the aforementioned CSO-LA instrument and the EIDHR. In this regard, interviewees highlighted that European cooperation has been on target and stands out

³⁶ In the rule of law Index 2019, Honduras is ranked # 115 out of 126 countries evaluated, with a 0.40 rating of adherence to the rule of law (on a scale of 0 to 1, in which 0 is weak and 1 is strong). <https://worldjusticeproject.org/our-work/research-and-data/wjp-rule-law-index-2019>

³⁷ See details above in chapter 1 'Challenges for European democracy support programmes'

for its support to civil society, the strengthening of participation and the inclusion of citizens. Within the current context of authoritarian tendencies and the shrinking of civil society space, the specific support to human rights is also relevant, in particular to support the full enjoyment of the right to access information (see above, Secrecy Law), to counteract institutional weakness and to overcome the risks resulting from hostility against human rights defenders. The creation of a Human Rights Secretariat during Lobo's government (2011), still in force today, and the invitation of the Honduran government to open an office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), sent a clear message of political will to face the threats against human rights, which worsened after the coup d'état. This includes the adoption of public policies on the topic, specific attention to vulnerable groups, and coordination of government and CSO efforts. However, these types of measures contrast with public questioning over the role of the Ombudsman and the election and functioning of the Public Prosecutor's Office. Cooperation efforts frequently try to work together with on-going government initiatives. For example, the EU supported the creation of a platform for dialogue on human rights and legislative reforms, and the Law for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders. However, when dealing with controversial issues, such as human rights and corruption, supporting ongoing government initiatives runs the risk of supporting window dressing efforts by the government, instead of concentrating on the most essential issues.

Just as importantly, we should highlight that an effective execution of the operational efforts depends strongly on favourable conditions and the political will of the authorities and counterpart institutions (timing and opportunity). Some examples demonstrate the importance of tapping into sudden windows of opportunity:

- The support provided by the EU to the post-coup d'état process (June 2010 - December 2011), with UNDP as the implementation partner, has allowed for and contributed to internal dialogue efforts within the country to overcome the effects of the political crisis. The EU also financed part of the efforts of the TRC with funds from the stabilisation programme. This came at a time in which the development of the 2007-2013 cooperation programme was formally suspended, as it was still too controversial to go through with the revision of what had occurred during the political crisis. Although many of its recommendations are still pending implementation, the TRC's report established important elements to strengthen the rule of law and the situation of human rights that served as input for the newly created Ministry and for the strategy adopted by the EU for the 2014-2020 period.
- Another example of the opportunity used adequately is that of support to the OAS-MACCIH (since 2016): the EU cooperates in this case in a politically uncomfortable issue, in which the interests of some political groups do not match the interests of those in favour of those actions and of most of the population. Despite the internal difficulties and complications that the OAS-MACCIH faces (e.g. doubts about the real impact of their operation) the expectations for the results of their

operation are still high among a sector of the population who expects the extension of their mandate in the following months.

- The results of the 2013 and 2017 electoral observation missions should be highlighted. In both cases, recommendations were issued proposing substantial reforms to the Honduran electoral political system; after the 2013 general elections the different suggestions were not considered, mainly due to the lack of political will and openness. After the elections of 2017 and the subsequent post-electoral crisis, a window of opportunity opened in the short and medium-term to carry out some specific reforms, which would help to restore collective confidence in electoral institutions. The questioning and doubts regarding the transparency of the electoral processes and the reliability of the election results have eaten away at the legitimacy of the authorities and elective representatives, affecting their mandates and providing arguments to the political opposition to refuse dialogue and the search for agreements in key aspects for the governance of the country. One of the essential reforms proposed by both election observation missions to improve transparency and increase confidence in the elections has been the modernisation and strengthening of the National Registry of Persons (RNP). The RNP is the institution responsible for developing the ballot and the identification documents for citizens (Identification Card) which are used for the majority of important transactions, including voting. The EU has evaluated and is currently providing technical assistance in a complex process of institutional reforms for the RNP to help them achieve the conditions which would increase transparency and confidence in Honduran electoral processes.³⁸

2.2 Balanced and coherent support

When reviewing the priority cooperation areas established in the ‘Honduras Country Strategy Paper. 2007-2013’, some issues that stand out are the thematic concentration on the PRSP framework, the forestry sector and the development of a comprehensive public security and justice policy.³⁹ The Multiannual Indicative Programme of 2014-2020 refers to the fact that the previous cycle’s evaluation prioritised the rule of law⁴⁰, linking it with explicit indicators of the 2010-2022 Plan of the Nation as democracy, citizenry, governance and security as a development requirement. The MIP acknowledges that ‘the national agenda on the rule of law is still a work in progress’.⁴¹ The MIP also acknowledges that valuable recommendations were issued by the TRC (July 2011) and that the Human Rights

³⁸ EU-MOU Report, 2013 at http://www.eods.eu/library/EUEOM%20FR%20HONDURAS13.02.2014_es.pdf and EU-MOU, 2017 at <https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/373041878-moe-ue-honduras-2017-informe-final.pdf>

³⁹ Honduras. Country strategy paper. 2007-2013 (E/2007/478) p. 4.

⁴⁰ MIP. p. 3.

⁴¹ Ibid p.6.

Secretary of State is in charge of following up on these and recommendations of the United Nations' Universal Periodic Review. The MIP conceives of the recommendations as an opportunity to 'reform the security and justice sector, strengthen human rights, promote stronger and more independent public institutions, and improve transparency in public administration and policy'.⁴²

Based on the analysis of the political context and sources consulted, it is clear that the prioritisation and selection of sectors as democratic support themes has been well-balanced and coherent. More specifically, this includes areas in which there were possibilities to achieve some significant impact such as human rights, the fight against corruption, strengthening of civil society and local authorities, the right to access to justice and electoral reforms. European cooperation is perceived as balanced and credible due to the absence of a clear conflict of interest or visible political calculations. Usually, there is complementarity and coordination with other donors and agents, which is also due to the fact that on some issues where there is little support scarce resources can be integrated or coordinated more easily. A good example of balance and consistency is the assignment of European resources from the Anti-corruption and Transparency Program (EuroACT) to the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) at the end of 2017.⁴³ Historically, support for strengthening the democratic role of political parties has been lacking in the country.⁴⁴ NIMD was selected to implement a project which is known as ProDEMOS: More Inclusive, Transparent, and Democratic Honduran Political Parties (€1.7 million; for the years 2018-2021). The combined use of EU and Dutch financing is an important example of complementarity and coordination in an area which is highly complex and requires significant specialisation.

Over the last decade, freedom of the press concerns arose because of the worsening situation of the media and journalists - which has been noted by international organisations.⁴⁵ Local NGOs, like C-Libre for instance, have produced alerts and yearly reports that show a worrying context for the exercise of freedom of the press and risks for journalists. These risks were related not only to the polarisation of the country but also to a worsening of the situation of human rights after the 2009 coup, which were closely monitored by human rights organisations, including the Press Freedom Rapporteur of the Inter American Commission of Human Rights. Some international NGO, like the Irish Trocaire, have received funding from Irish Aid and the EU to deal with the perilous human rights situation in their programmes in Latin America, including Honduras, through the EIDHR and the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI).

⁴² Ibid, p. 6.

⁴³ The author of this document worked as Executive Director of NIMD in Honduras from 2012 to 2018.

⁴⁴ Besides the German Political Foundations, the last European effort to support political parties strengthening and political reform was financed by Sweden (SIDA) and it was stopped in 2009, as a consequence of the Coup d'Etat.

⁴⁵ According to Reporters without Borders 'The situation of the media has worsened steadily for the past decade, ever since the 2009 coup d'état...Journalists working for opposition media or community media are often the target of death threats or violence or are forced to flee abroad. They are also often the targets of abusive judicial proceedings, and prison sentences for defamation are common, sometimes accompanied by bans on working as a journalist after release'. <https://rsf.org/en/honduras> A similar opinion is shared by Freedom House: 'The environment for media freedom in Honduras has grown worse since the 2009 coup, with increasing violence and threats against journalists'. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2015/honduras>

Nevertheless, it was not possible to determine if some of this funding specifically addressed freedom of press issues. In 2015, the Ministry of Human Rights (created in 2011) implemented the Protection Mechanism for Human Rights Defenders, journalists and justice operators to address the risks faced by journalists. EU support was fundamental to the creation of this tool. Also, taking advantage of the public attention around elections, the EU-EOM reports emphasised the risks which are faced by communications media and the press. In addition to requesting that the authorities increase the investigation of crimes against journalists and protection for those who have been threatened, they emphasised the need for reforms or for the elimination of prison sentences for the crimes of libel, slander, and defamation. These recommendations mirrored past denunciations and recommendations by C-Libre and the Press Freedom Rapporteur of the Inter American Human Rights Commission. The EU-EOM report also recommended the elimination of mechanisms, which allow the communications media to trade favours with the government in exchange for the broadcasting or publication of institutional propaganda. Last but not least, the EU has recently approved a grant to the initiative 'Honduras in Action Against Corruption and for Transparency Project' (HondurACTion)⁴⁶ to strengthen social oversight by communications media with the objective of strengthening independent media and civil society.

Furthermore, it is vital to note the continuous support to civil society: facilitated through mechanisms with CSOs, albeit in significantly inferior amounts to that which is offered to government counterpart. The decision taken by European cooperation agencies to support CSOs and their activities, despite the prevailing polarisation, is important especially in a context of a progressive shrinking civic space. Violence, insecurity and threats to the work of human rights and environment defenders made this support vital for the survival of organisations and their activists. The polarised context makes it difficult to approach organisations that have positions against the government, since some reject cooperation agencies which maintain an official relationship with authorities and State institutions. On the other hand, some government actors react with suspicion when they find out that cooperation agencies provide support to organisations that oppose or question them openly. Donor representatives have on many occasions facilitated dialogue between civil society and government, adopting a role of 'proactive intermediators' in divisive issues (e.g. police and human rights).

Some sources consulted mentioned that this exercise of prior identification of potential unfriendly relationships between various actors became a regular task when preparing their different interventions involving CSOs. It has been estimated that support programmes have a real impact on the beneficiaries on issues such as gender and support for the protection of human rights defenders, even with these and other limitations. The continuity of support allows for a proper and less reactive response to CSOs' needs, which is particularly relevant in a new context of violent structural conflict

⁴⁶ €3.7 million grant. It is also part of the EuroACT Transparency and Anti-Corruption Program in Honduras (EuropeAid/155796/DD/ACT/HN)

and threats to their work. This includes the protection of the rights of indigenous people and their right to prior consultation regarding the exploitation of natural resources in their territories as a consequence of the implementation of an 'extractive economic model'. Nevertheless, ideally, this protection should be taken on progressively by the government and its institutions, for greater effectiveness. Along this same line, the support which is provided to beneficiaries at the local level tends to be insufficient due to a limited coverage of CSOs, which are covered by other cooperating partners, such as US donors.

The absence of cooperation and technical support in favour of Parliament is evident: other than the specific support (although intermittent) by Spain, this is and has been a missing topic. This may be because of perceived political risk and because resistance prevails in Brussels in terms of involving cooperation efforts on potentially polemic issues.⁴⁷ This absence has deprived European cooperation efforts from having a privileged position to weigh-in with sufficient political pressure, which may have been used by different leaders of missions to give more weight to the positions of the EU or of the whole G16, for example, during the 2017 post-electoral crisis and in the context of electoral reforms (such as support with the reform of the National Registry of Persons (RNP)). In general, a criticism that is constantly repeated, is the fact that this absence of European support to Parliament generates some sort of a time lag in relation to the political context, which may have led to the EU-EOM reports giving more weight to the need to achieve compliance with its recommendations.

⁴⁷ This is the summary of the opinion of several sources that were consulted, when reiterating the author's question on why there seems to be an absence of the European cooperation at the National Congress.



3.

Complementarity

3.1 The G16: an essential opportunity for coordination and collaboration among cooperating partners

Even before 2005 and the Paris Declaration on the Effectiveness of Development Assistance (PD), there were serious efforts towards coordination and standardisation of cooperation in the country as a result of international support for post Hurricane Mitch reconstruction (1998) and the need to organise a framework for a better utilisation of the debt relief. In 1999, the G5⁴⁸ was organised to follow up on the ‘Stockholm Declaration’, which emerged as a commitment of the main donors for the reconstruction and transformation after Hurricane Mitch. Afterwards, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) offered a framework to facilitate coherence between external cooperation and the country’s needs as long as it was applicable. By that time, the group of cooperating partners had become known as the G17, but by 2005, with the exit of the United Kingdom, the name became G16. Since that time, it has maintained that ‘brand’, independent of the number of its members.⁴⁹

The G16 has been useful, not only for general coordination of the donors present in the country, but also for coordination among European donors, both EUMS and the EU. Throughout its history, there have been different periods of influence and authority, such as during the 2005 electoral process, in which their efforts helped to reduce post-electoral tensions and prior to the 2009 political crisis, by expressing their concerns with the failure to comply with the PRSP and growing internal unrest. The influence of the G16 decreased greatly after the coup d’état, after the withdrawal and return of

⁴⁸ Sweden, Canada, United States, Germany and Spain.

⁴⁹ Julio Raudales, economist, expert in cooperation and former Minister of Planning (interview).

cooperation resources: some cooperating partners, more emphatic in their support for democracy withdrew due to changes in their regional priorities for foreign assistance programmes (Sweden, other Nordic countries, and the United Kingdom), while coordination became more complex due to a significant increase of the role of US diplomacy in the country, and a more influential position of the multi-lateral credit bodies within the G16.

Prior to its restructuring in 2015, it had an executive structure consisting of the Group of Ambassadors and Representatives (GER) and the Technical Follow-up Group (GTS), and other thematic, technical roundtables. In 2015, the structure was modified to increase the impact and effectiveness of the work, and to align it with the country strategy and the structure of government established in the National Plan. This restructuring included the creation of thematic roundtables - now 16 in total - and a change in nomenclature for the different levels: the GER became known as the 'Mission Leads' and the GTS 'Cooperation Leads'. In the opinion of the experts that were consulted, the technical articulation and coordination of the roundtables has been reduced because there is less clarity and effectiveness in the coordination and dialogue regarding policies with the government.

While the interruption of cooperation in the post-coup d'état period affected the continuity of its work, the reduction in size and reorganisation of the government ministries and the different government sectors in 2014 also had an important effect due to the change in points of reference and in leadership authorities. Currently, commentators tend to criticise the lack of leadership on behalf of government and its interaction with the cooperation community, and as the years go by, coordination has deteriorated along with the quality of dialogue. The incorporation and interaction with civil society within the roundtables deserves a separate comment: the polarisation resulting from the coup d'état and the 2013 and 2017 electoral exercises, has affected its participation in joint efforts with the government, due to the refusal to take part in them. CSO participation has been achieved through invitations from donors, in meetings on specific topics, but not constantly or regularly, therefore a specific and continuous strategy is required to get them back into the areas where they worked before (something which was common prior to 2009).

The meetings between 'Mission Leads' and 'Cooperation Leads' are periodic and on-going. The thematic roundtables also meet regularly, although their level of effectiveness fluctuates depending on who their members are and their abilities to coordinate with others. Regarding support for democracy, there are good levels of coordination within the following roundtables: gender, justice-security-human rights, and electoral follow-up. However, this also greatly depends on the agency in charge of facilitation and their resources available to do the work.

The European donors with a resident representation in the country (Spain, Germany, France) and the EU, together with the Swiss Cooperation Office (COSUDE), have their own programmes for coordination and joint programming for the 2019-2022 period, which is the result of commitments

taken on during the European Consensus for Development⁵⁰, to establish a joint approach to respond to global challenges, compliance with the Sustainable Development Objectives, and the 2030 Agenda. Thanks to this program, the aforementioned donors committed to contribute resources and skills to improve the effectiveness and coherence of their cooperation in the country, in addition to their dialogue with government and other stakeholders, and to come out with common analyses and responses. Their support for democracy is framed under the promotion of the rule of law and democratic governance, with crosscutting themes of human rights, gender equality, and the promotion of dialogue with non-governmental stakeholders.⁵¹

The ability of the EU and EUMS to act as spokespersons and to promote dialogue with government and other stakeholders, fluctuates depending on the head of the cooperation for each country and without a doubt, the personality of their diplomatic or cooperation representatives. For example, Spain lost much of its influence when the amounts of its cooperation assistance fell during recent years as a consequence of the financial crisis in Spain. However, its ambassadors still have an important ability to advocate due to the historic relationship of the country with Honduras, and because of the traditional emphasis - quite political - of its cooperation programmes targeted at local governments, Parliament, gender, and water/sanitation. Germany has had great impact in sectors for governance such as in the education and the forestry sector. France plays a peculiar role, because it has a budget for cooperation, but does not have a country strategy.⁵² Switzerland (the only Ambassador not residing in the country) participates actively in the G16 and in its joint programming, focusing on democracy and governance issues to strengthen the police force, defence, the promotion of human rights, and in support to strengthen civil society in the fight against corruption (OAS-MACCIH).⁵³

The level of influence of the EU delegation increased notably when the first Ambassador was appointed in August 2013, a few months before the elections that year; prior to this appointment, the delegations in the Central America region had a Chargé d'affaires in each country, and the Ambassador Chief of Delegations was in Nicaragua. During the mandates of their resident ambassadors (2013-2017; 2017-present), the EU has been very pro-active in cooperation and diplomacy in key aspects for democracy such as political reforms, human rights, inclusion, anticorruption efforts, and political dialogue.

In principle, coordination with other important democracy supporter partners (Canada, USA) should be formally achieved through the G16, but in practice it operates more in specific cases and topics (roundtables on: governance-justice-human rights, electoral monitoring and gender, decentralisation,

⁵⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/new-european-consensus-development-our-world-our-dignity-our-future_en

⁵¹ Joint Programming 2019-2022 of the European Union, its Member States, and Switzerland in Honduras. February, 2019.

⁵² Only in two countries (one of them Honduras), the Cooperation and Cultural Action Service (SCAC) of France presents this peculiar situation.

⁵³ Currently, the following countries have a resident Ambassador in the country: Germany, Spain, France and the EU delegation. Other European ambassadors have their diplomatic headquarters in other Central American countries, with concurrent functions in Honduras, for example Switzerland, Sweden, and UK in Guatemala, and Netherlands in San José, Costa Rica.

and local governments), and sometimes just based on personal coincidence or circumstances. These difficulties could be avoided through greater coordination in the framework of the technical roundtables or at least through regular meetings for specific issues, as has been demonstrated through the efforts of coordination of the donors with the MACCIH-OAS and with OHCHR, covering electoral issues - with the intervention of G16's Electoral Monitoring Roundtable, with issues such as femicide and gender equality, as well as through political dialogue. Recent coordination exercises in human rights with beneficiary organisations also stand out, with donors meeting them directly to prevent problems including in recent initiatives such as training for strategic litigation (although this was outside of the corresponding thematic roundtable). There are also good examples in the area of justice (Eurojusticia: cooperation delegated to AECID), even though it has not been easy to coordinate with US cooperation efforts, as they designate greater resources to work in the area of justice and have an opposite vision to that of Europe in line with their own track-record and interests in the country.

3.2 Other coordination efforts and their challenges

Coordination with practitioners tends to be more complex. During the observed period (2009-2019) there have been challenges related to coordination and insufficient consultation. Sometimes there are overlaps in programming and in field work, especially when the participants in initiatives are not European donors (EU and EUMS) or when they are not from the United Nations system, since the EU and UN are more prone to engage in teamwork and are willing to coordinate among each other. The presence of international organisations that collaborate with the objectives of European states supporting democracy has been relatively limited. Competition among local practitioners has prevailed, due to the reduction of cooperation funds for democracy issues, caused by the withdrawal of the cooperating partners from the countries who were originally focusing on this sector (Nordic countries) or due to a reduction of the amounts earmarked for these efforts (Spain).

When inquiring with some of the consulted sources about the possibility to insert support for democracy as a cross cutting theme in other sectors, opinions vary. One source working for an EUMS cooperation agency⁵⁴ expressed the view that in their case it was useful to include the notion of 'good governance' of the sector during the five year negotiation with different and wide-ranging sectors in order to achieve the governance of the forestry sector (MOSEF). Similar situations have occurred with the cross-cutting approach to human rights and gender approaches through local level interventions. Other people were of the opinion that the cross-cutting efforts have not operated effectively and that in practice, they do not happen because the agendas tend to be isolated. It is important to highlight the efforts made by the Swiss cooperation (with territorial and inclusive economic development approaches) to promote coordination on issues such as security (police), femicide, and human rights, with the engagement of other donors (such as Canada) and civil society stakeholders.

⁵⁴ Cooperation Specialist, AECID.

One important challenge that will have to be faced in the coming years is the possibility of the withdrawal of some cooperating partners who have played a role in key areas related to support for democracy (like it happened with Swedish cooperation after 2011). For example, COSUDE may not continue after the 2020-2024 period and strategic planning should be undertaken to prevent the lack of sustainability in the support areas where Swiss cooperation had been leading (such as civil society capacity strengthening, among others).

In terms of European cooperation for democracy, both the EU and EUMS have always placed a strong emphasis on the need to consult and coordinate with civil society, even at times when it is complicated due to the high levels of polarisation prevailing in the country. In dialogues that involve state-owned entities and their agents, efforts are made to include intra and inter-sectoral representations of civil society, although it was not always possible due to the lack of interest or of willingness to participate by civil society and government stakeholders.

Some interviewees highlighted the practice of inclusion of Honduran civil society stakeholders from the EU, Spain, Germany and Switzerland, not only in the areas linked to governance and the rule of law, but also in other sectors of their intervention (for example, at the local level, education, forestry, food security, water and sanitation, parliament, police, and justice issues). In general terms, there is a lack of participation by representatives of political parties and media outlets (which are also polarised), except in specific exercises in which they were engaged, such as activities to increase women's political participation (2013; 2016) or human rights protection (Switzerland), or training workshops for journalists (Spain).

Due to the country's prevailing polarisation, the inclusion of different stakeholders is usually complex, because many cooperating partners tend to operate with certain calculations based on the different interests at stake: i.e. a) involving the 'wrong' or 'hostile' groups and thus avoiding conflicts with government stakeholders, and b) avoiding the promotion of agendas that seem to emanate from a desire for democracy and institutional strengthening, but which at the same time hide personal interests and personal projections. This has resulted in roadmaps on 'parallel dialogues' with civil society and other sectors, which have been particularly visible in the framework of the work of the TRC and with the support for the MACCHI-OAS. The engagement of civil society within joint efforts with government stakeholders is still an important challenge that requires a process of sustained strengthening of CSOs. European states need to be more 'hands-on' in their interventions with civil society actors, who are usually in a position of disadvantage with respect to official counterparts.



4.

Consistency

4.1 The evolution of a sensitive and well-focused cooperation agenda

In general terms, European support for democracy is seen as consistent throughout time in the promotion of democratic values, showing an adequate and very sensitive understanding of the political and democratic situation of Honduras. There is awareness among the relevant stakeholders of the EU and EUMS, in terms of the context of the country and its challenges, in addition to the need for long-term efforts during several years to achieve results. Prior to the coup d'état and after Hurricane Mitch, an emphasis had been given to address the need to strengthen the rule of law, prioritising the focus on the improvement of the justice and security system. The 2009 coup led to the temporal suspension of funding to the Honduran Government by EU and EUMS because of the breach of democratic principles and the Rule of Law in Honduran national authorities. This decision did not include cooperation programmes to municipalities and civil society (especially those related to human rights affairs, seriously undermined after the political breakdown). EU and EUMS cooperation already had a high level of credibility for a long time, but this radical decision sent a clear and relevant message about the need for the reinstallation of the rule of law and democracy in the country.

This reputation was reinforced when the EU and other EUMS (like Sweden and Spain) supported the creation and activities of the Commission of Truth and Reconciliation (CVR) in 2010-2011, following an official petition by the Honduran Government under President Lobo. The CVR mandate and final report with recommendations for all Honduran stakeholders provided an opportunity for open discussion about the causes and consequences of the democratic disruption. It also provided an opportunity to strengthen the Rule of Law, seek reconciliation and surpass polarisation. The changed

context demanded flexibility in conducting a renewed analysis and reviewing strategies, based on the proactive participation of state institutions and CSOs, who were already relevant stakeholders for the EU and other EUMS' cooperation efforts.

As a consequence of the events of 2009, one of the main focus areas of European support efforts is the rule of law. This is quite general and includes respect for democracy, governance, access to justice, human rights, strengthening civil society, transparency, the fight against corruption, and gender equality. Interested donors such as Switzerland continue to provide assistance to police strengthening. This is a sector that has received quite some attention in the past, and faces challenges in terms of a lack of human rights knowledge and internal corruption. These two challenges were incorporated in both the 2007-2013 Country Strategy and the 2014-2020 MIP, the former targeted directly at human rights training of police and improving police oversight mechanisms, as part of one of the three justice and public security objectives. The 2014-2020 Honduras MIP continues this logic (Specific Objective 1, rule of law sector) foreseeing to '[s]upport national efforts to guarantee the universal application of the law and the protection of human rights, particularly focusing on the fight against corruption'.⁵⁵ The prioritised sectors in both documents are formally aligned with Objective 4 of the 2010-2038 Country Vision (Honduras as a modern, transparent, efficient, and competitive State).

Nevertheless, one remaining challenge is the timely approval of interventions to properly react to demands that arise in moments of sudden opportunities, e.g. the support to strengthen political parties and to promote political reforms, which was required in early 2014, and after the EOM, or the restructuring process of the RNP, recommended in 2017. It is key to be able to provide assistance quickly through flexible fund management schemes and modes.

The general alignment and plans of the EU and EUMS programming during the 2009-2019 period are consistent when it comes to policies of democratic strengthening. There is an acknowledgement of the fact that results and changes are attained through long-term processes, with several years of work, in different phases and with the same objective. For this, it is important to achieve the proper adaptation to the local context, some flexibility when necessary and the leverage required with government and key stakeholders (like CSO and private actors) within the sectors of interest.

It is worth highlighting some issues regarding the effects of the reduction of cooperation funds for democratic issues, caused by the withdrawal of countries who were originally focusing on this sector (Nordic countries, before 2010) or due to a reduction of the amounts earmarked for these efforts (Spain, after 2011). In some cases, the scarcity of funds for democracy support issues led to virtuous joint efforts among local practitioners to pool resources and budgets to pursue their objectives. This was the case for the initiatives for the strengthening of women's equal political participation which

⁵⁵ 2014-2020 Honduras MIP, p. 11.

had started in 2012, when different organisations and institutions (financed by European cooperation funds) decided to cooperate with each other to support the 'Women's Political Academy' instead of doing individual activities. But in other cases, the scarcity of funding led to a different situation, where harsh competition and antagonism among practitioners emerged, which could have been prevented if some strategies were created and coordinated to ensure the sustainability of efforts and to cope with a sudden reduction of funds.

Something can be said also about the need to guarantee the consistency of the agenda is that the programming periods of European cooperating partners show significant variation. Germany has two-year cycles, Spain adopts five years periods, while the EU has seven-year programmes. In all of the analysed cases, strategies favour the continuity of cooperation and the adjustment to any national political changes, especially a change of administration - as was demonstrated in the case of the coup d'état, when aid was suspended and efforts were resumed without much complication.⁵⁶ In the context of support to the justice system, this cyclical approach to funding is considered positive. There have been attempts to standardise programming cycles with other operating partners, following aid rules agreed to in Paris and Busan. Although the initiative could count on a proper amount of resources, there are concerns regarding the lack of comprehensiveness and the connection with other subsectors of the justice system (for example, the Prosecutors Office and the penitentiary subsystem).

It is also necessary to favour adequate follow-up to interventions over time and to watch closely their complementarity with cooperation policy and the principles that inspire it. Sometimes initial support for an initiative may vary over the years and in relation with the surrounding context, making the initial effort unviable and making the result very different from what was originally planned and expected. The funding provided by AECID to the Honduran Parliament for the creation of a Legislative Management Body and the enactment of a new Parliamentary Organic Law in 2012 provides a good example: the last version of the law passed by the legislative chamber in 2014 was very different from the technical proposal that incorporated more democratic criteria of participation, inclusion and transparency.

Another similar case is the technical support given by the Spanish cooperation to the Parliament for the preparation of a new Criminal Code: the final product is nowadays subject of public criticism for having a different content from the one that was originally proposed and communicated with diverse stakeholders. Although it improves the old one in many items, penalties for crimes of corruption, drug trafficking and violence against women are reduced - among others - and it has produced a negative backlash in public opinion. In situations like these, cooperation agencies must distance themselves earlier from such an initiative to avoid leaving the impression of endorsing results that could discredit their image and credibility.

⁵⁶ It is the case of the change of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) to the new 'Plan of the Nation' (Lobo's administration).

4.2 European public positioning in democratic issues: quality vs. quantity

The few statements and political positions that have been issued by the EU or EUMS in situations related to Honduras reflect a proper understanding of the local context and an awareness of the political relevance. Each time the EU or some of the EUMS preside over the G16 at the local level, it provides an opportunity for visibility and positioning. However, statements must be agreed to with the rest of the members of the cooperation community prior to making anything public, which may heavily restrain the language employed.

At very specific times of democratic transcendence, the EU Delegation, the European Parliament, and the European External Action Service have made themselves quite visible: with the 2009 coup d'état, with the reactivation of bilateral relations between the EU and Honduras in March of 2010⁵⁷, and in support of the work done by the OAS-MACCIH in March 2018⁵⁸, just to mention a few cases. During the 2013 and 2017 electoral processes, the EU has expressed an 'opinion' primarily through their electoral mission leads, where their role has been to clarify complex situations that allowed them to take on a vital role for the prevention and resolution of periods of unrest.

The public position taken by the European External Action Service on the 21st of December during the 2017 post-electoral crisis is an excellent example. The EU declared the announcement of the official results by the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) to be a 'significant step'⁵⁹, while the EU-EOM's support and subsequent recommendations placed an emphasis on the need to restore public trust and to overcome polarisation through dialogue. This principle-based position was audacious but timely and brave, because it occurred at a moment of generalised and violent uncertainty.⁶⁰ At this occasion, the EU made good use of the professional quality of its EOM in taking this position, even in the face of criticism from some CSO sectors, political stakeholders from the opposition and European citizens who questioned the electoral results, generating doubts concerning the transparency and the lack of independence of the TSE.

It is worth mentioning the case of the murder of the environmentalist and indigenous leader, Berta Cáceres: this unfortunate event motivated a letter of condemnation from the European Parliament and continuous references from the European Ambassador in the country, reactions which were justified due to the magnitude and seriousness of the case.⁶¹ Some of the interviewees reported their

⁵⁷ https://www.bbc.com/mundo/america_latina/2010/03/100322_1440_honduras_europa_relaciones_wbm

⁵⁸ https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/honduras/41445/reiteramos-nuestro-apoyo-la-maccih_es

⁵⁹ <http://www.proceso.hn/politica-nacional/38-politica-nacional/la-ue-dice-que-anuncio-de-resultados-en-honduras-es-un-paso-significativo.html>

⁶⁰ Idem.

⁶¹ <http://www.radioamerica.hn/parlamento-europeo-condena-asesinato-de-bertha-caceres-y-solicita-exhaustiva-investigacion/>

opinion that the EU Ambassador's declarations and his visible presence, accompanying the relatives of Mrs. Cáceres during the days after the murder, and for some of the proceedings within the legal process of the case, had a powerful effect of political and moral support at a time when it was a badly needed and justified.



5.

Impact

5.1 Contributions of European Support for Democracy

In order to properly evaluate the true impact and outcomes achieved by European cooperation efforts in support for democracy, an analysis of a set of indicators can be undertaken, while acknowledging the fact that the success of development interventions often depends on the political will of those in power in the three branches of government.

In a democratic system with persistent vulnerabilities and challenges, the overall opinion among the different interviewees is that intentions have always been positive and that positive contributions have been made in a variety of areas of intervention. The analysis and designation of resources and areas is perceived as balanced, coherent, and well prioritised, with different opinions with regards to the real and practical effectiveness of each intervention.⁶²

Electoral Recommendations

The EOMs in 2013 and 2017 were excellent examples of European support in the sense that they became more than simply electoral observation missions, but had a major role in preventing conflict and generating more trust in elections that faced significant difficulties in terms of their credibility (but without fully endorsing them). Nevertheless, their recommendations did not receive any internal

⁶² The Court of European Accounts concluded in 2016 that European Development Cooperation could be considered 'partially effective', primarily because it had supported 'a number of advances in the selected sectors, but the difficult circumstances which prevailed in the country and a series of poor management issues impaired the overall impact'. Special Report. Effectiveness of EU assistance to 'priority sectors in Honduras. No.30. The Court of European Accounts. European Union. 2016. p.6.

response from the political stakeholders and had only a weak response from a civil society which is also weak and lacks the capacity to advocate for reform (even with the support received for strengthening purposes). Despite this, there is an increased public demand for electoral reform in order to increase confidence in the authorities responsible for administering the elections. While this document was being developed, the EU took advantage of a window of opportunity, which has developed as the result of minimum political agreements for the modernisation of the National Registry of Persons (RNP). This activity is now underway and is being supported technically and financially by the EU.

Support to strengthen the rule of law at the national and local levels

The EU and some EUMS (mainly Spain) have supported the democratic strengthening of the country at the regional and national levels. First by cooperating with the reform of the security and justice sectors, in a complex context of insecurity and impunity, then by promoting the start of the CVR for reconciliation and the post 2009 coup d'état transition, and subsequently re-starting their initiative to strengthen the rule of law with its variety of challenges. Security and Justice sectors reform proved to be a challenging task. Over the last ten years, the country faced increasing rates of violent crime and continuous scandals because of the evident penetration of illicit networks (mainly related to drug trafficking) in political and financial circles. The lack of political will for reform (as explained in the case of Eurojusticia program) further complicated the efforts of local and external donors. Joint efforts were made by the government and external donors to successfully reduce crime rates and strengthen security and justice institutions. These efforts included administrative modernisation, cleaning up the police force and strengthening the skills and capabilities of judiciary operators. Besides clear cooperation strategies and implementors, donors worked around the challenges of a lack of political will through deep synergies with different stakeholders who served as allies in advocating for real reform.

Slightly different, after the CVR report in 2011, a significant and very visible impact was made with the strengthening of the Human Rights protection official system, via support of the newly created Ministry of Human Rights. The Ministry of Human Rights formulated a national public policy (2013) and a National Plan on Human Rights (2013) which is still under implementation. Even at a time of intense polarisation, the Ministry has been sustainable and has managed to maintain communication with different stakeholders to address specific issues as the Protection Mechanism for Human Rights Defenders, journalists and justice operators (since 2015), created with European support and now incorporated in the national budget. Additionally, after its opening in 2016, the national office of UNHCHR also received support by European cooperation to contribute to the compliance of the Honduran State with their international human rights commitments and standards. UNHCHR carries out important follow-up work on potential human rights breaches in the country and provides recommendations for how to properly address them.

Some of the interviewees emphasised how, in different regions of the country in which their efforts have been prioritised, it is easier to see their impacts, because there were synergies and fewer conflicting approaches or messages with other bilateral cooperating partners. This was the case for Spain, able to focus on issues such as local governance, gender, coordination with civil society, governance of regions and municipalities.⁶³ Similarly, for Germany working on issues related to forestry, agriculture, and education. Although the impact in terms of institutional reconstruction may seem insufficient, EUMS' support has been complementary to the EU's efforts, where we have seen more streamlined and coherent technical coordination, better inclusion and participation of civil society, standardisation with government and fewer contradictions, all of the aforementioned has been quite positive for democracy because it promotes improved governance and the culture of peace in target areas.

Impetus to participation in governance topics

European cooperation efforts provided an impetus to gender equality and demands of vulnerable groups (such as the indigenous people and the LGBTI community). This positive assessment is also shared by organisations of civil society, government, and OHCHR, stakeholders who become active in support of the freedom to access information, transparency and the fight against corruption (IAIP, OAS-MACCIH) jointly with other cooperating partners. This could also be said about the support of European cooperating partners (Germany) in the area of good governance for the forestry sector and water and sanitation (Spain), just to mention some examples related to EUMS. In addition to improving the visibility of the sectors and providing responsive solutions to the problems, the approaches of the EU and EUMS prioritise the inclusive participation of different civil society stakeholders along with national and local government authorities; in the long term this promotes a more democratic and transparent management model in which multi-sectoral dialogue can directly address intolerance and authoritarianism.

Promoter of inclusion and dialogue between government and civil society

The European cooperation efforts have played, until now, a role as an intermediary between civil society and government in complex issues, especially in the prevailing context of political and social polarisation. The long and mid-term support in specific topics (such as human rights, gender equality, decentralisation, to mention a few) has positioned the EU, EUMS and other European countries like Switzerland as stakeholders who allow bring different positions closer during conflicting moments on specific topics. Even when no agreements are initially reached, European cooperation usually helps by acting as a channel of communication which allows for an improved understanding between sectors

⁶³ The Spanish OED in Honduras was regionally distributed with a 61% during the 2007-2013 period, prioritizing the western region (25%) and central zone (10.2%). In the 2014-2018 programming, the geographic prioritisation of the intervention remains within these zones. This region has the lowest human development levels and the highest levels of poverty in the country . Country Association Framework of the Spanish Cooperation in Honduras for 2014-2018. AECID. September 2014. p.p. 18 and 51.

in conflict (for example, this has been achieved at times with regards to human rights and police related issues), but it is still missing in other areas (political reform, for example) as a consequence of the prevailing polarisation (see above) and rejection of participation in common opportunities, mainly from the side of prejudiced political actors or the civil society representatives.

Response to complex State problems, despite the lack of political will

Some problems have a complex nature, but that does not mean that they should be ignored, if their intervention is coherent with the vision and objectives of strengthening the rule of law. Eurojusticia is a good example of this: in general terms, its objective is to support national efforts to fight impunity in cases of corruption and violent crimes, and to guarantee access to justice for Honduran citizens. Although its design and implementation has been criticised as inadequate, the general perception among the different interviewees is problematic relationships between national partners⁶⁴ falls out of the responsibility of the cooperating partners. Rather, the limitations and under-execution of the initiative are the result of the lack of political will of the national stakeholders, the gravity of the problems that are being focused on, and the absence of a more specific and effective CSO work agenda on this topic. As one of the interviewees responded when asked to what degree European support for democracy had been positive or not: ‘How can we ask them to do what should be done by the Honduran people? Diplomacy has its limits... they do what is necessary and possible for them’.⁶⁵

Contribution to the credibility of the efforts made by the international cooperation partners

The empathy and solidarity demonstrated by European representatives in the country during critical moments have strengthened the already positive profile and image of bilateral European cooperation partners, especially having proved to be politically and morally appropriate as critical observers of government counterparts. Cases such as the condemnation of the murder of the activist Berta Cáceres and support for the demands to investigate attacks against human rights defenders and for the TRC, OHCHR and OAS-MACCIH have strengthened that credibility. They demonstrate coherence with the promotion of democracy, human rights, good governance and transparency in the country, in line with the support that has now been provided for decades. In this regard, expert Sally O’Neill⁶⁶ expressed that, ‘it is important for some political stakeholders (government and political parties) to feel that they are being observed, from a critical perspective, which is not always easy to maintain.’

In order to maintain that positive image, a staff member working for the international cooperation group insisted heavily on the need to always consider the consistency among cooperation policies,

⁶⁴ Judicial Branch, Public Prosecutor’s Office (Public Ministry), Superior Court of Auditors of the Public Ministry, Institute of Access to Public Information.

⁶⁵ A civil society prominent leader (interview).

⁶⁶ Sally O’Neill was a distinguished Irish collaborator who provided data and information during the preparation of this review. She died tragically before the completion of the editing of the draft report.

economic interests and investment initiatives promoted by cooperating states, in order to avoid affecting their good credibility and enhance the effectiveness of their efforts. One example is the assistance provided in the early and mid-term stages for the development of a new penal code in the country, providing advice by experts financed by some EUMS for specific cases: the final version of the new legislation which was approved nationally by the Honduran Congress has been criticised by human rights defenders, women's rights groups, and other civil society entities who are fighting against impunity and corruption. The main point of criticism was the inclusion of reforms which could imply restrictions on rights and the cancellation of achievements obtained in the past decade. This case could have a negative effect on the impact and positive image of European technical assistance and there have been no statements or clarifications to distance themselves from the criticised outcome. Other examples can be found in potential links between commercial interests or investments (including of European companies or local companies exporting to Europe) and threats to the protection of the environment.

Willingness to work in strengthening political parties and inclusion of underrepresented social groups in the political process

European cooperation organisations have contributed to the strengthening of the democratic culture of Honduran political parties and the promotion of political dialogue as a peaceful mechanism for the solution to problems. There are a few initiatives that are focused on strengthening the democratic culture and increasing the inclusion of under-represented groups in political organisations and in the overall Honduran political system. In addition to the political party support from some German political foundations,⁶⁷ NIMD (with the support of the EU and other international organisations such as UNDP) has provided technical assistance to the entire Honduran political spectrum,⁶⁸ in order to follow up on the recommendations of the CVR (2011). Such support has focused on strengthening the parties' and their members' capacities and on promoting the inclusion of underrepresented social groups (women, youth, LGBTQ, indigenous populations, and Afro-descendants).⁶⁹

There is some evidence of these improvements in democratic culture within the parties: the progressive compliance of mandatory inclusion of women in parties and in electoral lists as well as openness to afro-descendants, indigenous people and LGBTQ(I) by many parties was tangible and visible during the 2017 electoral cycle. The public demand of more transparency and accountability of political party representatives and candidates increased after the enactment of the Clean Politics Act in 2016. The Unit responsible for the implementation of the Act asked every political party and candidate for the 2017 elections to provide evidence of their expenses for political activities and

⁶⁷ Currently, the following remain active in the country: Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES), Friedrich Naumann Foundation (FNS) and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS), all of them with offices in the country. FES helps with two political parties: Libre and PINU-SD, FNS with Liberal Party and KAS with the Demócrata Cristiano and Nacional Party (currently in power).

⁶⁸ Currently, it has nine legally registered parties.

⁶⁹ See above, PRODemos: More inclusive, transparent and democratic political parties. EuroACT Transparency and Anti-Corruption Program in Honduras (EuropeAid/155796/DD/ACT/HN)

origin. The Clean Politics Act was approved by the National Congress thanks to the technical assistance of OAS-MACCIH, supported partially with European cooperation funds.

6.

Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

After three decades of civil governments and ten major electoral events, Honduras still faces structural problems that erupted during the 2009 coup d'état. European cooperation efforts - with a long-standing history in the country - were able to resume after this event, even when the effects of that institutional rupture impacted the country's governance and conditioned the approach of the new multiannual European cooperation programming.

International cooperation in general faces several challenges, mainly related to the weakening of the rule of law and the fragility of government institutions - among them much of the structure of the State, its natural counterpart - in a context of high levels of insecurity and the presence of organised crime (drug trafficking), which not only affects the efficiency of the aid and its sustainability, but also the credibility of cooperation efforts. The total amounts of resources from European cooperation in the two time periods covered by the overall timeframe under this study (2007-2013, and 2014-2020) are very similar, with a clear definition in the latter period with the work with civil society organisations and local authorities and democratic affairs and human rights issues (in the framework of the EIDHR).

Even though a clear impact of European support to democracy was difficult to identify for a number of years, the electoral recommendations of the 2017 EU-EOM have led a consensus within the collective imagination of the need to promote modernisation of the RNP. In addition, the support for strengthening the rule of law can be included as an impact, especially after the political crisis of

2009, highlighting the work of the CVR (2011) for national reconciliation, in addition to the national and regional support provided by European governments to increase communication among political stakeholders and civil society (and promoting governance, decentralisation and the management of national and municipal public policies).

In the midst of the polarisation which has characterised the Honduran context, the willingness of the EU to serve as a facilitator in bringing together the positions of government and civil society has been decidedly positive. It should be highlighted that in the search for compliance with the goals of cooperation, there have been compromises in paying attention to complex government problems due to risks associated with a lack of political will, harsh disagreements on key issues and weak government capacity. Nevertheless, the credibility gained through the efforts of European cooperation in the country, as a result of their moral presence and public positions at critical times, has allowed the EU to have a specific political impact on large national themes, even with the limitations imposed by the local geopolitical conditions.

The questioned re-election of the current government, amidst growing movements of protest as a result of the accusations of corruption and an increase in organised crime, have generated an environment of uncertainty that demands continuity for the work of the EU in the country.

6.2 Recommendations

The analysis and design of the 2021-2027 programming is an opportunity to make strategic contributions that consider lessons learned, unifying them with priorities in development based on human rights and specific reforms that can have a real impact on the support for democracy and at the same time which may be established as minimum conditions for the continuity of the cooperation programmes.

1. *On European priorities and perspectives*

Make better use of the position of credibility of the EU and EUMS

The EU and EUMS should be able to achieve greater advantages from their position as credible, transparent donors (with comparatively less geopolitical interest) in order to strengthen their diplomatic influence in the democratic development of the country and in this way ‘incentivise’ political dialogue when conditions allow. This approach should be used as a strategy to impact the different programmatic roundtables of the G16, strengthening participation and government leadership in these areas.

This is particularly important for supporting democracy, since the EU and its member states could play a key role in promoting political dialogue between the government and civil society. Additionally,

the announced reduction in assistance from the United States to the Central American Northern Triangle countries may become an opportunity for the EU and other European cooperation efforts to augment their democracy support to Honduras and amplify their role as mediators to prevent governance conflicts.

Support for democracy should be a priority guiding theme

Based on the current dispersion of different activities related to democracy, the concept of support for democracy should be a specific theme for the work of European states in Honduras. The conditions for democratic governance are essential to advance the level of development for other sectors of cooperation but are not explicitly framed through the lens of democracy as a political system. The priority of this support should include an increase of the funds to respond to the demands of citizens from different sectors and to strengthen their leadership.

Using the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030 for programming

Programming by the EU and its member states should make use of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda. The application of this common language could be a useful tool to facilitate meetings between European cooperation agencies, the government, and civil society, since it would allow the elimination of conceptual arguments regarding goals and objectives to be reached in determined time periods.

2. On funding and technical work mechanisms

Specific identification of sectors which require increased support and resources

There are areas of critical support which should be strengthened more (such as civil society strengthening, transparency and anti-corruption) and others which have not been addressed sufficiently (for example, work with the Congress, political parties, media, new political and social stakeholders, academia and research), but which are vital to the area of governance and democratic strengthening. Once the effectiveness of certain interventions is thoroughly assessed, those sectors which are already receiving support should continue to receive such support while resources are increased to address those where the current level of support is insufficient to be able to respond to citizen demands.

Technical follow-up and support to implement EU EOM recommendations

One of the EU's challenges is to properly harvest the investment carried out by both EOMs (2013 and 2017). Progressive follow-up and support to the design and execution of electoral reform may help to put into practice several recommendations made by the missions and therefore increase credibility and trust in electoral institutions.

Flexible resources must be earmarked to make use of the circumstances and opportunities to strengthen governance

In order to support democratic governance, it is necessary to have flexible, specific resources (currently difficult to obtain) to make use of governance opportunities and circumstances such as specific and urgent reforms. These can be subject to an ‘incremental approach’ and match up with the medium and long-term strategies. The European stabilisation aid fund (implemented by UNDP in 2010-2011, after the 2009 crisis) is a good example of a resource of this nature.

Analyse the modalities of work, structures, and temporary cycles of cooperation staff members

The EU and EUMS have the potential to improve the division of labour between themselves and with other European cooperating partners. This is all the more important considering the reduced size of Europeans mission offices and the general difference of approach. Regarding internal EU coordination it would be important ‘to make sure that political dialogue goes hand in hand with international cooperation and not separately...that requires a clear strategy and a well-defined framework combining dialogue and active engagement...with all stakeholders, among them the different national and international stakeholders who are linked to specific topics’.⁷⁰

Unfortunately, existing work cycles are short (rotation of international staff members every 2-3 years), with limited or non-existing transition periods, which influence the learning curves and continuity of the programmes (which have a duration of seven years). This could be prevented by modifying the cycles, but also by assigning the technical work of analysis and follow-up to local experts who reside in the country to avoid losing knowledge and to guarantee the sustainability in terms of presence and dialogue.

3. On monitoring and learning

Taking advantage of lessons learned in governance and democratic support

New programmes need to take advantage of efforts to strengthen civil society which are already underway to extract lessons learned from the various cooperating agencies within the country (in areas such as justice, human rights and protection of vulnerable groups). This should include an exchange of experiences with countries which have a long tradition of work in the areas of governance and multi-sectoral inclusion (such as Spain and Germany).

Promote milestone achievements and conditions for cooperation in support for democracy and other areas of support

This report found that stricter compliance with binding milestones must be incorporated in order to maintain EU prestige and increase credibility as an operating partner. This is particularly true in key areas such as the separation of powers (Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court of Justice,

⁷⁰ Opinion of a former staff member of the EU Delegation in Honduras.

Parliament), human rights, women's equality, transparency and the fight against impunity and corruption.

For this purpose, it may be necessary to establish 'red lines' and political commitments for democratic progress through an open multi-sectoral dialogue (using statistics and rates). These would then serve as conditions to guarantee the continuity of support and to ensure future sustainability. Otherwise, the alternative is to decisively close those programmes which do not work or do not yield the desired outcomes.

4. On coordination & communication

More European coordination in joint coordination and implementation opportunities:

A greater effort must be made to achieve consensual technical coordination in the sectors within which European donors operate, with analysis, vision, and medium and long-term strategies. Usually, there is coordination at the political level, but it is the operational level that requires greater collaboration: when achieved, risks are shared and necessary adjustments between initiatives are facilitated, above and beyond the level of individual personalities.

The Joint Programming Strategy must be fine-tuned, complementing it with greater efforts in planning, agenda design and decision making at the political and technical levels (Mission Leads and Cooperation Leads). Seeing what lies ahead with the future withdrawal of the Swiss Cooperation program (which has prioritised work with CSOs), it is necessary to harmonise donor cooperation with civil society. At the same time, considering that the weight and influence of a European cooperating partner may be reduced due to a reduction in the percentages of its monetary contribution (Spain is a good example), there is a need to ensure mechanisms to compensate for this loss and to make good use of their expertise and 'know-how' (as is done in delegated cooperation).

In this same sense, it is important to have proper coordination with partners or multilateral entities because they usually have more resources to work with the government (for example, CABI, US, IADB, WB). This is essential in order to have the proper preparation and sustainability of cooperation initiatives with government (regarding budgeting, institutional and regulatory issues) and in order to avoid 'institutional islands' that emerge when projects end - a situation that tends to be even more serious due to the lack of government ownership and the loss of 'know-how' when skilled personnel leave the institutions.

More coordination in communication efforts between EU and EUMS

Consistency and precision of political messaging achieved in the spaces of joint European programming must be maintained within the G16 only if necessary. Since the design of the G16 does not allow for an in-depth analysis or taking on positions with respect to diplomatically sensitive issues, the possibility to coordinate communication efforts only among European stakeholders should be

considered to overcome actions that weaken the impact of key messaging in support of democratic governance. The joint response could be more consistent if it engages government in a dialogue platform - joint programming between European states can be used in this regard as a tool with a long-term vision to provide timely and strategic support.

Strategic and proactive EU communication

The EU and EUMS should seriously consider issuing more regular public statements and pronouncements during strategic moments while retaining the same diplomatic and respectful tone. Just like the EU statement during the 2017 post-electoral crisis, official communication needs to follow up on political issues where appropriate in order to contribute to the prevention of conflict. These statements and pronouncements should be based or inspired on reaffirming the democratic values that inspire the EU and always with respect to the sovereignty of the host country. Furthermore, both the EU and EUMS can assist with collective reflection by making their research studies and documents available for public debate or promoting dialogue for joint reflection on sensitive issues.

Improving communication between the government and civil society

A specific effort must be made to improve the abilities for dialogue among government, civil society and opposition political stakeholders. With that in mind, it may be helpful to engage foreign experts, partnered with local analysts and expert stakeholders who know the context and the links/networks among key local stakeholders, to assist in enhancing civil society advocacy efforts as partners in the proposal and oversight of public policies.

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The European Partnership for Democracy (EPD) was created in 2008 by EU members states and non-for-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 conducted a participatory review of European democracy support over the course of 2018-2019. The research took 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.