

Contribution to the review of the EU Strategic Framework and Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy

Brussels - July 2014

The European Partnership for Democracy (EPD) welcomes the opening of the revision process of the EU strategic Framework and Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy initiated this year by the European External Action Service (EEAS). We thank the EEAS and the Chair of COHOM for opening the discussion with Civil and Political Society Organisations (CPSOs) and for putting efforts in making it a genuine consultation process.

As a result of an internal consultation process and an external consultation with the enlarged community of practice on Democracy assistance which took place in Brussels on June 6th 2014, EPD proposes the following elements to be taken into consideration by the European Institutions and the EU Member States when reviewing, designing and adopting a new framework and action plan beyond 2014.

In particular, EPD recommends that:

- As a matter of consistency with EU policies, the new framework systematically mentions Human Rights and Democracy together;
- Strikes a balance between short term activities addressing technicalities, and medium to long term objectives addressing processes;
- The EEAS upgrades the guidance note on the implementation of the democracy profiles and action plans to facilitate the implementation of action plans related to Democracy assistance and support;
- EU staff, especially in the EU delegations, should get adequate training on issues related to democratic governance and assistance.

General remarks and principles

EPD recognises the importance of having a European framework and action plan on human rights and democracy, and strongly recommends renewing and strengthening it. In particular, EPD recognises the necessity to support the implementation of specific actions aimed at reinforcing the inter-connection between Human Rights and Democracy, mainstreaming them into the overall framework for EU external action. Secondly, EPD supports the EU's stated objective to foster the collaboration between all actors involved, in particular the EEAS, Development and Cooperation Directorate General (DevCo), EU Member States, EU Delegations (EUDs) and the representatives of CPSOs. Acknowledging the challenges inherent in the new approach, EPD recommends that the EU adopts a series of principles, which will allow it to maintain the right level of ambitions, implementation, participation and coherence.

Consistency and coherence: putting Human Rights & Democracy on an equal footing

The current EU Strategic Framework and Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy does not sufficiently reflect the very comprehensive and useful considerations of the 2009 Council Conclusions on Democracy Support in the EU's External Relations and in particular does not give sufficient space to outcomes related to democracy. Instead, the current document clearly puts the focus on human rights (in the legal sense rather than a *practice* that ensures democratic participation), which can be seen in the number of stated planned outcomes. It is fundamental to underline that issues such as Freedom of Association and Assembly, Freedom of Expression, the rights of minorities or women's rights and their participation in the political process are essential areas linked to democratic governance.

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The conclusions indeed stressed the needs to have (a) a country-specific approach to democracy support; (b) a more coherent use of existing forms of EU dialogues and partnerships; (c) more coherence and better coordination between the institutions involved in democracy support; (d) a further mainstreaming of human rights, democracy, democratic governance, and the rule of law in all EU external relations activities; an intensification of the EU's efforts to promote democracy-related norms and elements through its activities within international organisations; and (e) more visibility for democracy issues in EU annual reports on development cooperation and human rights and in other relevant country reports

By systematically stating Human Rights and Democracy together, the EU gives a strong message and expresses its commitment to furthering both. EPD therefore recommends that the new framework systematically mentions Human Rights and Democracy together, be in its Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World, statements by the EU Special Representative, dialogues with third countries or the mandate of COHOM.

A realistic and pragmatic approach: balancing short-term and long-term objectives

In order to be an efficient tool for policy implementation, the framework should balance mainstreaming and thematic priorities. Technical issues related to the process of mainstreaming Human Rights and Democracy into EU actions (role of EU Member States, the work of COHOM, capacity of EU Delegations, consultation mechanisms with CPSOs, dialogues or any other tools) should constitute a entire priority.

Certain thematic issues should be broken down into short term and long-term priorities in order to encourage progress. Working on too many priorities over many thematic areas, hinders progress given the resources of the EC and EEAS. A chronological series of priorities would benefit progress.

A realistic timeframe

EPD believes that the framework should cover a period of 4 years to give enough time for adequate results to be achieved, while at the same time keeping the right level of flexibility. A midterm review/evaluation after 2 years could help re-orient actions where needed.

Better coordination and use of existing resources

The framework can only become an effective tool for the EU if the EEAS and DevCo receive support in the implementation process. The lack of resources, which the institutions are currently facing, should be seen as an opportunity to increase collaboration between them and pool their resources together, and not as an excuse to limit objectives. Moreover, the EU institutions should commit to strengthen coordination and share information on actions, results and lessons learned. The framework should serve to highlight all the relevant actions and achievements done by all actors involved in the fostering of human rights and democracy support.

Monitoring, evaluation & reporting

The framework and action plan constitute an efficient tool for coordination and planning as well as monitoring and evaluation of EU democracy assistance actions. EPD recommends that the EEAS continues to use this tool in the regular exchanges with CSOs organised in Brussels and other places in Europe so that it can serve as a common basis for discussions and collaboration. To go further, EPD recommends that the EU develops its theory of change and uses the strategic framework as a means to define expected results and realistic related activities. In this context, the use of SMART indicators should be promoted, which can help establish benchmarks and facilitate implementation.

Mastering the political will to back up policy

The change in the EU institutions and leadership in 2014 constitutes a unique opportunity to reaffirm the commitments of all the different players towards the framework and joint efforts to achieve a coherent political approach to back up and strengthen EU democracy assistance actions. We therefore encourage the new High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the European Commission (HRVP) to take a strong position on the renewal and strengthening of the framework, and to engage her/his colleagues in the institutions and in the EU Member States to work closely together under her/his leadership.

Strengthening the strand of Democracy assistance and support

Dialogues on EU Democracy Assistance

EPD advocates for the establishment of a regular and structured dialogue on democracy assistance and democratic governance between the institutions, civil society from beneficiary countries and regions and the experts involved in transformation processes. We state that a high quality EU support for democratic transformation and transition in partner countries can only be achieved if we set up a mechanism to (1) analyse collectively the needs in partner countries with a proper role for national stakeholders, (2) consult with all relevant actors to determine areas on which focusing assistance efforts on the basis of the feasibility and readiness of local actors to make progress through sharing international experiences and cross learning

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initiatives, and (3) monitor and evaluate progress made at all levels (policy and programmatic). We also recommend that the EU either develop specific Democracy Dialogues with partner countries modelled on the Human Rights Dialogues or to systematically include components related to democratic transformation into the existing Human Rights Dialogues.

Towards implementation

2009 Council Conclusions on Democracy Support in the EU's External Relations and the related action plan marked a significant step forward in the structuring of a coherent and pragmatic EU policy on Democracy Assistance and Support. Despite the delay in implementation, the recent progress achieved by the institutions (selection of the second generation of pilot countries and the launch of the process related to Democracy profiles and Action Plans) should be seen as a first step towards a long-term engagement in the selected countries.

EPD strongly recommends that the EEAS upgrades the guidance note on the implementation of the democracy profiles and action plans which it has shared with the EU delegations in the pilot countries to a more comprehensive guidance note on Democracy Assistance. Additionally, the EU staff, especially in the EU delegations, should get adequate training on issues related to democratic governance and techniques for working with and empowering civil society organisations, political parties, local authorities, parliaments, trade unions, media and decision makers/leadership.

Process and inter-connections

The framework should recognise that democracy is a process, which requires time and cannot deliver within the traditional timeframe established by current EU policies and programmes. Hence, the EU action plan should find a balance between short-term objectives, which will enable the EU to the set of adequate starting initiatives and milestones, and long-term objectives ensuring the necessary continuity and sustainability of its support. It is fundamental to develop and put into practice a comprehensive approach through interconnecting the different components or areas of EU Democracy Assistance. The framework should thus a) help foster the relations between stakeholder groups and their participation in the democratic development of their country, b) ensure stronger focus on pre- and post-election processes, and c) facilitate the creation of an enabling environment which allows the fulfilment of economic, social, political and cultural rights as well as sustainable development and the peaceful conciliation of conflicting interests.

About EPD and the Community of Practice

The European Partnership for Democracy is an independent European non-profit organisation supporting democratic transformations outside the European Union. As a network of European civil and political society organisations working on democracy assistance, EPD advocates for a stronger presence of democracy support on the European Union's agenda and facilitates the exchange of knowledge and good practices in democratic transformations around the world. We do this through innovative methodologies based on the development of effective partnerships with organisations in third countries, and the facilitation of political and social dialogue.

The EPD network is conceived as a **community of practice**, i.e. a group of organisations that work together because, by doing so, they can substantially improve the way they operate in the realm of democracy support and provide a comprehensive response to the needs of populations. This notion does not only apply to EPD as a network and its institutional development, but also to all the actions and partnerships constructed under the EPD banner.

The following organisations have signed a Partnership Agreement with EPD. As per this agreement, they are represented on EPD's Board of Directors and participate as Partner Organisations in the development and day-to-day activities of the Community of practice:

Club de Madrid, Spain; Eastern Europe Studies Centre, Lithuania; FRIDE, Spain; Institute for Political Studies, Portugal; Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy; People in Need, Czech Republic; Political Parties of Finland for Democracy, Demo Finland

Since September 2013, EPD has been co-chairing the Human Rights and Democracy Network (HRDN) with the objective of operationalising the link between Human rights and Democracy at both a policy and a programme level.

For more information please contact info@epd.eu.