



## PROMOTING DEMOCRACY AND OBSERVING ELECTIONS

Supporting democracy worldwide is a priority for the European Union. Democracy remains the only system of governance in which people can fully realise their human rights, and is a determining factor for development and long-term stability. As the only directly elected EU institution, the European Parliament is particularly committed to promoting democracy.

### LEGAL BASIS

- Articles 2 and 21 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU);
- Article 205 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU).

### BACKGROUND

The EU's approach to democracy complements its work on human rights.

In 2009, the Council adopted conclusions on Democracy Support in EU External Relations and the related EU Agenda for Action, which outlined a new strategy for supporting democracy by means of a country-specific approach, greater coherence and the involvement of all stakeholders. Democracy and human rights were mainstreamed across all policy areas. The Commission's 2011 Agenda for Change subsequently highlighted the importance of supporting human rights, democracy and good governance within the EU's development policy.

Following the Arab Uprising events of 2011, the EU updated its European Neighbourhood Policy to adopt a 'more for more' approach, with support being linked to democratic transition and 'deep democracy'. Incentives — including deeper economic integration, greater financial assistance, enhanced mobility of people, and access to the EU's internal market — were offered to those countries willing to undertake political reforms.

The EU's commitment to stepping up its efforts to promote democracy was reiterated in the Strategic Framework and Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy adopted by the Foreign Affairs Council in 2012. The Action Plan included a plan for more systematic follow-up to the reports of EU election observation missions (EOMs), so as to support the full electoral cycle. The new Action Plan for the 2015-2019 period, adopted in July 2015, is aimed at mainstreaming democracy support across several objectives.

The Council emphasised the role of civil society in its 2012 conclusions entitled 'The roots of democracy and sustainable development: Europe's engagement with civil society in external relations'.

### FINANCING INSTRUMENTS

Supporting human rights, democratic reform and political participation and representation is the main task of the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR). Specifically designed for these goals, the EIDHR finances projects, programmes and EU EOMs,

and awards grants to civil society organisations, non-governmental organisations and human rights defenders.

The European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) provides financial assistance for the promotion of the rule of law, political dialogue and reforms, democratisation, media pluralism and election observation.

Civil society actors in the countries of the EU's southern and eastern neighbourhood are also eligible for funding from the Neighbourhood Civil Society Facility for projects, networks, training and exchanges of best practices.

The Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI) also provides financial backing. Although its primary objective is to eradicate poverty, it also aims to consolidate and support democracy in developing countries.

The EU's Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP) can be used in some circumstances to support democratic institutions and civil society.

The European Development Fund (EDF) — which operates outside the EU budget but is managed by the EU Commission — finances cooperation with countries in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific. Like the DCI, it focuses on poverty eradication, but also contributes to consolidating and supporting democracy, the rule of law and good governance.

In 2012, the European Endowment for Democracy (EED) was established. Operating autonomously as a private law foundation, it aims to support political and civil society actors striving for democratic change by providing tailored financial assistance in a quick, flexible and non-bureaucratic way, with a focus on the EU's eastern and southern neighbourhoods. Its governing board includes representatives of the EU Member States and institutions, including up to nine MEPs, as well as other experts.

## **ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT**

The European Parliament, the only EU institution elected directly by the citizens of the Union, is strongly committed to promoting sustainable democracies in the world and has highlighted this commitment in a number of resolutions.

Parliament is continuously engaged in election observation activities, working to strengthen the legitimacy of national electoral processes and to increase public confidence in the protection of elections and human rights. Each year it sends several parliamentary delegations to observe elections or referendums in third countries. Parliament may decide to send such delegations of MEPs on condition that the elections are held at national level, that the national authorities have invited the EU or the European Parliament, and that a long-term mission is present. Parliament delegations are always integrated into EU EOMs or the long-term missions of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The European Parliament is consulted on the identification and planning of [EU EOMs](#) and on the subsequent follow-up.

Long-term EOMs assess not only events on election day but also the whole electoral process, in order to gauge the state of democratic development in a given country at a particular time. Long-term observers usually begin operating two months before the elections and follow the entire electoral process through to the announcement of the official results and the appeals procedure. Short-term observers (STOs) monitor polling day and the tallying of votes. The chief observer leading an EU EOM is, as a rule, an MEP.

In order to ensure a comprehensive approach to democracy support, Parliament links election observation to complementary activities including election follow-up, human rights actions, and initiatives to support parliamentary work. The EP assists parliaments beyond the EU's borders in strengthening their institutional capacity through conferences and seminars, joint training programmes and study visits for members and officials, as well as fellowships for staff of third-country parliaments. Special focus is placed on the enlargement countries in South-eastern Europe. Parliament also provides support and expertise in the field of mediation and dialogue, through targeted activities with partner parliaments and international events focused on mediation and conflict prevention.

Parliament's Democracy Support and Election Coordination Group (DEG) gives political guidance for the different EP activities. It consists of 15 MEPs and is co-chaired by the chairs of Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs and Committee on Development.

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