



2023/2122(INI)

12.9.2023

DRAFT OPINION

of the Committee on Foreign Affairs

for the Committee on Budgetary Control

on the transparency and accountability of non-governmental organisations
funded from the EU budget
(2023/2122(INI))

Rapporteur for opinion: Deirdre Clune

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SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Foreign Affairs calls on the Committee on Budgetary Control, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions into its motion for a resolution:

- A. whereas Article 15 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) requires the EU institutions to conduct their work as openly as possible in order to promote good governance and ensure the participation of civil society; whereas the European Economic and Social Committee, composed, inter alia, of representatives of civil society organisations and exercising advisory functions, should assist Parliament, the Council and the Commission, in line with Article 300(1) TFEU;
- B. whereas, under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe (NDICI)¹, ‘civil society organisations’ (CSOs) are defined as a wide range of actors with multiple roles and mandates, which may vary over time and across institutions and countries; whereas CSOs include all non-state, not-for-profit independent and non-violent structures through which people organise the pursuit of shared objectives and ideals, whether political, cultural, religious, environmental, social or economic, which operate at local, national, regional or international levels and which comprise urban and rural, and formal and informal organisations;
- C. whereas, in Article 2(48) of its proposal of 16 May 2022 for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union (recast) (COM(2022)0223), the Commission defines a ‘non-governmental organisation’ (NGO) as ‘a voluntary, independent from government, non-profit organisation, which is not a political party or a trade union’;

Importance of the role of NGOs in promoting and protecting human rights and democracy

- 1. Stresses that NGOs and CSOs working for the promotion and protection of human rights, democracy and the rule of law play an important role in societies around the world; highlights, in this regard, the crucial work of these organisations in collecting public interest information, exploring and proposing new ways of promoting human rights and democracy, informing individuals, especially the most vulnerable, about their rights and standing up for them when those rights are violated, promoting civic engagement and public participation, countering disinformation and hate speech, holding governments and elected representatives accountable to citizens, and fighting corruption and impunity for human rights abuses;
- 2. Highlights the serious risks that people working for human rights NGOs face in their activities around the world, including threats against them and their families, intimidation and all forms of harassment, including through online channels and social media, abusive legal proceedings and prosecution, arbitrary detention, violence, torture,

¹ See Article 2(7) of [Regulation \(EU\) 2021/947](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 June 2021 establishing the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe, OJ L 209, 14.6.2021, p. 1.

disappearances, killings and executions;

3. Is alarmed by the fact that some governments, whose aim is to shrink civil society space and silence dissenting voices, have adopted legislation based, inter alia, on security, counter-terrorism and the fight against foreign interference, that imposes discriminatory obligations on human rights NGOs, stigmatises, restricts or bans their activities, including by closing these NGOs, freezing their assets, deterring their donors from contributing funds or depriving them from access to funding;

***Transparency and accountability of human rights NGOs funded by the EU 2021-2027
external action budget***

4. Underlines the need to make more transparent and accessible to the public, the available information on the beneficiaries, including NGOs, of EU external action funds dedicated to human rights and democracy support and to the related EU-funded projects which are implemented worldwide; acknowledges the precarious conditions faced by some human rights defenders and NGOs in non-EU countries; believes, in this regard, that confidentiality and data protection must be ensured in order not to put them at risk;
5. Calls on the Commission to improve the clarity and organisation of information and data available in the Financial Transparency System on the beneficiaries of EU-funded projects to be implemented, in particular, in the field of human rights and democracy support;
6. Recommends that the legal obligations on transparency and financial accountability be applied identically to all human rights NGOs benefiting from EU funding, independently of whether they take on the role of coordinator or member of an EU-funded project consortium;
7. Points out that human rights NGOs receiving EU funding give visibility to the EU's support in different ways, and sometimes incompletely, through various communication channels, including official websites; calls for the establishment of harmonised approaches to make EU funding for human rights and democracy support more transparent and visible to the public;
8. Stresses that the funding by non-EU countries of EU-based legal entities, including human rights NGOs, while also carrying out lobbying or advocacy activities within the EU and aiming to influence EU foreign policymaking, raises questions as to their objectives; denounces the use of organisations sponsored by non-EU country governments (government-organised NGOs (GONGOs)) to spread disinformation and false narratives related, in particular, to human rights issues; highlights that, in the context of recent corruption allegations against some Members of the European Parliament, an NGO, whose stated purpose was to carry out advocacy activities on human rights, is suspected to have been used as a vector of foreign interference; considers that there is a public interest in knowing the financial sources, including non-EU funding, of the stakeholders active in the fields of lobbying or advocacy;
9. Welcomes the progress made in the use of the EU Transparency Register and is committed to continuing its work to expand the scope of the Register and strengthen the

monitoring of the data it contains; points out that, as a general rule, annual financial data on the sources of funding, including EU grants and domestic and non-EU donations, of registered legal entities are made publicly available under the EU Transparency Register; stresses that, since 12 July 2023, the participation of ‘interest representatives’ as invited active guests at Parliament’s events is conditional on their prior registration in the EU Transparency Register, except if registration is likely to endanger an individual’s life or personal safety or where other compelling reasons require confidentiality;

10. Recognises, however, that the EU institutions, including Parliament, should have been more diligent in ensuring greater transparency, integrity and accountability regarding their framework for interaction with entities listed in the EU Transparency Register; also acknowledges that further resources are needed to strengthen the transparency and accountability of the lobbying or advocacy activities of legal persons or entities, including human rights NGOs;
11. Recommends that legal entities engaging in lobbying, including NGOs, be required to register in the EU Transparency Register as a condition for applying for EU grants and receiving EU funding; calls on the Commission to present proposals to enhance the transparency of interest representation bodies and to ensure that lobbying or advocacy activities, in particular on behalf of non-EU country governments, their budgets and their policy scope are properly disclosed under the EU Transparency Register and that false declarations are subject to sanctions.