



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).

POLICY FRAMEWORK AND POLICY TOOLS

The EU's approach to democracy complements its work on human rights (see fact sheet [5.4.1](#)). It is grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international and regional standards on human rights, democratic institutions and elections. Since 2015, the EU has also been basing its support for democracy on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular Goal 16 on accountable institutions and inclusive and participatory decision making, and Goal 10 on reducing inequality.

On 17 November 2009, the Council adopted conclusions on democracy support in the EU's external relations, which outlined a new strategy for supporting democracy by means of a country-specific approach, greater coherence and the involvement of all stakeholders. 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. In 2012, the EU agreed on a strategic framework on human rights and democracy and an action plan for its implementation. Following the Arab Uprisings 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.

In October 2019, the Council adopted conclusions on democracy, which reconfirm the principles of its 2009 conclusions, while identifying new challenges that the EU needs to counter urgently and comprehensively through external action. These include the undermining of democratic processes and institutions; low levels of trust in institutions



and politicians; a shrinking democratic space for civil society; increased violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms; and manipulation using online technologies.

The EU's commitment to stepping up its efforts to promote democracy was reiterated in the [third EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy](#), adopted by the Council in November 2020. The plan, which defines priorities for the period 2020-2024, mainstreams democracy support across the five lines of action, one of which is entitled 'Building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies'.

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'. Its conclusions of 19 June 2017 on EU engagement with civil society in external relations reaffirmed the EU's commitment to an empowered and resilient civil society as a crucial way of supporting good governance and the rule of law in any democracy.

Several elements of the EU's policy, which developed over time, address both human rights and democratic principles. This includes country-specific strategies on human rights and democracy, which define priorities for action and objectives to be pursued by the EU in partner countries. It also includes the human rights and democracy clauses in international agreements, which allow the EU to suspend trade or cooperation if a country commits grave violations of human rights and democratic principles. Another element is a specific funding instrument for supporting civil society actors in the area of democracy and human rights (see below).

Election observation is a central EU tool for supporting democratic developments in non-EU countries, promoting human rights and the rule of law, and contributing to peacebuilding and conflict prevention. The EU's long-term election observation missions (EOMs) assess events that take place throughout the electoral process. The host country must extend an invitation before an EU EOM can be deployed. 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 monitor polling day and the tallying of votes. The chief observer is, as a rule, an MEP. After the mission, the EOM publishes a final report containing conclusions and recommendations, which give guidance for electoral reform and possible future assistance by the EU. In addition to election observation, the EU can provide technical and material electoral assistance to partner countries, enhancing the conditions for democratic elections, increasing the capacity of state and non-state actors, and supporting necessary reforms, taking into account the full electoral cycle.

In November 2021, the EU and its Member States launched the [Team Europe Democracy](#) (TED) initiative. To increase the impact of support for democratisation worldwide, TED consists of three pillars: research on democratic support best practices and policies; a TED Network (at global level); and providing expertise on democracy support at country level.

The EU and its Member States also engage in multilateral forums, such as the UN, the Council of Europe or the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), to promote and protect democracy. In December 2021, the Presidents of the European Council and the European Commission participated in the US-led [Summit](#)



[for Democracy](#) that sought to promote democratic renewal and to encourage leaders to respond together to the global trend of democratic backsliding. The Commission participated in several of the ‘democracy cohorts’ created to allow for engagement beyond the summit. The President of the European Commission also participated in the second Summit for Democracy, which took place on 28-30 March 2023.

FINANCING INSTRUMENTS

The EU’s main financing instruments to support democracy abroad are the [Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument \(NDICI\) – Global Europe](#) and the [Instrument for Pre-Accession assistance \(IPA\) 2020-2027](#). The IPA supports EU candidate countries and potential candidates in fulfilling the relevant membership criteria. The NDICI finances geographical programmes in the remaining countries not covered by the IPA, as well as thematic programmes with a global reach. Its general objectives include consolidating, supporting and promoting democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights. The thematic programme on human rights and democracy focuses on civil society organisations and democracy and human rights defenders. With a budget of EUR 1.511 billion it operates independently from the consent of the partner countries’ governments. The programme also finances EU EOMs and complementary actions on elections, as well as cooperation with key international partners in the field of democracy and human rights.

In 2013, the [European Endowment for Democracy](#) 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, and other experts.

ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

The European Parliament, the only EU institution elected directly by the citizens of the EU, is strongly committed to promoting sustainable democracies around the world. It has highlighted this commitment in a number of resolutions. Every year, Parliament adopts a resolution on human rights and democracy in the world and the EU’s policy on the matter, analysing the main challenges and achievements of the EU’s approach to democracy support, and making recommendations for the future. In November 2023, Parliament is set to adopt a [recommendation on strengthening the right to participate in genuine elections](#).

Parliament has also developed a range of tools for engaging directly in [global democracy support](#). Parliament is continuously involved 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 non-EU 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 of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. The European Parliament is consulted on the identification and planning of EU EOMs and follow-up activities.

Guided by its comprehensive democracy support approach, Parliament links election observation to complementary activities including pre-election actions and election follow-up, human rights actions, and initiatives to support parliamentary work. Special focus is placed on the enlargement countries and the European Neighbourhood. The European Parliament 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 non-EU-country parliaments. It supports partner parliaments in mainstreaming human rights into legislation and connecting to civil society. Parliament facilitates capacity building for agents of democratic change, including human rights defenders, and promotes media freedom and independent journalism. Parliament's [Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought](#) and the activities of the Sakharov Prize community of laureates are integrated into this approach.

The [Simone Veil programme](#) is specifically designed to support women politicians and parliamentarians. 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. The [Jean Monnet Dialogue for Peace and Democracy](#) is a mediation tool developed by Parliament to bring political leaders together in order to promote inter-party communication and consensus building. The [Young Political Leaders Programme](#) is one of the flagship initiatives designed to promote dialogue and understanding among future leaders outside the EU, and thus to contribute to building trust and peace. The European Parliament [resolution](#) on building EU capacity on conflict prevention and mediation adopted in March 2019 recognises the importance of mediation and dialogue processes and Parliament's role therein. As part of its [Solidarity with Parliamentarians programme](#), Parliament regularly debates the situation of human rights of parliamentarians in the world and works to protect parliamentarians at risk through twinning partnerships with MEPs.

The Democracy Support and Election Coordination Group (DEG) gives political guidance for Parliament's different activities. It consists of 16 MEPs and is co-chaired by the chairs of Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs and its Committee on Development. The DEG decides on European Parliament election observation missions and adopts [an annual work programme](#) for the other activities. For 2023, the DEG re-confirmed the six priority countries and regions (Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, Tunisia, the Western Balkans region and the Pan-African Parliament, and Belarus as an ad hoc political priority, following the political events in early summer 2020), as well as thematic areas (pre- and post-election activities, parliamentary mediation and dialogue, human rights actions, including the Sakharov Prize community and fellowship, and parliaments and democratic innovation).



