

REPORT ENoP CONFERENCE 2009

“The EU Agenda for Action on Democracy Support in EU External Relations” and its challenges to achieve more coherence and effectiveness in EU democracy support

**1 December 2009, 9:30 – 12:30
Residence Palace, Brussels,**

Executive Summary

The EU as the world largest donor provides a considerable number of instruments in external actions to develop and consolidate democracy and the rule of law, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The ENoP conference on 1 December, two weeks after the adoption of the Council Conclusions on Democracy Support in the ‘EU’s External Relations – gave the opportunity for assessments and reflections related to the Agenda for Action which should be implemented in 2010.

The members of the European Network of Political Foundations have been engaged in the promotion of democracy for decades and therefore ENoP covers not only the young democracies of the European Neighbourhood but also accompanies the democratisation processes in developing countries. ENoP strongly encourages a more coherent and coordinated approach but also would like to draw attention to the challenges and shortcomings that come along with the EU Agenda for Action on Democracy Support. ENoP and its members are prominently placed not only to accompany the implementation process of the agenda in pilot countries and beyond but also to render its experiences and expertise on political processes and actors sur-place in order to contribute to a successful implementation of the EU agenda on democracy support.

More than 60 participants from the European Commission, the Council Secretariat, the European Parliament, ENoP member organisations and other stakeholders in the field attended the conference and contributed to the discussion.

The approach is to support what is of fundamental value for the European Union



Sessions

The speakers of the first panel were Balthasar Benz, European Commission, DG External Relations, Claudia Gintersdorfer, Council Secretariat, and David Johnson, European Commission, DG Development. The three panellists had been involved as representatives of their institutions in the drafting and development of the document and presented its genesis as well as the main issues.

The second panel reflected on the relevance of the Council Conclusions for the work of Political Foundations. The ENoP panel speakers came from ENoP member organisations: Martin Ängeby from the Swedish liberal member organisation , Stiftelsen Svenskt Internationellt Liberalt Center – SILC Milan Zivkovic, from, Novo Društvo/New Society, Croatia which is affiliated to the S&D group. The discussion was complemented by contributions from Helena Lagerlof and Andreea Pavel of the EuropeAid Cooperation Office.

Both panels were chaired by the ENoP coordinator Arjen Berkvens.

Background

The process discussing this topic started under the French EU Presidency, and continued in January 2009 by a meeting of the ministers for development. A conference in Prague titled “Building Consensus about EU Policies on Democracy” on 9-10 May under the Czech EU presidency led to a joint paper in July enumerating all instruments targeting democracy support. In the joint paper 19 instruments, related to all the three pillars had been identified; plus in addition 3 – 5 dialogues in one country. However, none of them had been coordinated.

What initially started of with the aim to reach a consensus on democracy building – similar to the consensus on development (2006) or the consensus on humanitarian aid (2007) became a much weaker agenda for action in democracy support. Particularly the term democracy promotion was heavily disputed due to its tarnished image by the Bush administration. Instead of promotion, the term “support” was favoured – comprising the concept of supporting locally grown processes rather than an imposed process.



Summary Session 1

The Council Conclusions on Democracy Support lists a set of 6 operational recommendations:

- A country-specific approach

A profound analysis of the individual country should lead to Country Strategy Papers and should recommend a mix of instruments. However, until today such an analysis does not exist within the majority of instruments or those existing are not accessible within the Commission.

- Dialogue and partnership

Democracy support is definitely not about exporting a model but about supporting the concept of ownership

- EU Coherence and Coordination

In order to increase effectiveness it is not required to create new tools and policies but to find a way how to use the existing instruments in a coherent way.

- Mainstreaming

In line with existing commitments, the EU should continue to improve mainstreaming human rights, democracy, democratic governance and the rule of law in all EU external relations activities.

- International cooperation

The EU should intensify its efforts to promote democracy –related norms and element through it activities within international organizations.

- Visibility

More visibility should be given to democracy issues in EU annual reports on development cooperation and human rights.

The first step for the implementation of the conclusions would be the identification of a number of pilot countries – taking into account a balance of geographic, regional and continental aspects. The Political Foundations of Europe are seen as useful advisers for this process due to their obviously broad experiences in the field. They were asked to come up with recommendations which countries should be chosen. “Any feedback is important for us – to come with proposals to the council”



Despite the fact that the country studies still have to be exercised it is confirmed that the existence of the agenda for action is an important benefit.

Summary Session 2

The two representatives from ENoP member organizations drew attention to the different facets of the work and role of political foundations as well as political actors in democracy support.

Related to the implementing experiences of his organisation in Belarus, Martin Ängeby outlined the importance to support a struggle for democracy inside the legal framework of the respective country in order to encourage a transition process. “Democracy is often won using the thwarted rules that the dictatorship has set up. The opposition should engage in the political process and stay visible, even if it knows the rules of the game are not fair. The cooperation with other organisations is seen as an asset – but the main focus is on the work with local politicians as the key actors and potential initiators of democratic structures.

Milan.Zivkovic highlighted that Political Foundations in candidate countries could play an important role in the democratisation process of their own as well as in neighbouring countries. So far, this is hampered by the lack of a legislative definition and stable funding for most foundations. He pointed out that the design of the EU support often does not correlate with the actual needs of the candidate countries, and that a political foundation needs a space to propose and not just react to the European democracy support agenda. In that sense he found the council Conclusions and the new Agenda for Action on Democracy Support encouraging, especially when proclaiming “a special focus on the role of elected representatives and political parties and institutions”.

The role of political parties as chief interlocutors was pointed out during the discussion as well as the role parliaments should play in the democratisation processes in order to achieve transparency and accountability.



In practice it is necessary to have a close look on what is going on at the level of political parties, the interaction amongst themselves as well as their internal structure and decision finding processes.

Concerning the design of the EIDHR tool, there will not be any fundamental changes. EIDHR can be implemented without the consent of governments.

Election observation missions will not be financed through this instrument. Once the pilot countries have been chosen, the budget line of the Country Based Support Schemes CBSS will be the main tool to implement the EU guidelines according to internally agreed decisions

Conclusions

Andrea Ostheimer

At a time when democratisation processes worldwide experience a backlash and democratic systems seem to lose their attractiveness not only for the ruling elites but also for parts of the local populations who are drifting into absolute poverty, it has been a pertinent initiative to have a critical look at the approach that has been used by the European Union for democracy promotion in its external relations so far.

Although the initial start by the Czech presidency to reach a European Consensus for Democracy has become an EU Agenda for Action on Democracy Support in EU External Relations, we all agree that it has been an exercise overdue for a long time.

Therefore, ENoP's thanks go to the Swedish presidency for their dedication to democracy promotion, the Council secretariat and Commission for their excellent status quo analysis of the currently existing instruments in all their diversity and last but not least to the European Parliament which has particularly highlighted in its resolution on democracy promotion the importance of political actors, be it



members of parliament, representatives of political parties or even political foundations.

In the past, democracy promotion by the EU has focused at large on human and political rights protection, support to institutional structures, on elections and here particularly on election observation. Political actors have rarely been target groups although they are the most important elements for a consolidation of democratic structures.

Our experience from the field has shown that particularly in developing countries or even young democracies, it is not a democracy of parties serving as transmitters of interests and needs between government and the population. What we find are quite often personalised political structures that easily take on populist connotations. A first counter-balance within the ruling party does not exist as also intra-party democracy remains a remote concept.

In addition, in many democratising countries the aspect of political culture has been neglected. What we find within Samuel Huntington's famous "third wave of democratisation" is an elite recycling that now 15- 20 years down the line shows its true character.

As it stands, the EU Agenda for Action on Democracy Support is an excellent initiative. Considering the 19 different instruments, programmes and initiatives which have been identified by the Council Secretariat and Commission in their working paper, and which are currently at disposal for democracy promotion of the EU it is certainly time, to aim for more coherence, coordination and complementarity and to enhance by this not only the efficiency but also the impact of democracy promotion in external relations.

However, democracy promotion is more than only the protection of human rights and civil liberties and their advocates.



The essential element of participation and representation should not only be interpreted and reduced to aspects of gender equality or inclusion of otherwise marginalised groups. The effective participation and representation of citizens needs political parties who are linked to and embedded in the respective societies. Parties which are able to develop local structures, provide political alternatives, adhere to intra-party democracy and turn from personalised associations into core institutions for democracy in a country. Here, external assistance is much needed and should not be neglected in any endeavour to promote democracy.

Certainly, civil society plays an important role and interaction with them and support for civil society should be increased. However, civil society can and should not replace political parties. A vibrant civil society is an essential element to hold up the checks-and-balances in a democratic system and any politicisation or even instrumentalisation by the ruling elites needs to be counteracted.

This indeed refers to another point mentioned in the EU Agenda which is laudable but needs to be reflected cautiously regarding its operational ability.

The idea is to include civil society in the future much more in bilateral dialogues between the EU and the partner countries. But who will represent civil society, a heterogeneous and diverse sector of organisations in those dialogues? Who will select or nominate? And above all, who will assist these organisations in the preparations for the meetings. Inclusion of civil society representatives does not make sense if they are not briefed properly about their role, their mandate and also the agenda they are supposed to represent.

Equally complex seems to be the request to compile specific country analysis in the delegations, taking stock of the state of democracy in the partner country and to harmonise the focus of thematic and geographic instruments. ENoPs members as political foundations have a long tradition not only in the support to democratic processes by training, awareness-raising, capacity building but also in the political analyses of our project countries. Most of the political foundations serve at the same time as think tank and could be used in this regard.



However, the most important point mentioned in the EU Agenda for Action on Democracy Support is the “intend not to introduce a new conditionality for EU development aid”. Is it possible to promote democracy ?, to main-stream a set of values and principles into the mix of instruments and programmes of assistance and cooperation? and to continue at the same time in the field of development assistance with “business as usual”.

Does the agenda for democracy promotion not become a mere lip-service losing its credibility in the long run when a lack of political will on the other side gets accepted and does not bring any consequences along.

Definitely, these are questions that are pertinent when it comes now to the implementation of the Agenda for Action in Democracy Support in the operational programmes of the EU.

It is a first step that hopefully will contribute to counteract the wave of democratic regression we currently experience worldwide.

Therefore, we would like to thank all stakeholders again for the efforts they have put into the elaboration of the document. Special thanks in this regard go to our presenters and panel discussants, Mr Balthasar Benz DG Relex, Ms Claudia Gintersdorfer, Council Secretariat, David Johnson DG DEV, Ms Helena Lagerlof and Ms Andreea Pavel from EuropeAid as well as our ENoP colleagues, Martin Ängeby and Milan Zivkovic. Finally and above all we would like to thank you for your active participation this morning and wish you nice remains of the day.

