MULTI-ANNUAL STRATEGY 2020-2023

EUROPEAN PARTNERSHIP FOR DEMOCRACY

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Introduction

The European Partnership for Democracy is a not-for-profit organisation with a global remit to support democracy. We were established in 2008 and we bring together 15 members from 13 states across Europe, specialising in the different parts of a democratic system. We are the only democracy support organisation covering such a wide variety of specialisations anywhere in the world.

We work inside and outside Europe because we recognise that democracy is a universal aspiration and that the contemporary challenges and opportunities for democracy are global in scope. The richness of the global experience of democratic governance - including within Europe itself - means that we believe that those supporting democracy need a collective approach that goes beyond national boundaries to share experience between states and between people.

Democracy - widely defined and in all its varieties - holds both intrinsic and instrumental value for society. Democracy gives citizens greater autonomy and liberty, while encouraging participation and transparency in decision-making. Democracy offers us the greatest potential for achieving sustainable development, respect for human rights and long-term stability. Yet, democracy is not a perfect political system and requires continuous support to flourish. Our new multi-annual strategy sets out the priorities for our support to democracy around the world for the period 2020 - 2023.

Vision and Mission

Our vision:
A world of democracies that truly reflect the interests and needs of people.

Our mission:
EPD was set up with the "purpose of making a contribution to, and reinforcing the impact of European endeavours in democracy assistance across the world. In doing so, the organisation is by nature a community of practice bringing together in an effective partnership the know-how and added value of European organisations implementing democracy support programmes." (Article 3 of the EPD statutes)

Context

Democracy remains popular for citizens all around the world - that much has not changed. Yet, the myriad social-economic, technological and political changes of the last decade have increasingly called into question many parts of the status quo both internationally and in domestic politics. As a result, our democracies will need to adapt and it is increasingly likely that authoritarian states will come under greater pressure to reform in the coming years.

Democracy

A wide body of academic evidence shows that the prevalence and quality of democracy has been plateauing for most of the last decade and is now falling slightly. It is both noticeable and worrying that the highest levels of democratic erosion are occurring in those regions with comparatively high levels of democratisation, including within the European Union. Empirical evidence supports a trend of democratic erosion, yet one that is gradual and modest, for now. The depth and nature of current global political challenges – the Covid-19 pandemic, inequality and the urgency of addressing social justice, and the climate emergency - will put all of our political systems under unprecedented pressure. The fact that these challenges come after a long period of decline in the quality of democracy in many countries makes the mission of EPD even more urgent.

Evidence also shows that while support for democracy has declined somewhat in certain regions, it remains high across the world. Citizens that are disillusioned with the functioning of their democracy do not necessarily support non-democratic alternatives. In fact, a recent survey suggests that an average of 82% of people in twenty European and North American countries say that democracy is important to have in their country. At a global level, this figure stands at 79%. A different survey conducted in 38 nations across all continents finds that roughly 70% of citizens are either 'committed' or 'less-committed' democrats. These figures indicate that - despite significant dissatisfaction with the performance of many democratic systems - democracy still possesses an overwhelming normative appeal to citizens worldwide.

Still, the global context has changed and serious challenges to democracy have arisen in recent years. Several governments have been successful in undermining democratic institutions through attacking the system of checks and balances, infringing on civic and political rights, increasing control of civil society, attacking media actors, or restricting academic and cultural freedom. Democracy is also being weakened by a decline in citizens' trust in political institutions while several authoritarian states have been more assertive on the global stage, with the goal of destabilising democracies and simultaneously protecting themselves from questions of legitimacy.

The rise of anti-pluralist political actors across the world has been one of the most referenced challenges to democracy in recent years - often through the lens of 'populism'. At the same time, more and more political contexts worldwide show signs of polarisation,

whereby social differences increasingly reflect a binary logic and citizens perceive the main conflict lines as a matter of 'us' vs. 'them'. The digital transformation of society has immense positive potential for democracy - such as increased access to information, lower barriers to participate in public discourse, a lack of editorial or state control - but there have been numerous examples of how democracy was threatened by these technological changes to our communication. These include, inter alia, mis- and dis-information, 'harmful' content, political micro-targeting, echo chambers and online bullying.

Our new strategy takes into account these trends and others that have emerged in democratic governance in recent years and that have led to challenges for multiple countries around the world. The appeal of democracy remains incredibly strong but there is a clear need for greater support in meeting the expectations of citizens around the world.

Democracy support

These trends have been played out in the work of academics, practitioners, donors and policy-makers supporting democracy worldwide. Many commentators have worried that the aforementioned challenges would fundamentally undermine the ability of state and non-state actors to successfully support democracy. Reduced space for civil society, a lack of unity at EU level and greater authoritarian influence in multilateral institutions all pose significant problems for the practice of democracy support.

In October 2019, the European Union agreed to new Council Conclusions on democracy, noting that the "challenges (to democracy) are multi-fold and we need to counter them urgently and comprehensively". This renewed political commitment comes at a time when Europeans and European policy-makers are increasingly concerned by questions of security, social cohesion, climate change and sustainable development. Such concerns only serve to highlight the importance of stepping up efforts to support democratic governance in Europe and abroad as a means of promoting peace, inclusive growth and more accountable and participatory solutions to key social challenges. The Sustainable Development Goals provide an important vehicle in this regard, particularly goal 16.

As EPD was created to strengthen European efforts to support democracy, our analysis has focused primarily on the thinking and practice that has shaped European democracy support. Nevertheless, our partnerships around the world mean that we have expanded in recent years in attempting to understand the challenges faced by other democracy support actors. Our research into European efforts to support democracy found five core challenges to democracy support - a lack of consensus and evidence, a low prioritisation of democracy, the absence of a clear policy framework, inappropriate funding modalities and insufficient resources for coordination. These can be found in our 2019 report 'Louder than words? Connecting the dots of European democracy support'. The report provides a comprehensive analysis of the trends and challenges facing those supporting democracy over the past decade and has been used as a basis for developing our new strategy.

Our Approach

It is our firm belief that supporters of democracy must work together in order to build democracies that truly reflect the needs and interests of people.

EPD is unique because of our horizontal and vertical coverage of the key players within a democratic system and our ability to straddle the academic, policy and practitioner worlds. Our light central structure and ability to innovate and adapt mean that EPD is ideally placed to make a difference in a changing, dynamic and unpredictable world. Our collective strength allows us to understand the evolving challenges in political systems and democratic governance, to build evidence of what works - and what doesn't - and to tackle programmes in ways that respond to the complexity of the challenge.

EPD has direct insight and hands-on experience of the various dimensions of democratic governance that must work in parallel in a functioning democracy. This is because we bring together organisations with a solid track-record, vast external reach, strong relationships with key domestic actors and specialisations of working on:

- **different fields of democracy support**: media support, civic tech, political parties, local authorities, elections, the rule of law, women's participation, parliamentary support, multi-stakeholder dialogue, political and civil rights, civil society capacity building, ICT and civic and political education;

- **different levels of society**: political leadership, elected representatives, state officials, civil society and grassroots community representatives.

We work with state and non-state actors in Europe and abroad. EPD brings this expertise together in order to combat the traditional approach of working in silos. This wealth of knowledge means that EPD is a veritable centre of expertise for democracy support.

Through focusing on the whole of the democratic system, EPD is also able to look at the links between actors rather than just the actors themselves. These links are frequently missed even if it is clear that changes in one element of the system produce intended and unintended ripple effects on other parts of the system.

It is also through this diverse knowledge and experience that EPD is able to take a bird's eye view of the challenges affecting democracy and provide analysis and research for the benefit of all those supporting democracy around the world. From our headquarters in Brussels we centralise information from around Europe and likewise feed information from Brussels to European states through our members. We have proven that we can make a difference in the policy space based on the evidence from our research and our field-experience.

Our Community

The EPD membership has doubled in the last five years to include a more diverse and specialised range of organisations from around Europe. The current members of EPD are:

Our membership is active in over 180 countries across the world and has implemented over 2000 projects in the field of democracy support in the last 5 years for a total of over EUR 400 million in funding. This collective knowledge is leveraged through the coordination of projects under the umbrella of EPD.

The network has a combined 239 years of organisational experience and employs over 2000 staff members. These staff come together through different working groups within EPD to share expertise on issues such as communication and stakeholder engagement, research methods and political analysis, programme development, and monitoring and evaluation.
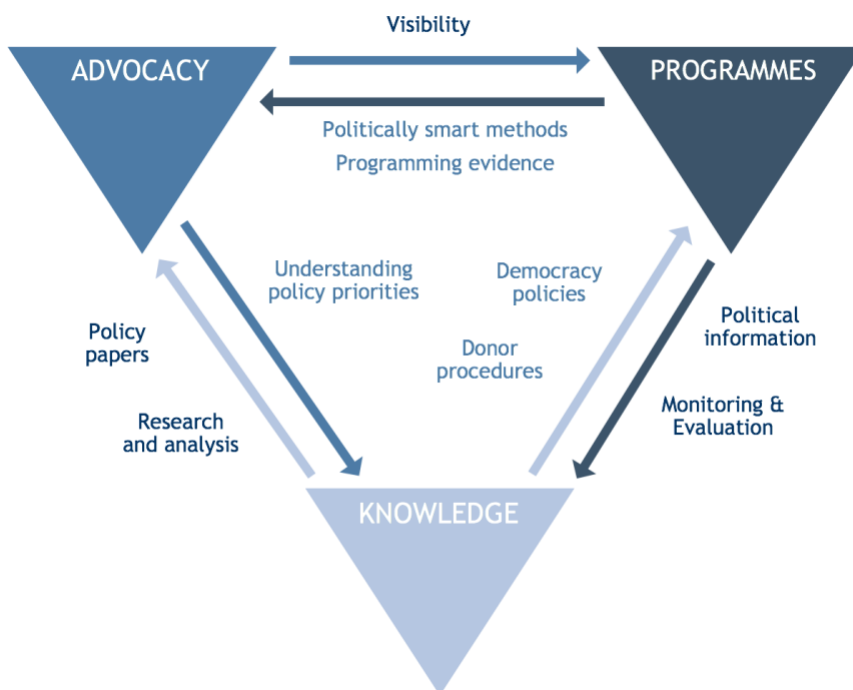
Our Toolkit

Our toolkit for working on our multi-annual priorities is based on the three pillars constituting the core of the EPD approach: knowledge, advocacy and programming.

The three pillars are interlinked and must be seen as complementary, mutually-reinforcing tools for pursuing our priorities as an organisation. Good **advocacy** depends on a first-hand

understanding of how democracy support programmes function as well as excellent knowledge of democracy support trends and donor priorities (i.e. knowledge). Similarly, successful **programming** requires the necessary methodological innovation and management skills that result from research and practical experience related to specific themes, policy priorities and country expertise. Finally, through the exchange of **knowledge** and mutual learning, democracy support organisations can improve subsequent programming and engage in evidence-based advocacy, particularly related to government policies.

Visibility

ADVOCACY → PROGRAMMES

Politically smart methods
Programming evidence

Understanding policy priorities

Democracy policies

Policy papers

Donor procedures

Political information

Research and analysis

Monitoring & Evaluation

KNOWLEDGE

A. Knowledge

EPD has invested significant time and resources into improving our research and analytical capacities in recent years, publishing numerous papers, reports and articles. Given the relative shortage of democracy policy research, there is a need to fill the gap by engaging in systematic analysis that falls between a broad analysis of democracy and evaluations of specific democracy projects. Improving this evidence base is vital for improvements in the impact of actual policies.

At the same time, assessments and evaluations of democracy support programmes have improved in recent years in an attempt to provide a better marriage between the realities of supporting democracy and the need to demonstrate short-term results. Building on these improvements will be important for the success of democracy support programmes in the future.

B. Advocacy

EPD has been working closely with the EU and EU member states on democracy support since our creation. Our advocacy activities will reflect our analyses of the key challenges to democracy support at the European level.

This advocacy will focus on the political sphere, diplomatic communication and the manner in which states support democracy through resource allocations. Because of our diverse membership around Europe and activities across the globe, EPD is well placed to share intelligence on the political and operational level between our members for the purposes of promoting effective democracy support policy and practice within Europe and outside.

C. Programmes

EPD supports democracy in Europe and abroad through programmes engaging different players within the political system. This support is made up of a wide range of activities, including training, peer-to-peer support, dialogue and direct financial support. We will build on lessons-learned from the substantial increase in joint programmes between our members in the last five years and coordinate between members active in shared spaces.

Given the operational challenges to democracy support stemming from the manner in which financing tends to be dispersed by funders, there is also a clear need to further demonstrate the benefits of "adaptive programming". Highlighting the advantages of a more updated understanding of how political change happens and how it can be supported will be important for our membership in the coming years.

Photo: Vice President of the European Commission for Values & Transparency Vera Jourova speaking at an event convened by EPD. Photo taken by EPD staff.
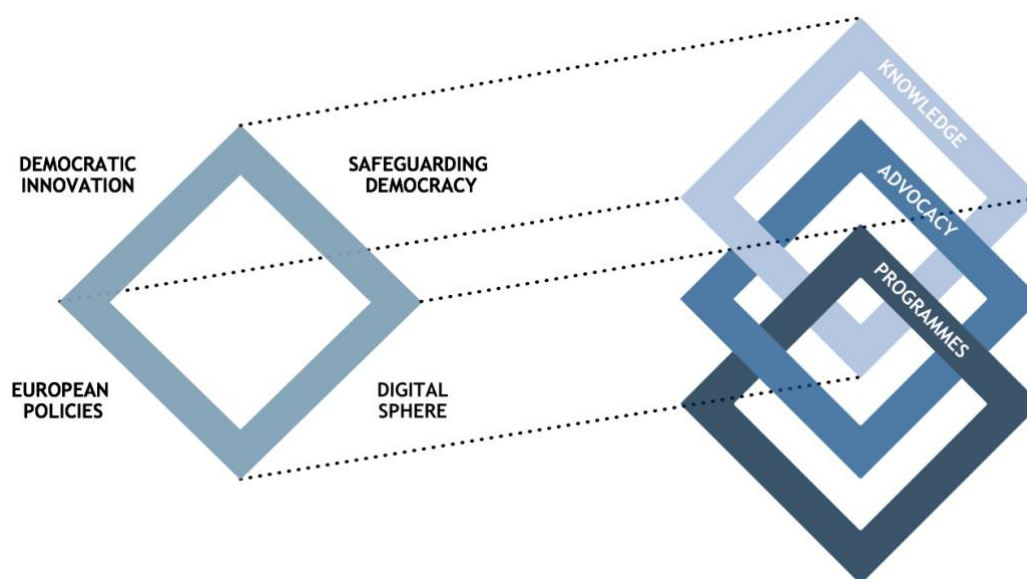
Our priorities

We believe that we must be forthright in our support for democratic principles and institutions in order to meet the contemporary challenges to democracy around the world. We also believe in the need to look at the linkages between different actors and themes in order to respond to the behaviour that is driving these challenges.

The overarching objective of EPD is **to contribute to setting a comprehensive and effective agenda for democracy support around the world.**

We have four priorities in order to achieve this, namely: supporting democratic innovation and inclusion, safeguarding democracy, contributing to stronger European policies for democracy and promoting democratic principles in the digital sphere. Each EPD annual plan will set specific targets linked to these four priority areas that are categorised through the three pillars of EPD (see figure below). The three pillars are interlinked and provide a framework for structuring the work on EPD in the four priority areas (e.g. EPD will support democratic innovation through research, advocacy work and projects in the field etc.).

1 | Democratic innovation and inclusion

To support the innovation of institutions and of participatory mechanisms and the inclusion of different groups in political life

The challenges above show that political systems will need to evolve and innovate in the coming years. This innovation will take place in all manner of regimes times, from well-functioning democracies to closed autocracies.

We want to be at the forefront of this evolution through supporting institutional innovation, new participatory mechanisms and the greater inclusion of underrepresented groups

within different political systems. We will have a particular focus on the role of women and the importance of gender equality as a key element of inclusion.

We will use our strong track record on advocacy to push for a greater dispersion of political power and more inclusive governance in specific countries around the world, including on the European continent.

2 | Safeguarding democracy

To defend democratic space where it is under threat from domestic or foreign attacks

Defending democracy from domestic and foreign actors seeking to undermine democratic governance will be key to our strategy in the coming years. The rollback of democratic principles as well as the corrosion of certain institutions is a major threat to peace and prosperity worldwide.

This will build on our work supporting a comprehensive response to closing democratic space - including by promoting civic space, an even political playing field, democratic accountability and the rule of law.

Given our position in Brussels and our European membership, fighting gradual autocratisation within the European Union will be a key goal in this priority area.

3 | European policies for democracy

To contribute to stronger European policies in support of democracy in Europe and worldwide

Overt geopolitical competition is back and the EU will need to carve out a clear role for itself globally in the coming years. We believe that this needs to be based on the founding values of the Union, particularly a strong and consistent position of support for democracy in Europe and abroad. We intend to use our network, partnerships and links to peers in order to contribute to a more pro-democracy policy framework at the European level.

Given the rapid changes to politics worldwide, those who believe in democratic governance need to explore the future of democracy support and think about what comes next - and European actors are no different. We will continue our successful research on democracy support policies that takes advantage of our position as a community that straddles the political and operational spheres of democracy.

4 | Democratic principles in the digital sphere

To promote the use of democratic principles in the digital sphere, including in the rules that govern interaction online

Technological changes to our means of communication are profoundly changing our political and cultural systems and will continue to do so in the next decade. We view the links between democracy and the digital sphere as an area where EPD has a clear added value through our diverse membership.

We will focus our work on promoting transparency and accountability online. The next decade will be a vital moment for setting the rules that will shape the online public sphere and the ability of citizens to have sufficient oversight and control of this sphere.

Governance

The organisation will retain the same governance structure based on a General Assembly of members, a Board of Directors and a Secretariat in charge of day-to-day management.

The General Assembly is composed of all the members of the organisation and is the highest decision-making body of the organisation. The General Assembly delegates the management of the organisation to a Board composed of at least 3 legal persons elected amongst the members of the organisation. The maximum number of Board members is 12 and each member is elected for a mandate of 2 years. The board elects within itself a President, a Vice-President and a Treasurer. The Board in turn delegates the daily management of the organisation to the Executive Director of the organisation who is assisted by the EPD Secretariat.

The Secretariat is the engine and coordinating hub of EPD and will continue to be based in Brussels. In the same spirit, EPD members based either in Brussels or in other countries, most notably in European capitals, act as the EPD liaison office in that particular country and extend the same courtesy to EPD members to facilitate exchange of information and coordinate between the centre of the European Union and EU capitals.

Organisation

The institutional set-up of the organisation has evolved significantly in the previous five years and this spirit of organic development will continue.

EPD Secretariat
The EPD Secretariat has a unique window into the different sectors of democracy support as well as the policies of different EU member states and the EU itself. As a result, it is well-placed to straddle the policy and practitioner worlds that are so-often dealt with separately. The EPD Secretariat is based in Brussels and EPD has opened and maintains offices in different countries where this has been necessary for specific programmes.

Working Groups
The four working groups of EPD - 1) communications, 2) programming, 3) monitoring & evaluation and, 4) democracy in Europe - bring staff from the EPD Community together to learn from each other and share information. These working groups are a key mechanism for exchange between the experts that make up our Community. The working groups also host joint training sessions for members, either from staff within the Community or external professionals. New working groups may be formed depending on demand from members.

Membership
The key requirements for new memberships will be a balanced assessment of the added value of eligible organisations. To be eligible for membership an organisation must a) have a mission related to democracy support b) be European, and c) be non-profit.

Partnerships
EPD values the strong partnerships it has developed with organisations in the countries in which the EPD Community is active and we will continue to work closely with these organisations. EPD may seek new partnerships with both European and non-European organisations for strategic reasons and we will continuously assess our existing partnerships. In Brussels, EPD will continue to work with the organisations of the Human Rights and Democracy Network and through the European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development (CONCORD).

Communications
The EPD website is the primary means of information sharing and the external identity of the network, while recognising the primacy of social media for mobilisation and visibility. We will continue to expand our media presence and online outreach and deepen the engagement with our audience, including through social media, newsletters, publications, events, and direct targeted communication to experts and policy-makers. This communication will serve to advance the network's goals and increase the visibility of EPD members in Europe.

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