

EUROPEAN
**PARTNERSHIP FOR
DEMOCRACY**



MULTI-ANNUAL STRATEGY
2016 - 2019



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1. Introduction

The European Partnership for Democracy (EPD) was established in 2008 with the goal of contributing to, and reinforcing, European endeavours in the field of democracy assistance. EPD is a Belgian non-profit association (ASBL) based in Brussels that brings together 13 members from 11 member states across Europe, specialising in different sectors of democracy assistance. Its membership is active in over 100 countries across the world and has implemented over 200 projects in the field of democracy support (mainly funded by EUMS and the EU institutions) in the last 3 years, for a total of over EUR 100 million in funding.

EPD is the first Community of Practice at the EU level - where practitioners from different dimensions of democracy support can produce and share knowledge and experience in order to increase the impact of their work. EPD currently comprises members with a long track record and specialisations in working:

- a) on *different fields of democracy support*: political parties, local authorities, elections, multi-stakeholder dialogue, political and civil rights, civil society capacity building, media monitoring and civic and political education;
- b) at *different levels of society*: political leadership, elected representatives, state officials, civil society and grassroots community representatives.

By covering different fields and levels of support, EPD has direct insight and hands-on experience of the various dimensions of democratic governance that must work in parallel in a functioning democracy. The current members of EPD (June 2016) are active in the following domains.

Association of European Parliamentarians with Africa	Parliaments
Club de Madrid	High-level leadership
Demo Finland	Political parties
European Association for Local Democracy	Local democracy
Eastern European Studies Centre	Think-tank
elbarlament	Parliaments
European Centre for Electoral Support	Elections
Netherlands Helsinki Committee	Human Rights and Rule of Law
Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy	Political parties
OneWorld	Communication and Information
Osservatorio di Pavia	Media Monitoring
People in Need	Democracy and Human Rights
The Universidade Católica Portuguesa	Research

EPD carries out a wide range of activities both in Brussels and abroad, such as lobby and advocacy, managing projects and facilitating the work of the Community of Practice.

Over the past three years EPD has evolved as an organisation, improving its reputation in Brussels, strengthening its programmatic influence and expanding its membership. Nevertheless, the political context is changing rapidly and funding for democracy support is under threat due to reductions in international development assistance from a number of important donors. Considering the on-going refugee crisis and intra-state conflicts in the EU neighbourhood, funding for democracy support has never been more important. The role that EPD can play in this support is crucial for the work of the EU and its member states in the analysis of the complexities of the challenges ahead, for sharing knowledge and for implementing activities in the field. This multi-annual strategy sets out the priorities for the organisation in the period 2016-2019.

2. Vision and 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 Association 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 in third countries.”* (Article 3 of EPD statutes)

This aim is based on the belief that 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 also represents the political system with the greatest potential for achieving sustainable development, respect for human rights and long-term stability. Nevertheless, democracy is not a perfect system and can be dominated by powerful interest groups, short-termism and the translation of healthy competition into conflict and potential violence. This is why working to improve the legitimacy and effectiveness of political governance - in democracies, hybrid regimes and authoritarian states - is more important than ever. The vision of EPD is of a world of democracies that truly represent the interests of citizens.

EPD holds unique potential to tap into different levels of societal groups in third countries given the vast range of organisational profiles of EPD members. This support can be in favour of stakeholders such as CSOs, faith-based organisations, media, women’s groups, youth wings, private sector, etc. Support is also in favour of institutional stakeholders on the democratic ladder such as political parties, parliaments, election management bodies and other electoral stakeholders (security and justice sector, regional organisation and power-holders). EPD is a platform that can be geared to build bridges amongst stakeholders in the democratic process on all these levels in order to facilitate the interaction between them.

3. Context

Since EPD was first established in 2008, there have been significant changes in global and European affairs that have had important implications on the work of EPD and its members. The organisation itself has also evolved in a number of important ways. As always, reality changes as events unfold and the effects on the sector are manifold.

Democracy

Several international commentators have argued that democracy is in decline or under threat. High expectations of the power of democracy promotion at the turn of the century did not lead to a radical new wave of democracies. The ‘Arab Spring’ has not met the high aspirations of citizens in the region since it began in 2011. Nevertheless, other commentators have highlighted the fact that there has yet been no ‘reverse wave’ following the major increases in democratic governance following the end of the Cold War. There has also been an unprecedented decrease, never seen before in human history, in the number of autocracies in the last 25 years. In analysing the literature, there are two main reasons that democracy is currently seen as under threat:

- *Weakness in developed democracies*
The lack of economic growth in advanced democracies has made them seem less stable and prosperous in recent years. Democracy is criticised with increased vigour for failing to represent citizens - for example, due to the power of special interests. Meanwhile, a growth in inequality over the past 30 years is now increasingly seen as a major problem by all sectors of the political spectrum.
- *Assertiveness of autocracies*
Several autocratic governments have become more influential on the international scene, both in terms of economic power as well as in political and diplomatic assertiveness. While some have pushed their brand of governance forcefully in its near abroad, others have doubled down on support to autocrats in the Middle East or use economic clout to great effect all around the world, particularly with regards the control of information. Authoritarian regimes are not the only states to support dictatorial government abroad, but the effect on geopolitics is noticeable and therefore has an ensuing impact on international norms.

Despite these trends, democracy still has an overwhelming normative appeal that is consistently shown in national surveys. Indeed, autocracies still employ the discourse of democracy in generating appeals to rights or organising (fraudulent) elections. Democracies still remain overwhelmingly richer on average than authoritarian regimes and significantly less prone to conflict. EPD remains optimistic over the future of democracy in all its guises (representative, participatory, liberal etc.) while noting that there is no perfect system for any polity. There are significant challenges for democracy that vary to different degrees depending on context but the flexibility inherent in the system allows it to seek renewal from crisis and

development from stability. There is significant work to be done both on the emergence and the quality of democratic governance in the coming years.

Democracy support

Neither the names of the main players in the field of democracy support nor the major donors active in the field have altered since the last strategic EPD review in 2013. The field is relatively stable from an institutional point of view. Nevertheless, several distinct trends can be identified that EPD is well placed to react to and influence within the democracy support community given its federative nature and links to the EU:

Financial and political priorities of donors

Economic stagnation in traditional donor states has led to a reduction in public support for funding for overseas development assistance (ODA) and in many EU member states a reduction in ODA itself. Meanwhile, the importance of democracy support in foreign policy has changed in recent years, particularly in Europe. The review of the European Neighbourhood Policy conducted by the European Commission in 2015 is an example of this, as it outlined a move from prioritising ‘deep democracy’ to a focus on stability and security in the region.

Political approach to development

Donors have traditionally been reluctant to become involved in national politics, leading to the predominantly technical focus of international development assistance. Democracy support is still too sensitive for some donors, who prefer to retain a focus on governance. All the same, several major donors have become more sensitised to the prominence of local politics when designing and implementing development assistance projects, particularly given the oft-cited goal of local ownership. This has led to a greater use of political analysis to design programming and more politically smart methods for implementing programmes.

The rise of civil society support

The importance of support for civil society (broadly defined) has grown over the past 10 years and it is now seen by donors as a legitimate counterweight to state or private power. This has been reflected in policy as well as in financial support. Indeed, the new stringent regulations on foreign funding for NGOs by many governments around the world are a cause and effect of this. The implications for democracy support are important to reflect upon, particularly as civil society can be seen as a) a watchdog of government, b) a service provider itself or c) a partner of government. On one hand, creating a voice that can check the power of a government and feed into policy making is crucial. On the other, civil society can become more closely linked to donors than citizens and should not be seen as a replacement for government or political parties.

Electoral cycle support

Electoral support consists of electoral assistance and election observation and in the last 10 years several large international donors, including the EU, have increased funding in the sector. In particular, support has

moved from emphasising elections as an event to addressing elections as a process with several different stages. The EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy commits the EU to “*Encourage participatory and inclusive dialogue between Election Management Bodies and key stakeholders throughout the overall democratic cycle, with a view to increase participation of political parties and civil society organisations*”¹. There is now a clear recognition of the need to focus on the full electoral cycle as well as involving more stakeholders (parties, parliaments, CSOs, leadership) in electoral work.

Sustainable developments goals (SDGs)

The agreement on a new Agenda for Sustainable Development includes seventeen new overarching global goals to be attained by 2030. Goal 16, on Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions is the most relevant for work on democracy as it seeks to “develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels” and “ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels”. The targets within goal 16 will likely form a vital part of democracy support in the coming years (even if sometimes indirectly).

EPD is well placed to react and influence these trends within the democracy support community given its federative nature and its links to the EU. It is within this context that the objectives of the organisation over the coming three-year period have been formulated.

4. Objectives

The overall objective of the organisation for the next three years (June 2016 – June 2019) is to ensure that EPD is seen as the key federator of democracy assistance at the EU level and a key source of knowledge for both donors, beneficiaries and practitioners.

In light of this, EPD will retain the three pillars for which it is recognised: knowledge, advocacy and programmes.

Objective 1 – Knowledge

To produce and share knowledge related to democracy support activities, methodologies and priorities between EPD members, donors, practitioners, beneficiaries and citizens in order to improve programming and policies in the non-profit sector.

The activities under this objective involve a wide range of stakeholders and therefore require strong communication and coordination. The EPD Secretariat will need to build on recent improvements in terms of knowledge sharing in order for the organisation to be seen as a ‘go-to’ source for knowledge about the sector

¹ Art 2.b. The EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy (2015-2019) is available at the following address <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-10897-2015-INIT/en/pdf>

including face-to-face and distance training activities. Given the width and breadth of the experience and expertise within the EPD membership, the EPD secretariat is well placed to be a hub for information for the whole range of stakeholders interested in democracy (donors, think-tanks, academic, citizens). Through the coordination of the EPD Secretariat, the expertise of the network can be systematically brought to the fore for the benefit of donors, practitioners and citizens.

Objective 2 – Advocacy

To promote the interests of the democracy support community through the use of evidenced-based demands that take into account policy and programming cycles (primarily of the European Union).

The main target for EPD advocacy activities continues to be the European Union. EPD is based in Brussels and has been working closely with the EU on democracy support since its creation. The organisation will continue to advocate for the importance of democracy support in the field of development assistance, which is, of course, increasingly vital given the trends mentioned above. Building on the successful use of evidence-based advocacy in recent years, the Secretariat will closely monitor methodological developments in the sector and members' programmes while simultaneously following and influencing EU policy-making processes. EPD recognises the importance of flexibility and adaptability within projects/programmes and will therefore support a more politically aware approach to development work that takes into account local political realities.

Objective 3 – Programmes

To coordinate projects and programmes in cooperation with EPD members and stimulate cooperation between EPD members, through information sharing and the promotion of comprehensive and innovative programming.

The EPD Secretariat has gained significant experience in terms of programming in recent years, including working on several joint programmes with EPD members. The EPD community will continue to emphasise the added value of the [INSPIRED methodology](#) for inclusive and participatory dialogue particularly with relation to the impact it can have on democratic culture. EPD members have also increased cooperation on projects and the European Response to Electoral Cycle Support underlines the desire of members to find areas of cooperation where each bring a specialisation to the table.

The added value of EPD for members (and, where appropriate, non-member organisations) is that EPD brings a whole network of expertise to projects, possibilities for stronger consortia and an in-depth understanding of EU financing requirements. For donors, EPD has added value due to the coverage and expertise of the network in a wide variety of different democracy support sectors. As a general rule, the EPD Secretariat (presenting all of the members) will apply for projects in instances where it is in the interests of the organisation as a whole.

5. Approach

The three EPD pillars are interlinked and must be seen as complementary. Good advocacy depends on an excellent understanding of how democracy support programmes function as well as knowledge of democracy support trends and donor priorities. Similarly, successful programming requires the necessary management skills that result from research and practical experience related to specific themes, donor priorities and country expertise. Finally, through the coordination of knowledge, democracy support organisations can improve subsequent programming and engage in evidence-based advocacy, particularly related to EU policies. These links are made explicit in Figure 1 below.

The difference between EPD and other networks is the practical experience it brings to its advocacy work stemming from over 200 projects implemented around the world. This has served the organisation extremely well in past years and will be further solidified. Similarly, the advantage from a programming perspective is that the organisation is greater than the sum of its parts – it brings together expertise on different sectors of democracy in order to combat the traditional approach of working in silos. The various organisations that make up EPD have specialised thematic and geographical knowledge that means that when harnessed the network is a veritable centre of expertise for the sector.

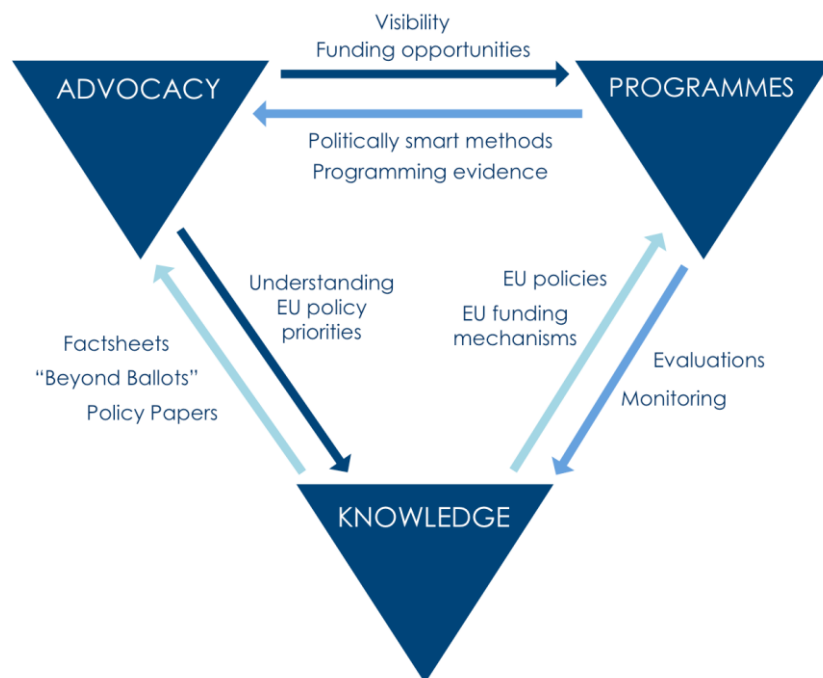


Figure 1: The EPD approach

6. Governance

In terms of organisational governance, the EPD statutes outline the necessity of a General Assembly, a Board, and a Secretariat.

The General Assembly is composed of all the members of the organisation and is the final decision-making body. EPD is managed by a Board composed of at least 3 legal persons (and a maximum of 7 legal persons) elected amongst the members of the organisation. The maximum number of Board members is 7 and their mandate is for 2 years. The board elects within itself a President, Vice-President and a Treasurer. The Board delegates the daily management of the Association to Executive Director 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 important 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 its member states around Europe.

7. Organisation

The EPD Secretariat conducted strategic reflections in 2014 and 2015 in order to review the direction of the organisation. These reflections have provided the input for this document and based on the three objectives outlined above, all of the members of EPD view financial sustainability as a key target for the organisation going forward. From an institutional perspective the organisation commits itself to working on the following issues in the upcoming period:

Membership

The organisation will need to ensure a strong membership base in coming years. Membership increased significantly in 2015-2016 and the organisation will continue to be open to membership from external organisations in the coming years. The key requirements for new memberships will be a balanced assessment of the added value of an organisation in terms of their thematic and geographic expertise (particularly in relation to the competencies of existing members) as well as their professional and financial capacity.

EPD Secretariat

The Secretariat is the engine of EPD and will continue to be based in Brussels. The offices of EPD Tunisia, based in Tunis, will continue to be at the services of EPD members in that country.

Partnerships

EPD values the strong partnerships it has developed with organisations in the countries in which the Secretariat and EPD members have worked and will continue to work closely with these organisations. EPD

may seek new partnerships with both European and non-European organisation for strategic reasons. In Brussels, EPD will continue to work with the organisations of the Human Rights and Democracy Network regarding advocacy vis-à-vis the EU.

Communications

The visual identity of EPD, developed in 2012, forms the basis of communication with external stakeholders. 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. The organisation will continue to build its presence on twitter over other social media and to use its database of experts and EU staff for targeted communications. This communication will be a blend of information about current affairs and news from EPD members.