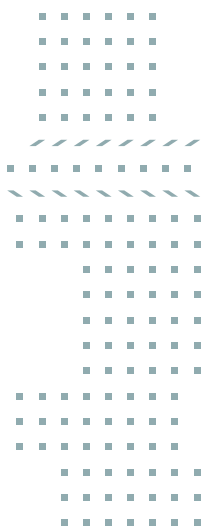




GLOBAL DEMOCRACY SUPPORT



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INTRODUCTION

Democracy is a fundamental value of the European Union, and one that the Union is legally bound “to advance in the wider world”.

The European Parliament actively supports the European Union’s effort to promote democracy and its other basic values – including the respect for human dignity, freedom, equality, the rule of law and human rights.

This is true within the EU, where the European Parliament works to safeguard all residents’ basic rights.

It is also true beyond the EU’s borders, where the European Parliament has become a devoted and active advocate for democracy.

A DEDICATED GROUP

Parliament’s activities in this area are coordinated by the Democracy Support and Election Coordination Group (DEG), headed by the chairs of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Committee on Development.

This group also includes Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) appointed by the political groups, including the chair of the Conference of Delegation Chairs, the chair of the Subcommittee on Human Rights and Parliament’s vice-presidents responsible for human rights and for democracy.

The DEG provides political guidance and supervision on:

- reinforcing parliamentary democracy in non-EU countries,
- supporting the parliaments of the Western Balkans and Turkey,
- monitoring and following up elections,
- initiatives involving mediation, facilitation and dialogue,
- efforts focused on human rights,
- activities connected to the Sakharov Prize and its network.





A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

In 2014, the newly elected DEG adopted a “Comprehensive Democracy Support Approach” (CDSA) to guide its work.

The aim was to coordinate the European Parliament’s democracy support activities so that they revolve in a coherent manner around non-EU countries’ electoral cycles.

The CDSA ensures that a smaller number of priority countries and regions are targeted, but over a longer period.

In these countries and regions, the European Parliament provides comprehensive democracy support to a range of parliamentary actors, including elected representatives, civil servants, political parties and civil society organisations. Several instruments are applied before and after Election Day.

One MEP is appointed to serve as “lead member” for each priority country and region. This increases the political ownership of these activities, reinforcing political backing and making the work more visible.



PARLIAMENTS

The European Parliament assists national parliaments and regional assemblies – selected by the DEG according to the CDSA – beyond the EU's borders in order to reinforce the parliaments' institutional capacity.

The European Parliament establishes an ongoing dialogue with these legislatures, exchanging best practices and supporting their participation as fully-fledged members of the democratic community.

The aim is to create joint ownership of customised support programmes for members of parliament (MPs) and civil servants.

Programmes usually focus on the following activities, which may be organised in the European Parliament, in the priority country/region or in EU Member States:

- conferences, seminars and workshops on specific topics that allow MEPs to highlight best practices for local MPs;
- study visits, which enable local MPs and staff to become acquainted with the work of the European Parliament and to meet key MEPs;
- fellowship programmes, intended for the staff of partner parliaments and aiming to build their institutions' capacity.

The support programmes generally strengthen the principal functions of parliaments:

- representing voters,
- making laws,
- scrutinising government.

Additional programmes are dedicated to more specific topics, such as fighting misinformation and “fake news”.

PRIORITY COUNTRIES

At the beginning of every European Parliament five-year term, the DEG names a limited number of “priority countries” that constitute the focus of the work programme.

The choice of priority countries is reviewed on a yearly basis.

Halfway through the legislature, a report examines progress and adjusts the programme if necessary, taking recent developments and the Parliament’s political priorities into account.

SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE AS A PRIORITY REGION

While some geographical priorities shift from year to year, the European Parliament remains focused on the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia) and Turkey year in and year out.

Parliament’s efforts strengthen the capacities of parliaments in this region, facilitate the parliaments’ scrutiny of EU legislation in these countries, and encourage parliamentary dialogue.

All these efforts align with the European Parliament’s own political objectives.





ELECTIONS

The European Parliament is actively engaged in election observation around the world.

Because elections are part of a larger cycle, Parliament also supports the entire electoral cycle, beginning with the pre-election period and continuing after the vote.

ELECTION OBSERVATION

The DEG has an official consultative role for the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP) when the HR/VP selects priority countries for long-term EU election observation missions and appoints chief observers for those missions.

Every EU election observation mission is headed by an MEP-Chief Observer. These missions are sent only when invited by the country's authorities.

The European Parliament sends some 10-12 short-term election observation delegations to countries outside the EU every year. These missions always reinforce an ongoing, longer-term mission in the country.

The long-term missions that MEPs join are either:

- European Union election observation missions (EU EOMs) in Africa, the Americas or Asia,
or
- international election observation missions (IEOMs) led by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) in countries that are members of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). In this case, the European Parliament's delegation joins forces with delegations from parliamentary assemblies, such as those of the OSCE, the Council of Europe or NATO.

The European Parliament's participation adds political clout to the long-term missions. MEPs' experience as elected representatives also enriches the evaluation of local electoral processes.

PARLIAMENTARY ELECTORAL DIALOGUES

As well as election observation, the European Parliament carries out "parliamentary electoral dialogues". These usually take the form of round tables gathering MEPs and the key parliamentarians and political leaders of a non-EU country.

Other actors – such as members of the local electoral commission, security forces, religious leaders or young political leaders – are also invited to take part when they can contribute to the discussion.

Before elections, these dialogues focus on issues surrounding preparations for the next election, and particularly on any concerns that a tense pre-electoral climate might lead to violence. Themes for dialogues include hate speech, codes of conduct for political parties and the importance of accepting election results.

After the elections, dialogues focus on implementing the recommendations of the election observation mission. As many recommendations require legislative changes, local parliaments play an important role in the follow-up phase.



MEDIATION AND DIALOGUE

Since 2009, MEPs have been asked to provide mediation, dialogue and good offices to support the EU's overall effort.

In response to an increasing number of requests, the DEG introduced mediation and dialogue as new areas of activity in 2014.

The DEG reviews all options for the European Parliament's mediation, facilitation and dialogue initiatives, including activities that support the broader electoral cycle and those that underpin longer-term efforts to strengthen democracies.

MEPS AS MEDIATORS

MEPs play a number of roles in this effort, including through:

- parliamentary diplomacy: acting as European Parliament envoys for mediation and conflict prevention,
- participating in joint EU task forces,
- strengthening the role of parliaments in regional and multilateral peace processes,
- developing parliamentary and political parties' capacities to prevent conflicts,
- facilitating inclusive parliamentary round tables,
- organising high-level international events on mediation,
- monitoring peace processes.

JEAN MONNET DIALOGUES

A new tool, the Jean-Monnet Dialogue for peace and democracy, has been developed for situations of high tension in specific countries.

Held at the historic Jean Monnet house in France, these events bring political leaders together to promote inter-party communication and consensus building.

The location and format reinforces democratic practices out of the spotlight of the media and far from Brussels and national capitals.

The methodology of these dialogues is based on Jean Monnet's own working methods: pragmatic, concrete and focused on dialogue to achieve results by consensus.

FOCUSING ON YOUTH: THE YOUNG POLITICAL LEADERS' PROGRAMME

The European Parliament reaches out to politically engaged youth in non-EU countries as a means of investing in the parliaments of the future.

In 2015, the DEG established a programme targeting these young leaders – young MPs, political party representatives and politically active civil society actors.

These leaders come from:

- the European Neighbourhood countries (the Maghreb, Middle East and Eastern Partnership countries),
- the DEG's priority countries,
- regions that have suffered from long-standing conflicts.

The programme encourages peaceful dialogue between young leaders, in order to build trust and spur reconciliation. The programme also reinforces the EU's image in the world as a supporter of peace and democracy.



HUMAN RIGHTS

The EU treaties demand that the European Parliament – like the EU as a whole – defend universal human rights in its foreign policies and activities.

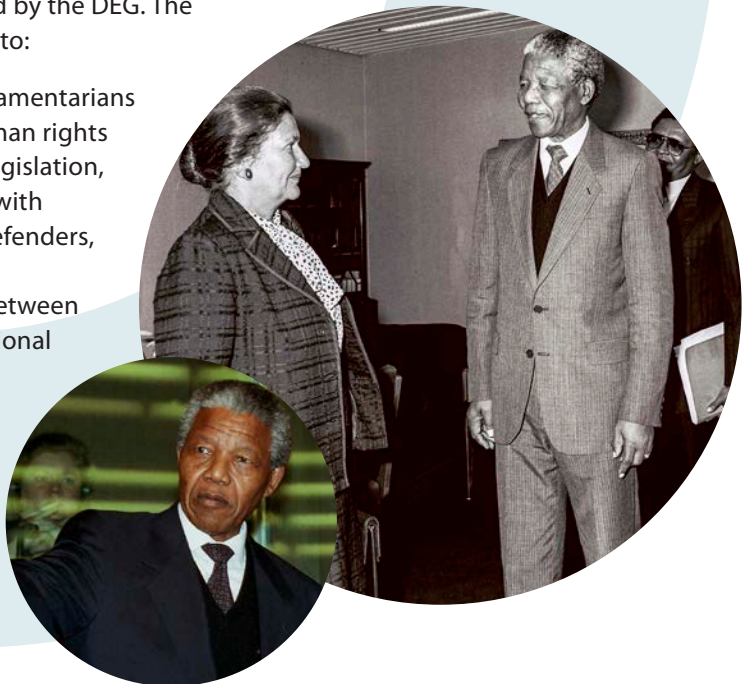
This work is closely aligned with Parliament’s support of democracy in non-EU countries, another requirement of the treaties.

MEPs regularly speak out – individually and in unison – about human rights issues. Parliament has responded to violations in Myanmar/Burma, some 8 000 kilometres away, as it has to offenses in Belarus, which borders on the Union.

Over the years, Parliament’s regular “urgency” resolutions on human rights issues, the work of its committees and the activities supervised by the DEG have contributed to the legislature’s reputation as a dedicated champion of human rights.

These efforts raise awareness among elected representatives of non-EU countries, and in particular from the priority countries identified by the DEG. The principal goals are to:

- encourage parliamentarians to integrate human rights protections in legislation,
- build networks with human rights defenders, and
- spur dialogue between civil society, national parliaments and local authorities.



THE SAKHAROV PRIZE, ITS NETWORK AND FELLOWSHIP



Since 1988, the European Parliament has awarded the annual Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought, recognising outstanding work by individuals or organisations for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The laureate is chosen by the Conference of Presidents from a shortlist decided by the Members of the Committees on Foreign Affairs and Development, based on nominations by political groups and individual MEPs.

In 2008, the European Parliament set up the Sakharov Prize Network as a forum for sustained contacts among all the past laureates of the prize, and as a means of monitoring the situation of laureates who are threatened or at risk. All previous winners are part of the network, which is co-chaired by the President of the European Parliament and the most recent laureate.

The Sakharov Fellowship provides an annual training programme for 14 human rights defenders in Brussels and at the European Inter-University Centre for Human Rights and Democratisation (EIUC) in Venice. Since it was launched, the fellowship has built up a large pool of activists contributing to parliamentary human rights work. Candidates for the programme are identified in close cooperation with EU delegations worldwide.



CIVIL SOCIETY

With the understanding that a vibrant civil society strengthens democracy, the European Parliament builds bridges between citizens and priority parliaments and regions.

Parliament tries to involve civil society organisations as partners when carrying out democracy support activities.

Various initiatives extend the focus on parliaments:

- Parliament promotes dialogue and partnership between non-EU parliaments and civil society organisations.
- Parliament also supports civil society by encouraging investigative journalism and protecting freedom of information. Countering “fake news” and helping ordinary people identify fabricated stories is becoming a significant part of democracy support work.
- Because women are motors of democratic change, the European Parliament works to empower women in non-EU countries.





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