

BULLETIN

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EU Democratisation Policy— Prospects for Establishing the European Endowment for Democracy

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The European Union lacks a holistic and internally coherent democratization policy. Since 2011, there has been an ongoing discussion about a proposal for a new European Endowment for Democracy (EED). In developing the concept of the EED, it is essential to avoid an overlap with existing EU instruments and initiatives. It is in Poland's best interest to include the promotion of democracy as one of the EU's policies towards neighbouring countries. Poland holds the rotating EU presidency and stands a unique chance to establish itself as a major player in the creation of a new structure for EU democratisation policies. It is clear the EU needs a lighter, less bureaucratic and more flexible instrument to respond more quickly to emerging crises.

There is no doubt that promoting democracy is part of the EU's genetic code; and, in fact, it is the EU's *raison d'être*. The reason why the European Union is missing a comprehensive policy for the promotion of democracy is because of both the idea of the European integration process (member countries are responsible for some sorts of public policies) and the EU's fragmented policies towards non-democratic countries and countries in transition. It already has been some time since the EU tried to coordinate its democratisation instruments and initiatives. In November 2009, the Council adopted Conclusions that reaffirmed that democracy consists of some inherent elements, such as a respect for the rule of law, human dignity and the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The Conclusions and the attached EU Agenda for Action did not call for the creation of new instruments but for using the existing ones in a more coherent and effective way. However, the developments in North Africa and the Middle East, exceptional in their range and nature, suggested that much more remains to be done if the EU does not want to be just a passive observer of current developments. In February 2011 at the EU General Affairs Council, Foreign Minister of Poland Radosław Sikorski called for the creation of the European Endowment for Democracy.

Is There Room in EU Democratization Policies for a New Tool? The test of the success of the EED and support for it would be to make a clear case for its added value. The scope of action, target groups and the geographical span of the EED should be different from other democratization tools. The EU has launched other democratisation instruments, such as the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), the Civil Society Facility (CSF) and the Non-State Actors and Local Authorities program (NSA-LA) to support "own" initiatives from non-state actors and local authorities. While the EU has a valuable instrument at hand in the EIDHR, which is most comparable to the proposed EED, nevertheless it so far has lacked a substantial role in countries where the aid is delivered. The EU grants provided under EIDHR are hard to obtain because of the high expectations put on applicants, i.e., they must make a substantial contribution. EIDHR displays a certain degree of rigidity in terms of its programming cycle and budgeting, which is set by the nature of the EU and its internal procedures. To give a perspective on how other tools work, the U.S. National Endowment for Democracy gives more than 1,000 grants per year with an average grant of about €37,000. With a budget of €87 million per year, it spends €37 million on grants. EIDHR has an average budget of €157 million per year. Since 2007, it has issued 100 calls for proposals (distributed by the European Commission and its Delegations) and given grants to 400 projects,

which results in an average of 125 new projects per year—a much smaller number than the 1,000 projects sponsored by the NED. In addition, EIDHR is spending much more money on projects related to the protection of human rights than on the promotion of democracy. This year's budget assigns €61,4 million for democracy projects and €106,52 million for human-rights projects. The political scope for the promotion of democracy in the EU is relegated to the outer edge. Nevertheless, it is too early to estimate the impact of the EIDHR since the preliminary evaluation indicated that one of EIDHR's major problems is its global outreach.

European Endowment for Democracy. The idea to create the European Endowment for Democracy comes from both a critical analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the EIDHR and an operation model of the NED. In a recent Communication, High Representative Catherine Ashton and a majority of member countries offered support for the idea of establishing the European Endowment for Democracy. In general, there is common consent amongst member countries that the EU needs a tool with a lighter structure to be able to support democracy. New, flexible, inclusive and non-bureaucratic funding tools would significantly enhance the EU's capacity to promote democracy worldwide. The EED would be set up as an international convention that will be open to the participation of EU member states (as well as EFTA members) and states that have applied for membership in the EU (and their application has been accepted). The Polish government and the European External Action Service plan to launch the European Endowment for Democracy at the end of the Polish presidency of the EU. At this time, it also will be known if the EED has received sufficient funds from both the EU and the contracting parties to start operating in the near future. It is said that the estimated initial capital should be not lower than €100 million.

Recommendations for Poland. Taking into account the favourable situation on the international scene, Poland should play an active role in the creation of this recently proposed instrument. The New Transatlantic Trends Survey released last month by the American think-tank the German Marshall Fund indicates that a solid majority of EU respondents (64%) said it should be the role of the European Union to support democracy. The same respondents were also supportive of providing assistance to political parties, civil-society groups, election monitoring, and economic aid for development. The overwhelming majority of citizens of established democracies such as the Swedes (83%), French (76%) and Italians (75%) favoured promoting democracy even if it leads to a period of instability in an aid-recipient country.

Poland should clearly demonstrate that it wants the EED to do what the EU cannot do with the current instruments, and that it be a tool that is based on the cornerstones of the Union's external policies, such as democracy, the rule of law and human rights. It should stress the need to support emerging actors in the political field. The EED could support political parties, democracy activists, dissidents, civil-society organizations (both registered and unregistered), trade unions, independent media and think-tanks. The aid could be divided into three phases: pre-transformation (similar to Aim 1 of the EIDHR), transformation and the consolidation of democracy. This would help the EED to be both more effective in delivering aid (respond directly to local needs) and to be visible in its actions. Depending on the situation of each country, the aid could be delivered to projects, such as those for women or youth or it could go for support of independent media. The Endowment should avoid funding actors or countries that already are sponsored by other EU instruments such as the CFS or NSA-LA. Poland should call for more coherence in the existing democratisation policies and continue its inclusive dialogue and consultation process on EED objectives, beneficiaries and disbursement modalities with the EU institutions that already have experience in this field (DG DEVCO or the European Parliament).

In order to increase support for the EED in the EU, Poland should quickly remind member states about two crucial issues. First, Poland stands for drawing additional funds, in general, for democracy support, including money for the EIDHR (human-rights activists are afraid of losing money). Second, the EED would not take over the EIDHR budget but would mobilize additional money for democratisation.

If it happens that the EED does not attract a sufficient number of contractors or funds, which given the current euro crisis is probable, Poland could adjust its projects to regional needs and offer the members of the Visegrád Group the creation of such a fund. This would still fit the priorities of Polish foreign policy on one hand while on the other it would draw more money and increase the effectiveness of the Eastern Partnership.