

# BULLETIN

No. 75 (408) • August 1, 2012 • © PISM

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## The EU's Democratisation Agenda in Times of a Eurozone Crisis

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*Despite reasonable suppositions that the current eurozone crisis could have a negative effect on the European Union's (EU) democratisation agenda, at least at the rhetorical level, this does not appear to be happening. The Council of the EU recently adopted the first Strategic Framework and Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, as a guide to engagement by the Member States and the EU as a whole, for the next ten years. Additionally, the statute for a new foundation, the European Endowment for Democracy (EED), the creation of which was called for by Poland, was formally approved.*

**The EU's Democratisation Policy.** Democracy is one of the EU core values, and one on which it was founded. Article 21 of the Treaty on the EU reaffirmed its determination to promote democracy through all of the Union's external policies. In 2009, in the spirit of the Lisbon Treaty, the Member States adopted the Agenda for Action on Democracy Support, to improve the EU's coherence and effectiveness in this field. Democracy is promoted through three instruments: political dialogue, financial and technical assistance programmes, and the mainstreaming of democratic values in EU policies. It is funded through, foremost, thematic instruments (the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights, EIDHR) and geographical instruments (the Instrument for Stability, the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument, the Development Co-operation Instrument, the European Development Fund). Funds, primarily for strengthening the rule of law, also come from the Common Foreign and Security Policy budget.

**The EU's Democratisation Agenda.** The events of 2011 in the Middle East and North Africa raised questions about the state and efficiency of the EU's democratisation policy. The decision to adopt the Strategic Framework on Human Rights and Democracy in June this year was influenced directly by reflection on the weaknesses of the Union's democratisation policy (such as the application of double standards in engagement with authoritarian regimes, inability to respond quickly to the changing environment in nascent democracies, and lack of internal cohesion), and the EU's obligations under the Lisbon Treaty. The action plan connected with it comprises 36 headings, under which are goals that should be implemented by the end of 2014. One of them – an effective policy to support democracy – consists of four action points. These are: the adoption, in 2012, of democracy reports on the first 12 pilot countries indentified by the Council in 2010, and implementation of systematic use of Election Observation Missions and their reports. In early 2013, the second generation of pilot countries will be selected. In 2014, the development of joint comprehensive democracy support plans and programmes is planned, for the countries in which the EU is already active. The framework does not specify any particular geographic area of action, except for the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) countries, where it pledges to support comprehensive agendas of locally-led political reform, with democracy in the centre. The EU priority countries for 2012, according to the Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity's Report of 2011, are Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, and Syria.

**Consequences of the Eurozone Crisis.** The European slowdown could suggest that the EU's democratisation agenda is fading into the background. However, at least at the rhetorical level, this does not seem to be the case. On the contrary, events in the Southern neighbourhood forced the EU to strengthen its democratic agenda. There are three tangible proofs. Firstly, and for the first time

ever, the Union has adopted the joint strategic framework. Secondly, the EIDHR's budget for 2014 – 2020 is expected to increase by almost 40% (€474 million). Finally, the Union has agreed on the statute of the EED. However, the EED is not a new instrument but a private foundation, it will cooperate with the EU instruments. It will draw additional funds for democratisation support (Poland, Sweden and the Commission are talking about supporting it with €5 million each) and do what the EU cannot, due to bureaucratic restrictions or for political reasons, do under EIDHR.

**Challenges.** This, however, does not mean that the weaknesses of the EU's democratisation policy have been overcome. Although the concept of the framework is new, it does not guarantee that the Union will from now on speak with one voice. It is strong on aspiration but weak on detail, foremost in the distribution of tasks within EU institutions, and between the EU and Member States, which is not yet clear. Previous EU activities on democratisation also indicate that its declarations do not always coincide with its actions. Right up to the outbreak of civil war, the EU negotiations on a framework agreement with Libya were underway. Additionally, even though most of the EU resources within the geographic instruments are dedicated to the ENPI, the Council for implementation of the Agenda for Action selected just two of them (Lebanon and Moldova). Others included such countries as the Philippines and the Solomon Islands. Last but not least, the risk of a deepening crisis in the eurozone could limit funding for democracy support to some degree (as happened with development aid). In 2011, the EU's aid to developing countries fell by almost €500 million. The deepest cuts were in those countries worst-affected by crisis, including Spain (-32.7%) and Greece (-39.3%), but were also apparent in Austria (-14.3%) and Belgium (-13.3%).

**Recommendations for the EU and Poland.** The EU democratisation policy requires not only the formulation of a strong common position, but primarily of allying words with deeds. In times of budgetary constraints on Member States, EU democracy support should start with the ENP countries. Stable and prosperous neighbours with sustainable democratic institutions are important for EU security. In this light, the Council should, at the beginning of 2013, select primarily the ENP countries as the pilot countries under the Agenda for Action. Then again, support for the southern Mediterranean countries cannot be at the expense of the EU's eastern neighbours. On a technical level, to strengthen outreach capabilities and be receptive to third countries, the EU should build common ground with multilateral forums and partnerships with civil society. This would not only increase the effectiveness of the EU's policies, but would also help to build a real picture of the state of democracy in third countries. Additionally, the EU has to make sure that its democracy support embraces all components of "deep and sustainable" democracy.

Since the outbreak of the Arab Spring, the Polish experience of transition to democracy has become its "export product". Poland has shown its commitment to democracy support by its contributions to the EU's democratisation agenda (e.g., by calling for the creation of the EED and the withdrawal of the EU Member States' ambassadors from Belarus), through its involvement with multilateral institutions (e.g., as co-chair of the Community of Democracies' Democracy Partnership Challenge Task Force for Moldova), and by establishing bilateral relations with those countries in transition (e.g., the Polish-Tunisian Institute for Democracy and Development is due to open this autumn). Sharing the Polish experience should not, however, be Poland's main objective, but should serve as a tool within a holistic strategy of democracy promotion. It should be applied particularly in countries that are culturally or geographically similar, and in which its transformation experience is relevant. It would therefore be welcome if Poland continued focusing primarily but not exclusively on its eastern neighbours. Bearing in mind the Polish experience in working with its eastern neighbours, on the EU level it should continue calling for more coherence and effectiveness of the eastern dimension of EU policy. To enhance the consistency of democracy support within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the establishment of a special unit, which would focus on democratisation, or would at least have democratisation in its portfolio (e.g., primarily the United Nations and Human Rights Department, or alternatively the Department of Development Cooperation) would be desirable. Finally, as it called for establishment of the EED, it should keep supporting that newcomer by making sure that sufficient funds are forthcoming.