



Promoting Human Rights and Democracy in the next EU Multiannual Financial Framework

Co-ordinating Members

- Open Society Foundations
- International Partnership for Human Rights
- International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)

HRDN Statement

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- ACT Alliance EU
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- World Coalition against Death Penalty
- World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)
- World Vision

Repressive governments are pursuing a backlash against democracy and human rights, diminishing civic space and creating a chilling effect for those working to promote and protect human rights. *Civicus Monitor* lists 108 countries as Obstructed, Repressed, or Closed and shows a serious downward trend for freedom of assembly, association and expression.

Civil society organisations (CSOs) and individual human rights defenders (HRDs) have been directly affected. Instead of being recognised as essential actors for the democratic functioning of society, the legitimacy of the work of civil society organisations is being questioned and CSOs subjected to smear-campaigns. This is true both outside and inside the EU.

In this context, the 51 member organisations of the Human Rights and Democracy Network (HRDN) consider that the European Union's commitments spelled out in Article 2 and 21 of the Treaty remain fully relevant. The EU institutions and its member states must guide the negotiations of the future Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) in a direction that reinforces human rights through the EU's internal and external financial instruments.

Specifically the HRDN calls on the EU institutions and Member States to:

1. Oppose the merging of the EIDHR within a single External Financing Instrument

The EIDHR was created on the initiative of the European Parliament in 1994, after years of inter-institutional negotiations. It has since become a visible symbol of the EU's global leadership in supporting human rights and democracy.

The Human Rights and Democracy Network (HRDN) is an informal grouping of NGOs operating at EU level in the broader areas of human rights, democracy and conflict prevention. Participation in the network is open to non-governmental organizations which engage at EU level in the promotion of human rights, democracy and conflict prevention in and outside the EU.

The vision of the HRDN is that human rights and democracy are placed at the heart of the EU's internal and external policy agenda. This vision should manifest itself in a EU that effectively protects human rights at home and is a force for positive change in the world. In pursuit of this vision, the network aims to influence EU and member state human rights policies and the programming of their funding instruments to promote democracy, human rights and sustainable peace.

This instrument has proven to be a crucial tool to support civil society organisations and individual human rights defenders, and has been an important source of funding for **democratic reforms and the protection and promotion of human rights**. Putting the existence of the EIDHR, as a single, distinct and visible instrument into question, would send a negative signal. It would, not only put already vulnerable organisations and individuals at risk, but would also call into question the EU's global leadership and commitment, to protect and promote democracy and human rights, and those who defend them.

The EIDHR is one of the smallest EU's external financing instruments – with € 1,3 billion budget for the current 7-year period: it represents 0.001% of the 2014-2020 EU budget. Despite this, the instrument's relevance, impact, sustainability, efficiency and added-value are outstanding – as was highlighted in a recent external evaluation.¹ The evaluation also insisted that the EIDHR has a specific value, especially in a context where it has become more and more difficult to support democracy and human rights.

The EU should preserve a dedicated EIDHR instrument, boost its budget, and prevent the reallocation of funds from EIDHR to other financial lines.

2. Preserve and reinforce the EIDHR instrument

The EIDHR has unique features and modalities. In particular, it is able to fund individuals and organisations working on human rights and democracy in difficult circumstances, independent of the consent of the national government.

The instrument can support both registered and unregistered organisations; organisations without legal personality, as well as individual human rights defenders. It is universal, responsive and offers flexibility in terms of confidentiality, reporting and sub-granting.

All these elements make the EIDHR particularly relevant in difficult and closed environments. As these conditions are becoming more prevalent, the instrument's added-value and relevance is greater than ever. It also makes the EIDHR key for supporting democratic processes, by assisting elements of the democratic system that the executive branch of a partner country may not prioritise –

¹ European Commission, Evaluation of the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) 2014-2020, 30 June 2017, https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/evaluation-european-instrument-democracy-and-human-rights-eidhr-2014-2020-draft-evaluation-report-1_en

such as work with parliaments, support to the media, support to a representative political party system and to civil society organisations working on democracy.

The future MFF should also aim to increase core funding to CSOs and allow more flexibility to co-financing obligations and multiannual partnerships. Providing this type of structural support to CSOs will allow organisations to prioritise and act swiftly in response to emerging threats. Core funding will also enable organisations to plan, focus on structural changes and tackle new and complex challenges.

The EU should maintain and reinforce the unique features of the EIDHR and its structural support to human rights and democracy. In particular, measures to ensure that funding reaches human rights defenders most at risk need to be strengthened, as well as more flexibility in supporting organisations and individuals and democratic institutions.

3. Mainstream human rights and democracy and support to civil society through other instruments

Human rights and democracy should also be fully and effectively integrated into the geographic instruments – and a rights-based approach implemented. One element should be to ensure that civil society is actively involved in the design, implementation and monitoring of EU cooperation programmes. It should be a top priority for the EU to ensure that all recipients of EU aid are obliged to commit to, and implement, international human rights standards in all their work.

The EU should mainstream human rights and democracy into all financing instruments.

4. Ensure targeted support to human rights work within the EU

Over the last years it has become increasingly evident that attacks against civil society are also happening within the EU. The recent report of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights “Challenges facing civil society organisations working on human rights in the EU” (January 2018), demonstrates that it has become harder for civil society organisations to continue their work to protect, promote and fulfil human rights across the Union. Specifically on funding, the report notes an overall decrease in available funds, as well as range of legal and practical obstacles in accessing funds.

In its external relations, and specifically through the creation of the EIDHR, the EU and its Member States have placed great emphasis on supporting human rights organisations. The same attention is needed within the EU, without compromising vital work externally.

In this context we urge the EC to create a funding instrument to support civil society organisations working on human rights in EU member states. It should include funds for monitoring, advocacy, litigation and education and support both national and community based organisations. **It should also look into improving the flexibility of the instruments to enable sustainable work by local structures, with special attention to the need for core funding and the possibility for re-granting schemes.** Some of the same features as the EIDHR should also be included i.e. the possibility to offer support to both registered and unregistered organisations, support to individual human rights defenders, and confidentiality where necessary.

The EU should create a funding instrument dedicated to the work of human rights organisations in EU member states.

In this circumstances the HRDN therefore calls on the EU institutions and member states to: maintain a dedicated EIDHR instrument to support the work of CSOs and HRDs in the next MFF; mainstream human rights and democracy throughout other instruments; and create a fund to support the core work of human rights organisations within the EU.