Council conclusions on report from the Commission on EU support for democratic governance, with a focus on the governance initiative

FOREIGN AFFAIRS (Development) Council meeting
Brussels, 12 December 2013

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

1. The Council welcomes the Report from the Commission on EU Support for Democratic Governance, with a focus on the Governance Initiative and the presentation of lessons learned from the EU’s work within the context of the Governance Initiative for the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries and the Governance Facility for countries covered by the European Neighbourhood Policy.

2. The Council notes that the commitment, ownership and leadership of partner countries are vital in driving democratic governance and that country ownership calls for a tailor made approach and the involvement of all relevant domestic actors (CSOs, local authorities, national parliaments, private sector) in order to build stronger democratic processes and accountability systems. The EU’s support should be based on a rights based approach, encompassing all human rights, and the principles of participation, non-discrimination, accountability and transparency.

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1 Doc. 10939/13
3. The Council underlines the importance of a structured policy and political dialogue on governance issues, based on international human rights and governance frameworks, to identify the most appropriate reforms and support measures with commonly agreed clear and country specific indicators and benchmarks to measure results and performance. Notwithstanding the partner country's needs and the commitment of the EU to provide predictable funding, the Council notes that elements of an incentive based approach in programming can stimulate progress and results in democratic governance and should respond in a dynamic way to the level of commitment and progress with regards to human rights, democracy, the rule of law and good governance. The Council also notes that while financial incentives are not sufficient to trigger democratic reforms, an incentive-based approach works best when a critical mass of funding is available in order to generate significant impact and results, and where allocations form part of a broader strategy of EU engagement.

4. The Council, furthermore, stresses the importance of continued support for regional and continental governance initiatives such as the Africa Governance Architecture and the Africa Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) for strengthened ownership, transparency and accountability and notes that the local ownership of the APRM also crucially depends on the political and financial support provided by African participating states.

5. The Council underlines that better use should be made of the wealth of experience the EU has accumulated in the area of democratic transition, including through the further promotion of knowledge and experience sharing, people-to-people contacts and the worldwide use, where appropriate, of instruments such as technical assistance and twinning.

6. The Council calls for strengthened joint analysis by the EU and Member States on issues relating to democratic governance support. This should inform the development of tailormade assistance packages and further coordination, in particular in joint programming processes, as well as in the wider context of political and policy dialogues and in the implementation of the Strategic Framework and Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy.²

7. The Council also believes that, in view of encouraging partner countries to initiate and accelerate reforms, future governance support should better incorporate monitoring and benchmarking, and that the impact of monitoring could be further increased by involving multiple stakeholders, including civil society, in the process.

8. The Council notes that special attention is needed in challenging environments where the government may lack legitimacy or capacity and where a greater partnership may need to be sought with non-governmental actors and local authorities. Such flexibility is often particularly important, among others in fragile and conflict-affected states. Inclusive politics and local ownership in such situations can be promoted by building on the principles of the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States.

² Doc. 11855/12
9. Looking forward, the Council underlines that support to democratic governance should remain a priority in EU development cooperation, in accordance with the Council Conclusions on "Increasing the Impact of EU Development Policy: an Agenda for Change"\(^3\) and in line with the continuous implementation of the Council Conclusions of November 2009 on Democracy Support in the EU's External Relations.\(^4\) Issues relating to democratic governance and the rule of law need to be properly addressed in the context of the work towards a new post-2015 framework as essential preconditions for poverty eradication and sustainable development, as well as important values and objectives in themselves.

10. The Council invites the Commission and the EEAS to regularly take stock and to report by 2015 to the Council on how the above principles are being applied in the context of dialogue and development assistance and how it can be ensured that they are reflected in strategic decision-making and programming for further strengthening the EU's support for democratic governance."

\(^{\text{\footnotesize 3}}\) Doc. 9369/12
\(^{\text{\footnotesize 4}}\) Doc. 16081/09