



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



Council conclusions on The roots of Democracy and sustainable development: Europe's engagement with Civil Society in external relations

*3191st FOREIGN AFFAIRS Development Council meeting
Luxembourg, 15 October 2012*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. An empowered civil society, in all its diversity, represents a crucial and integral component of any democracy and constitutes an asset in itself. Civil society actors can foster pluralism and contribute to more effective policies, equitable development and inclusive growth. Civil society organisations (CSOs) have the capacity to empower, represent, defend and reach out to vulnerable and socially excluded groups, including minorities. They can also foster economic and human development, as well as social cohesion and innovation. Moreover, CSOs often engage in initiatives to advance participatory democracy for transparent, accountable and legitimate governance, also in fragile situations.
2. Synergies between States and CSOs can help address poverty, support equality, social inclusion and sustainable development. These synergies are key elements in reinforcing democratic governance. The EU recognises the significance of constructive relations between States and CSOs and will further promote them.
3. CSOs are now recognised as autonomous development actors in their own right. Governments in several partner countries have strengthened their engagement with CSOs. Nonetheless, in other partner countries, dialogue with CSOs is still limited and the space for civil society engagement remains narrow or is, in some cases, shrinking. In addition, some CSOs are challenged in terms of representation, transparency, internal governance and capacity. They may depend on international donors and, due to the economic and financial crisis, they increasingly have to compete over resources. Connecting CSOs with new forms of citizens' engagement as well as social movement marks yet another key dynamic in this process, as reflected, for example, in the Arab Spring.

P R E S S

4. In the light of these challenges, the Council welcomes the Commission Communication on the “Roots of democracy and sustainable development: Europe's engagement with Civil Society in external relations,”¹ which builds, in particular, on the European Consensus on Development, the Agenda for Change, the new European Neighbourhood Policy, the Enlargement strategies and international commitments deriving from the 2011 Busan Partnership on Effective Development Cooperation. The Communication is based on the results of the worldwide “Structured Dialogue on the involvement of CSOs and Local Authorities in EU development cooperation” held during 2010 - 2011.

A renewed EU response: a shared vision for action

5. The Council welcomes the proposal from the Commission for a renewed and more ambitious policy in support of civil society, with a focus on CSOs from partner countries and an emphasis on CSOs’ engagement to strengthening democratic processes and accountability systems and achieving better development outcomes. The proposal also sets out guidelines on how to better address current challenges and have a greater impact on issues such as the promotion of human rights, gender equality, democracy, the rule of law, accountability and good governance, as well as in fostering inclusive and sustainable growth for human development. CSOs can also play an essential role in strengthening social protection and in advocating for decent work and corporate social responsibility.
6. The Council welcomes in particular the proposal that EU engagement and dialogue with CSOs should take into consideration, as a starting point, the political, economic and social context of partner countries. The EU will support and promote an enabling environment for an independent, pluralistic and active civil society in partner countries. The EU will encourage and support partner countries to promote a meaningful and structured participation of CSOs, in the context of their domestic policies’ dialogue as well as budget processes, and to respect the independence of CSOs.
7. The Council calls for a rights-based approach to development cooperation and acknowledges the key role of CSOs in promoting human rights. Gender equality is an essential human right and contributes to a more free and fair society and economy. CSOs can play a key role in improving women and girls’ participation in, and access to, development actions. As development actors, CSOs share the responsibility to place the empowerment of women and girls, and the protection of their rights, at the centre of development initiatives.
8. The EU aims at further promoting the participation of CSOs in the programming of its external assistance, both at headquarters and at country level. The involvement of CSOs in the EU programming cycle should be further strengthened in all regions and at all stages. In order to reach CSOs from partner countries more effectively, a flexible and tailor-made approach to funding and adaptation to administrative procedures is required, where necessary.

¹ Doc. 13788/12.

9. Ensuring effective provision of social services, including health, education and social protection, is the responsibility of governments at both central and local levels. CSOs can play an essential role in service delivery, complementing local and national government provision of services and piloting innovative projects, which can help to enhance the capacity and legitimacy of CSOs for engaging in advocacy at all levels. Support to CSOs as service providers will be considered according to country context and framed, wherever possible, in collaborative multi-actor partnerships coordinated with national and local authorities, with the longer-term objective of promoting more accountable, effective and sustainable systems. In addition, CSOs' initiatives will be supported when addressing issues that do not receive adequate consideration within national policies but are key elements to social progress and the protection and promotion of human rights.
10. CSOs are active players in the economic realm and can contribute to inclusive and sustainable growth, promoting entrepreneurship and job creation. The EU will support CSO initiatives and partnerships which develop social, intercultural and economic schemes in response to community needs, including access to financial services, particularly to those most excluded. Attention will be given to CSO initiatives to promote and monitor issues such as corporate social responsibility, ethical business models and the decent work agenda, fair trade as well as actions aimed at equitable access to natural resources, health, education and food security.
11. Dialogue and support for CSOs in the context of situations of fragility, in countries in crisis or in post-conflict situations require a targeted approach, based on the commitments undertaken in the New Deal for engagement in fragile states, as set out in the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation. The Council recognises the essential role of CSOs in the peace and security agenda, particularly in conflict prevention and state building.
12. As development actors, CSOs share the responsibility to demonstrate results, particularly to their constituencies. The EU will support CSOs from partner countries to increase their capacity to become more transparent, effective and accountable. The EU encourages further efforts in developing and implementing self-regulatory initiatives, such as the Istanbul CSOs Development Effectiveness Principles.
13. In partner countries, the EU and its Member States will develop country roadmaps for engagement with CSOs, to improve the impact, predictability and visibility of EU actions and ensure consistency and synergy. Acknowledging that the identification of local needs lies with local actors, the roadmaps should be developed taking into account the views of local civil society and existing coordination structures. The roadmaps should identify long term objectives of EU cooperation with CSOs from partner countries and encompass dialogue as well as operational support, identifying appropriate working and funding modalities. In this regard, EU Delegations have a crucial role to play, in close cooperation with Member States.
14. Being aware that countries are increasingly interdependent and that many issues of concern to civil society require cooperation across borders, the EU will facilitate collaboration between CSOs from partner countries and European CSOs to ensure policy engagement at the global level.
15. The EU will continue to promote a strategic approach to increase the level and quality of Development Education and Awareness Raising (DEAR) as well as the capacity of CSO networks in that regard.

16. At the EU level, particular attention will be given to the dialogue of CSOs with European institutions. In addition to existing mechanisms for consultations on policies and programmes, the Council welcomes the Commission's proposal of setting up a consultative multi-stakeholder forum allowing CSOs and other relevant development actors from the EU and partner countries to dialogue with the EU institutions on EU development policies, as well as on the provisions proposed in the present Conclusions.

Next steps

17. Recalling that the Union's development policy and that of the Member States complement and reinforce each other, the Council calls on the EU and its Member States to apply these Conclusions.
 18. EU support to CSOs should feature more prominently in all partnerships and a more strategic engagement with CSOs should be mainstreamed in all external instruments and programmes and in all areas of cooperation. The principles contained in these Conclusions will guide the design and implementation of external action instruments under the Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020, including the successor to the 10th EDF. The EU will support the implementation of these Conclusions also through its political and policy dialogues with partner countries.
 19. The Council calls on European CSOs to partner with organisations from partner countries with long-term and equitable partnerships based on local demand, which should include monitoring and promoting Policy Coherence for Development, awareness raising and education on development-related issues, mentoring, coaching and peer learning, networking, and building linkages from the local to the global level.
 20. The Council invites the Commission to provide, in cooperation with the EEAS, regular updates and report back to the Council on progress made in implementing these Conclusions by 2016."
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