DEMOCRACY PROGRAMME

POR UN NUEVO CONTRATO SOCIAL

Renovar la democracia para no dejar a nadie atrás

MINISTERIO DE ASUNTOS EXTERIORES, UNIÓN EUROPEA Y COOPERACIÓN
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Cooperación Española

Democracy Programme

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General catalogue of official publications:
https://cpage.mpr.gob.es

This publication was made possible by the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID).

Official Publication ID Number (NIPO): 109-22-125-6

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1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Programme concept

The purpose of the Democracy Programme of the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID) is to promote, strengthen, and reaffirm the value of democracy through different actions that incorporate new viewpoints and voices, foster policy and social dialogue, and promote the exchange of knowledge and experience between Spain, Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

The Programme is based on a broad initiative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation of Spain, together with AECID and the Carolina Foundation, to advance and intensify democratic processes. This initiative was presented on 25 April 2022 in Madrid by Foreign Minister José Manuel Albares.

The Programme exemplifies the commitment of Spanish Cooperation, through AECID, to carrying out specific actions to promote democratic processes in different contexts, as well as to intensify a democratic approach to all AECID actions in the Region of Latin America and the Caribbean, as a value that makes it possible not only to imagine desirable scenarios for the future, but also to promote the conditions to make them possible.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation of Spain, José Manuel Albares, during the launch of the initiative "For a new social contract: Revitalizing democracy to leave no one behind", at Casa América, Madrid.

This Programme complements and is built on existing initiatives which, within AECID's efforts in the field of democratic governance, promotes institutional strengthening and capacity-building at the State level, both through the Intercoonecta Programme and bilateral projects in this area. To that end, the Programme begins with a diagnosis of the causes underlying the current debate on the erosion or questioning of democracy around the world, to then focus, above all, on making recommendations aimed at creating spaces to foster trust among actors, institutions and countries, with the goal of stimulating new agreements and pact to spur on the necessary reforms to improve democratic quality and to build or strengthen the social contract in Latin American and Caribbean partner countries, to leave no one behind.

To achieve this, the Programme features a wide-ranging set of activities, all with democracy as their cross-cutting theme, intended to lead to new narratives and dialogues on democracy, the promotion of a broader view of rights with greater guarantees, reflection on new forms of political and social representation, protection of freedom of expression and information, and strengthening transparency and accountability mechanisms.

Panel discussion during the launch of the initiative “For a new social contract: Revitalizing democracy to leave no one behind”, at Casa América, Madrid.

1.2. Programme design

The close partnership between democracy and development has become a crucial issue in recent decades. Their cause-effect relationship has been the subject of much research and many essays over time, and today continues to represent an open question subject to a great deal of debate. Especially noteworthy here is the current debate on the concept of sustainable development itself, within the framework of the 2030 Agenda, and its relationship to democracy, as well as the importance of incorporating new viewpoints enabling a better understanding of the scope of this necessary partnership.

Here, advances are needed in two directions: one, to inclusively identify the needs and interests of the citizenry, and the other, to respond to them through transformative policies able to create well-being and promote fairer, more equitable societies. This is why, to addresses the governance of major current and future social, environmental and economic challenges, the role of the State is and will remain key: an innovative State, able to promote new democratic processes and redefine the social contract or social pacts.

It will only be possible to address these major transformations through greater citizen involvement in public affairs, egalitarian and equitable access to public resources, and the protection of rights. The basic assumption is, therefore, an approach to democracy that includes both its formal and material dimensions and which, beyond democracy through the ballot box and public deliberation, assumes that democracy should contribute to the realization of economic, social and cultural rights, as well as the construction of a social contract able to ensure cohesion within different societies.

Therefore, to protect and promote democracy, it is no longer enough to strengthen public authorities and administrations (e.g. court systems, parliaments), but rather, to work with stakeholders such as civil society and the media.

The point of departure is a situation in which democracy is being questioned worldwide, as can be seen in different phenomena: attacks on basic human rights, the instrumentalization of institutions and authorities, the rise in political polarization, and the loss of the public's trust in institutions and their representatives. These processes, affecting different countries in different ways around the world, are also having an impact in the Region of Latin America and the Caribbean, where even countries with the most stable democracies are facing challenges in their political practices.

In this scenario, Spain maintains a close, deep relationship with the Region, sharing a recent past of cooperation and mutual support in their respective processes of transition to and consolidation of democracy.

This mutual commitment to strengthening democracy was at its height during the 1980s and 1990s, with the promotion of peace processes in Central America and the consolidation of democracy in Spain and in the Southern Cone countries.

The Democracy Programme is in line with this history of cooperation, aiming to foster dialogue between Spain and countries in the Region, to improve and highlight the importance of democratic systems and facilitate processes that enable social contracts to be strengthened and renovated, and that advance towards societies that are freer, fairer, and more prosperous, inclusive, and sustainable.

To provide content for this Programme, preliminary work and consultations were carried out in five Discussion Meetings for Latin America and the Caribbean, featuring the participation of different social, political and economic stakeholders at the local, national and regional levels, as well as international organizations.

The first Discussion Meeting was the launch of the initiative “For a New Social Contract: Revitalizing democracy to leave no one behind” held in Madrid on 25 April 2022. Subsequent Discussion Meetings were held in the four Training Centres that Spanish Cooperation operates in Latin America and the Caribbean (in Montevideo; Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia; Cartagena de Indias, Colombia; and La Antigua, Guatemala), for the purpose of generating input to draft this cooperation Programme.

The Discussion Meetings were aimed at opening up participation for designing the Programme, identifying demands, including different viewpoints, deliberating on thorny questions and, ultimately, reflecting together on what the main areas for action should be for a Spanish Cooperation focused on strengthening and promoting democracy in the Region. These Meetings constitute, therefore, the heart of the Programme, providing it with issues, debates, and viewpoints.

Group photo, Discussion Meeting in Montevideo

Group photo, Discussion Meeting in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia

Group photo, Discussion Meeting in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia

Group photo, Discussion Meeting in La Antigua, Guatemala

All four Meetings had a similar dynamic, lasting a day and a half, combining debates with break-out working groups for brainstorming. The structure followed for each of the Meetings was the same, described below:

- Day one comprised two sessions. The first session aimed to reach a consensus among the participants regarding a diagnosis of the state of democracy in the Region. This session was held in a plenary format, which started off with a three- or four-person panel, each member making a 15-20-minute presentation on the main aspects to consider. Next, the floor was opened for debate among the rest of the participants, who reacted to the panel and contributed their own reflections to enrich the diagnosis. The resulting diagnosis, validated by the participants, was also the starting point for the following Discussion Meeting, constituting a dynamic document that was provided with content by all of the participants in the four Meetings.

- The second session comprised a series of brief dialogues in which groups of four to six persons, grouped by thematic areas, debated different issues that had been previously identified as crucial. Based on a set of questions that they came up with, the participants first explained their viewpoint and then exchanged ideas. These sessions aimed to generate a lively dialogue with a clear component of generating proposals on how to act, once the diagnosis had been validated.

- Day two comprised a third session, organized as a brainstorming exercise. The participants were again grouped in thematic areas, and had to work collaboratively to identify, first, priorities for action, and second, key stakeholders, mechanisms to address these challenges, and ways in which Spanish Cooperation could support these processes. Once these working groups had ended, all of the participants in the Meeting presented their proposals and debated them, in order to confirm them and incorporate them into themes in the future Programme.

The Discussion Meetings brought together approximately 120 people from nearly every country in the Region, between May and October 2022. Each one of these Meetings focused on a specific sector of the population:

The first Meeting, held in **Montevideo on 5 and 6 May,** brought together civil society stakeholders. This first Meeting centred on the role of the media, communicators and journalists, as well as the demands of different movements, groups and population sectors (women, young people, LGBTI people, environmentalist groups, indigenous peoples and Afro-descendants).

Brainstorming session, Meeting in Montevideo

Plenary session, Meeting in Montevideo

The second Meeting was held in **Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, on 9 and 10 June,** bringing together different political stakeholders from the Region, both representatives of traditional political parties and emerging movements. The principal thematic areas addressed were the following: functioning of political institutions, quality of management of the public administration and justice systems, stability and plurality of party systems, capacity of representation of political parties and movements, creation of spaces for political dialogue, connection between parties and social movements, recognition of socio-cultural and ethno-racial diversity in different countries, effective protection of the rights of indigenous and Afro-descendant people, creation of shared political agendas.

Inauguration of the Meeting in in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia

Brainstorming session during the Meeting in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia

The third Meeting was held in **Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, on 14 and 15 September,** and brought together economic stakeholders and social partners. Among others themes, this meeting addressed the need to promote a new social contract that includes all stakeholders more equitably, including fiscal reform, informal employment, collective bargaining and production models, with a special emphasis on moving past extractivist models.

Dialogue during the Meeting in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia

Brainstorming session during the Meeting in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia

The fourth Meeting was held in La Antigua, Guatemala, on 10 and 11 October, bringing together regional stakeholders, organizations and think tanks. The purpose of this Discussion Meeting was to bring a regional viewpoint to the issues debated during the previous three Meetings, and to analyse how regional governance mechanisms can be leveraged to enhance processes that promote and safeguard democracy.

Starting with the concept of a social and democratic State under the rule of law, different topics were addressed: independence of the judiciary and combating corruption, inclusive democracy, human rights, and establishing regional spaces for dialogue on fiscal issues, production models, and employment. All of the information on the development of this process is available at: intercoonecta.aecid.en/program-democracy

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Inauguration, Meeting in La Antigua, Guatemala


Brainstorming session, Meeting in La Antigua, Guatemala

Finally, another noteworthy aspect of this same initiative is the contribution of the Carolina Foundation through its study “The support of Spain for Democratic Governance in Latin America”. This report served as input for the Discussion Meetings, and was used to identify the major lessons learned from more than 30 years of Spanish Cooperation’s activities in the Region to promote democratic governance, including both its achievements and its limitations.

Debates and brainstorming sessions during the Discussion Meetings held in AECID Training Centres

1.3. Diagnosis of the state of democracy

During these Discussion Meetings, the participants have created, debated, and consolidated a list of 10 key points summarizing the state of play of democracy worldwide, and particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean, based on contributions from the different stakeholders. This diagnosis has been conceived as a living document, which has been debated and validated at the beginning of each Discussion Meeting and has served as a starting point for the next one. Participants sought to draw up a collaborative diagnosis, with input from multiple viewpoints of different social, political, economic and regional stakeholders representing every country in the region. These are the 10 key points that emerged from the Discussion Meetings:

1. The crisis of democracy as a point of departure

The democratic model today faces a crisis. This situation represents not only the risk of falling back into authoritarian models, but also the opportunity to imagine new alternatives to deepen democracy. It is a global phenomenon, in which there are some countries where democracy is deteriorating and others where autocratic inclinations are taking hold. These trends go beyond symptoms of institutional weakness; they can be seen in profound social divisions over the very meaning of democracy. In parallel, we can see the flowering of new dialogue processes that call for rethinking the social pact and including new viewpoints and stakeholders, incorporating the ideas of just transitions and intergenerational dialogue. Given these tensions, spaces for regional integration have the potential to operate as key coordination mechanisms to promote democracy as a common project.

2. Breakdown in the rules of the game

One of the principal threats of democratic deterioration involves the division of powers and the functioning of rule of law, owing to, among other causes, the lack of appropriate or effective control and accountability mechanisms. The adoption of exceptional measures, the questioning of electoral processes, cross-interference between powers, and the politicization of the justice system are examples of this.

The lack of safeguards leads to high levels of impunity when there are rights violations and attacks on human rights defenders.

3. Power machinations, elites, and corruption

Eight out of ten Latin Americans believes that the government of their country is primarily concerned with benefiting the elites. Understanding politics in the Region therefore requires including this perception, which questions the very ideas of equal access to positions of power, or of transparency in decision-making. Certain economic and political power groups' power grabs in different policy areas or within part of the State apparatus, utilized to favour their own interests, compel us to adopt an approach able to analyse and make visible the barriers to entering politics, the fabric of power, and the informal mechanisms that facilitate corrupt practices, where organized crime takes hold and expands. .

4. Crisis of political and social representation

The disconnect between different public identities, values, and interests, and the institutional response to them, gives the crisis of representation pride of place in this diagnosis. Disaffection affects both the party systems, in the political arena, and the trade unions, in the social arena. The incapacity of these traditional mechanisms to represent different interests means that it is necessary to advance in internal democratization processes and to create new spaces for participation that favour dialogue and bottom-up channels for making demands.

5. Growing polarization

The lack of shared values, social differences, and the lack of a minimum of consensus has sparked a growing polarization that certain political stakeholders exploit through radicalization strategies. This creates an “affection gap”, in which such values as pluralism and dialogue are replaced with confrontation. Moreover, this gap complicates the creation of integrating narratives around desirable ideals, such as social justice and solidarity. Trust building thus becomes a political priority for closing these gaps and building bridges for dialogue.

6. Problematic channelling of protest

The new cycle of protests is marked by a sense of grievance on the part of the protesters. When dialogue processes have been opened, both old and new barriers have arisen to adopting decisions, owing to the primacy of special interests, the lack of organization of preferences, and the weakness of participation mechanisms.

7. Threats to freedom of information and expression

Violence against journalists, reporters, and activists has generally been on the rise in recent years. The lack of plurality in the media, as well as the growing influence of social networks, without any regulation to protect digital rights, introduces new information and disinformation dynamics, including the dissemination of fake news, which affect the perception of democracy.

8. Weakness of the State and ineffective public policies

States' difficulties in addressing the everyday problems affecting the majority of the population lie at the roots of democratic deterioration. This incapacity is translated into the impossibility of reaching basic agreements able to transcend a partisan, electoral dynamic. The result is weak States, with problems in providing essential public services, such as education and health, and in taking on the role of promoting social development.

9. Inability to reach an income pact

The State's weak ability to collect revenue, and difficulties in financing policies that promote more equitable societies, has become a recurring issue in the Region. The urgency of reaching a fiscal pact is at odds with the resistance to tackling a comprehensive reform able to lay solid foundations for effort-sharing measures based on the principles of transparency, progressivity, and combating fraud and tax evasion. Such questions arise as how to break this vicious circle, or how to create incentives to achieve a higher degree of formality in the employment market.

10. The inter-transition dilemma

The undesirable effects of development in Latin America and the Caribbean, including policies based on exporting raw materials and the damage this causes to the environment, highlight the need for these countries to open an in-depth discussion on the current production model and its consequences. Transitions thus acquire a special significance, because this is a region very rich in natural resources, which faces, like few others, a dilemma between the energy and ecological transitions. Faced with a history of extractivist economic growth and energy-based exports (natural gas, oil, and lithium), alternative forms of production are arising, based on the principles of the Sumak Kawsay, or Live Well, movement; however, expressing these in actual policies is complicated.

2. REFERENCE FRAMEWORK

2.1. National and international regulatory framework

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 169 Targets of the 2030 Agenda incorporate defending and promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms as a general intervention framework, although references to democracy are not specifically included in any of the SDGs. However, they do include supporting institutions and combating corruption.

Specifically, SDG 16 "Peace, justice and strong institutions" seeks to promote peaceful societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice through effective and inclusive institutions.

Moreover, Spain, as a signatory of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is committed to protecting and safeguarding freedoms and human rights all around the world. Spain is a member of the Human Rights Council and has ratified and acceded to the principal international human rights instruments, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance; the Convention on the Rights of the Child; International Labour Organization Convention 169 on indigenous and tribal peoples; and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Moreover, Spain is a member of the United Nations LGBTI Core Group, and AECID has been part of the Global Action on Disability (GLAD) Network since 2019.

In addition, Spain, as a Member State of the European Union (EU) and of the Council of Europe, and as a signatory of the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights, assumes the commitments set forth in these frameworks. Within the framework of the EU, promoting democracy complements the support for human rights worldwide that is a cornerstone of the EU itself, and which is included in different regulatory instruments, beginning with the Treaty Establishing the European Community. Furthermore, the European Consensus on Development, adopted in 2017, and in which the Member States participate, takes a democracy and human rights approach that goes beyond the good governance vision or the reference to the 2030 Agenda's SDG 16.

Regarding more recent frameworks, in 2019 the Council of the European Union approved Conclusions on Democracy, identifying new challenges, such as the "undermining of democratic processes and institutions [...], low levels of trust in institutions and politicians [...], a shrinking democratic space for civil society, [...] increased violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms, [and] manipulation using online technologies". The EU strengthened its commitment to democracy in November 2020,

with the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, which set forth the strategy for 2020-2024, one of the lines of which is "Building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies". The key instrument for carrying out these initiatives is the Global Europe: Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument.

At the national level, support for democratic governance has been considered a priority sector in the different strategic frameworks that have defined the more than 30 years of Spain's development cooperation policy. The essential reference framework is the recently approved Act on Cooperation for Sustainable Development and Global Solidarity, which includes, in article 2.2.i), support for democracy as the essential action principle in this framework: "Democracy, the rule of law, peace, and promoting strong, effective, inclusive, transparent and accountable institutions". This Act also identifies support for democracy and human rights as a goal, specifically stipulating: "Promoting democracy, human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law; furthering local democracy; and building peaceful, just and inclusive societies, with the ultimate purpose of creating strong, effective, accountable and accessible institutions for the entire citizenry, which can address the different manifestations of violence, and which are also a necessary condition for sustainable development, human security and peace. Fostering a strong civil society, an open civic space that encourages democratic participation, a culture of peace and the appropriate recognition of democratic memory".

At the strategic level, in 2008 Spanish Cooperation approved a Strategy for Democratic Governance, Citizen Participation and Institutional Development. Moreover, AECID has manuals for implementing a human rights-based approach, for mainstreaming a gender approach, for including disability in development cooperation, and for mainstreaming cultural diversity.

Over time, the Master Plans for Spanish Cooperation have prioritized this sector, albeit with different approaches, scopes and contents. The First Master Plan for Spanish Cooperation (2001-2004) set the following sectoral goals: promoting social participation, institutional development and good governance, focusing on defending human rights and supporting the rule of law. The Second Master Plan for Spanish Cooperation (2005-2008) defined citizen participation and institutional development as a sectoral priority for supporting democratic governance, promoting a new concept of governance, which was no longer limited to promoting an impact on the political and institutional sphere but also included strengthening spaces for consensus-building and for the participation of public and private national and international stakeholders.

The Third Master Plan for Spanish Cooperation (2009-2012) steered away, in part, from the institutional strengthening approach, instead committing to a rights-based approach as a general cooperation framework, identifying democratic governance and human rights as a horizontal priority, "because they are crucial elements to be taken into account in planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating Spanish Cooperation". The Fourth Master Plan for Spanish Cooperation (2013-2016), drafted at the height of the euro crisis,

continued to commit clearly to the sector of democratic governance, with an approach that was less aimed at rights and more at institutional strengthening. The Plan sets forth as Strategic Objective 1 “Promoting the quality of democracy” through political pluralism, strengthening the structure and management systems of the public sector, supporting the rule of law, and strengthening human rights protection systems.

Finally, the Fifth Master Plan for Spanish Cooperation (2018-2021) includes, as its principal innovation, the adoption of the 2030 Agenda as a reference framework and, consequently, the organization of priorities around the SDGs. Moreover, it sets forth that the human rights-based approach constitutes a cross-cutting intervention principle (together with gender equality and cultural diversity), meaning that Spanish Cooperation must promote, as priorities, political participation, accountability, and the empowerment of all people for the full exercise of their rights.

These priorities are consolidated in the framework of Spain’s 2021-2024 Foreign Action Strategy, which commits to promoting democracy and the rule of law as the main areas for foreign action, including among its priority objectives “the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security, and promotion of the rule of law and fundamental freedoms”. Moreover, it puts at the heart of its action the international promotion of human rights, especially of equality between women and men, the fight against gender violence, and the defence of diversity and the rights of LGBTI people.

Overall, these efforts and strategic frameworks may be considered useful and relevant to consolidate the sector as a priority sphere for Spanish Cooperation. Over and above variations in conceptual terms, two major intervention areas have been fostered in the sector: strengthening democratic institutions and promoting democratic spaces through the recognition of rights and support for civil society.

2.2. AECID and democratic governance in Latin America and the Caribbean

Support for democratic governance in Latin America and the Caribbean has been constant in Spain's development cooperation policy with the Region, and also of our foreign policy as a whole. In fact, the 2021-2024 Foreign Action Strategy states, as regards our relationship with Latin America and the Caribbean, that "Spain must prioritize strengthening institutions, respecting human rights, resolving crises politically, ensuring inclusive and sustainable economic growth, and maintaining its policy of solidarity with the Region, an issue that is particularly relevant in the post-Covid-19 scenario. Likewise, it is necessary for Spain to support legal certainty throughout the Region and promote open economies, as well as strengthening the link between the European Union and the Ibero-American Community, in all its dimensions" (page 48).

Thus, support for democratization and the reference to Spain's historic transition to democracy constituted an area of cooperation policy for the country's first elected governments. Since then and to date, this strategic approach has materialized in a great many actions supporting different democratization and public institution strengthening processes, through technical cooperation, training and knowledge-sharing activities between officials and experts from the public administrations of Spain and Latin America and the Caribbean, and through strengthening the provision of public services, especially at the local level.

The importance of the local sphere in Spanish Cooperation has been recognized internationally, as stated in different reports by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Even though support for the sector has been volatile owing to changes of governments, economic crises and refocusing development cooperation policies, promoting democratic governance in the Region has never ceased to be relevant for Spanish Cooperation.

This support has varied greatly over the years, and this variety has been reflected, especially, in two aspects, namely the intervention areas and the management models:

- The intervention areas associated with DAC Code 150 ("Government and civil society", relating to support for democracy and democratic governance) have been very diverse, although they could be simplified by identifying two major intervention areas: 1) strengthening democratic institutions, focusing especially on institutions in the sectors of justice, security, tax administration social security, civil service and local government; and 2) supporting social and political rights, and citizen participation.

- Support for democratic governance has been managed using different models, noteworthy examples being—due to their size, identity and impact—bilateral programmes, regional programmes, programmes with international organizations, triangular cooperation, and support for non-governmental development organizations (NGDOs).

3. INTERVENTION FRAMEWORK

3.1. Added value of AECID

Thanks to its history, AECID is able to support shared efforts towards democratic strengthening and improvement, bearing in mind its strengths in the following areas:

1. Institutional presence in countries. The promotion of spaces and processes for debate and dialogue on shared challenges. This is especially valuable to generate reflection and discussions on the democratic system and on social, production or environmental transformations. This ability to bring together stakeholders and create spaces for dialogue is facilitated by AECID's institutional presence in the countries of the Region, through the Spanish Cooperation Offices, Cultural Centres, and Training Centres.

2. Regional programmes and bilateral projects, which carry out activities that are complementary to this programme:

a. **INTERCOONECTA**. This is a programme for the transfer and dissemination of quality knowledge, based on innovation, to generate public value. Its interventions support institutional strengthening by providing technical knowledge.

b. **Indígena and Afro Programmes.** These Programmes aim to promote social cohesion from the perspective of the recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples and Afro-descendant populations and of the promotion of inclusive public policies.

c. A lengthy track record of work on democratic governance using **bilateral technical assistance programmes,** with special emphasis on supporting institutional strengthening, institutional capacity-building and public policies.

d. Promotion of actions carried out in collaboration with **multilateral organizations** having a global or regional scope, such as the United Nations Development Programme in the field of governance and election assistance, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean in the field of social cohesion and taxation, OECD in the framework of the regional programme for Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Ibero-American system in the field of building networks and supporting cooperation and horizontal dialogue between institutions of the different countries.

3.2. Intervention approach to promoting democracy

The process behind the erosion and questioning of the democratic model calls for actions involving democratic revitalization, reform, improvement and innovation. This process may be partly due to factors that are specific to a certain moment or country, but it is also the result of structural processes that have an impact on the normal functioning of most democracies.

These processes in which democracy is eroded or questioned are reflected in different aspects:

1. The loss of value of democracy as a political system, including some of its defining characteristics: dialogue, pluralism, debate, tolerance, and consensus-building.
2. The concentration of power in the executive, the appropriation of public policies by private interests and, consequently, limitations to oversight by other powers and by social stakeholders and, among these, the media or organized civil society.
3. Limitations to the exercise of rights and freedoms, which have a direct impact on opportunities for representation and citizen participation. This affects freedom of expression above all, but also the right to social assembly and to participate in elections.
4. A rise in conflicting views, ideological polarization and political confrontation, which reduces the opportunities for peaceful coexistence and for debate and consensus-building.
5. An incapacity to implement public welfare systems, due to institutional ineffectiveness in the provision of public services and to difficulties in implementing policies that will improve people's quality of life.

The principal effects of all of these factors is a gradual process of loss and destruction of trust, with an increasingly sceptical citizenry and scenarios marked by social anomie.

Therefore, opportunities to promote democracy in contexts where it is being eroded require the generation of **intervention areas** in which it is possible to::

1. Revitalize democracy and the processes that define it, generating spaces and mechanisms for dialogue and consensus-building.
2. Strengthen the capacity to act of political and social groups that may expand democracy, and curb autocratic tendencies.
3. Protect the rights and freedoms of the entire citizenry, to enable participation.

Actions in this intervention area aim to encourage dialogue between stakeholders to favour consensus, specifically giving a voice to new, excluded or vulnerable stakeholders with the capacity to expand representation and participation, and contributing to protecting rights and freedoms and to facilitating peaceful coexistence and respect among the entire citizenry.

Therefore, the necessary **inputs** to protect, improve and consolidate democracy are::

SPACES AND MECHANISMS FOR DIALOGUE promoting the revitalization of democracy and dialogue, and bringing stakeholders closer together.

VOICE AND CAPACITY-BUILDING for stakeholders and institutions, so that they may promote democratic values and curb authoritarian tendencies.

PROTECTION of peaceful coexistence, of respect for others and of fundamental rights.

This intervention area and these inputs define the scope of action of Spanish Cooperation's Democracy Programme.

Thus, the premises underpinning this **Programme** are:

1. The essence of promoting democracy is, above all, political, so cooperation must therefore support political processes. Therefore, the Programme will prioritize promoting cooperation actions focusing on different public policy areas, but also on politics, as a complement to other actions being addressed by other programmes that support policies and institutions with technical support, as well as other spheres of Spain's foreign policy beyond sustainable development and global solidarity.

2. Promoting democracy calls for and requires actions that strengthen political and social stakeholders who promote democratization processes in different forms. The erosion of democracy and the questioning of institutions are global phenomena affecting many countries and which, therefore, call for actions differentiated by region and by country. This is precisely why it is necessary to have spaces for debate, regional coordination and integration, networks and partnerships, and international organizations and partners: to facilitate and promote processes for democratic improvement and innovation. In this regard, AECID can help to create such spaces.

4. PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES

The principal objective of this Programme is to promote and reaffirm the value of democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean. This is a twofold objective: on the one hand, it aims to foster and promote good practices, and on the other, to provide instruments and spaces for protection against the processes eroding democracy.

This general objective is broken down into the following **specific objectives:**

1. **PACTS:** Facilitate spaces for dialogue to generate consensus and **new social pacts:** social dialogue and the fiscal pact.

2. **STAKEHOLDERS:** Contribute to improving representation and political participation to promote **inclusive democracies**: support for different stakeholders who have an impact on the quality of democracy.

3. **RIGHTS:** Support the protection of **human rights and fundamental freedoms,** especially freedom of the press.

5. INTERVENTION AREAS

In accordance with the objectives set, the Democracy Programme focuses on three intervention areas. In turn, in each of these intervention areas, priority areas for action have been identified, which will determine the specific lines of action that will give the Programme content and identity. These intervention areas are:

5.1. Supporting spaces for dialogue to generate consensus and new social pacts: social dialogue and the fiscal pact

There are many reasons for the erosion or questioning of democracy; some of them are more structural and global in nature, and others are more associated with specific factors. Some common elements in the diagnosis of democratic erosion are related to the loss of the intrinsic value of the idea of democracy itself, on the one hand, and to the association of the democratic model with a development model that favours inequality and exclusion, on the other.

In accordance with these two elements, for a considerable proportion of the citizenry representative democracy has ceased to be a system with value of its own, as it enables the perpetuation of inequitable and ineffective political practices. This perception has spread among the public in many countries, along with the idea that democracy does not solve their problems, especially their socio-economic problems, and this leads to a loss of trust in democratic institutions.

Therefore, one of our current challenges is to reflect and debate on the very idea of democracy, so as to identify possible ways to intensify and strengthen democracy and enable the inclusion of different social groups, and dialogue and deliberation between them, and to overcome the merely formal concept of democratic institutions to address the outcomes of democratic processes in terms of inclusion, sustainability and prosperity. Reflection and communication can also lead to identifying innovations in democratic processes, involving the social stakeholders who are represented, to a varying extent, in today's institutions. In this regard, it will be essential to integrate mechanisms that include those who do not usually participate in these areas, together with innovative methodologies. Finally, debate and reflection will not only make it possible to identify areas for improvement, but also to create new, more inclusive narratives about democracy, to enable the inclusion of those sectors that are most disaffected with current democracies.

The dialogue process can focus on different areas. However, in two of them dialogue is especially necessary, as they are processes which require consensus-building to address some of the main challenges of sustainable development: social dialogue and the fiscal pact. In both cases, the private sector and the trade unions are necessary participants.

In the first case, major transformations in the sphere of employment, imbalances in production models, accelerated digitalization processes and the emergence of new social stakeholders all require new dialogue processes able to lay the foundations for reaching

agreements and inclusive social pacts, as key elements in democratic revitalization and enhancement.

Secondly, the fiscal model reflects, as few other dimensions do, the nature of the political model, as well as the social and power dynamics that create it. The fiscal model of many Latin American countries—which have a low revenue collection capacity unable to support quality public services, in addition to having small tax bases, limited progressivity and ineffective spending—reflects a very unequal power structure, in which certain economic and social groups are politically over-represented, and thus have the capacity to steer public policies towards their own interests. Different studies and analyses have shown that, with such limited national revenue collection and spending capacities, countries in the Region find it difficult to build welfare systems.

Therefore, renewing the fiscal pact is currently one of the major challenges involved not only in sustainable development but also in democratic revitalization. In this context, it is becoming increasingly urgent to promote fiscal reforms that make tax systems fairer and more effective, while contributing to expanding the tax base and strengthening the efficiency of public spending, thus allowing the State to have more resources to address the protection needs of its citizenry and to promote a more sustainable and inclusive development model. Identifying areas of opportunity to carry out this reform constitutes an essential priority for all those promoting development and well-being.

Taking into account the current situation and the added value of development cooperation, the following **priority areas for action** are the most important:

1. **DIALOGUE ABOUT DEMOCRACY:** Debates on the value of democracy as a model for peaceful coexistence and the management of public affairs, identifying innovations, variations or alternative models that are fairer and more inclusive for the majority of citizens, as well as new narratives about democracy.

2. **SOCIAL DIALOGUE:** Creation of spaces for dialogue, discussion, debate and possible agreement about different areas for social transformation.

3. **FISCAL PACT:** Promotion of dialogue and discussion about the relevance of reforms to the fiscal and tax systems.

On the basis of these objectives, the following **lines of action** have been established:

- **Forums on democracy:** Forums and debates will be held regularly about different aspects linked to democratic practice and to the major challenges or political reforms, enabling the study of new dimensions for improving democracy that may, in turn, serve as inputs for the Programme's work (for example, democracy and digitalization, or democracy and culture).

- Development of **innovative participation and mediation methodologies** to facilitate the integration of groups and sectors that do not yet participate in civic spaces.

- **Initiatives to build new narratives:** In partnership with media stakeholders and those with the capacity to build new narratives, different actions will be implemented to offer positive alternatives for the promotion of democracy.

- Actions to **support social dialogue** in collaboration with consolidated dialogue forums, while at the same time advancing towards new dialogue scenarios and stakeholders.

- **Technical and political debate**, between the different stakeholders, institutions and entities committed to and affected by the fiscal model, including the strengthening of possible agreements and pacts between stakeholders.

- Support for actions that contribute to **modifying the anti-tax narrative** strengthening measures that increase citizens' tax morale.

- Technical support, including **learning about experiences and conducting studies** that favour the incorporation of different fiscal and tax models, to advance in the system's equity and effectiveness.

5.2. Improving representation and political participation: support for building inclusive democracies

Today, the traditional mediation role of political parties seems to be called in question. In recent decades, most of the political party systems in Latin America and the Caribbean have undergone a profound crisis, which has caused many traditional forces to be relegated to irrelevance or even to disappear. At the same time, new electoral options are emerging, which are, in many cases, unstable, without defined structures or programmes, and which are often short-lived. This is due to a number of factors that are both internal and external to parties themselves.

Among the endogenous factors, the lack of transparency and accountability, together with rising elitism, have hindered openness to new social sectors. In this regard, the lack of more horizontal mechanisms and of new forms of participation, as well as the rigidity of certain structures, prevent the promotion of stakeholders with fewer resources, and this particularly affects women, young people and people from the lower social strata. These internal democracy problems have at times caused tension with regard to the roles of representation and of the aggregation and channelling of demands which political parties are supposed to play.

These internal problems are compounded by other, more exogenous elements, which are related to parties' inability to adapt to a highly dynamic and fluid social context such as that of Latin America, where social movements and organizations play an important role in the assertion and emergence of new demands. This disconnection between movements and parties, between the grassroots level and party apparatuses, weaken even further the mediation role that political parties are supposed to play. Moreover, neither is it clear that these movements can replace political parties, or that the new, hybrid forms of party-movement can finally take off and succeed in achieving the desired stability. This opens up new doubts regarding how to strike a balance, and better coordination, between the social and political spheres.

Furthermore, together with these representation mechanisms, demands to promote and create new spaces and instruments for participatory democracy are emerging strongly. However, all too often, when such mechanisms are launched they are unstable, lack institutions, reproduce participation biases, are utilized for polarization, or hardly have any real political impact. In the medium and long term, these risks curtail the legitimacy of these processes and end up increasing citizens' distrust and apathy.

Taking these difficulties into account, the following **priority areas for action** have been established:

1. **STRENGTHENING POLITICAL STAKEHOLDERS:** Fostering the creation of stable democratic structures with real mechanisms facilitating access to, and promotion in, public life.

2. **DIALOGUES BETWEEN POLITICAL STAKEHOLDERS AND MOVEMENTS:** Incentives for dialogue between political stakeholders and movements, fostering the creation of channels and spaces for interaction, to boost trust between social stakeholders.

3. **NEW LEADERSHIPS:** Support for the emergence and creation of new, more plural and collective leaderships, with values based on listening and horizontality.

On the basis of these objectives, the following **lines of action** have been established:

- **Training and capacity-building** actions to achieve political and social leadership, with a pluralist perspective.

- Fostering **good practices** in the functioning and internal organization of political parties and social organizations, favouring **horizontal, transparent and open dynamics**, as well as creating **mechanisms for inclusion and promotion.**

- Strengthening **networks of political stakeholders** at the regional level.

- Creating **spaces for dialogue** between political stakeholders and social movements..

- Supporting the development of **emerging local and territorial stakeholders.**

5.3. Protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, especially freedom of speech and freedom of the press

The protection of human, political and social rights is an essential element that defines democracies. Therefore, democratic systems are required to guarantee the citizenry the free and full exercise of their rights.

In different countries of Latin America and the Caribbean significant reversals are taking place both in the protection of rights—with serious violations of constitutional provisions—and in the proper functioning of the rule of law. As a result, more attention is being drawn to the vulnerability and criminalization of human rights defenders and environmental defenders, including, in particular, the LGBTI community, indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants, and defenders in remote areas, often linked to extractive industries or the energy sector.

The criminalization looming over human rights defenders seeks to deter and demobilize them, to prevent resistance. One of the objectives of the Democracy Programme is to protect rights defenders, promoting agreements to guarantee safe and favourable conditions in which environmental and human rights defenders may act without threats, restrictions or insecurity.

Among the most threatened rights and freedoms is freedom of expression, which is an essential medium for the development of democratic societies, as it enables accurate information to be received and spread, ideas and proposals to be shared, and diverse cultural manifestations to be created and known. This implies the existence of a plurality of spaces, mediums and formats for people to express themselves freely, with equitable access, and where those exercising their right to expression may do so with every guarantee. These conditions, however, are not always present in Latin America and the Caribbean, because freedom of expression is subject to different threats, which obliges us to focus on those risks, at different levels, and according to each subregional and country-specific context.

The first of these risks is related to corporate and political dynamics which, at times, may affect media coverage. Indeed, the media have often become political stakeholders, playing a leading role, whether in power or in the opposition, but without being subject to transparency and accountability processes—essential practices for playing the role that is expected of the media, which are considered a counterbalance to the powers of the State.

However, due to this watchdog role, the media have also sometimes been subject to economic, legal and political pressure. For this reason, journalism has become a high-risk profession in some areas of the Region, where journalists can find their ethics, their jobs, or even their physical safety to be compromised by the mere fact of reporting, and be subject to different forms of violence and public persecution, often leading them to require special protection measures, or even forcing them to leave the country. Reporters from independent, grassroots or local media outlets are especially affected, because they often work in precarious, highly vulnerable conditions.

Together with these contextual aspects, a substantive risk factor is the democratic focus of editorial policies. This means that, in addition to guaranteeing the essential plurality of the press, there is a series of ethical guidelines accepted by all of the media which enables public dialogue based on the inclusion of different stakeholders and viewpoints, as well as respect for minorities. If not, in a Region as diverse as Latin America and the Caribbean, reporters run the risk of spreading derogatory stereotypes or images that have an outsized impact on the rights and freedoms of lower-status or vulnerable stakeholders, propagating racist, sexist, and homophobic views.

A last aspect here is related to the new dynamics of social networks and fake news, which spreads quickly and has a polarizing effect by generating and amplifying hate speech, with the final result of impacting public trust, both at the social and institutional levels. Also connected to this is the emergence of new leadership in these social networks, which poses a problem both of representativeness and of public responsibility, in addition to a situation of unequal access that replicates existing generation, gender and class gaps, and the urban-rural divide.

Once these issues are identified, AECID can play an important role in protecting and safeguarding freedom of speech through four major **priority lines of action:**

1. **PROMOTING A PLURAL MEDIA SPACE:** where different forms of media have a shared professional ethic based on democratic values.

2. **SOCIAL NETWORKS, DISINFORMATION AND HATE SPEECH:** Promote good practices in the use of social networks, favour equitable access to them and promote protection mechanisms to combat disinformation and hate speech.

3. **PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR JOURNALISTS, REPORTERS, ACTIVISTS, AND ACADEMICS:** in the free expression and dissemination of ideas and viewpoints that favour plural dialogue.

4. **PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR DEFENDERS:** of human rights and territorial rights..

Based on these goals, the following lines of action will be promoted to protect and safeguard freedom of speech in the Region:

- Incentivize processes of **transparency and public responsibility** in the media.
- Foster democratic editorial policies and **good practices in journalism.**
- Promote **coverage that avoids stereotypes** and the stigmatization of excluded social sectors.
- Support the creation, viability and independence of **grassroots media.**

- Galvanize the creation of **media and reporting networks**, as well as media coalitions.
- Strengthen **networks for supporting and protecting territorial and human rights** defenders, academics, and victims of any kind of persecution.
- Support the **ethical use of social networks** through different initiatives.

6. CROSS-CUTTING AREAS

In addition to these intervention areas, the Programme promotes cross-cutting areas for action which will define the added value that Spanish Cooperation can contribute through AECID. These include the following:

1. Supporting **democratic transformation and innovation**, as a means to overcoming structural problems tied to political practices that hinder sustainable development.

2. Supporting the **effectiveness, efficiency and integrity of public institutions and policies, and combating corruption**, facilitating processes of generating, transferring and spreading knowledge to best face the problems that affect the public and meet the challenges that the current situation presents.

3. **Feminist approach and diversity:** in keeping with the mandate of Spanish Cooperation, all of its actions incorporate a human rights approach, a feminist approach, and diversity and environmental sustainability, assuming that democracies should evolve towards more inclusive models that ensure better representation of social diversity. Therefore, the political participation of women will be encouraged.

4. Supporting **groups that are disadvantaged** by traditional political models, with special reference to young people and older adults (new intergenerational contracts), and to indigenous and Afro-descendent persons, LGBTI persons and persons with disabilities.

5. **Making the citizenry stakeholders** who participate actively in public life.

6. **Digitalization** as a virtuous circle of innovation and transformation in political participation and public management, taking on a digital pact and the need to bridge the digital divide as a basic principle of action.

7. INSTRUMENTS

The AECID Democracy Programme will be launched in 2023 and be implemented through a wide variety of instruments.

1. **Bilateral cooperation projects:** Spanish Cooperation Offices will identify and create programming for technical cooperation projects aligned with the Programme's objectives, with local stakeholders as their counterparts (e.g. government entities, social partners, and civil society), and promoting ownership.

2. **Knowledge creation and management activities:** Spanish Cooperation Training Centres will play an active role in implementing the Democracy Programme through the creation, management and dissemination of its different components, as well as the organization of spaces for dialogue to enabling the identification of new hubs of activity (e.g. democracy and digitalization, democracy and culture). The Centre in Cartagena de Indias will play a key role, owing to its specialization in democratic governance. Intercoonecta will incorporate some of the issues identified in the Democracy Programme.

3. **Instrument to protect journalists and human rights defenders:** In 2023, AECID will launch a new instrument to protect journalists and human rights defenders, complementing the instrument currently managed by the Foreign Ministry's Human Rights Office.

4. **Partnerships with civil society:** The AECID calls for proposals from NGDOs will include among their sectoral approaches with regard to Latin America and the Caribbean, the objectives of the Democracy Programme, enabling civil society organizations to participate in their implementation on the ground.

5. **Partnerships with regional and multilateral organizations:** AECID will forge or strengthen, as the case may be, new partnerships with international organizations with regard to some of the topics in the Democracy Programme.

The Democracy Programme will be financed through an annual allocation in the AECID ordinary budget. In 2023, the Programme is to receive an initial allocation of six million euros, without including the funding involved in competitive tenders or contributions to international organizations.

SUMMARY

All the information about the development of the process is available: **For a new social contract. Renew democracy to leave no one behind** (https://intercoonecta.aecid.es/programa-democracia)

GENERAL OBJECTIVE	Promote and reaffirm the value of democracy		
SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE	**INTERVENTION AREA**	**PRIORITY AREAS FOR ACTION**	**LINE OF ACTION**
1 Facilitate spaces for dialogue to generate consensus and new social pacts: the fiscal pact and social dialogue.	Supporting spaces for dialogue to generate consensus and new social pacts: the fiscal pact and social dialogue.	**Dialogues on democracy.**	Forums on democracy. Initiatives to build new narratives. Public innovation and building revitalized democracies.
		Social dialogue.	Actions to support social dialogue. Actions to support political dialogue, with consolidated stakeholders and new stakeholders, regarding social, economic and environmental challenges.
		Fiscal pact.	Policy and technical debate between different stakeholders, institutions and entities involved in and affected by the fiscal model. Includes strengthening of potential agreements and pacts between stakeholders. Support for actions that contribute to shifting the anti-tax narrative, strengthening measures to improve the public's tax morale. Technical support, including exchanging experiences and conducting studies to promote the incorporation of different taxation models to advance the system's equity and effectiveness.
2 Contribute to improving political representation and participation: supporting different stakeholders who have an impact on the quality of democracy.	Improving political representation and participation: supporting different stakeholders who have an impact on the quality of democracy.	**Strengthening political stakeholders.**	Actions aimed at training and capacity-building for new leaders in the political arena . Fostering best practices in the operations and internal organization of political parties, favouring horizontal, transparent and open dynamics. Strengthening political stakeholder networks at the regional level.
		Dialogue between political stakeholders and movements.	Creating spaces for dialogue between political stakeholders and social movements.
		New leadership.	Supporting the development of emerging local and territorial stakeholders.
3 Uphold the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, especially freedom of the press.	Protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, especially freedom of speech and freedom of the press.	**Promoting a diverse, plural media space.**	Incentivizing processes of transparency and public responsibility in the media. Fostering democratic editorial policies and good practices in journalism. Promoting coverage that avoids stereotypes and the stigmatization of excluded social sectors.
		Accompanying and supporting journalists, reporters, rights defenders, academics and activists.	Creating spaces for dialogue between political stakeholders and social movements.
		Social media, disinformation and hate speech.	Supporting the development of emerging local and territorial stakeholders.

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