No Democracy without Accountability

International Day of Democracy

European Committee of the Regions | Tuesday, 17 September 2019

Accountability is the cornerstone of a well-functioning democracy. In a well-functioning democracy, accountability refers to all the different ways that citizens, political parties, parliaments and other democratic actors can provide feedback to, reward or sanction elected officials in charge of setting up and enforcing public policies. Proper accountability mechanisms provide incentives for governments to work in the best interest of their citizens.

The conference No Democracy without Accountability aims to take stock of the role of accountability within the democratic framework, to examine possible challenges and to explore how accountability will evolve in years to come. The event will serve as an exchange of practice between citizens, government officials and elected politicians who will come together to discuss traditional and new forms of accountability, and explore ways to improve accountability.

This conference is funded by the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR)
PROGRAMME

09:30-10:00 | REGISTRATION & COFFEE

10:00-10:15 | WELCOME REMARKS
Stefano Manservisi, Director General for International Cooperation and Development, European Commission (tbc)
Franco Iacop, Member of the Committee of the Regions and CIVEX coordinator. Party of European Socialists in the European Committee of the Regions

10:15-10:35 | KEYNOTE SPEECH
Maina Kiai, Former UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights and Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

10.35-10.45 | PRESENTATION OF THE “VOX POPULI” SURVEY

10:45-12:15 | PANEL DISCUSSION: HOLDING ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES ACCOUNTABLE
Maina Kiai, Former UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights and Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association (tbc)
Jessica Musila, Executive Director, Mzalendo, Parliamentary Oversight Organisation, Kenya
Anuna de Wever, Belgian Climate Activist (tbc)
Leoluca Orlando, Mayor of Palermo, Italy (tbc)
Facilitator:
Ilya Lozovsky, Managing Editor, Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP)

12:15-13:30 | LUNCH

13:30-15:00 | BREAKOUT SESSIONS: WORKSHOPS 1 & 2

Workshop 1 | New methods for a traditional form of democratic accountability – the importance of civic courage to counter corruption
Hosted by European Endowment for Democracy (EED)

Anti-corruption activities are seen as one of the traditional forms of democratic accountability that have been practised for decades. Yet, corruption still strives in many countries, including in Europe, and particularly in countries where civil society is disempowered. In recent years, some governments have cut back on the rights and opportunities for civil society actors to hold authorities to account. In such a context where democratic norms are under threat, civic activists combatting corruption risk facing consequences for their work.

This workshop brings together three courageous civic activists from European Neighbourhood and Western Balkan countries that are breathing new life into this traditional form that is as vital for democracy now as it was decades ago. They expose cases of corruption in governments and empower citizens to engage in anti-corruption efforts. They will share their experiences and exchange ideas on how to encourage a citizen-focused approach to anti-corruption and what innovative methods can be used to counter corruption in a weak democratic country context.

Panellists:
Assaad Thebian, Founder, Gherbal Initiative, Lebanon (tbc)
Zaza Abashidze, Director, Squander Detector, Georgia (tbc)
N.N., Zurnal, Anti-Corruption Initiative, Bosnia and Herzegovina (tbc)

Facilitator:
Ilya Lozovsky, Managing editor, Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP)
Workshop 2 | Digital accountability: social media platforms and digital political advertising  
Hosted by European Partnership for Democracy (EPD)

The phenomenon of digital political campaigning has caught global public attention since the twin shocks of Brexit and the US Presidential election in 2016. This challenge was highlighted again by the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica scandal in 2018. Since then, the tension between the integrity of electoral systems and a vastly unregulated digital sphere have arguably become an inherent danger to democracies worldwide. Therefore, this workshop will look at accountability of social media platforms, and specifically digital political advertising, in Europe and beyond.

Guiding Questions:
- How can we hold social media platforms accountable for the way they are used and abused for political ends?
- What are some of the pitfalls of regulating the digital space?
- What specific measures should be taken on a national and EU level to regulate social media platforms, in particular regarding political advertising?
- To what extent has the Code of Practice against Disinformation ensured that social media platforms were accountable to citizens in the run-up to and following the European Elections?

Panellists:
- **Pavel Havlicek**, Research Fellow, AMO Research Center
- **N.N.**, Public Affairs Representative, Google (tbc)
- **N.N.**, European Commission (tbc)

Facilitator:
- **Sam Jeffers**, Director and Founder of “Who targets me”

15:00-15:30 | BREAK

15:30-17:00 | BREAKOUT SESSIONS: WORKSHOPS 3 & 4

Workshop 3 | Accountability Initiatives and opportunities in shrinking space context  
Hosted by the European Network of Political Foundations (ENoP)

Civil society and political parties are crucial part and parcel of all political processes, be they local, national or international. Civil society and political parties can shape political processes, successfully organise political participation, uncover corruption and human rights abuses – and demand accountability from state actors. They are watchdogs of official policy, drawing attention to unsound developments, initiating and focusing public debate, and offering political and social alternatives.

However, all across the world, civil society and political opposition parties are under growing pressure. In many countries, state authorities are taking more and more systematic measures, aimed to restrict the work of civil society and political opposition. The freedoms of opinion, association, and assembly - the essence of democracy - are being limited in order. Efforts to limit such freedoms therefore must be regarded as a challenge to all democratic governments and to global cooperation – and they must be stopped. This session discusses civil society's ways of reacting to and holding governments accountable in environments of shrinking spaces.

Guiding questions:
- What can be innovative approaches/methods for political parties, CSO’s to hold governments accountable in shrinking space contexts?
- How can the EU intelligently support CSO’s, political parties in countries where spaces for CSO’S and Political Opposition Parties are shrinking?

Panellists:
Workshop 4 | Using ICTs for transparency and accountability in political finance
Hosted by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA)

Democracy is ultimately about popular control over decision-making. A lack of information on how much money circulates in and around elections, where resources are coming from and how they are spent leads to diminished transparency and deprives the public an opportunity to make informed choices and keep the elected representatives accountable. Over the past decade, significant steps have been made by many governments to use information technology and internet for improving the effectiveness of political finance oversight and enhance transparency in this field. The rapid digitalization of government agencies, political parties and citizens alike has significantly expanded the potential to use digital tools to enhance transparency and accountability in this field. Along with government-led efforts, an increasing number of civil society organizations work to promote transparency and public accountability of political parties through building public databases of political and campaign finance information, based on data released by oversight bodies and data that they gather themselves through monitoring of party assets, activities and expenditures. The panel will feature examples of government-led, political party-led and CSO-led ICT initiatives in political finance transparency and accountability from across the globe. Invited speakers will address the issues listed below.

Guiding Questions:
- Do ICT tools improve transparency and accountability in political and campaign finance?
- How can they affect citizen trust in parties and in representative democracy?
- What ICT tools are available to both governments and CSO’s to monitor political finance?

Panellists:
- Pavel Cabacenco, Head of the Centre for Continuous Electoral Training, (CICDE), Moldova
- Vita Dumanska, Representative of Ukrainian CSO Chesno/Gold of Parties, Ukraine
- Raghav Chadha, National Spokesperson, AamAM Aadmi Party, India

Facilitator:
- Sam van der Staak, Head of Europe Programme, International IDEA

17:00 | END OF THE EVENT