



Basic information	
<b>2016/2324(INI)</b> INI - Own-initiative procedure Addressing shrinking civil society space in developing countries <b>Subject</b> 6.10.08 Fundamental freedoms, human rights, democracy in general 6.30 Development cooperation	Procedure completed

Key players				
European Parliament	<b>Committee responsible</b>		<b>Rapporteur</b>	<b>Appointed</b>
	<b>DEVE</b> Development		JIMÉNEZ-BECERRIL BARRIO Teresa (PPE)	20/10/2016
			Shadow rapporteur FRUNZULICĂ Doru-Claudian (S&D) THEOCHAROUS Eleni (ECR) MICHEL Louis (ALDE) SÁNCHEZ CALDENTEY Lola (GUE/NGL) HEUBUCH Maria (Verts/ALE) CORRAO Ignazio (EFDD)	
	<b>Committee for opinion</b>		<b>Rapporteur for opinion</b>	<b>Appointed</b>
	<b>AFET</b> Foreign Affairs (Associated committee)		ASSIS Francisco (S&D)	26/01/2017
European Commission	<b>Commission DG</b>		<b>Commissioner</b>	
	International Cooperation and Development		MIMICA Neven	

Key events			
Date	Event	Reference	Summary
19/01/2017	Committee referral announced in Parliament		
16/02/2017	Referral to associated committees announced in Parliament		

30/08/2017	Vote in committee		
05/09/2017	Committee report tabled for plenary	<a href="#">A8-0283/2017</a>	<a href="#">Summary</a>
02/10/2017	Debate in Parliament		
03/10/2017	Decision by Parliament	<a href="#">T8-0365/2017</a>	<a href="#">Summary</a>
03/10/2017	Results of vote in Parliament		
03/10/2017	End of procedure in Parliament		

Technical information	
Procedure reference	2016/2324(INI)
Procedure type	INI - Own-initiative procedure
Procedure subtype	Initiative
Legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 55
Other legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 165
Stage reached in procedure	Procedure completed
Committee dossier	DEVE/8/08784

Documentation gateway				
<b>European Parliament</b>				
Document type	Committee	Reference	Date	Summary
Committee draft report		<a href="#">PE602.940</a>	26/04/2017	
Amendments tabled in committee		<a href="#">PE604.630</a>	02/06/2017	
Committee opinion	<a href="#">AFET</a>	<a href="#">PE603.109</a>	11/07/2017	
Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading		<a href="#">A8-0283/2017</a>	05/09/2017	<a href="#">Summary</a>
Text adopted by Parliament, single reading		<a href="#">T8-0365/2017</a>	03/10/2017	<a href="#">Summary</a>
<b>European Commission</b>				
Document type	Reference	Date	Summary	
Commission response to text adopted in plenary	<a href="#">SP(2017)778</a>	22/01/2018		

## Addressing shrinking civil society space in developing countries

2016/2324(INI) - 03/10/2017 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 509 votes to 90, with 96 abstentions, a resolution on addressing shrinking civil society space in developing countries.

Members recalled that the civil society (which includes non-governmental and non-profit organisations) represented, together with the public and private sectors, the **third sector of a healthy and decent society**, as a necessary counterweight to the existing power in force.

Civil society organisations (CSOs) have become important players in development aid at the global level, while the Cotonou Agreement recognises civil society as a key actor within ACP-EU cooperation.

**Recognising the major role of civil society:** the resolution stressed the importance of an **independent, diverse and pluralistic civil society** to ensure the development and stability of a country, to ensure democratic consolidation, social justice and respect for human rights, and to establish an inclusive society.

Parliament stressed that the contraction of space devoted to civil society - through legislation, taxation, restrictions on funding, excessive administrative burdens, or by stigmatization as 'foreign agents' of CSO representatives - was a global phenomenon that was not limited to developing countries, but also increasingly manifested itself in countries where democracy is firmly anchored, including in EU Member States.

Members therefore called on the EU to **recognise the need to assist the governments of beneficiary countries in creating a political, administrative and legal environment** for civil society organisations to work effectively.

**Protecting human rights defenders:** Parliament called for the **systematic denunciation** of the killings of human rights defenders, and any attempt to subject them to any form of violence, persecution, threat, harassment, forced disappearance, imprisonment or arbitrary arrest. It invited the Union to:

- support human rights defenders and increase the conditions and **funding mechanisms** for civil society actors;
- put in place monitoring tools for the effective joint implementation of **EU guidelines** on human rights defenders;
- ensure the protection and application of **sanctions** in the event of serious violations human rights;
- implement EU guidelines on the promotion and **protection of freedom of religion or belief**.

Parliament also called on the EU to:

- work towards **greater autonomy of civic space**, not only through EU development and human rights policies, but also by integrating all other EU internal and external policies, including justice, home affairs, trade and security policies;
- address the root causes of shrinking civil society space within the framework of a **uniform and coherent approach** in its relations with the third countries;
- promote **institutional mechanisms** and initiatives to strengthen dialogue and build partnerships between governments, CSOs, local authorities and the private sector in developing countries;
- monitor **counter-terrorism measures** and aspects of anti-money laundering and transparency legislation and anti-money laundering legislation;
- develop a **monitoring framework of EU external financing instruments**, with a special focus on human rights
- strengthen the role of civil society actors in trade agreement institutions, which should contain binding clauses on human rights.

Parliament reiterated the obligation incumbent on the **private sector** to adhere to both human rights and the highest social and environmental standards.

**Benchmarks and indicators:** Members called on the Commission and the EEAS to establish **best practices** and to develop clear benchmarks and indicators related to shrinking space in the context of the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy and the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR). They also advocated:

- **increased European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) funds** to address the threats to human rights defenders;
- systematically including shrinking civic space in their **bilateral relations** between the Union and the Member States;
- **improving protection of civil society organisation representatives** in third countries in order to prevent any hostility against them.

Lastly, Parliament shall commit to establishing, on an annual basis, a **list** of countries where civil society space is most under threat.

## Addressing shrinking civil society space in developing countries

2016/2324(INI) - 05/09/2017 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Development adopted an own-initiative report drawn up by Teresa JIMENEZ-BECERRIL BARRIO (EPP, ES) on addressing shrinking civil society space in developing countries.

The Committee on Foreign Affairs, exercising its prerogative as an associated committee in accordance with [Article 54 of the Rules of Procedure](#), also gave its opinion on the report.

Members recalled that the civil society (which includes non-governmental and non-profit organisations) represented, together with the public and private sectors, the **third sector of a healthy and decent society**, as a necessary counterweight to the existing power in force.

Civil society organisations (CSOs) have become important players in development aid at the global level, while the Cotonou Agreement recognises civil society as a key actor within ACP-EU cooperation.

**Recognising the major role of civil society:** the report stressed the importance of an **independent, diverse and pluralistic civil society** to ensure the development and stability of a country, to ensure democratic consolidation, social justice and respect for human rights, and also to promote accountability and good governance, particularly in the fight against corruption and violent extremism.

While the shrinking of space for civil society in developing countries, and particularly in conflict-stricken countries, is being carried out in increasingly complex ways which are harder to tackle and imposed through legislation, taxation, funding limitations, increased bureaucracy, Members called on the EU to **recognise the need to provide guidance to governments, political parties, parliaments and administrations in beneficiary countries** on developing strategies for establishing the appropriate legal, administrative and political environment to enable the efficient work of civil society organisations.

**Protecting human rights defenders:** concerned at the growing number of attacks on human rights defenders worldwide, Members called for the **systematic denunciation** of the killings of human rights defenders, and any attempt to subject them to any form of violence, persecution, threat, harassment, forced disappearance, imprisonment or arbitrary arrest.

The Union is invited to: (i) develop **guidelines on the freedom of peaceful assembly** and association; (ii) put in place monitoring tools for the effective joint implementation of EU guidelines on human rights defenders; (iii) ensure the protection and application of sanctions in the event of serious violations human rights; (iv) implement EU **guidelines** on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief.

The report also called on the EU to:

- work towards **greater autonomy of civic space**, not only through EU development and human rights policies, but also by integrating all other EU internal and external policies, including justice, home affairs, trade and security policies;
- continue to provide **funding** to create an enabling environment for civil society at the national and local levels;
- address the root causes of shrinking civil society space within the framework of a **uniform and coherent approach** in its relations with the third countries;
- promote **institutional mechanisms** and initiatives to strengthen dialogue and build partnerships between governments, CSOs, local authorities and the private sector in developing countries;
- monitor counter-terrorism measures and aspects of anti-money laundering and transparency legislation and anti-money laundering legislation;
- establish mandatory and legally enforceable human rights **due diligence** for the business activities conducted in third countries by companies based in the Union;
- strengthen the role of civil society actors in trade agreement institutions, which should contain binding clauses on human rights.

**Benchmarks and indicators:** Members called on the Commission and the EEAS to establish **best practices** and to develop clear benchmarks and indicators related to shrinking space in the context of the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy and the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR). They also advocated:

- **increased European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) funds** to address the shrinking space and the threats to human rights defenders;
- establishing a **shrinking space monitoring and early warning mechanism**;
- systematically including shrinking civic space in their **bilateral relations** between the Union and the Member States;
- **improving protection of civil society organisation representatives** in third countries in order to prevent any hostility against them.

Lastly, Parliament shall commit to establishing, on an **annual basis**, a list of countries where civil society space is most under threat.