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THIS ACTION IS FUNDED BY THE EUROPEAN UNION

ANNEX II

to the Commission Implementing Decision on the financing of the 2023 action plan part II in favour of the Regional South Neighbourhood

Action Document for Support to Democratisation in the Southern Neighbourhood

ANNUAL ACTION PLAN

This document constitutes the annual work programme in the sense of Article 110(2) of the Financial Regulation, and action plan/measure in the sense of Article 23(2) of NDICI-Global Europe Regulation.

1. SYNOPSIS

1.1. Action Summary Table

1. Title OPSYS Basic Act	Support to Democratisation in the Southern Neighbourhood 2023 annual action plan part II in favour of the Regional South Neighbourhood OPSYS business reference: ACT-61720 ABAC EN Commitment on budget line 14 020110 Financed under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI-Global Europe)
2. Economic and Investment Plan (EIP)	Yes
EIP Flagship	FLAGSHIP 2 – Human rights, the rule of law, and modern, effective administrations, governance and accountability
3. Team Europe Initiative	No
4. Beneficiar(y)/(ies) of the action	The action shall be carried out in the Southern Neighbourhood countries: Algeria, Egypt, Israel ¹ , Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine ² , Syria ³ and Tunisia.
5. Programming document	Multi-annual Indicative programme for the Southern Neighbourhood (2021-2027) ⁴

¹ See Guidelines on the eligibility of Israeli entities and their activities in the territories occupied by Israel since June 1967 for grants, prizes and financial instruments funded by the EU from 2014 onwards on http://eurlex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_.2013.205.01.0009.01.ENG.

² This designation shall not be construed as recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual positions of the Member States on this issue.

³ Co-operation with the Government of Syria suspended since 2011.

⁴ Commission Implementing Decision C(2021)9399 of 16.12.2021 on a Multi-Annual Indicative Programme for the Southern Neighbourhood.

6. Link with relevant MIP(s) objectives/expected results	Priority Area 1: Human development, good governance, and rule of law SO1: To promote democracy, human rights, good governance and transparency Expected result: Human rights defenders, democracy activists and pro-democracy movements are supported			
PRIORITY AREAS AND SECTOR INFORMATION				
7. Priority Area(s), sectors	Government and civil society 151			
8. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	Main SDG (1 only): SDG 16. Peace, justice and strong institutions Other significant SDG: SDG 5. Gender equality SDG 10. Reduced inequalities			
9. DAC code(s)	Main DAC Code –15150 Democratic participation and civil society 100%			
10. Main Delivery Channel	20000 - NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS (NGOs) AND CIVIL SOCIETY			
11. Targets	<input type="checkbox"/> Migration <input type="checkbox"/> Climate <input type="checkbox"/> Social inclusion and Human Development <input type="checkbox"/> Gender <input type="checkbox"/> Biodiversity <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Human Rights, Democracy and Governance ⁵			
12. Markers (from DAC form)	General policy objective	Not targeted	Significant objective	Principal objective
	Participation development/good governance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Aid to environment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Gender equality and women's and girl's empowerment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Reproductive, maternal, new-born and child health	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Disaster Risk Reduction	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Inclusion of persons with Disabilities	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Nutrition ⁶	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	RIO Convention markers	Not targeted	Significant objective	Principal objective
	Biological diversity	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

⁵ Thematic target for geographic programmes (at least 15%) in delegated act.

⁶ Please check the [Handbook on the OECD-DAC Nutrition Policy Marker](#).

	Combat desertification	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Climate change mitigation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Climate change adaptation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. Internal markers and Tags	Policy objectives	Not targeted	Significant objective	Principal objective
	EIP	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	EIP Flagship	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		NO <input type="checkbox"/>
	Tags	YES		NO
	transport	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	energy	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	environment, climate resilience	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	digital	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	economic development (incl. private sector, trade and macroeconomic support)	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	human development (incl. human capital and youth)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
	health resilience	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	migration and mobility	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	agriculture, food security and rural development	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
rule of law, governance and public administration reform	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	
other	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Digitalisation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Tags	YES		NO	
digital connectivity	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
digital governance	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
digital entrepreneurship	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
digital skills/literacy	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
digital services	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Connectivity	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Tags	YES		NO	
digital connectivity	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
energy	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
transport	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	

	health	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	education and research	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Migration	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Reduction of Inequalities	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	COVID-19	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
BUDGET INFORMATION			
14. Amounts concerned	Budget line(s) (article, item): 14.020110 Southern Neighbourhood Total estimated cost: EUR 11 000 000 Total amount of EU budget contribution: EUR 10 000 000		
MANAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION			
15. Implementation modalities (management mode and delivery methods)	Direct management through: - a grant		

1.2. Summary of the Action

The present action reflects the EU priorities under the *Joint Communication on a Renewed Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood*⁷ and its *Economic and Investment Plan (EIP)*⁸. The objectives of the action are also aligned with the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) political framework. This action implements the *Multi-Annual Indicative Programme for the Southern Neighbourhood (2021-2027)*⁹ under its Priority Area 1: Human development, good governance, and rule of law. It contributes to the EIP flagship FLAGSHIP 2 – Human rights, the rule of law, and modern, effective administrations, governance and accountability.

More than a decade after the Arab Spring outburst and the dramatic developments which unravelled in its aftermath, the Southern Neighbourhood region is at a critical point with regards to democracy, civic and human rights. For instance, in the most repressive regimes of the region, the already very constrained civic spaces and human rights and freedoms have been further pushed back in the last three years and even in countries where the hope for a successful democratisation process was the highest (Tunisia and Lebanon),. This goes hand-in-hand with a rampant culture of impunity among the political elites of the region and a significant lack of transparency and accountability which sustain a certain fatigue among the people with regards to democratisation, further aggravated by the anti-democratic and anti-Western discourse which spread across the region as a reaction to Russia's war on Ukraine.

In view of these challenges, there is a critical need to support existing pro-democracy actors, as well as emerging ones, in the Southern Neighbourhood region to strengthen their resilience in such difficult civic contexts.

In line with NEAR's Regional MIP Priority Area 1, via a direct award of a grant to the European Endowment for Democracy (EED), the action will contribute to promote deep and sustainable democracy in the Southern

⁷ JOIN (2021) 2 final of 09.02.2021

⁸ SWD(2021) 23 final

⁹ C(2021) 9399 final

Neighbourhood countries by supporting pro-democracy civil society activism. It will also foster new pro-democratic actors and media in repressive contexts and preserve and strengthen the existing ones, in particular:

- The grant will provide financial support to new and existing pro-democracy actors and media is provided, with due consideration to the complementary nature of EED grant and with attention paid to the potential added value of the EED grant in supporting politically sensitive action proposals, thus aiming to benefit the most vulnerable and marginalised pro-democracy actors.
- The grant will fund coaching and capacity-building to existing pro-democracy actors and media, helping them to navigate changing local, national and regional contexts and thus strengthening their resilience.

The proposed action aims to contribute to EU's commitment to 'promote a rule of law culture through close involvement of civil society', and the need to 'support concrete initiatives to reinforce civil society organisations and human rights defenders', as put in the 'Renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood – A new Agenda for the Mediterranean' (2021). It also contributes to the goals set by the 'EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024'.

The action also directly contributes to Flagship 2 'Human rights, the rule of law, and modern, effective administrations, governance and accountability' of the Economic and Investment Plan for the Southern Neighbours.

1.3. Beneficiar(y)/(ies) of the action

The action shall be carried out in the Southern Neighbourhood region (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria and Tunisia).

2. RATIONALE

2.1. Context

The Southern Neighbourhood has recorded a worrying pushback on democracy in recent times. In most repressive countries, this has translated into shrinking civic space and growing pressure and attacks against pro-democracy actors including civil society organisations (CSOs) and independent media in order to silence those dissenting voices. The latter have been facing intimidation, legal harassment, arbitrary arrests, restricted access to funding, and travel bans among other repressive measures.

Local pro-democracy actors have also been losing momentum. The hostility and attacks of the authorities, and in some cases, other political and military actors, have not only contributed to discrediting those actors, but they have also fuelled growing polarisation within the society. This has further weakened an already fragile social contract. Moreover, some countries including those that have initiated a democratic transition, such as Lebanon and Tunisia, are currently affected by major political and socio-economic crises that are driving them to the verge of collapse.

Overall, most of the political systems in the region are plagued with a deeply rooted culture of impunity. Lack of accountability and transparency still largely prevail, while the economy is in disarray in many of these countries. Therefore, a significant part of the societies cast doubt on the relevance of the democratic model

and consider that democratic endeavours initiated after the 2011 popular uprisings have not improved their daily life.

From global perspective, Russia's war on Ukraine and its geopolitical fallout – which has aggravated already compromised local economies – have left less visible marks, weakening the pro-democracy discourse and those promoting it. Democratic values and standards are often associated to the West and the European neighbours while anti-western sentiment and European discourse have proliferated in the region in the context of Russia's invasion to Ukraine.

In such a context, the European Endowment for Democracy (EED) has the vocation to support democratic values and objectives, and to complement existing EU co-operation instruments by funding actors of change and fostering democratic transition in the Neighbourhood region through rapid and flexible assistance to civil society organisations (CSOs) and human rights activists. The complementary nature of EED grants is important to be underlined in this context as the identified added value of the EED lies in supporting politically sensitive action proposals, that traditional donors consider difficult to fund or where a repressive environment has started to restrict civil society-oriented actions or external funding. In this sense the EED is complementary to the traditional EU financial support mechanisms such as Civil Society and Human Rights and Democracy thematic programmes.

The European Endowment for Democracy (EED) was established by all EU Member States, the European Parliament (EP), the European Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS), in October 2012 as a private law Foundation under Belgian Law, governed by its own Statute and governing bodies. To date, EED has approved for funding over 2012 initiatives implemented by pro-democracy actors in 35 countries in the European Neighbourhood and beyond, with a budget of over EUR 165.4m. Out of these, more than 467 initiatives were supported in the Southern Neighbourhood countries for a total amount of over EUR 35.6m.

Core EED running costs are covered by an Operating Grant from the European Commission. A significant part of this success was due to the joint efforts of DG NEAR and EED through the provision of additional funds in these challenging contexts. This stems from EU's commitment to 'promote a rule of law culture through close involvement of civil society', and the need to 'support concrete initiatives to reinforce civil society organisations and human rights defenders', as put in the 'Renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood – A new Agenda for the Mediterranean' (2021). This is further stressed in 'EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024' which recalls the retreat of some partner states from human rights protection and the ongoing trend of a 'shrinking space for civil society'. The action also directly contributes to Flagship 2 'Human rights, the rule of law, and modern, effective administrations, governance and accountability' of the Economic and Investment Plan for the Southern Neighbours, accompanying the implementation of thematic objectives highlighted in the new Agenda for the Mediterranean.

In line with the EU's commitment to inclusiveness and the overall human rights-based approach in its international partnerships and external relations, the action will ensure that youth and gender are effectively mainstreamed through its activities, following the sustainable and inclusive approach demonstrated by the EED so far.

The action will ensure that timely and flexible support is provided, enabling key actors to sustain themselves despite the difficult situation in the region. Thanks to its risk-taking approach, EED will seek to fill gaps in donor-support in repressive environments where security concerns can prevent certain donors' operations and require specific security protocols to reach sensitive initiatives as well as support a wide range of initiatives across the region. This represents an important element of complementarity between different EU actions and enhances the effectiveness of EU's action in the region to support civil society and human rights promotion.

Therefore, complementing the work of other donors, through this action grant, EED will provide flexible support, in the form of grants, to civil society and media organisations, local actors and grassroots activists, civic initiatives, and other forms of citizens' self-organisation to enable them to drive forward the pro-democracy agenda in the Southern Neighbourhood. Additionally, EED will seek to enable new critical actors, emerging civic movements and leaders, independent media platforms, and other actors who seek to play a meaningful role in democratic transformation, as well as preserve and strengthen the capacity of existing pro-democracy actors and media initiatives to operate and survive.

2.2. Problem Analysis

Short problem analysis

Most of Southern Neighbourhood countries continue to have restrictive legal frameworks and challenging operating environments for the protection of CSOs and human rights activists. On the first hand, a big challenge is represented by very repressive and complex political environments, where in the last two years, an increased crackdown by local authorities has been recorded where they resorted to systematic repression against dissident voices. Those local civil society groups and independent media platforms are operating in very challenging and restrictive environments where freedoms of association and expression as well as media freedoms have been under widespread and often growing repression. Such circumstances impact various sectors of activism, and as environmental protection, minority rights and human rights increasingly intertwine, environmental rights activists are also put at risk in this context. Actors and organisations advocating for gender equality are also significantly constrained and threatened in many cases.

Security concerns in some of these countries deeply affect the funding of such actors by external donors. Foreign funding accusations remain an efficient tool to discredit the local civil society and prevent majority of donors to operate in the country. Moreover, authorities still maintain tight control over public and political space and exercise a complete monopoly over public discourse as well as a severe repression of the rights and freedoms and discrimination against women and sexual and religious minorities. This also involves media manipulation, which resulted in the proliferation of polarising narratives inciting violence and further fragmentation.

On the second hand, another challenge is posed by democratic backsliding environments, where civic engagement and pro-democracy activism are shrinking and that need urgent support. In such contexts, activists and CSOs face arrests and repressive laws that curtail their freedoms of action. Such states resort to repression of the most vocal dissenters via politically motivated prosecutions for criminal offenses, and eventually imprisonment. Also in contexts experiencing positive democratisation efforts over the years, recent measures and laws adopted have progressively unravelled the rule of law and the fragile democratic progress the country has achieved. Checks and balances are increasingly weakened with the expanding executive power over the legislature and judiciary.

Such developments have a particularly detrimental impact from a gender and youth perspective in the target countries. For instance, democratic backsliding and shrinking civic spaces contribute to the further marginalisation of minorities, as mentioned above. In the countries of the region, women and youth are already on the margins both socially and economically. They are the most impacted by unemployment and the lack of protection due to their propension to work in the informal sector. They are also vulnerable to intersectional discriminations should they belong to sexual, religious and other minorities or whether they are migrants or refugees. The deterioration of the civic space and of the democratic environment in the countries of the regions thus further consolidates their exclusion or the risk of. This action will ensure that these specific groups are given support to remain or become actor of their civic space, without risking persecutions.

Identification of main stakeholders and corresponding institutional and/or organisational issues (mandates, potential roles, and capacities) to be covered by the action.

The direct beneficiary of this action is the European Endowment for Democracy. The Foundation's main purpose is direct grant-making to pro-democracy activist and/or organisations struggling for democratic transition in the European Neighbourhood and beyond, through specific flexible procedures.

The direct beneficiaries of the Endowment's activities include: pro-democratic movements and other pro-democratic actors in favour of a pluralistic multiparty system on democratic ground; social movements and actors; civil society organisations; emerging leaders, independent media and journalists (including bloggers, social media activists, etc.), non-governmental institutions, including foundations and educational institutions functioning also in exile; provided that all the beneficiaries adhere to core democratic values, respect international human rights standards and subscribe to principles of non-violence. Among them are included environmental and gender equality activists and organisations.

The EED supports groups and individuals, who seek to employ innovative, as well as traditional, means of communication and public expression to raise public awareness, assist observance of fundamental freedoms and human rights and consolidate democracy. These actions are carried out on the basis of assessments of requests for help.

Specific beneficiaries of the project will include:

- Existing and emerging civil society organisations (including initiative groups, trade unions, professional associations, youth organisations, cultural centres, volunteers' networks, cultural hubs, etc.) and media initiatives.
- Individual democracy actors and civil activists (registered and non-registered).
- Grassroots initiatives (registered and non-registered), including start-ups and individual activists promoting innovative forms of civic engagement.
- Civil society organisations across the region, strengthening local and regional citizens' engagement in democratic processes.
- Initiatives and other platforms fostering free and democratic debate.
- Civic, human rights and political activists and organisations, including aspiring civic leaders.
- Small, start-up and local-based media initiatives (including digital).
- Larger, professional media outlets that face specific funding challenges.
- Independent journalists, writers, and influencers, including bloggers and social media activists.
- Media related initiatives such as organisations working on monitoring violence against media and journalists, provision of legal support to journalists, and media monitoring.
- Locally based media development organisations, civil society organisations and umbrella organisations of independent media active in strengthening the media sector overall or promoting a media environment conducive to democratisation.

2.3. Lessons Learned

This action will enable EED to step up its existing efforts by providing substantial additional funding for support to civil society and independent media. Thanks to three EU action grants for the South region signed between 2019 – 2021, EED was able to support 80 initiatives in nine countries with a total value of around EUR 9.0m.

Building on the experience of EED's democracy support work to date, lessons learned, and feedback from grantees, EED has formulated its lessons learnt which will be taking into account for this action.

This includes:

- EED's grant-making model, which is based on complementing other donor support, building human connections with grantees, trusting grantees with institutional support, and taking risks, has proven to be very relevant and effective, according to the 2020 external evaluation of EED.
- Democratisation is complex, unpredictable, and a long-term process. Even if immediate results are not always visible, supporting pro-democracy activists and a country's democratic infrastructure may prove to be effective over time, as it allows actors to be ready and respond to 'windows of opportunity'.
- Media pluralism is essential to ensure citizens' access to a diversity of views and ideas (including access to standpoints of opposition politicians). Similarly, support to local media actors has proven to be highly relevant for ensuring continued access to independent information on local affairs and fostering local citizen engagement.
- Strengthening the cooperation among independent media actors (e.g., pooling resources, sharing content), especially at the regional level, has been assessed as a promising strategy not only to counter domestic censorship but also to strengthen media's sustainability prospects.
- Support for creative and artistic initiatives has proven to be relevant and effective to stimulate civic engagement (especially in repressive contexts). Such initiatives have shown, for example, to be able to effectively raise public awareness about pressing political and social-economic issues and mobilise citizens.
- In some country contexts, where civil society and political actors have been strongly divided, initiatives that have bridged civic and political engagement - by focusing on achieving common objectives - have proven to be very effective in fostering democratic change.
- Supporting linkages between democratic actors inside and outside their country of origin is essential particularly for highly repressive countries, to reinforce one another and consolidate democracy promotion efforts.
- Discreet forms of funding have proven to become of increased importance as more countries have become hostile to international democracy support.
- While EED is mainly a one-time donor, repeat funds are increasingly recurrent. Under these circumstances, for most of the partners, in particular for independent media, repeat funds or long-term funding are necessary. Working with trusted and flexible donors gives a sense of safety that not only sustain them but also allow them to plan for long-term results. Repeat funds should be granted to those who are under ongoing pressure and security risks and have limited opportunities to diversify their fundraising.
- In light of EED's experience in media support, there is the need to provide longer-term, institutional, funding, to provide the necessary stability for the media actors to survive, sustain staff, and strengthen their resilience, is crucial.
- Start-up actors and pilot projects often require repeat funding and/or tailored capacity development support (provided by either EED or other donors) before they are institutionally mature enough to attract funding from donors like the EU.
- Grassroots actors often require substantial capacity development support in order to create the grounds for any sustained activism. EED has learned from its experience working with these actors across the regions. The need to carefully assess actors' capacity building needs and coordinate such support with other donors is pertinent.

3. DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTION

3.1. Objectives and Expected Outputs

The **Overall Objective** of this action is to promote deep and sustainable democracy in the Southern Neighbourhood countries by supporting prodemocracy civil society activism.

The **Specific Objective** of this action is to foster new pro-democratic actors and media in repressive contexts and to preserve and strengthen the existing ones.

The **Outputs** to be delivered by this action contributing to the corresponding Specific Objective (Outcome) are:

- 1.1 contributing to Specific Objective 1: Financial support to new and existing pro-democracy actors and media is provided.
- 1.2 contributing to Specific Objective 1: Coaching and capacity-building to existing pro-democracy actors and media is provided.

3.2. Indicative Activities

Activities related to Output 1.1:

- Support the emergence and consolidation of new civic groups who are ready to and capable of operating in the new repressive environment and the increased risks this involves;
- Support a new generation of civic activists as they face difficulties accessing mainstream donor support due to their registration situation or weak technical capacities;
- Provide emergency funding to civil society organisations to respond to specific urgent needs;
- Provide core and bridge funding to enable civic activists to respond more quickly in a changing and often unpredictable political environment as well as to consolidate the development of emerging institutions.

Activities related to Output 1.2:

- Provide capacity development activities and coaching to help local civil society to better adapt to changing country contexts, implement transformational ideas, become better communicators of their work and access other donors' funding;
- Provide capacity-building for CSOs and media organisations, such as helping to build their digital security and resilience;
- Organise visibility events and networking between beneficiaries and European CSOs to foster synergies and mutual knowledge;

3.3. Mainstreaming

Environmental Protection, Climate Change and Biodiversity

Outcomes of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) screening: The SEA screening concluded that no further action was required.

Outcomes of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) screening (relevant for projects and/or specific interventions within a project).

The EIA screening classified the action as Category C (no need for further assessment)

Outcome of the Climate Risk Assessment (CRA) screening (relevant for projects and/or specific interventions within a project).

The CRA screening concluded that this action is no or low risk (no need for further assessment).

Gender equality and empowerment of women and girls

As per OECD Gender DAC codes identified in section 1.1, this action is labelled as G1. This implies that building sustainable democracy also means ensuring gender equality and increasing the participation of women in political and economic life. This action will mainstream gender equality and youth issues and seek to integrate, and capitalise on existing thematic, regional and bilateral programmes that are already implemented with CSOs active in the fields of gender equality and support for youth, as well as Women's CSOs active in other fields of intervention within this action.

In this respect, this action contributes to the implementation of the GAP III, the thematic areas of engagement "Promoting equal participation and leadership" and "Integrating the women, peace and security agenda and the advancement of EU gender equality objectives, in dialogue with the Renewed Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood, by strengthening women's rights organisations and social movements as key strategic partners for good governance and human rights protection in the region, and in our cooperation. In so doing, this action will meaningfully involve WCSOs as sub-grantees but also in other activities, seminars, consultations and any other action planned to achieve the expected results. Considering that WCSOs are mostly absent from decision-making processes and arenas, specific attention will be placed on ensuring a gender balance participation at output level, ensuring women's and men's equal participation to events, forums, structured dialogues etc. Gender data will be collected in order to track progress and identify potential hubs for unconscious gender bias.

Human Rights

The action aims to support the pro-democracy activists which include organisations and individuals working on promotion and protection of human rights as main target groups. Human rights, democracy and the rule of law, as well as a gender responsive approach, will remain at the heart of the EU's response.¹⁰ The action will be taken into account the principles of non-discrimination, meaningful participation, transparency, accountability and respect to all human rights.

Disability

As per OECD Disability DAC codes identified in section 1.1, this action is labelled as D0.

Democracy

This action will primarily contribute to the democratisation and to the social and economic development of partner countries by supporting pro-democracy activists.

Conflict sensitivity, peace and resilience

¹⁰ EU [Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024](#).

As part of the context scrutiny and knowledge, due attention will also be given to conflict sensitivity and economic and social standards. The EED operates in a diverse range of countries across the European Neighbourhood and beyond, and each jurisdiction has its particular socio-political and economic environment. Contexts range from transitional, restrictive, or repressive to full-conflict environments and activities are tailored to such different realities.

3.4. Risks and Assumptions

Category	Risks	Likelihood (High/ Medium/ Low)	Impact (High/ Medium/ Low)	Mitigating measures
1	Increased instability at country/ regional level affects the implementation of the programme.	M	M	Priority of EU and international aid is to assist in its efforts to mitigate the situation. Situation to be closely monitored.
1	Shrinking space for civil society, media and journalists, as well as youth activists in the targeted countries	H	H	Throughout the implementation of the programme, the situation of independent civil society and media activism will be regularly monitored, in order to be able to adapt to changing circumstances.
3,5	Support given to political actors, media outlets, journalists and emerging leaders is a highly sensitive issue. Even if the EED is autonomous entity acting independently of the EU, the latter has to continue to be systematically informed and aware of the possible political consequences that could result from the action of the EED.	H	H	Headquarters and Heads of EU Delegations should continue to be kept systematically informed of EED action and training activities in order to ensure coherence and efficiency between their respective actions. Heads of Delegations in particular should be alerted when EED interventions may raise concerns and questions from partner authorities, in order to be able to respond to the latter in a proper way.
1	Safety and security concerns affecting individual beneficiaries.	L/M	L/M	EED has well-established and tested mechanisms to ensure the personal security of individual grantees. Operations will be adapted to respond quickly to risky circumstances or

				events to avoid interruption of activities.
2,4,5	<p>Among the added values of the EED is its ability to act swiftly and to offer dedicated and rapid funding in risky environments.</p> <p>However, sound financial management requires a minimum level of procedural and regulatory conditions and transparency, which are applied by EED. In addition, any EU funds to the EED should be delivered and managed according to EU financial rules. The principles of sound financial management may therefore limit the flexibility and swiftness expected.</p>	M	M	<p>Close co-operation between EED and European Commission allows efficient sharing of information about financial procedures and requirements. EED staff demonstrates to be strictly observing applicable legal and financial rules. Audit, expenditure verification and evaluation are also valuable tools of mitigation</p>

External Assumptions

- The political environment in the Southern Neighbourhood region will not deteriorate to the extent that even the EED can no longer function there.
- Insecurity in the region does not significantly prevent CSOs and pro-democratic actors to carry out their activities.
- No big economic disruption will significantly impair the successful delivery of aid (economic crisis, Covid-19 pandemic).
- Politically the EED will continue to be seen as an autonomous body which is not an EU institution although acting at “arm's-length” distance from the EU.
- The beneficiaries involved are committed to participate in all activities throughout the duration of the action.

3.5. Intervention Logic

The underlying intervention logic for this action is that the action will allow for functioning of EED’s mechanism for financial support to third parties focused on human rights and political activists, pro-democratic movements, civil society organisations, emerging leaders, independent media and journalists. By

supporting them financially and with capacity building – and if the environment for civic engagement does not deteriorate – they will achieve greater freedom of action for human rights activities and increased space for civil society activity reported by EU Delegations, UN organisations and Human Rights NGOs. This shall contribute to deep and sustainable democratisation in the Southern Neighbourhood countries and to the emergence of new pro-democratic actors and media and the strengthening of existing ones in repressive contexts in the region. At large, it shall also contribute to the improvement of the rights of citizens and specific groups of the population in the target countries and to their general inclusion.

As concerns Output 1.1. (Financial support to new and existing pro-democracy actors and media is provided), the provision of financial support through the EED will fill an important gap through which independent, not regime-aligned civil society actors and associations are facing important limitations vis-à-vis their financial subsistence and ability to operate. Financial support through the EED will therefore ensure that a larger array of civil society actors can participate to the civic and democratic life of their respective countries and local environments.

As concerns Output 1.2. (Coaching and capacity-building to existing pro-democracy actors and media is provided), the activities aiming at strengthening the capacities of pro-democracy actors and media in the target countries will help them navigate changing, and often hostile, local, national and regional contexts. Providing them the right knowledge and tools to operate in their environment shall strengthen them, help them enlarge support among their populations and allow them to establish connections and synergies with like-minded actors and organisations.

This action will be dedicated to cover the costs for sub-granting to the Southern Neighbourhood countries. 65% of the financial allocation should go to sub-grants in Algeria, Egypt and Libya; 35% should go to the other countries of the Southern Neighbourhood. The EED will report on the results with number and description of grants awarded to human rights defenders and related activities (coaching, training, advocacy).

3.6. Indicative Logical Framework Matrix

PROJECT MODALITY

Results	Results chain: Main expected results [maximum 10 @]	Indicators [it least one indicator per expected result @]	Baselines (values and years)	Targets (values and years)	Sources of data	Assumptions
Impact 1	Deep and sustainable democracy in the Southern Neighbourhood countries is promoted by supporting prodemocracy civil society activism.	International IDEA's Global State of Democracy	values of the year 2023	Improved or not changed	Global State of Democracy Report	<i>Not applicable</i>
Outcome 1	New pro-democratic actors and media in repressive contexts are fostered and existing ones are preserved and strengthened.	CIVICUS Monitor	values of the year 2023	Improved or not changed	CIVICUS Monitor website	
Output 1 related to Outcome 1	Financial support to new pro-democracy actors and media is provided.	Number of grants awarded to civil society and media activists, and human rights defenders in Southern Neighbourhood countries with restrictive legislation and environment for civil society to operate.	-	To be determined with EED	Sources of verification are the official communication and reports from the EED.	The political environment in the region will continue to enable EED actions in their territories.
Output 2 related to Outcomes 1	Coaching and capacity-building to existing pro-democracy actors and media is provided.	Number of beneficiaries of coaching and capacity-building activities provided by EED.	-	To be determined with EED	Sources of verification are the official communication and reports from the EED.	The political environment in the region will continue to enable EED actions in their territories.

4. IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS

4.1. Financing Agreement

In order to implement this action, it is not envisaged to conclude a financing agreement with the partner countries.

4.2. Indicative Implementation Period

The indicative operational implementation period of this action, during which the activities described in section 3 will be carried out and the corresponding contracts and agreements implemented, is 72 months from the date of adoption by the Commission of this financing Decision.

Extensions of the implementation period may be agreed by the Commission's responsible authorising officer in duly justified cases.

4.3. Implementation Modalities

The Commission will ensure that the EU appropriate rules and procedures for providing financing to third parties are respected, including review procedures, where appropriate, and compliance of the action with EU restrictive measures¹¹.

4.3.1. Direct Management (Grants)

4.3.1.1. Grants

a) Purpose of the grant

The action will be implemented under direct management through the award of one action grant to the European Endowment for Democracy (EED) awarded for the period from 1 November 2023 until 30 April 2027. The main purpose of the action shall be to redistribute the grant (financial support to third parties) as described above. In this context, the EED will be responsible for receiving, evaluating and selecting requests for financial support and awarding the financial support to the selected beneficiaries.

Satisfactory implementation may be assessed by the Commission through different means, which include: narrative and financial progress and final report(s); evaluation(s) including external evaluation; expenditure verification report(s); financial and/or system audit(s) including external audit(s); financial verification mission(s). The Commission will recourse to some of these tools, choice of which will depend on previous year(s) assessment results and on specific risk assessments. In case of poor performance, the Commission may reduce the amount of a payment instalment or not award it.

b) Type of applicants targeted

The grant will be awarded to the EED.

¹¹ EU Sanctions Map. Please note that the sanctions map is an IT tool for identifying the sanctions regimes. The source of the sanctions stems from legal acts published in the Official Journal (OJ). In case of discrepancy between the published legal acts and the updates on the website it is the OJ version that prevails.

c) Justification of a direct grant

Under the responsibility of the Commission's authorising officer responsible, the grant may be awarded without a call for proposals to the EED.

With regard to Article 195 (f) of the Financial Regulation and under the responsibility of the Commission's authorising officer responsible, the recourse to an award of a grant without a call for proposals is justified because the EED is one of the rare actors in the landscape of the organisations providing financial support in the Neighbourhood region to activists who cannot benefit from financial support from the donors community through traditional funding channels due to their size, legal status (e.g. non-registered entities or individuals), geopolitical context (e.g. civil war situation) etc. The specificity and sensitivity of this particular type of intervention requires a body with appropriate competence and mandate. In this respect, the EED offers trustful credibility and reliability thanks to its particular institutional set-up, having been established by an EU decision and being steered by representatives of the European Parliament, of the EU Member States, of the European External Action Service and civil society experts. This unique position, combined with a good track-record despite their short existence, with efficient award procedures (that are nevertheless compliant with the general principles applicable to the use of public funds) and with a standing good reputation, makes of the EED an adequate vehicle for providing financial support to local beneficiaries at a micro- or mini-scale, allowing beneficiaries such as non-registered associations, political movements, individual activists, bloggers etc. to benefit from the donors community funding where this would not be possible through more traditional funding channels. The EED has also the further advantage of being 'European-labelled'.

4.4. Scope of geographical eligibility for procurement and grants

The geographical eligibility in terms of place of establishment for participating in procurement and grant award procedures and in terms of origin of supplies purchased as established in the basic act and set out in the relevant contractual documents shall apply, subject to the following provisions.

The Commission's authorising officer responsible may extend the geographical eligibility on the basis of urgency or of unavailability of services in the markets of the countries or territories concerned, or in other duly substantiated cases where application of the eligibility rules would make the realisation of this action impossible or exceedingly difficult (Article 28(10) NDICI-Global Europe Regulation).

4.5. Indicative Budget

Indicative Budget components	EU contribution (amount in EUR)	Third-party contribution (amount in EUR)
Grants – total envelope under section 4.3.1	10 000 000	1 000 000
Evaluation – cf. section 5.2 Audit – cf. section 5.3	will be covered by another Decision	N.A.
Strategic communication and Public diplomacy – cf. section 6	will be covered by another Decision	N.A.
Contingencies	N.A.	N.A.
Totals	10 000 000	1 000 000

4.6. Organisational Set-up and Responsibilities

The EED will be the only recipient of this funding and will carry out the project. The project will have a steering committee made up of DG NEAR, EU Delegations representatives and EED and it will meet at least once a year. Other country and/or topic specific meetings may be organised in case of need.

The EED will be in regular touch with the DG NEAR B2 unit project manager but also with relevant EUD representatives in the target countries.

As part of its prerogative of budget implementation and to safeguard the financial interests of the Union, the Commission may participate in the above governance structures set up for governing the implementation of the action.

5. PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT

5.1. Monitoring and Reporting

The day-to-day technical and financial monitoring of the implementation of this action will be a continuous process, and part of the implementing partner's responsibilities. To this aim, the implementing partner shall establish a permanent internal, technical and financial monitoring system for the action and elaborate regular progress reports (not less than annual) and final reports. Every report shall provide an accurate account of implementation of the action, difficulties encountered, changes introduced, as well as the degree of achievement of its Outputs and contribution to the achievement of its Outcomes, and if possible at the time of reporting, contribution to the achievement of its Impacts, as measured by corresponding indicators, using as reference the logframe matrix.

The Commission may undertake additional project monitoring visits both through its own staff and through independent consultants recruited directly by the Commission for independent monitoring reviews (or recruited by the responsible agent contracted by the Commission for implementing such reviews).

Arrangements for monitoring and reporting, including roles and responsibilities for data collection, analysis and monitoring:

- Regular reporting of the project
- Steering committee once per year for information, housekeeping and networking purposes

5.2. Evaluation

Having regard to the nature of the action, evaluations will be carried out for this action or its components via the implementing partner.

The evaluation reports shall be shared with the partner countries and other key stakeholders following the best practice of evaluation dissemination¹². The implementing partner and the Commission shall analyse the conclusions and recommendations of the evaluations and, where appropriate, in agreement with the partner countries, jointly decide on the follow-up actions to be taken and any adjustments necessary, including, if indicated, the reorientation of the project.

¹² See best practice of evaluation dissemination.

5.3. Audit and Verifications

Without prejudice to the obligations applicable to contracts concluded for the implementation of this action, the Commission may, on the basis of a risk assessment, contract independent audit or verification assignments.

6. STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

All entities implementing EU-funded external actions have the contractual obligation to inform the relevant audiences of the Union's support for their work by displaying the EU emblem and a short funding statement as appropriate on all communication materials related to the actions concerned. To that end they must comply with the instructions given in the 2022 guidance document [*Communicating and raising EU visibility: Guidance for external actions*](#) (or any successor document).

This obligation will apply equally, regardless of whether the actions concerned are implemented by the Commission, the partner countries, service providers, grant beneficiaries or entrusted or delegated entities such as UN agencies, international financial institutions and agencies of EU Member States. In each case, a reference to the relevant contractual obligations must be included in the respective financing agreement, procurement and grant contracts, and contribution agreements.

Appendix 1: IDENTIFICATION OF THE PRIMARY INTERVENTION LEVEL FOR REPORTING IN OPSYS

A primary intervention (project/programme) is a coherent set of results structured in a logical framework aiming at delivering development change or progress. Identifying the level of the primary intervention will allow for:

- ✓ Differentiating these actions or contracts from those that do not produce direct reportable development results, defined as support entities (i.e. audits, evaluations);
- ✓ Articulating actions and/or contracts according to an expected common chain of results and therefore allowing them to ensure a more efficient and aggregated monitoring and reporting of performance;
- ✓ Having a complete and exhaustive mapping of all results-bearing actions and contracts.

The present action identifies as

Action level (i.e. budget support, blending)		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Single action	Present action: all contracts in the present action
Group of actions level (i.e: i) top-up cases, ii) second, third, etc. phases of a programme)		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Group of actions	Actions reference (CRIS#/OPSYS#):
Contract level (i.e. grants, contribution agreements, any case in which foreseen individual legal commitments identified in the budget will have different log frames, even if part of the same action document)		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Single contract 1	Direct award grant to the EED
Group of contracts level (i.e: i) series of programme estimates, ii) cases in which an action document foresees many foreseen individual legal commitments (for instance four contracts and one of them being a technical assistance) and two of them, a technical assistance contract and a contribution agreement, aim at the same objectives and complement each other, iii) follow up contracts that share the same log frame of the original contract)		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Group of contracts	