



**WESTMINSTER  
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**UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM**

## **Resisting attempts to close the political space and restrict civil society**

26 September 2017

9:30 – 16:00

European Endowment for Democracy  
Rue de la Loi 34 | B-1040 Brussels | Belgium

**Co-hosted by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, European Endowment for Democracy, European Partnership for Democracy and University of Birmingham**

Authoritarian incumbents, and democratically elected leaders with authoritarian tendencies, can close political space and restrict civil society in a variety of ways. One increasingly popular tactic is to suppress civil society by restricting its access to foreign funding and controlling its activities through requirements to register. This often occurs in divided societies in which the ruling party paints civil society as a threat to stability, and manipulates the growth of radical groups to pass anti-terror legislation that enables them to exert control over a range of non-state actors. Parliaments – who ought to be defenders of democracy – often aid and abet executives in this process.

Built around the launch of Westminster Foundation for Democracy's paper – *Defending democracy: when and why do parliaments protect political space?* – this event will examine how democracy actors can react to attempts to close the political space and restrict civil activism in different parts of the world. The morning session will focus on how parliaments can act to protect political space, then take a closer look at other tools and methods deployed by the activists and donor community responding to the challenges arising in the context of shrinking spaces. In the afternoon, panellists will tackle broader questions about risk-taking, unintended side-effects and 'politically smart' democracy support.

### **9:30 – 11:00 | Defending democracy**

Welcome by **Jerzy Pomianowski**, Executive Director of the European Endowment for Democracy

Launch of WFD policy paper: *Defending democracy – when and why do parliaments protect political space?*

Presentation by **Susan Dodsworth** | Research Fellow at the International Development Department, University of Birmingham

Commentary by **Kersty McCourt** | Senior Advocacy Advisor at the Open Society Justice Initiative and **Richard Youngs** | Senior Fellow in the Democracy and Rule of Law Program, Carnegie Europe.

Moderator: **Graeme Ramshaw** | Director of Research and Evaluation at the Westminster Foundation for Democracy

*Coffee break*



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### **11:15 – 12:45 | Voices from the ground**

*What is the current situation on the ground with respect to shrinking political space and restrictions imposed on civil society? How does this reflect in the civil society-parliaments relations? What are the risks for activists and their current needs with regard to the parliamentary landscape? How can parliaments engage more into protecting the political space and maintain dialogue with civil society? What are the needs of civil society in shrinking spaces?*

**Cathal Glibert** | Coordinator of the CIVICUS Monitor at CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation

**Alexandra Alissa Novitchkova** | Kharkiv Regional Foundation “Public Alternative,” Ukraine

**Gary Nkombo** | Member of the National Assembly of Zambia

**Emil Atanasovski** | Country Representative for Western Balkans, Westminster Foundation for Democracy

Moderator: **Peter Sondergaard** | Director of Programmes, European Endowment for Democracy

*Lunch break*

### **13:45 – 15:15 | Risk-taking vs politically smart democracy support**

*With the current backlash against democracy and democracy support, what does it mean to take risks in democracy support? How does ‘informed risk-taking’ interact with ‘politically smart’ democracy support? Do democracy supporters take enough risks – and are they the right ones? How can democracy supporters avoid unintended side-effects?*

**Alina Rocha Menocal** | Senior Research Fellow at the Overseas Development Institute

**Julia Leininger** | Head of Department (Governance, Statehood and Security) at the German Development Institute

**Dina Melhem** | Regional Director, Asia and MENA at the Westminster Foundation for Democracy

**Nic Cheeseman** | Professor of Democracy at the International Development Department, University of Birmingham

Moderator: **Alex Vines** | Research Director, Area Studies and International Law and Head of the Africa Programme at Chatham House

### **15:15 – 15:30 | Closing remarks**

**Nic Cheeseman** | Professor of Democracy at the International Development Department, University of Birmingham

*Coffee and informal discussion*