

Shared Values, Shared Responsibility.

A framework for cooperation between Iran's freedom movement and European democratic partners

DISCUSSION DRAFT

September 2026

A COMMON FOUNDATION. A PRACTICAL AGENDA.

01

**Shared
values**

02

**Shared
responsibility**

03

**Joint
action**

01 / EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A common foundation. A practical agenda.

Democracy Forum proposes a structured dialogue between participants in Iran's freedom movement and European democratic institutions, civil society organisations, researchers and citizens. Its purpose is to identify common principles, assess threats to those principles and develop practical plans for their protection.

The starting point is a shared commitment to human dignity, freedom, equality, pluralism and accountable government. These principles can connect people with different histories, political traditions and experiences of repression.

Effective cooperation requires more than declarations of solidarity. It needs agreed standards, credible analysis, clear responsibilities and sustained work. Democracy Forum therefore proposes a twelve-month programme combining a shared-values dialogue, practical support for democratic participation and joint policy development.

This paper presents a framework for consultation. It does not claim to represent every participant in Iran's diverse freedom movement or to establish a consensus that has not yet been developed.

THE PURPOSE OF COOPERATION

Democracy Forum seeks to build lasting connections between Iranian democratic aspirations and the institutions, practices and civic commitments that sustain European democracies.

This relationship should allow learning in both directions. Iranian activists, researchers and civil society participants bring experience of organising under pressure, resisting discrimination and defending fundamental freedoms. European partners can contribute institutional experience, educational resources, professional networks and established mechanisms for protecting rights.

- | | |
|--|---|
| 01 Identify a common foundation of democratic values. | 02 Understand how those values are threatened in different contexts. |
| 03 Strengthen the ability of individuals and organisations to protect them. | 04 Translate dialogue into joint projects and actionable policy recommendations. |

Cooperation should preserve the independence of participating organisations and create space for disagreement. The Iranian people must determine their own political future through a free and democratic process; European cooperation should support their capacity to exercise that choice.

02 / COMMON GROUND

Six commitments for democratic cooperation

The European Union's founding treaty identifies human dignity, liberty, democratic government, equality, the rule of law and human rights as fundamental values. It also recognises pluralism, solidarity and the protection of minorities. These are standards against which European policy and practice can themselves be assessed. ^[1]

There is documented overlap with demands expressed within Iran's freedom movement. In March 2024, the UN Fact-Finding Mission described participation in the Woman, Life, Freedom protests across social backgrounds, including minorities, around demands for equality, justice and social and political reform. ^[2]

These findings provide a starting point for dialogue, without establishing agreement among all Iranian democratic actors on every constitutional, political or social question.

01 Equal dignity and citizenship

Every person should enjoy equal protection and opportunity, regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, belief, language, sexual orientation or political opinion.

02 Democratic self-government

Public authority should depend on freely expressed public consent, meaningful political participation, genuine electoral competition and the possibility of peaceful changes of government.

03 The rule of law

Public power must be accountable. Independent courts, fair proceedings and effective remedies should protect people against arbitrary detention, persecution and abuse.

04 Freedom of expression and association

People must be able to speak, publish, organise and assemble peacefully, including when they criticise governments, influential organisations or prevailing opinion.

05 Pluralism and freedom of belief

Religious and non-religious people must enjoy equal rights. Public power should protect freedom of conscience and must not impose religious or ideological conformity.

06 Non-violence and democratic responsibility

Political differences should be addressed through peaceful participation and lawful democratic processes. Intimidation, dehumanisation and violence against opponents undermine the conditions for freedom.

Democracy Forum proposes these commitments as a common foundation. Their practical meaning should be discussed openly and tested against difficult cases, including the rights of people with whom participants strongly disagree.

03 / SHARED THREATS

Protect rights. Assess conduct and evidence.

Iranian democratic actors and European societies operate under different political conditions. A common framework should recognise connections between threats while remaining precise about differences in power, responsibility and harm.

For this paper, **fanaticism** describes an attitude that treats a religious or political doctrine as beyond question and uses it to justify coercion or the denial of others' rights. **Anti-democratic extremism** concerns efforts to suppress equal citizenship, political pluralism or democratic accountability, particularly through violence or intimidation.

Peaceful radical criticism, religious commitment, unpopular opinions and lawful protest must remain protected.

01 Repression and intimidation

Arbitrary detention, threats against activists, pressure on families and harassment of journalists can silence participation. These pressures may cross borders. In September 2026, the EU expressed concern about transnational repression affecting Iranian dissidents and human rights defenders, including on EU territory. ^[3]

02 Ideological coercion and political violence

Religious and secular ideologies can both be used to justify persecution or deny others an equal place in public life. Responses should assess conduct and evidence, avoiding collective suspicion based on religion, nationality or community membership.

03 Discrimination and dehumanisation

Misogyny, antisemitism, racism, anti-Muslim hatred and hostility towards minorities undermine equal citizenship. Democratic cooperation must apply consistent standards, including within its own organisations.

04 Information manipulation and the erosion of trust

Fabricated evidence, coordinated deception and targeted harassment can obstruct informed debate. Responses should strengthen verification, independent journalism and media literacy while protecting legitimate criticism and freedom of expression.

European policy recognises these connections: the European Democracy Shield, presented in November 2025, provides a relevant framework with which civil society initiatives can engage. ^[4]

04 / JOINT ACTION

Three areas of work. One shared responsibility.

Democracy Forum proposes three connected areas of work, linking dialogue, practical protection and policy development.

01

A shared-values dialogue

Bring together Iranian democratic participants and European partners through moderated discussions. Include women, younger participants, minority perspectives and people outside established organisational networks.

The first output should be a short statement of shared commitments. It should identify both areas of agreement and questions that remain open. Participation should not require agreement on Iran's future constitutional form.

02

Practical protection of democratic participation

Work with qualified partners to develop training and accessible resources on digital safety, responding to intimidation, responsible public communication and peaceful disagreement.

Establish clear referral pathways to appropriate legal, psychosocial and public protection services. Democracy Forum's role would be to connect people with competent support and strengthen prevention.

Participation must be voluntary and based on informed consent. Public visibility should never be a condition of involvement for people facing risks.

03

Joint policy development

Create small working groups around specific problems selected through consultation. Initial topics could include protecting diaspora civic participation, improving access to trustworthy information and widening opportunities for democratic education.

EVERY ACTION PLAN SHOULD SPECIFY

- The problem and the evidence supporting its assessment.
- The responsible people or institutions, proposed measures, resources and timetable.
- Expected results, evaluation methods, potential risks and safeguards for participants' rights.

This process should connect lived experience with professional expertise and the institutions capable of implementing change.

05 / IMPLEMENTATION

A twelve-month cooperation programme

The following milestones are **proposed pilot targets**. Implementation would depend on available resources and the agreement of participating partners.

MONTHS

01-03

Establish the basis for cooperation

Proposed responsibility: Democracy Forum coordination team and participating partners

Consultation plan, participation rules, draft shared-values statement and costed work plan.

MONTHS

04-06

Identify shared priorities

Proposed responsibility: Facilitators, participants and subject specialists

Two structured dialogues and a joint assessment identifying up to three priority problems.

MONTHS

07-09

Test practical responses

Proposed responsibility: Named project leads and qualified partner organisations

Two training sessions and one pilot education or participation-protection project.

MONTHS

10-12

Evaluate and plan the next stage

Proposed responsibility: Coordination team with independent expert review

Public progress report and a revised action plan with named responsibilities.

WHAT SUCCESS SHOULD LOOK LIKE

Evaluation should examine whether cooperation has become more reliable, participants have gained useful skills and agreed actions have been completed.

Attendance figures and online visibility alone are insufficient. More meaningful indicators include the adoption of practical protection measures, sustained collaboration between organisations and documented engagement with policy recommendations.

The pilot should not claim that its activities alone can reduce extremism or determine political developments in Iran.

06 / PARTNERS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Credibility through shared commitments

01 European institutions and national authorities

Establish regular, transparent channels for dialogue with diverse Iranian civil society voices. Strengthen responses to intimidation and transnational repression, and avoid treating any single organisation as the exclusive representative of Iranian society.

02 Foundations, universities and civil society organisations

Support sustained cooperation through accessible funding, shared educational resources and professional exchange. Support should allow space for organisational independence and critical debate.

03 Iranian democratic organisations and participants

Identify areas where cooperation is possible despite political differences, commit to equal standards of democratic conduct and develop workable procedures for managing disagreement.

04 Democracy Forum

Provide facilitation, coordination and public reporting. Its contribution should be assessed by the quality of the cooperation it enables and the practical value of its outputs.

ACCOUNTABILITY IN PRACTICE

The proposed programme should publish its objectives, funding sources, governance arrangements and evaluation methods. It should establish a complaints process and disclose relevant conflicts of interest.

Information about participants should be collected only where necessary and handled with particular care when political involvement could expose individuals or their families to harm. Public reporting should protect identities where required.

Democratic credibility also requires consistency. The same standards should apply to partners, opponents and Democracy Forum itself. Protecting freedom includes defending the rights of people whose views we reject.

Identify what we share.

Confront threats with evidence.

Turn common principles into practical commitments.

07 / SOURCES AND PUBLICATION

Evidence and an invitation to cooperate

[1] Treaty on European Union, Article 2

European Union | Consolidated treaty text, 2012

[Read the original source](#)**[2] Fact-Finding Mission Report on Iran**

United Nations Office at Geneva | Press briefing, 18 March 2024

[Read the original source](#)**[3] EU statement to the Human Rights Council**

European External Action Service | 63rd session, 21 September 2026

[Read the original source](#)**[4] Stronger measures to protect our democracy and civil society**

European Commission | European Democracy Shield, 12 November 2025

[Read the original source](#)

PUBLICATION NOTE

Democracy Forum e.V. | Insights

Discussion Draft - September 2026

This paper presents a framework for consultation. The proposed programme, responsibilities and milestones remain subject to available resources and partner agreement. Source links support the factual statements; the cooperation framework and recommendations are proposals by Democracy Forum.

Democracy Forum invites Iranian democratic participants and European partners to develop this framework together: to identify what they share, confront threats with evidence and turn common principles into practical commitments.

democracy-forum.orgcontact@democracy-forum.org