

**No nation is born a
democracy, no nation
is assured to stay a
democracy**

Farewell address as Executive Director of NIMD
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*Man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible,
but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary*
(Reinhold Niebuhr)

Dear Ladies and gentlemen,

To say farewell is to accept thankfully all that is worth remembering, or to say it in Dutch: *Afscheid nemen is met dankbare handen aannemen al wat herinnering waard is.*

In this farewell address, I will not attempt to recall all that is worth remembering for me of the past nine extremely interesting and valuable years. There is simply too much to remember, but I shall highlight some lessons and perspectives that I have learned and like to share at this occasion. It is great pleasure to be with you in The Hague tonight and to meet with friends with whom I have shared so many good and at times thrilling moments during the past nine years. Thrilling, because we have been working at the very political top end, upstream as we say, where power is contested and change is either blocked or unlocked.

At times, that was as tough as it can get, for example in Zimbabwe, Kenya, Burundi, Uganda, Georgia, Bolivia and Ecuador, too mention a few of the seventeen programme countries we worked in support of democratic reforms. Over those years, NIMD always managed to stay with the process in facilitating dialogue to overcome differences and deep-rooted conflicts peacefully, opening access to relevant knowledge and experience, opening windows for new horizons, mentoring stakeholders in the heat of political contestation and establishing strong partnerships. NIMD's programme was considered high risk while capable of reaping tangible political rewards. The inclusive approach followed, provided NIMD the political capital to implement our mandate uninterrupted in highly sensitive environments.

1. Supporting multi-party democracy

The NIMD approach has often been referred to as innovative in the field of political party assistance. It is thanks to the vision and perceptive analysis of Jos van Gennip (CDA), the late Klaas Groenfeld (VVD) and Alvaro Pinto Scholtbach (PvdA), that NIMD was established in 2000 as a multi-party institute of seven political parties, at the time representing mainstream politics in The Netherlands, with a mandate to support the advancement of multi-party political systems in emerging democracies and the institutional development of political parties or groupings within such systems. The trademark of NIMD became the slogan: an organization *of* political parties *for* political parties.

Linking the development of political parties with the development of multi-party systems was the innovative and proper approach. Emerging democracies are too often either dominated by one well established party, set to perpetuate its dominance, or by parties which are the chiefdoms of individuals who own the party as a potential gateway to power. Conducive conditions for political party development, therefore, needed first to be agreed and implemented, before political party development proper could be taken up. In some local contexts, the two objectives could be taken up in tandem.

NIMD detected early on, that in addition to these two interrelated aspects of democracy support, a third was crucial for political party development, namely the nexus between political and civil society. The relations between the two are often very antagonistic, counterproductive and an obstacle for democratic transitions. Whereas a well developed civil society is an important conditions for the development of democracy, the one-sided focus on civil society by international aid agencies, has emboldened civil society in the role of opposition without taking up their role in transition when different strategies need to taken up.

Kenya and Ghana are positive examples where strong links with civil society have been forged that played well off at times of political crises. Political parties have long been the missing link in international development cooperation and NIMD has become internationally known for its advocacy for the need to engage political society in addition to civil society in the pursuance of democracy and development. It has, for example, taken concerted efforts to get political parties on the agenda of EU democracy support but they are now included to qualify for support. In recognition that emerging democracies are by definition fragile and often incomplete states with weak institutions, I would hope that the inclusion in EU financial instruments will result in a balanced approach to political party development. Necessary as it is, it should not be done on a party-to-party basis without establishing a functioning party system and regulations (laws) for political parties and public funding of political parties first.

There has in the past been a misunderstanding that NIMD was in competition with the party foundations providing such support. Let me once and for all clarify, that such support can be and has proven to be valuable when party systems have reached a certain level of maturity. However, it has proven not to be effective for advancing democracy in countries were the political reform processes are still fragile and power is defined in other terms than in choices for political party platforms. The combination of support for multi-party political systems and political party development has made it possible, depended on the specific country context, to apply the right mix of support for both objectives. If the mix is applied well, parties will become properly policy oriented and will start liaising with the international political families and party-to-party cooperation. It is testimony to the vision of the founding fathers of NIMD that they embedded this approach in the mandate of NIMD, much against the grain of the interest of individual political parties.

2. The NIMD multi-party approach

The vision which resulted in the establishment of NIMD was important, but that did not answer the question of *how* support was going to be provided. There was only little time to develop this methodology in the summer of 2002 because NIMD, with a skeleton staff at that time, got only two months to prepare our first multi-annual programme 2003 – 2006, for submission under the TMF funding regulation of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The basis of the methodology was the recognition that democracy can not be exported and has to grow from within the countries concerned if it is to be sustainable. The ultimate consequence, therefore, was to conceive our support on the basis that *full* ownership of reform processes and agendas would need to rest with our prospective partners, the leaders of the political parties, in the programme countries. NIMD could only add value, if our partners would not object to our engagement in their internal affairs and, in the most positive scenario, would welcome our cooperation.

One could not have foreseen, at the time of conception of the methodology, the effect of this approach. The fact that NIMD was a cooperation of seven Dutch political parties with clearly identified representatives of these parties at all levels of the organization, proved to be a real *eye-opener* for political party leaders, ranging from state presidents to opposition leaders, that political parties can in fact cooperate. When we first entered the selected programme countries, this was totally inconceivable. Politics was almost everywhere about ‘the winner takes all’, and all meant all. At best the opposition was tolerated at the fringes of the political processes and at worst they were repressed.

Understandably, NIMD was first met with deep suspicion about perceived potential foreign intervention in domestic affairs, while the concept of advancing multi-party democracy was not very appealing to the incumbents in government. Multi-party democracy may have been enshrined in the constitutions by early 2000, but the political practice was not yet in tune.

Used to donors coming with their agendas, political leaders were first also suspicious about the NIMD message that we could not cooperate as long as political parties had not made a joint analysis of what the ‘gaps’ were that needed attention and along what agenda or roadmap that could be achieved. The fact that NIMD did not come with a specific agenda other than facilitate inclusive dialogue amongst the political leadership to arrive at a local reform agenda, was something rather unfamiliar. It took quite a bit of talking and even more listening during the first two years, to overcome the suspicion. But the multi-party set-up of NIMD helped enormously while we took the required time to lay the foundation for the much needed trusted relations. The strength of the approach is that political leaders can directly engage each other on a peer-to-peer basis without the obstacles of diplomatic protocol.

In fact, we found in most countries a political leadership entrenched in antagonism and distrust towards their political opponents. The NIMD approach offered a potential way out of these trenches and a new way of interacting across political dividing lines, both within the political parties and between them. The round-table NIMD offered, the discrete facilitation of dialogue, became gradually accepted, at first because there was little to lose by trying. But once the process of dialogue got underway, it became the vehicle for new political relations and interactions and matters started to unfold pretty fast. Political leaders *learned to disagree without becoming disagreeable* as one Ghanaian leader summarized the learning curve.

After some time, political party leaders, presidents and opposition leaders, started to appear together in public in the media, sometimes holding hands, which was symbolically tremendously important in countries where politicians were only known to fight each other. Joint political party meetings were held where politicians would engage each other publicly about substantial policy issues, such as education, health, employment and poverty reduction. It was the beginning of a new practice that was followed-through with tv and radio debates. Regularly talking to each other, taking joint responsibility for the free and fair conduct of general elections for example, changed the playing field in a number of NIMD programme countries. The list of political breakthroughs achieved through these new political interactions is long and well documented in over 15 external evaluations NIMD implemented during the past nine years, a record in the world of democracy support agencies. Tonight I like to highlight three lasting legacies of the NIMD programme, each of a different nature.

2.1

The most important in my view is **the institutionalization of the inclusive political dialogues** in most NIMD programme countries in what generically have become *Centers for Multiparty Democracy (CMD's)* or other existing local organizations who hosted these dialogues. These CMDs are platforms where political party leaders regularly meet to analyze and to find agreement about needed reforms and about the roadmaps (agendas) for implementation. These local partners exist in Ghana, Mali, Bolivia, Surinam, Guatemala, Kenya, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Zambia, Burundi, Uganda and Indonesia.

None of the CMDs existed (except for the two local organizations – in Ghana and Burundi - who became the hosts for the political party dialogue programme) when NIMD first entered the programme countries. Today, they have all become successful local catalysts for peaceful democratic reforms. Not reforms driven from the outside, but reforms agreed from the inside often in consultations with civil society, churches, the media and professional organizations.

Applying the Paris principles for aid effectiveness, these platforms and national agendas offer an excellent opportunity and entry point for international donors to harmonize their democracy assistance upon. Some of the programmes have now also taken first

steps to start linking political party leaders to the national development programmes (PRSPs). We found, that in many of our programme countries, political leaders are not aware of or involved in the processes of development programming. Again, the CMDs as inclusive platforms where political leaders meet, can in future become centers where democratic reform and development reform agendas are discussed at a national level in their coherence.

2.2

The second category of milestones relates to **democratic reforms** themselves. The biggest political contestation in emerging democracies is 1) about professional management of elections and the conduct of free and fair elections with real perspectives for a peaceful alternation of power, and 2) about the process for constitutional reform. For advancing multi-party democracy, proper political party systems and political party funding regulations, the first price to win is a review of constitutions and thereof derived legislation.

Through the political capital NIMD acquired through its approach, we have been able to directly contribute to constitutional reform processes and related legislation in Zambia, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Ghana, Mali, Bolivia and Ecuador, while a constitutional review is now also on the agenda in Tanzania. The promulgation of the modern Kenyan constitution in August of last year, completing a hard fought 20-year constitutional struggle, endorsed by a large majority of Kenyan citizens in a referendum, was a big event and a positive milestone in the political history of that country.

The experience with constitutional review processes is reproduced in the NIMD publication: *Writing Autobiographies of Nations*. Some of the NIMD partners have become central facilitators in the political processes in their countries, for example the Institute for Economic Affairs (IEA) in Ghana, the Zimbabwe Institute (ZI) in Zimbabwe, the CMD-K in Kenya, CMD-M in Mali, the Instituto Holandes in Guatemala and FUBODEM in Bolivia.

In all of these countries, some of my NIMD colleagues or myself have been on-line, often on a daily basis, at crucial moments in the political processes for brainstorming and mentoring purposes, for mobilizing political support or for offering access to relevant experience and knowledge.

2.3

The third example is the Indonesian programme which has seen the successful establishment of **democracy schools** at local district level and the dialogue platform that was created with the political parties. It was a memorable mission of Prof Jos van Kemenade, former NIMD President and Senator Jos van Gennip, former NIMD Vice-President that returned with the finding that a niche in Indonesia may be the establishment of a democracy academy. Subsequent careful consultations which covered various regions of the archipelago, turned this finding into a programme of

democracy schools to teach pursuing peaceful change by the use of the levers which democracy offers. It specifically aimed to overcome the distrust between political and civil society following the long years of Suharto dictatorship.

Visiting these democracy schools, on one occasion with Dr. Bernard Bot, current NIMD President and Harm Evert Waalkens, former MP, and witnessing the enthusiasm of the participants in this biggest Muslim democracy in the world, has always been a heartening experience. Not only are these schools spreading in Indonesia, but the concept has meanwhile also been developed by iLEDA and IDASA at the African continent. There is no democracy without democrats, these schools prepare a new generation for leadership positions in political parties, government or in civil society.

It was nice to note the statement of the former minister of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia, Wirajuda, referring to the NIMD supported programme as one of the successful examples of international cooperation on democracy in his country.

The legitimacy that the political party composition of NIMD offered to perform these political sensitive functions and to obtain the internationally recognized impact, should not be underestimated.

3. Democracy in development or democracy and development

The relationship between development and democracy support is a particular challenging and relevant topic. There is a world to win if the two sectors, one an elephant and the other a mosquito, would understand and appreciate each other better. There are still many misconceptions and misunderstandings and sometimes misfits between the two. Some consider democracy support more of the same as development cooperation, others see democracy support as too political to touch. It is not uncommon in The Netherlands that at study days about future development cooperation, the word democracy is not mentioned once.

Two issues are of particular relevance in this context if a better coherence between the two but separate sides of the same coin are to be pursued.

3.1

The first is a **review of some basic underlying assumptions**. The development community has a strong believe that countries should develop economically first for democracy to follow later. However, almost half of sub-Sahara, poor countries, proves this assumption wrong, but the old theories slowly die. For the past 15 years, these emerging democracies see an upwards trend in democratic consolidation and in economic performance. According to recent World Bank statistics, these countries that combine democratic reforms with economic reforms are expected to become the fastest economic growers in the years to come. Amartya Sen formulated years ago already, that countries become fit *through* democracy and not *for* democracy.

The Arab spring is underlining this finding; economic development is stagnating without democratic reforms. For me, it is not so much a matter of what comes first; the important thing is that political reforms and economic reforms need to be dealt with in tandem. It is not either – or, but and – and. From this perspective, the attention for democratic reform in relation to economic reform is far underrepresented and under sourced. People all over the world want their voices to be heard, want to be governed democratically. Is it acceptable that others should be told to wait for another day what we consider a core value for ourselves: to live, to breath democracy as basis for our peace and prosperity?

Another bias that is encountered in development circles is against anything political and specifically political parties, which suffer under rather negative perceptions the world over. There are many good reasons why this negative appreciation maybe so, but that does not take away the fact, that parties and their leaders play an important role in the well-being of countries. They hold the levers of decision-making and determine if countries turn into failed states or turn to emerging democracies with open markets. You may not like politics, but you can only ignore it at the peril of seeing development investments go up in flames. Engaging political society at an inclusive basis is still the missing link in much international cooperation. That is not very smart. We can be proud that the participating Dutch political parties recognized this gap, established NIMD and that the Dutch government has provided the financial support although on terms which become increasingly problematic.

The most awkward characteristic of development cooperation as practiced, something that in my opinion contributes to the root cause of why the assistance has had mixed results over the past decades, is the relativism of democracy by aid providers. The sovereignty of states in international relations, has turned much development assistance into technical approaches alone, with the political dimensions left out of the equations. In the process, the focus has been on accountability to donors rather than ensuring that through the development assistance the government accountability to its citizens were strengthened. It the process, the democratic incentive was perverted. When it was realized during the later part of the last century that politics matters, new priorities were introduced to strengthen governance and recently accountability without referring to democracy.

This inclination to depoliticize what is inherently political but has done democracy no service. However, in the more recent debates in development cooperation, there is now more interest in and recognition of the importance of political-economic analysis. This analysis is still too often prepared by experts from abroad, rather the result of inclusive dialogue processes within developing countries. There is still some road to travel before democracy support will be seen to be the natural and indispensable ally of development cooperation and before the D-word will be used upfront instead of via the backdoor. The NIMD experience can be considered a laboratory of how that can work in practice.

3.2

Which brings me to the second challenge in the relationship between democracy and development, one which is a hard nut to crack. It is bridging the **difference in logic** underlying the approaches in development cooperation and in democracy support. Different logic that naturally cause frictions which require institutionalized dialogue platforms to manage these frictions productively.

The prevailing development logic allocates money for projects or programmes through implementing agencies specialized in specific topics. Despite much talk about results-based management, the focus in practice lies primarily on the financial input side and not on the output. How much can it cost rather than what value do I buy for my euro. It is obviously more difficult to measure outcomes in terms of political impact, but it possible to make a calculation of how much it cost in terms of humanitarian assistance, peace keeping, immigration and asylum flows, for a country that turns into a failed state compared to a country that is supported in obtaining the emergent or consolidated democracy status with open markets?

In democracy support, the logic is to think in agendas and windows of opportunity, for which flexibility and responsiveness is required. These windows normally arise at two points along the electoral cycle. The first is at a moment long enough before the elections start dominating politicians agendas focused on the professional administration of elections in a free and fair environment, and after the second moment after the elections when the dust has settled and politicians are willing to think longer term. I guess Jean Claude Juncker, the Prime Minister of Luxemburg was right when he defined a politician as follows: *it is not the problem that politicians do not know what to do, but to be re-elected after they have been doing what they should have done.*

Democracy support is all about the process of peacefully shifting balances of power in countries to ensure that government to a larger degree becomes based on the will of the people and hence governs legitimately, that it governs by constitutional rule and that it pursues the common interest rather than particular group interests. It is a dynamic and often unpredictable process which process should inform where assistance is required most.

The difference in logic can be well illustrated with an example from the NIMD Kenya programme.

Following the outbreak of violence in the aftermath of the presidential elections in Kenya in December 2007, NIMD received a letter from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that it should stop funding the programme and develop a new funding proposal adapted to the new situation in Kenya. It needed to be approved by the Ministry before any funds could be disbursed. This letter came when NIMD was already engaged with our partner CMD-K and the cooperating political parties, providing all the assistance and

back-up we could manage, to secure the CMD-K staff, to help them stop the mayhem, try to avoid the break-up of Kenya and to get back on the road to democratic reform.

If you are in the business of democracy support, it was the last thing to consider letting your partners down at moments of such deep crises when the future of democracy in Kenya was on the line. And in circumstances like this, NIMD maintained close liaison with the ambassador in Nairobi who was the closest on the ground and provided useful security guarantees for the courageous CMD-K staff.

It was Napoleon who observed that *no plan survives the first contact with the enemy*. A renowned consultancy firm in the UK, Global Partners & Associates, recently found in a report for International IDEA, that programmes with the highest impacts were the programmes that deviated the most from the original approved plans, suggesting that Napoleon's law is still relevant today.

To bring democracy support and development closer, a strategic relationship is required between the various instruments available for delivering international cooperation, a relationship that is different from the status of sub-contractor under a tendering system. Sub-contracting erodes the essential autonomy in providing impartial democracy support and puts the continuity in partnership relations at stake.

The American government grants special financial regulations for democracy support, making the American democracy agencies such as NDI, NED, IRI and others so responsive and effective. In fact, the American organizations refuse to sub-contract on principle grounds because it impedes their autonomy and, hence, their legitimacy in the eyes of their partners in emerging democracies.

The current domestic accountability requirements are threatening implementing instruments such as NIMD into transaction agencies in which the partnership relation is dominated by contract negotiations and bookkeeping matters, with little to no time available for political support, sharing of relevant knowledge, or strategic planning for democratic reforms. The question should be asked at an appropriate moment if there is not a too heavy bureaucratic price to be paid in terms of cost/benefits in relation to the objectives pursued? Tom Carothers captured this trend by observing, that implementing agencies these days are *more concerned with doing the things right than doing the right things*. I am afraid that this is a self-defeating trend for international cooperation.

NIMD was perceived to be, and functioned as, a strategic instrument to further objectives that can not be pursued by state instruments. I sincerely hope that this legacy will survive in the years to come and that the future impact of NIMD programmes will also be assessed against this ambition.

It could perhaps be possible to consider establishing a platform in The Netherlands in which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs participates with all the Dutch agencies in

democracy support, not limited to NIMD, to engage each other in a serene debate about the issues highlighted and to work towards genuine complementarity in the development and democracy support disciplines. In Canada a Democracy Council was established for this purpose, an example that may serve as a template for a similar initiative in The Netherlands.

4. The Arab spring an EU wake-up call for a return of democracy support

The importance of and urgency for democracy support has returned at the political agendas because of the spark ignited by the self-immolation of Mouhammed Bouazizi in Tunis in December of last year and the Arab spring that triggered it. Desperate about the undignified manner in which he was treated by his corrupt government, the Arab street as it was traditionally called, transformed itself into the Arab square to demand an end to corruption, job opportunities and democratic governance. The unfolding Arab spring has become, without doubt, the most important geo-political development since the end of the Cold War. We are at the very beginning of what may well turn into the Fourth Wave of Democracy.

Samuel Huntington introduced the notion of the Third Wave of Democracy (starting with the Revolution of the Carnations in Portugal in 1974) and subsequently developed the concept of the Judeo/Christian/humanist world pitted against the Islam world in his *Clash of Civilizations*. Somehow he failed to recognize that people the world over are born with a democracy gene, that as Lincoln once stated: *no person is good enough to govern another person without that persons his permission*. Democracy is a universal value. Young Muslims, joined by the older generations, have arisen to demand democracy. The peaceful and determined manner in which they are demanding their democratic rights, can not fail to impress. Support for the complex transitions towards democracy in the Arab region, a process that has only just started and will take many years to complete, holds the promise of outdating Huntington's Clash of Civilizations.

It is one of those historic opportunities to engage with partners in the Arab region, not only on the politics of transition, electoral systems, constitutional reform processes and political party legislation and regulation, but specifically on the complex issue of the relationship between the state and the mosque/church, and the place of religion in a democracy. Dutch parties have a specific value added in this regard given our own history and practice.

Obviously, countries like Indonesia, India, Turkey and Mali have preceded the democratic wave in the Arab Muslim countries, so it could be known that democracy and Islam are compatible. Hopefully, politicians who declared the two incompatible, for example by suggesting that the Islam is not a religion but an ideology, will accept that with the images of Tahrir square, images repeated from Yemen to Syria, from Morocco to Bahrain, this discourse is false. That is not to say that there are no dangerous extremists in the Islamic world who tried and try to use religion for political ends. They

are a problem indeed, but that is a problem mainly situated within Islam and should not be elevated to a clash of civilizations.

Herman van Rompuy, the EU President, stated in an interview on the Belgium radio on the occasion of Europe Day on May 9th, that the political developments in the Arab region have been a wake-up call for the EU. In the past, EU foreign policies were focused on maintaining stability rather than focusing on Europe's core values of democracy and rule of law. The Arab spring has put democracy back at the EU agenda together with the need for a more value driven foreign policy. For those who believe that a peaceful world is a world governed by democratic states, that was a welcome statement. Soon thereafter, Barack Obama in his speech on the Middle East on May 19th put this shift in foreign policy emphasis as follows: "*...pursuing the status quo is no longer an option. We should not pursue a world as it is, but a world as it should be.*"

EU High Representative and Commission Vice President Catherine Ashton and EU Enlargement Commissioner Fule, presented the Commission's Review of the European Neighborhood policies on May 25th under the title: *A New Response to a Changing Neighborhood*. The renewed focus on advancing democracy, has translated in providing a bonus to countries undertaking democratic reforms. The policy is labeled *more for more*, more reforms resulting in more EU support.

The Review introduced the EU objective of pursuing *deep democracy* without defining what this is. Personally, I don't like adjectives before democracy, which unique feature is to be a noun and a verb at the same time. It confuses the meaning of democracy: the EU supports deep democracy in the future, Putin supports managed democracy, the Chinese guided democracy, and so on. You don't want to be in the league of democracy qualifiers, you want to be in the league, I humbly suggest, of those who accept that democracy is an universal value that belongs to the core values and objectives of foreign policy.

In this context The Dutch constitution obliges the government in article 90 to pursue the international rule of law. It is interpreted as contributing to international peace, enforcement of human rights and development cooperation. Support for democracy is rarely if at all mentioned under this heading. Yet, the core security concept of the EU is the notion *that a peaceful world is a world governed by democratic states*. Democracy is the political architecture that guarantees respect for human rights. It is the cornerstone of the European Union that assures Europe's peace and prosperity. With reference to the quickly changing geo-political context, would it not be necessary and helpful to interpret the obligation of the Dutch constitution to explicitly include support for democracy?

A modern foreign policy in my view, should integrate the 3Ds of Development, Defence (security and stability) and *Democracy*. The means through which to pursue these three content objectives is through formal diplomacy in strategic alliance with civic diplomacy

of such organizations at NIMD with its international partnership network of political leaders. A strong bond between the formal and informal diplomatic instruments, respecting each others separate mandates, will reinforce each other's efforts and shall achieve greater impact and more value for money. This integrated 3D concept is a compact and at the same time comprehensive and attractive framework for future foreign policy making, based on the core values we cherish in The Netherlands and within the European Union.

5. Democracy Support by the European Union

That brings me to the final stop on memory lane. The organization of the European wide conference in the Peace Palace in The Hague, early July 2004 at the opening of the Dutch presidency of the European Union. That was the biggest international conference NIMD staff organized with an impressive attendance of European but also American democracy support agencies and government officials. The subject was to enhance the European profile in democracy support at the time that the George W. Bush administration has justified its intervention in Iraq on the grounds of bringing democracy to that country and the wider Arab region.

The outcome of the conference was the *The Hague Agenda* and a book titled: *Democracy, Europe's Core Value?* (edited by Marieke van Doorn and myself) launched by Minister Maxime Verhagen at the Verwijs bookshop below the NIMD office in the Passage in The Hague.

The *The Hague Agenda* specified suggestions for the European Commission, the Council, European Parliament and ourselves, the European political and civil society. It has taken a number of years, but the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle are gradually falling in place.

The French, Czech, Swedish and now the forthcoming Polish EU presidencies have, often in consultation with the European Partnership for Democracy (EPD), another result of the *The Hague Agenda*, moved the EU agenda forward. In November 2009, the EU Council adopted the first EU Council Conclusions on Democracy Support and Action Agenda. More recently Lady Ashton and Joao Barroso decided to support a Polish initiative to establish a well resourced European Endowment for Democracy (EED). Finally, a very comprehensive and well considered report on EU democracy support - the so-called Dekeyser report - has been adopted early June by the foreign relations committee of the European Parliament and is expected to be adopted by the plenary session of the European Parliament this July.

The Arab spring has given a necessary push to this new elaborate framework for democracy support by the EU and is pushing the EU machinery into action to implement it. Putting democracy support more central at the EU agenda will hopefully serve as a positive EU undertaking at a time in which the Euro crises dominates the news and re-nationalization policies and rhetoric are spreading throughout Europe.

The contagious virus of Tahrir square has meanwhile crossed the Mediterranean and plays itself out at the squares of Spain and Greece. Popular dissatisfaction with how the political elite is failing to manage the speculation at the all powerful financial markets and rating agencies, is affecting our own democracies. No country is assured to remain a democracy. With all its failings and shortcomings, we need Europe more than ever to constrain the populist tendencies which are re-nationalizing the political agenda's, to ensure that in the changing power relations in the world, Europe remains a strong continent able to project its multi-party democratic values. Quoting Amarty Sen once more: *It can not be emphasized forcefully enough how important it is that marginalization of the European democratic tradition is prevented. Europe and the world can not do without European democracy.*

Conclusion:

In conclusion: the NIMD model of Dutch parties working together to support the advancement of multi-party democracy in emerging democracies has been a most rewarding laboratory in which innovative approaches have been tested and more tangible impact achieved than could have been foreseen at the start of NIMD. It has provided NIMD with substantial political capital and a network of political party leaders who share their experiences in implementing democratic reform processes.

My work for democracy has always been inspired not only by my own relatives who paid the highest price for a return to democracy in The Netherlands during WO II, but also by such great contemporary personalities such as Nelson Mandela for his anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa and his leadership during and after the successful transition to multiparty democracy in that colorful rainbow nation, and as Aung San Suu Kyi, the courageous democracy leader in Burma

When you enter the reception area in the NIMD office in The Hague, you can not miss the enlarged picture of Aung San Suu Kyi with her appeal to all of us: *please use your liberty to promote ours*. This has been the banner under which I have implemented my mandate as Executive Director of NIMD throughout the past nine years. I sincerely hope that this will remain the spirit for which NIMD is recognized. I wish NIMD well on the road ahead. Your mandate remains highly as relevant as ever.

Thank you!

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