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DEMOCRACY: A EUROPEAN INVENTION PATENTED 25 CENTURIES AGO IN ATHENS

Launch of the European Foundation for Democracy through Partnership
Brussels, 15 April 2008

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

President Havel, President Chissano,

Viscount Davignon,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to be here to celebrate the launch of the European Foundation for Democracy through Partnership in such good company. I would like to greet its founders and some of its distinguished supporters who are here today, particularly former Presidents Havel and Chissano, whose personal life stories are reflect so clearly the commitment to the values of democracy that we are highlighting here today.

The launch of this foundation in the context of European support for democratisation and respect for human rights is very good news. This is an area in which everyone has a role to play - the European institutions, the Member States, political leaders, EU civil society, including political foundations, and third countries – and in which we all contribute to an important collective task of reflection, information, action and commitment. Each link in this chain is important in this work, which can change the lives of millions of citizens worldwide.

I am therefore delighted that your foundation will be reinforcing Europe's visibility still more in our converging activities to promote democracy.

Democracy is first and foremost a will, not something that can be imposed. It is also a struggle; it must be won. And, finally, it is something that is built and that must be maintained.

We are just emerging from a great wave of democratisation. As you will recall, the period between 1970 and 2000 saw the end of the dictatorships in southern Europe, the overturn of the military regimes in Latin America, the transition to democracy in Africa, the abolition of apartheid in South Africa and the collapse of the iron curtain in central and Eastern Europe.

Today, the main region in which democratic regimes are still in a minority is the Middle East. We are convinced that if this region took greater steps towards democracy, it would one day

cease to be a hotspot of tension and conflict. In some regions of Asia and Africa, too, democracy is under threat, fragile or still absent.

Democratisation is a complex task which can only be achieved if numerous factors are put in place: free elections, institutional and legislative reform, an independent justice system, rights of minorities, the fight against discrimination, independent media and the fight against corruption. And acceptance of these elements depends in turn on the presence of broader conditions, such as peace and development.

To translate democratic principles into a concrete and durable reality through pluralist governance and political practices is a challenge for the democratic forces of a country.

It is also a challenge for the international community and for all the players on the ground who provide the political, social, administrative and technical support for the process.

It just so happens that when it comes to democracy and human rights, Europe knows what it's talking about.

After all, it was in Athens, in the heart of Europe, that democracy was first patented 25 centuries ago!

More recently, it was after WWII that the project of European integration was born, based on certain values: liberty, the rule of law, social justice and respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and diversity. As the founding fathers made clear, the EU's *raison d'être*, while channeled through an ongoing process of economic integration, is in fact about realising the higher political values of peace, freedom and solidarity. And if we see how far we have travelled since those beginnings 60 years ago you will agree with me that it is impossible to be pessimistic about Europe.

The European Union has clearly expressed its intention to extend these values still further –as we can see in the Lisbon Treaty and the Charter of Fundamental Rights.

The Treaty will enable the Union to play an enhanced role on the international stage and promote more effectively not just its interests but also its values, through trade, development policy and by proposing international rules to regulate globalisation.

For the Union, the Charter represents a further crucial advance in the area of civil liberties and fundamental rights, including economic and social rights. By establishing a genuine human rights culture, it will further reinforce the EU's determination to promote these values worldwide.

Respect for freedoms and the rule of law are therefore at the heart of the European project.

It is precisely because Europe embodies these values that the attraction exerted by European integration has been such a powerful driving force for democratisation. In fifteen years, the political aspects of the Copenhagen criteria, for example, have done more for democracy in half our continent than two thousand years of history. The transformative power of the EU has been a powerful factor for democratic change in Europe and beyond. Our soft power is hard reality. And the perspective of EU membership remains a strong incentive for democratic change.

For my generation in Portugal, as for President Havel's in what was to become the Czech Republic, Europe held out a promise of freedom and also social and economic development, opening up our countries to the world and restoring their dignity. The prospect of becoming members of the Union and the aid provided by the Union to the candidate countries has undeniably given these countries democratic dynamism.

For fifty years, European political foundations, too, have played an active role in supporting this advance towards democracy. To take one example in the case of Portugal, the German foundations, the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, all provided valuable support to the consolidation of democracy in my country in the 1970s. Today, also, I encourage all actors in the field to work together to that end, both within Europe and with our partners abroad such as the US.

Respect for freedoms and the rule of law are also at the heart of our external relations.

The promotion of democracy and human rights is a key political objective of the European Union in its relations with third countries, particularly in terms of cooperation and association agreements and political dialogues. Democracy and human rights is also a constant topic of discussion in our meetings with China and Russia. It is clearly one of the Union's strategic interests in terms of security. Since the Maastricht Treaty, the policy of support for

democratisation has been an objective both of the common foreign and security policy and of development policy.

We even have a specific financial instrument for support for democratisation for the period 2007-2013, with an allocation of 1.1 billion euros. The aim of this financial tool is to encourage the rule of law and justice, promote fundamental rights in the countries and regions where they are most under threat, reinforce civil society, provide better protection for human rights defenders worldwide and support the international framework for the protection of human rights.

Why should we wish to promote democracy outside the borders of the Union? **It is a question of values. It is also a question of interests.**

By investing in the democratisation of its neighbours and their partners, it invests in their openness and development. It invests in fairer societies in which the incidence of social problems, the use of force, and political, religious or cultural radicalisation is decreasing. Ultimately, the return on the investment made is collective and translates into prosperity, stability and peace for all.

Globalisation accentuates the challenges of development and democracy. This is why I think that Europe, as a world power, must use its "soft power" to promote its own "version" of globalisation – fairer, with more solidarity.

The European Union is a key international player. But because of its particular history, the Union has never had "imperialist" aims or pretensions. The idea that international relations must be governed by law is firmly rooted in our collective mind. We want rules and principles that are valid for everyone and enable the establishment of a world community based on freedom, justice, sustainable development and peace. I believe that Europe is profoundly marked by the heritage of philosophical and political universalism. This is the prism through which we view our action.

Europe, therefore, does not want to set itself up as a model or give anyone lessons in democracy. But by opting for definitive reconciliation and a partnership based on the rule of law, the pooling of sovereignty, of economic synergies and respect for diversity, Europe is an extraordinary laboratory for the future. This is why, without arrogance, it shows the way.

Showing the way does not mean imposing a way. The lesson that we draw from our specific European diversity is that people take ownership of democracy and shape it following universal democratic principles, but taking into account their own vision.

One illustration of this is the European neighbourhood policy. The reports presented by the European Commission a few days ago on the progress of the political reforms being implemented by our partners clearly show that our neighbours in the east wish to align themselves closely with the fundamental democratic principles in force in the Union, while the political reforms of our neighbours in the south draw their inspiration more clearly from the values proclaimed in the Barcelona declaration and the United Nations commitments.

The first rule of effectiveness, as we know, is to take into account the specific situations of the countries concerned. It is up to local populations and local civil society, above all, to establish an effective democracy and a human rights culture.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Over 50% of all countries on our planet are now democracies, compared with just 25% forty years ago. But we still have a lot of work ahead of us to ensure the emergence of a genuine world ecosystem of political pluralism, social justice and respect for human dignity. There will never be too many of us to achieve this task!

However, it will be achieved only if we first succeed in reducing poverty and injustice. President Chissano is absolutely right in stressing that peace and development are necessary conditions for democracy. The Union, which is the biggest world donor of public development aid, makes a very important contribution in this field. Globalisation, provided it is well regulated and managed, can also contribute by developing trade and building bridges between peoples. I believe that the real challenge facing us today is to give our partner countries the means of achieving their freedom, in other words the means of being genuinely able to decide their future themselves.

I will conclude with a sentence from the preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, whose 60th anniversary we will be celebrating in a few months: "... the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people".

Europe is more determined than ever to continue, together with all its partners, to pursue actively its commitment to that world through the promotion of its European values, which are also universal values. I wish the European Foundation for Democracy through Partnership every success in this common cause.

Thank you.