



THE HAGUE Statement

on

Enhancing the European Profile in Democracy Assistance

Presented to the Dutch EU Presidency
in the person of the Minister for European Affairs,
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Statement of the Europe Conference

on

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Introduction

The practice of democracy and the struggle against authoritarianism belong to the core of what is often considered to be a somewhat elusive European identity. The vocation of the European Union was and is to consolidate peace in Europe through the adherence to democratic values and practices. The historic expansion of the EU with 10 new EU members on May 1st of this year is a further expression of this key European objective.

The new EU Constitution, a new EU Commission, the recently elected new European Parliament, and a new European Security Strategy in the making in response to the post 9/11 world, all created the momentum to reflect on the importance of democracy assistance within Europe's external policy¹ in a Europe-wide conference. They also created the opportunity to consider ways of making that democracy assistance a more important and relevant European external policy instrument in the quest for peace, stability and social justice in the world. The awareness that Europe itself is confronted with the challenge of revitalizing and deepening democracy and citizen participation 'at home' makes this quest even more urgent.

The participants at the conference resolved to bring the outcome of these reflections as formulated in this statement to the attention of the EU external policy institutions, the European Parliament and the democracy assistance agencies in Europe with the request to act upon the specific recommendations contained in this conference statement.

Why enhancing Europe's profile?

Europe has been building the normative and operational foundations for integrating democracy assistance as a key component of its external actions. This has led the EU to support a wide variety of democracy initiatives in an equally varied group of partner countries, involving a plurality of public and private actors in the process. However, there was a broad consensus among participants that the European profile in democracy assistance, including its underlying values and features, needs to be enhanced and made more explicit. **Five main reasons** were put forward for such a strategic move:

- ***Democracy is needed for an effective fight against poverty and for sustainable development.*** If properly managed and consolidated, democracy brings the stability that is needed for economic development and the alleviation of poverty (a central objective of EU development policy and of the UN's Millennium Development Goals). Democracy also provides the institutional setting for the guarantee of human rights.

¹ Wherever the statement refers to "EU external policy" it includes the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy, the new EU Security and Defence Policy, the EU Development Policy, the EU External Trade Policy and EU Accession Policy.



- **Connecting the democracy and security agenda.** With the world facing new security challenges, an ever widening gap between the rich and the poor, and global warming resulting in substantial environmental shifts, no citizens can safely hide behind national borders. The world is an interconnected space in which human security can only be obtained through democratic governance that is responsive to the needs of the population at large and through the application and enforcement of commonly accepted international law. From this perspective it is in Europe's self-interest not only to guard and treasure the consolidation of democracy within Europe, but to also actively pursue the promotion of democracy as a means to prevent violent conflict in all its different institutional manifestations².
- **Europe has much to offer.** The European Union has succeeded in bringing a diversity of nations together under a wider umbrella that assures peace and prosperity for its peoples. After centuries of violent conflict, Europe has built peace and new supranational constructs that regulate conflicts of interest peacefully and facilitate integration. It has a long and diversified tradition of civic engagement, public-private dialogue and parliamentary oversight. These processes continue to be under construction. Democracy requires permanent maintenance. It is an experience that is assumed to be valuable for sharing with partners elsewhere in the world.
- **Complexity of democracy assistance.** Experience has confirmed the complexity of providing effective democracy assistance in support of societal transformation processes that also improve the day-to-day life of citizens. If change is to be achieved, the European Union needs a much bolder, integrated and coherent approach to democracy assistance. It has to close the gap between occasional policy dialogues at the macro policy level and administering project funding at the micro level. It needs to upgrade partnership approaches, enhance flexibility in response to reform opportunities and be inclusive and consensus seeking in its delivery. At the same time it requires a much better connected and professionalizing community of European democracy promotion agencies with structured links between the official policy levels and the civil society agencies and actors to obtain complementarities in efforts.
- **Clarifying Europe's own identity in order to revitalize democracy at home.** The contribution the European Union could make to democratic transformation processes is not only important for countries abroad. It can also help to clarify what the European Union stands for in a globalised world, to sharpen its identity and values, and to engage in a collective search to strengthen the democratic foundations of the European Union in a constantly evolving political and socio-economic setting.

² The European democratic vocation is in harmony with what citizens in Europe expect from the European Union. In a recent poll of the Eurobarometer, 89% of the respondents mentioned that 'maintaining peace and security in Europe' is a priority for the EU. It is remarkable that over the last 10 years, Europeans have shown a steady support for a common EU foreign and defence policy of 65% and 70% respectively. It underscores the European citizens' interest in making democracy promotion the core business in Europe's external policies.



What is the content of Europe's democracy assistance?

The European experience includes the following seven distinct features that are valuable reference points (points of departure or guiding principles) for an emerging European Union identity in democracy assistance:

- **variety in social and political organization**
The absence of uniformity and the rich diversity in institutions and procedures is an important reference in democracy assistance. Variety in social and political organization matters in furthering democracy. A European approach can therefore be distinctive in sharing a range of experiences and by being relatively inclusive. It is uniquely placed to avoid 'one-size-fits-all' approaches or solutions.
- **democracy – social justice nexus**
The European experience in linking the evolution of democracy with social justice is relevant beyond Europe's border together with the experience obtained in addressing the new challenges that globalization pose to this linkage. Economic liberalization has to be shaped so it leads to economically, ecologically and socially sustainable development and prosperity in order to strengthen and consolidate young democracies and to make democratization of authoritarian regimes more likely.
- **democracy is work in progress**
The 'paradox' or 'enigma' of the European Union is the habit of moving forward while continuously questioning the rationale of its existence. It resulted in pursuing democracy as a concept and institutional framework that is continuously under scrutiny, its architecture remains under construction.
- **peaceful transition through dialogue**
The peaceful and successful transition in the former East and Central European countries is a further asset in European approaches, strengthened by the recent accession of the new EU member states. Democratic outcomes have been achieved partly through the application of multi-stakeholder participation and dialogue.
- **human rights and the rule of law**
The European profile in democracy assistance is significantly shaped by a strong focus on the human rights component, as well as by the importance of the rule of law in protecting these rights. Three specific features characterize the EU's profile, which should be further enhanced in designing democracy assistance policies: a) the multilateral or internationalist role conception; b) integration of economic and social rights, and c) the emphasis on gender equality; and d) the principle of non-discrimination with regard to minorities.
- **democracy assistance preferred over conditionality.** The European approach favours positive support to countries engaging in democratic reforms, rather than the imposition of political conditionality. However, the EU is and should be prepared to apply subtle forms of conditionality when required or to suspend co-operation agreements in instances of human rights violations or interruptions in democratic practices. Dialogue, however, is the favoured mechanism for resolution of such occurrences.
- **regional context and supra-national institutions**
In pursuing and consolidating democracy the importance of the regional context is taken into account, recognizing the importance of adherence to the rule of law and the use of supra-national institutions to effectively apply the rule of law.



How can the European profile be enhanced?

The recommendations that emerged from the reflections at the European-wide conference are targeted at three main European stakeholders in advancing democracy throughout the world, the European Union, the European Parliament and the independent democracy assistance agencies within Europe, part of European civil society. While specific recommendations are presented below for each key actor separately, their effective realization will require inter-institutional dialogue and collaboration between all of them.

1. agenda recommendations for the European Council and Commission::

1.1. democracy assistance should be a core business of EU external policy

Democracy assistance is considered a strategic interest for the EU. It should, therefore, be a central and visible pillar in the new EU foreign and security (defense) policy as expression of Europe's core vocation and of the interests of the citizenry of Europe. This can be built on the 2003 Solana EU security paper that states: "the best protection for our security is a world of well-governed democratic states". The implication is that democracy assistance should not be subservient to other European foreign policy interests and that its value should translate in the share of human and financial resources spent by the EU in the pursuit of external policy objectives.

1.2. concerted and coherent approach to democracy assistance by EU member states and European Commission (EC)

The centrality of democracy assistance in EU policies and actions has to be ensured. This can be achieved by increasing coherence in democracy and overall assistance and a right policy mix for different countries and regions. The EU should consider assigning this responsibility to a specifically 'dedicated mechanism' that facilitates a common analysis of the democratic reform agendas of EU partner countries and the assistance required for these agendas. This dedicated mechanism could also become the EU instrument for so-called joined-up policy making between such intrinsically linked areas as governance, human rights, conflict prevention, peace building and the mainstreaming of democracy in development cooperation and anti-poverty programs.

1.3. domestically owned democratic reform agendas

Much has been undertaken by the EU during the past years to put in place basic provisions for democracy support abroad. The EU May 2001 Communication on "The European Union's Role in Promoting Human Rights and Democratization in Third Countries" sets out to "permeate all Community policies, programs and projects" with human rights and democracy strategies. The European Parliament launched the "European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights" (EIDHR). These important frameworks require a further qualitative overhaul of what has essentially remained fragmented, inconsistent and ad hoc project approaches to complex democratization processes. Through national dialogue processes a long-term, inclusive and flexible engagement is needed to support the advancement of democracy. Partner countries should be supported in the development of democratic reform agendas that should guide future EU democracy assistance programmes.

1.4. include the missing link of political society

Much democracy assistance has refrained from engaging political society (political systems, political parties and the nexus between political parties and civil society) in the democratic reform processes. Political society is the essential link between state institutions, civil society and the market. It should have an important place



in EU democratization strategies that should be focused on strengthening the four sectors (state, civil and political society and the market) in an integrated manner.

1.5. ***a multi-sectoral approach***

The approach to democracy promotion should be multisectoral, careful not to either neglect or overemphasize various levels of democratization. Decision-making on which are the relevant sectors in a specific country context should emerge out of national dialogue.

1.6. ***gender equality and the promotion of political participation of women***

The democratic deficit from the exclusion of women from various decision-making democratic institutions should be overcome by the introduction of specific mechanisms.

1.7. ***applying the principle of subsidiarity in the EU democracy assistance policies***

European political society, in particular the political party foundations in Europe, maintain relations with political stakeholders in EU partner countries that can and should effectively be used for the advancement of democracy reform agendas. This strength should be positively utilized in the future. Regular consultations between EU policy making and the democracy promotion foundations in Europe are required with the objective to enhance Europe's profile in democracy assistance and to share lessons learned. Mechanisms to this effect should be established such as a trans-institutional consultation network between the major state and non-state actors in Europe involved in democracy assistance.

2. ***Agenda recommendations for the European Parliament:***

2.1. ***Supporting implementation of the EU agenda recommendations***

The European Parliament is requested to provide full support for the recommended EU agenda suggestions listed in the previous section as appropriate under the European Parliament mandate.

2.2. ***Reviewing the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR)***

EIDHR was introduced by the EP over ten years ago and constituted a milestone in European democracy assistance. Given the complexities of supporting democratic reform processes, the new EP is requested to review the EIDHR. This would aim to consolidate lessons learned and prepare a next generation initiative that shall be equipped to facilitate an enhanced European profile in democracy assistance.

2.3. ***Establishing a public space for the discourse on enhancing European democracy assistance***

The EP is invited to support a regular public-private dialogue about strengthening Europe's democracy assistance efforts. This would facilitate joint stock-taking of progress achieved in mainstreaming democracy; promote joint learning, including on relevant indicators of impact, assess progress achieved with the effective promotion of gender equality and help to systematically adapt intervention strategies to evolving needs.

2.4. ***EU democracy assistance instruments***

Democracy support requires operational instruments and procedures that can respond to newly arising opportunities for reform processes, be sustained over longer periods of time and answer to nationally formulated reform agendas. However, the current administrative provisions within the EU seriously constrain



an enhanced European profile and the strategic application of available resources. The EP is requested to address this perceived gap and take the necessary initiatives to legislate the introduction of appropriate new procedures and instruments.

2.5. ***Universal democracy support***

European Union support to democratic reform processes should be applied to all countries that entered partnership agreements with the EU, avoiding double standards in Europe's external policies.

3. ***Agenda recommendations for the democracy assistance agencies in Europe:***

3.1. ***sharing the challenge of change***

The European agencies involved in democracy assistance share the challenge of introducing change to enhance Europe's profile in democracy assistance. The agencies active in this field will need to engage each other more actively for sharing lessons learned in democracy assistance, for sharing expertise, analysis, results and evaluations, and for providing increased coherence in approaches based on the reference points that constitute the European identity as elaborated in this statement.

3.2. ***connecting at the European level***

An increased engagement at the European level should result in the growth of a society or association of European democracy assistance agencies that shall be able to become a partner in a regular and multi-actor consultation process with the EU policy making institutions and act as European civil society advocate in shaping and implementing EU policies and instruments in the field of democracy assistance and for mainstreaming democracy in EU external policies.

3.3. ***connecting with partners abroad***

To enhance the European profile, agencies will consider taking shared responsibility for establishing dialogue processes about democratic reforms with stakeholders in other regions such as the Arab world, regions of Africa, Latin America and Asia. The outcomes of these dialogues should inform the analysis of support programs of the agencies and be used as policy input at the policy making levels within Europe. The platforms will serve for building strategic partnerships with stakeholders involved in moving democratic reform agendas forward. An additional regular dialogue will be established with partner organizations in North America with the objective of sharing lessons learned and aligning policies and approaches. The moderation and organization of these dialogues can be shared amongst the agencies participating in the growing European society of democracy assistance agencies.

3.4. ***the way forward***

Within the next six months the steering committee that organized the European Conference will prepare an action plan on the basis of the recommendations in this statement. The action plan will be submitted to the participating democracy assistance agencies for their consideration and consent. The Westminster Foundation for Democracy is invited to facilitate a further European conference at the beginning of the British EU Presidency in order to review the progress in the implementation of the recommendations in this statement and to discuss follow-through initiatives.