

Report from Roundtable on European Consensus on Democracy

European Partnership for Democracy

Rue Archimede 5, Brussels

December 8, 2008

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This roundtable was a closed meeting called by European Partnership for Democracy to assess the possibilities of joint efforts in promoting a European Consensus on Democracy, an overarching strategy for EU policy on democracy assistance. The meeting brought together different ideas about why such consensus is necessary and what should be the content of the Consensus. The goal was also to speak about practical steps that can and should be taken towards gaining support for a future European Consensus on Democracy.

This is a summary of main points of the discussion:

Impulses for the discussion and promotion of European Consensus for Democracy – WHY?

- The European Consensus on Democracy should create a more conducive environment for world-wide democracy assistance by European actors.
- There is political will from several Member States to push the idea of a European Consensus on Democracy forward – UK, France, Czech Republic, Sweden and others – there is an opportunity of two subsequent Presidencies to move the agenda forward.
- The Czech Republic has a record of supporting democracy in third countries, and has a good experience in cooperation with civil society on this issue. It would like to use the opportunity of organizing a conference in Prague in March 2009 during the Czech Presidency of the EU to give space to European and non-European civil society to come together informal COHOM meeting representatives to share their ideas on how bring the European efforts in democracy support forward. With the Prague conference, the Czechs aim to prepare the ground for the subsequent Swedish EU Presidency, who made democracy an important item on their Presidency agenda, and will further the discussions – the European Consensus on Democracy.
- Democracy is Europe’s core value and an incremental number of „democratically governed states world-wide is in Europe’s security interest.“
- Current global developments urge Europe to critically assess its democracy assistance efforts: The current democracy ‘backlash’ or regression, the financial crisis, the attention that Russia and China gain with their alternative governance models, energy and security issues, and Europe’s need for new political alliances to face new political dimensions in a multipolar world.

Possible elements for the European Consensus on Democracy – WHAT?

- Democracy and Development are different concepts, therefore the European Consensus on Development should not serve as an example. Furthermore the Consensus on Development lacks the proper implementation mechanisms. The European Consensus on Democracy needs a higher political debate and agreement among the EU Member States.
- Don’t focus on an EU definition of democracy and democracy promotion, but rather focus on constituting elements and principles underpinning European democracy support.
- The European Consensus on Democracy should go beyond rhetorics and aim for a more operational/practical paper, the more concrete it will be the more it will tie the governments and institutions to follow practical steps and actually implement the references to democratic principles in existing policies and the Consensus.
- The EU should not promote a blueprint for democracy, should not push forward its own model of democracy because it is not superior. Europe itself has 27 different models of democracy.

- The European Consensus on Democracy should emphasise effective policies over looking for a typical European approach, this would unnecessary offend democracy supporters in likeminded parts of the world e.g. Australia or Canada .
- There are various policies and instruments in place that comprise support for democracy, which need to work more effectively and complementary; different EU institutions and Member States need to cooperate on democracy support – coherence and complementarity are key issues.
- There is a lot on democratic governance comprised in the EU development policies and this should be used for the European Consensus on Democracy.
- The European Consensus on Democracy should invite European actors to use dialogue to connect real shared agendas on democratisation. It should abandon the route of supporting schemes driven by our bureaucracies and not by the partners. A focus on the demand side is necessary.
- The European Consensus should spell out the inconsistencies between democracy and trade interests of the EU.
- Another function of the Consensus is to put peer pressure on those EU Member States that are not concerned with democracy support. A proper implementation mechanism which ensures the above mentioned peer pressure within the EU but which could also help states outside of Europe to remember their commitments regarding democracy.

Other concerns:

- On the relation between human rights – democracy – development: it is better to stress the complementarity of and interlinkages between these concepts than to enter into discussions on which one is more important.
- On the conflict between values and interests: democracy is Europe's core value but other interests of the Member States will always stand ahead of it (security, energy etc.) – it is necessary to convince the EU that „Democratically governed states are Europe's security interest“
 - necessary to view democracy as an interest of EU but on the outside the message has to be presented as the interest of the target countries as well
- Who sets the agenda of democracy support? Currently it is more supply driven than demand driven but the challenge is to combine them with the agendas in the target countries , this connection is often missing (dialogue, exchange etc).
- There is a big gap between the EU policies and its implementation – the Consensus needs to emphasize this, it should not become another document which does not have practical impact, it has to be tied to the practical issues.
- Is the EU able to do such political work? There is lack of knowledge on how to do democracy support and there is lack of political will.

A possible roadmap to the European Consensus on Democracy – HOW?

- COHOM has the mandate to deal with the issues of democracy and democracy support and one of the impulses was given by French non-paper recently presented – this is an opportunity to take the debate further.
- Cross-pillar approach is necessary, the risk of involving both COHOM and CODEV can be that the discussion will become too vague or too stirred one way or the other.
- Use the existing know-how, instruments, policies and institutions. Start building from what is already in place.
- Complementarity with other policies is key.
- To further and finalise a European Consensus for Democracy, strong leadership from the EU Presidency country is necessary – the subsequent Czech and Swedish EU Presidencies provide a great opportunity.
- The European Parliament can give an impulse via a resolution.
- A good coordination within and between the current (France, Czech Republic, Sweden) and subsequent (Spain, Belgium and Poland) trios allows for the necessary time to properly discuss the European Consensus to its full extent.
- In a multi-track approach, NGOs can provide the content, briefings and links for the formal discussions on the European Consensus on Democracy in the EU.
- A COHOM working group or even a committee on democracy could assist the preparation of Council meetings regarding Europe's policies in democracy assistance.
- It is necessary to identify the different target groups for the Consensus:
 - a. Diplomatic and policy community in Brussels
 - b. EU delegations
 - c. Member States
 - d. Partner countries outside of Europe.