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European Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy

Remarks on democracy promotion

Democracy Promotion: The European Way. Conference organised by the European Parliament's Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe

Brussels, 7 December 2006

Mr Chairman,

Honourable Members of Parliament

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The European Commission has always looked to the European Parliament as an ally in our vigorous promotion of the basic principles of democracy and the universality of human rights.

So I was delighted to hear of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe's initiative to organise this conference on democracy promotion. I would like to thank Graham Watson in particular for this kind invitation to address you today.

This conference is a clear signal of the importance the European Union attaches to promoting democracy, good governance and human rights around the world. For their own sake, but also because they are the cornerstones of peace and human development.

Central to the EU's approach is the concept of human security – an idea of security which places people at the heart of our policies. It means looking at the comprehensive security of people, not the security of states, encompassing both freedom from fear and freedom from want.

As an organisation founded on respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law, we believe democracy is inherently valuable and universally desirable. And we are morally obliged to foster those values in all our international partners.

Over the last few months we have had a series of discussions with Member States about ways to coordinate our assistance, and how we can better tailor that assistance in the future. We have also had intensive discussions with the European Parliament. We are always open to new ideas for improving our current practice, so I am looking forward with interest to the recommendations of this conference.

There are a number of questions still open for debate. But before I come to those, I should point out what is sometimes overlooked – the EU already has a good track record on democracy promotion.

Democratisation is by no means a new departure for the EU. Of the estimated \$2 billion spent annually on democracy-related aid projects worldwide, approximately half is spent by the EU. Around the world we are working with partners like the UN, the Council of Europe, and the OSCE, as well as bilateral donors, to ensure our assistance is as effective as possible.

Our main tool is our geographic programmes which are tailored to particular countries' needs. The philosophy behind our assistance is a long-term commitment; tailored to local needs; aware that the crucial element in democratisation is the domestic impetus for reform. We know democracy cannot be imposed from outside; our responsibility is to support and encourage the forces of reform.

As the European Consensus on Development Policy makes clear, support for democracy, human rights and good governance underpins all our development assistance.

Perhaps our greatest success in democratization has been the enlargement process. This used the EU's gravitational pull to foster democracy and the rule of law across central and Eastern Europe, and the process continues today.

Although enlargement is unique in offering the incentive of EU membership, we have nevertheless learnt from the experience and have used it to inform the development of our newest democratization tool, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).

ENP gives us a framework for promoting democracy and economic development in the countries around the borders of an expanded EU. It aims to encourage the spirit of democracy by providing our partners with incentives to reform. As countries strengthen the rule of law, democracy and respect for human rights; and promote market-oriented economic reforms, we offer a share in the EU's single market; closer cooperation on energy and transport links; and a chance to participate in the EU's internal programmes.

Earlier this week I announced we are proposing ways to strengthen ENP and make it still more effective. One proposal is to establish a governance facility, which will offer those countries demonstrating clear progress in democratic reforms additional financial resources to go further. This builds on a previous facility established for our southern partners.

The impetus must come from within, but with ENP and its governance facility, we offer the kinds of incentives which can tip the balance in favour of reform.

I would also like to mention the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights, which dedicates approximately €120 million a year to complementing the work of our geographic programmes in the area of human rights and democratization. Earlier this year we released a new policy document setting out EIDHR's priorities for the next budgetary period. It gives us more flexibility than in the past and means we should be able to react more quickly to events around the world.

Elections are a fundamental pillar of democracy. So the EIDHR budget also funds the Commission's election observation activities. We have developed particular expertise in this field, and are a visible and credible actor in election observation, sending on average 12 missions a year to places as diverse as Ethiopia, the Palestinian Authority and Afghanistan. These missions have made a real difference. They stand as very practical signs of the EU's worldwide commitment to human rights and democracy.

EIDHR is sometimes criticised for focusing more on human rights than on democracy. But that is neither fair nor true. I find it unhelpful to separate the two – respect for human rights is one of the foundations of democracy, and democracy is necessary to develop and protect human rights. How can human rights be upheld without the other components of a democratic system, including the rule of law and an independent judiciary? And how can a democratic system work without paying

attention to the rights and freedoms of everyone, including disaffected groups and minorities?

Rest assured, the Commission takes a holistic view in designing and implementing its assistance strategies. We look at both the rights of individuals and the processes and institutions which form the foundations of a democratic system. And we ensure our different channels of assistance, EIDHR, geographical programmes, and so on, work in close coordination together.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I said, we are already an important actor in the democracy field. But we are well aware there is still room for improvement. I mentioned the ongoing discussions with member states about ways in which to improve our assistance. We know that EU assistance is not sufficiently coherent, visible or clearly identifiable.

We also know there are several difficult questions we must tackle: how to support democratisation in countries with very limited freedoms and hostility to external intervention in support of civil society? How to develop a European profile for democracy support, based on specific expertise, experience of democratisation, democratic practice etc.? And how to improve the effectiveness of our incentives, conditionalities and sanctions?

I am sure you will have interesting thoughts on these and other questions – democracy promotion is far from an exact science. Like everyone else we are still learning what works and what doesn't.

But with the help of the lively community of democracy experts and activists represented here today I am sure we will be able to make a difference. As the saying goes, "The cure for the ills of democracy is more democracy".

Thank you.