

THE COMMUNITY OF DEMOCRACIES – A NEW INSTRUMENT OF TRANSATLANTIC EFFORTS TO ENHANCE DEMOCRACY BUILDING?

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In July 2009, Lithuania assumed the presidency of the Community of Democracies (CoD), comprising over 100 countries worldwide, for a two-year period ending in 2011.

For the beginning, some words about the history of this organization. The CoD is an intergovernmental structure. The goal of the CoD is to strengthen and deepen democratic norms and practices worldwide as well as to consolidate and expand democracy around the world. The idea of the CoD was conceived in the United States of America in 1999. The Community itself was inaugurated at the first biennial ministerial conference that was held in Warsaw on 25-27 June 2000 – over 100 democratic countries met to affirm their governments' commitment to strengthening and promoting democratic values and practices. The Warsaw Declaration spells out a series of core democratic rights, among others the right to free and fair elections, freedom of expression, equal access to education, rule of law, and freedom of peaceful assembly. Ten countries convened the first ministerial meeting in Warsaw: Poland, Portugal, the United States, Chile, the Czech Republic, India, Mali, Mexico, the Republic of Korea, and South Africa. The initiative of establishing the Community was spearheaded by the then Polish Foreign Minister Bronisław Geremek and the US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. In 2006, the Convening group was expanded by adding Cape Verde, El Salvador, Italy, Mongolia, Morocco, and the Philippines. In July 2009, Lithuania was proposed to assume the presidency of the CoD and to become de facto its 17th convening member. The Convening Group of 17 governments is an executive institution of the CoD. It meets in Washington at the level of ambassadors of the represented countries. Decisions are made by consensus. The presidency rotates on a biennial basis.

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The Community has already been chaired by Poland, South Korea, Chile, Mali, and Portugal. In 2003, in Seoul, the Seoul Plan of Action was adopted. It foresees actions for strengthening democracy. In 2005, the Santiago Ministerial Commitment of the CoD affirmed the commitments of the Community to promote the participation of citizens in the democratic process, to reduce poverty, support regional and interregional cooperation, and respond to the threats to democracy, especially terrorism. In order to implement these commitments, four working groups were established: Working Group on Democratic Governance and Civil Society; Working Group on Poverty, Development, and Democratic Governance; Working Group on Regional and Interregional Cooperation for Democratic Governance; Working Group on Promoting Democracy and Responding to National and Transnational Threats to Democracy. In 2007, during the ministerial conference in Bamako (Mali), a decision was made to establish a Permanent Secretariat¹ with headquarters in Poland. At the end of 2008, the Secretariat started its activities in Warsaw. In 2009, during the ministerial conference in Lisbon (Portugal), the Final Declaration, the declaration on Honduras, and the decisions of a procedural nature were adopted. The first ever Bronisław Geremek Award was conferred on famous anti-apartheid activist Nelson Mandela for his merits towards democracy.

In addition to the governmental process, the Community of Democracies also has a non-governmental process, which is represented by civil society organizations and serves as a source of information and advice to the respective governments. The NGOs that participate in the activities of the CoD have established the International Steering Committee (ISC), which comprises 20 representatives of civil society organizations from five regions of the world and a representative of the Executive Secretariat, representing the NGOS of the chairing country. The Council for a Community of Democracies² serves as the Secretariat of the ISC. CCD is the only nongovernmental organization in the world with an exclusive focus on the Community of Democracies.

What was the general rationale to create the Community? First and foremost because we believe in democracy and because we also know that we may not take our liberty and democracy for granted. The current Polish Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski at the panel “What Future for Democracy” organized by the CoD at the 19th Krynica Forum (10 September 2009) explained it in the following

¹ For more information see: <http://www.community-democracies.org/>

² For more information see: <http://www.ccd21.org/index.htm>

way: “while democracy was well established in a part of the world, various countries have either experimented with less democratic forms of management or have completely abandoned democracy for an authoritarian type of power structure ... There is also a democracy deficit, which means that several societies strive for more democratic measures but the governments do not deliver it ... With the ongoing and profound economic crisis that is affecting large parts of the globe there is also a phenomenon of the enemies of democracy, which produces authoritarian leaders and economic systems that favour compulsory political measures rather than democratic procedures”.

What is the benefit of the Community? First of all, the CoD involves and interfaces with grass root democracy proponents (identification of the appropriate actors, reach out, establishing communication lines, ongoing training, empowering, on the ground intel); the CoD transmits non-governmental actions and voices into governmental responses and policies; the CoD identifies region specific threats to democracy and concentrates democracy assistance on target areas; the CoD creates a synergy between different democracy stakeholders – it is the only cross-continent organization for democracy in the world, smaller than the United Nations, but bigger than any other regional organization and capable of creating a synergy for democracy among countries with very different institutional, cultural, and geographic backgrounds.

Lithuania’s Presidency of the Community of Democracies 2009–2011 coincides with the important anniversaries of the history of independence and democracy in the country. In 2010, Lithuania commemorates the loss of its independence 70 years ago. 20 years ago, on 11 March 1990 Lithuania was the first Republic that declared the reestablishment of independence from the Soviet Union. The history of democracy in Lithuania, as well as in all of Central and Eastern Europe, is full of impressive examples of unity of civil society and civil endeavour: from the Hungarian Revolution to the Prague Spring, from the Baltic Way to the January Events in Vilnius in 1991, when thousands of unarmed people defended their independence against brutal Soviet military forces. These events became living examples of the culture of peace and a non-violent way towards democracy that was chosen by the civilian, ordinary people in our countries. The last two decades demonstrated that the delivery of democracy (or democracy promotion) requires the concerted action of the entire international community. The ascent of the “colour revolutions” in Central Europe marked a remarkable success of democracy in those countries where civil societies were already nascent. As a result, the

expertise accumulated by the countries must be used in democracy building efforts on a global scale. Current international institutions have grown increasingly bureaucratic and the process of their responding to the challenges produced by the dynamics of international relations is slow. The CoD is a coalition of forces that seek to make democracy attractive and applicable to all players, small and big, rich and poor, to those societies that already have a thick texture of civic institutions and to those that are starting from scratch and that are trying to find their own way to a more prosperous future.

According to various reports, 40% of the world's population still lives under authoritarian rule, while only 13% live in fully developed democracies. From the year 2006, global democracy retreat is perceived in different regions of the world as well as international organizations – autocratic states are growing in numbers and democratic countries face increasing hurdles while promoting their agenda at multilateral fora; while the economic crisis has added risks to democracy worldwide. Our task is to help reverse these trends.

In 2009, the following goals and priorities of Lithuania's presidency of the Community of Democracies were approved by the Democracy Caucus at the United Nations³: discussing the implications of the current financial and economic crisis for democratic governance in order to expand and improve democratic governance at the local, national, and global levels; revitalizing the CoD, welcoming new partners to the CoD; achieving maximum synergy between CoD and relevant international organizations, initiatives and stakeholders for the strengthening of democracy. Among the priorities, the following actions were emphasized: strengthening the role of CoD in the United Nations, including the Human Rights Council, initiating UNGA resolution on democracy education; initiating regional CD meetings; encouraging regional and local initiatives, including constructive input by non-governmental partners, aimed at promoting democracy, transparency, social inclusion, women's and youth empowerment; strengthening synergies and cooperation with relevant international and regional organizations and fora (including the European Union, OSCE, Council of Europe, Council of the Baltic Sea States, Union for the Mediterranean, Community of Democratic Choice, ASEAN, African Union); initiating CD missions to countries that seek assistance

³ *Democracy Caucus at the United Nations* - informal meetings of the CoD at the ministerial level, organized each September, annually on the margins of ministerial week of the United Nations General Assembly.

in dealing with threats to democracy or the consolidation of democracy; crystalizing the mandate of the Community of Democracies, adjusting it to the current realities; by making efficient use of the Permanent Secretariat and reviewing the structure and working methods of CD working groups, creating CD capitals Contact Group, encouraging better burden sharing in CD activities.

Building on the experience of the Chilean Presidency the Lithuanian Presidency established a new system of six working groups covering the following issues: Working Group on Poverty, Development, and Democracy (Italy and Chile has agreed to co-chair the working group), Working Group on Promoting Democracy and Responding to National and Transnational Threats to Democracy (Hungary leading the group), Working Group on Gender Equality and the Promotion of the Rights of Women (the United States and Lithuania co-chairing the working group), Working Group on Regional Cooperation (Republic of Korea and Romania co-chairing the group); Working Group on Enabling and Protecting Civil Society (Canada leading); Friends of Presidency Working Group on the Reform of the CoD (Sweden leading the group). Currently, international consultations are being held within the CoD on the establishment of the Working Group on Education for Democracy. The main objective of the working groups is to come up with practical initiatives to promote and support democracy at all levels – national, regional, and international.

During the Lithuanian Presidency, the voice of the CoD has started to be heard on different important issues for democracy globally. During its Presidency, Lithuania has initiated CoD statements on International Democracy Day, Afghanistan elections, the situation in Honduras, on 2010 Presidential Elections in Ukraine, Burma (release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi), Kyrgyzstan, Haiti, and Thailand. During this period, the International Steering Committee of the CoD has also issued statements on Iran as well as on the Imprisonment of Singapore Democratic Party Leaders.

At the United Nations the CoD operates through Democracy Caucus (or the “democracy lobby group”) that was established in June 2000 that aims at promoting the principles of democracy and human rights embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Warsaw Declaration of the Community of Democracies. In September 2009, Lithuania convened a special informal meeting of the CoD foreign ministers to discuss the efficiency and relevance of the Community worldwide, creating synergies between the Community and other stakeholders of democracy building as well as the situation in Honduras.

Lithuania's efforts in New York are currently concentrated on drafting a UN resolution on education for democracy. Lithuania has also initiated a similar "lobby group" in the framework of the Geneva based Human Rights Council – e.g. the Convening Group Statement on the Draft UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training statement was delivered by Ambassador Jonas Rudalevičius in Geneva at the 13th session of the UN Human Rights Council on 2 March 2010.

Under the initiative of Lithuania, the first ever dialog between the Community of Democracies and the European Union started with the first consultations of both organizations (Informal Round Table Meeting "New Partnerships in Democracy Building: EU and the Community of Democracies was organized in Brussels on 16 November 2009). On this occasion, EU Foreign Ministers approved conclusions on Democracy Support, including the EU Agenda on support for Democracy-Building Processes, and naming CoD as an EU partner in this endeavour (alongside the United Nations and the OSCE). Creating synergies and pragmatic cooperation between various global democracy actors, including the EU and the Community of Democracies, is especially important when democracy is challenged by such trends as the emergence of "sovereign democracies".

The important highlight of the concretized CoD activities was women and the democracy agenda. The International Conference Women Solidarity for Democracy gathered women in Warsaw on 13 September 2009 from different countries, including Poland, the United States, Ireland, Belarus, Lebanon, Russia, France, Israel, and Lithuania. It was also attended by Iranian women intellectuals living outside their homeland. The participants met to discuss and analyze the challenges confronting women in the rapidly changing world. Conference participants wanted to express their solidarity and show their support for those actions that are intended to develop democracy and modernize societies throughout the world (including in Iran). As a follow-up, on 12 April 2010, the Working Group on Gender Equality and Women's Rights of the CoD was created in Vilnius as a joint initiative of Melanne S. Vermeer, the United States' Ambassador-At-Large for Global Women's Issues, and Evaldas Ignatavičius, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania, as co-chairs of the group. President Grybauskaitė welcomed the working group. Senior officials and representatives from Lithuania, the United States, Denmark, Iceland, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Spain, Sweden, and the European Institute of Gender Equality, and the Nordic Council of Ministers all took part in this meeting. The group stated: "the status of the world's women is not only a matter of morality and justice, but also a political,

economic, and social imperative. When women are free to develop their talents and contribute fully to their societies, everyone benefits. Most of the world is now in agreement that women's rights are human rights. We say a further step is needed: women's progress is human progress". The main focus areas of this group will be women and governance; women and economic development; women and violence; women, peace, and security. The working group proposed for the September 2010 Democracy Caucus meeting at the fall session of the United Nations General Assembly to be dedicated to the issues of women's equality and the role of women in implementing the Millennium Development Goals. In addition, concrete projects were agreed that fit our priority areas, e.g. leadership training for women in Afghanistan; training and mentoring courses for women in Iran; an entrepreneurship conference to provide leadership training and business skills to women in Eastern Europe and the three Caucasus countries; mentoring projects to help women in Belarus, Russia's Kaliningrad region and Georgia to develop business and entrepreneurship skills; program against human trafficking in Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine; leadership training in Moldova, Azerbaijan, and Ukraine; training in gender studies at the university level for the representatives of Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia; conference on women's leadership issues in Central Asia and Afghanistan. Finally, the United States and Lithuania as well as other participants of the meeting have expressed appreciation of the commitment by the Lithuanian presidency of the Community of Democracies to convene in 2011 a high-level meeting dedicated to the issue of women and democracy within the framework of the Vilnius ministerial meeting with reference to a similar meeting that was organized by the United States and Lithuania in 2001.

The Working Group on Enabling and Protecting Civil Society concentrates its efforts on developing recommendations for governments in this area, because non-governmental organizations are being put at increased threat globally. The working group develops tools for diplomats to assess and respond to regulatory threats, disseminates materials that have been developed by civil society organizations, encourages CD member states to include a component on protecting civil society in their foreign service training program, is considering the possibility to establish a joint-action protocol so that states can collaborate more effectively in dissuading states in adopting and implementing restrictive legal frameworks, supports and strengthens the worldwide network of non-governmental organizations working on restrictive legal frameworks, develops funding to support advocacy on this issue, and considers the development of a CoD mechanism that would

facilitate the provision of technical advice to states in the process of developing legislation that may impact civil society.

Diplomat's Handbook is another interesting initiative of the CoD in the worldwide training of diplomats. This flag project includes a wide variety of case studies documenting and explaining specific country experiences in winning democracy. It also identifies the creative, human, and material resources available to Missions, the ways in which Missions and diplomats have supported requests in the past, and describes how such support has been applied. Strategic workshops on democracy and democratization for young/mid-career diplomats from Central, Southern, and Eastern Europe (at the Natolin-Warsaw campus) are launched. It aims at building both a network of diplomats and experts with a thorough understanding of democracy and democratization as well as a sustainable platform for the exchange of professional experience and knowledge. The project consists of a series of workshops that are aimed at educating the representatives of the countries where democracy is threatened and countries where it is young and developing. Diplomat's Handbook – Democracy Support Workshops – will be organized in all regions where the Community of Democracies is present, with workshops following in Latin America, Asia, and Africa.

In the framework of the Working Group Threats to Democracy, the Community will also highlight the current challenges, such as Internet freedom. The Internet provides new opportunities and poses new challenges to democracies in the digital age. Therefore, Lithuania in cooperation with Hungary is initiating a special workshop on the new opportunities and challenges for democracies in the digital age during the Internet Global Forum 2010 in Vilnius.

An important new dimension of the Community was launched by Lithuania – the Parliamentary Forum of the CoD was created on 11 March 2010, celebrating the 20th anniversary of the reestablishment of Lithuania's state. It is stated in the convening declaration that a Parliamentary Forum is a coalition of like-minded parliamentarians from the states' participants of the CoD who are determined to work together to strengthen democracy where it is weak and invigorate even where it is longstanding, to promote peace, development, human rights and freedoms, gender equality, and equal opportunities in their respective countries and around the world. Parliamentarians or former parliamentarians representing 18 countries (Lithuania, the United States, Belarus, Bulgaria, Canada, the Czech Republic, Georgia, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Mexico, Moldova, Morocco, Norway, Poland, Ukraine, and Turkey) agreed to cooperate in strengthening dem-

ocratic institutions, primarily the parliaments, in the transition and pre-transition countries. They expressed their commitment to engage in the experience and best practice sharing projects with the parliamentarians as well as the pro-democracy activists from the CoD participating countries or countries where the CoD is engaged in democracy building activities. The Parliamentary Forum agreed to meet at least twice a year. It is important to emphasize that March 11 will remain the permanent date of the annual informal meeting in Lithuania. Emanuelis Zingeris, a signatory to the declaration on the re-establishment of Lithuania's independence as well as the current chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, is elected as the President of the Parliamentary Forum. Patron of this event, Speaker of the Seimas (Parliament) Irena Degutienė, U.S. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton, and President of the European Parliament Jerzy Buzek all welcomed the Forum meeting. Long-time member of the United States House of Representatives Lincoln Diaz-Balart, one of the most active of Canada's fighters for human rights and democracy David Kilgour, German representative in the European Parliament Michael Gahler, who significantly contributed to Lithuania's Euro-Atlantic integration, leader of the European Conservatives and Reformists group in the European Parliament Michał Tomasz Kamiński, one of the most active participants in the Prague Spring and former Czech Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Vondra, Speaker of the Georgian Parliament David Bakradze and Mexican Senator Adriana González Carrillo were all elected as Vice-Presidents of the Forum. The Forum on the occasion of its establishment in Vilnius issued several resolutions: *Resolution Calling for the Support of Cuba's Pro-Democracy Movement*⁴, *Resolution on the Situation in Georgia*⁵, and *Resolution on the Nomination of Liu Xiaobo for the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize*⁶. It was agreed that in 2010 this forum is going to arrange a session of training for democratic Moldovan Parliamentarians in Vilnius, a fact-finding mission to Georgia, a high level meeting in Krakow on 2-4 July 2010 as well as in Washington DC on the occasion of International Democracy Day on 15 September 2010.

⁴ The Community of Democracies Parliamentary Forum, *Resolution Calling for support of Cuba's pro-democracy movement*, 12 March 2010 <http://community-democracies.org/images/stories/Cuba_resolution_12032010.pdf>

⁵ The Community of Democracies Parliamentary Forum, *Resolution on the Situation in Georgia*, 12 March 2010 <http://community-democracies.org/images/stories/Georgia_resolution_Parliamentary_Forum__2_.pdf>

⁶ The Community of Democracies Parliamentary Forum, *Resolution on the Nomination of Liu Xiaobo for the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize*, 12 March 2010 <<http://community-democracies.org/images/stories/LiuXiaobo.pdf>>

Youth dimension of the Community is also “under construction” as a part of the preparations for the high level Krakow meeting.

Over 100 countries are invited to the upcoming meeting of the Community in Krakow. The event will also be attended by democratic leaders and activists from all over the world, as well as by representatives of the world of business, media, international non-governmental organizations, and academics. The purpose of the meeting will be to renew the Warsaw Declaration that was signed in the year 2000 and to develop a program of the international community actions supporting democracy in the coming years. In one year, in July 2011, a similar meeting will be held in Vilnius. This will be the biggest diplomatic event by share numbers of governments attending that Lithuania has ever organized on its soil.

In conclusion, the Community could become an effective tool of new transatlantic as well global agenda of democracy building that is being established by the current Lithuanian Presidency of the Community of Democracies. The Community can serve as an effective tool of strengthening the synergies and democratic outreach on a global scale. As stated above, the Community comprises countries with different institutional, regional, and cultural backgrounds. This diversity adds to the unique character of the Community. Inside the Community, we also have a unique interface between governments, parliamentarians, and civil society activists. Such a cross-institutional nature as well as the synergies between the governmental, non-governmental, and political community are the future of international efforts on democracy building of the post-modern world.