

Ahead of 2019, democracy support should become a pillar of the EU narrative and action. Let's be clear and brave.

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Ahead of 2019, with a new Parliament and Commission coming up, the EU should definitively take a stand and say loud and clear that democracy is part of our essence and *raison d'être*. Without this clear vision, many other aspects of the EU project could become irrelevant and be challenged by the many illiberal alternatives, which are mushrooming these days. This concerns the EU's internal rules and the Member States', and how we operate in external affairs. In a recent high-level meeting at the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [organised by DEMO Finland](#), the challenges and opportunities were outlined, by looking at the future Finnish Presidency of the EU.

Some pretend that Democracy is an empty word. The excuse seems to be really convenient for those who live comfortably in a non-democratic society. I doubt that inequality and lack of freedom, which come along with the lack of democracy, satisfy most of the people, who are left out of the limited welfare zone authoritarian countries offer.

Challenged from its very core and from outside, the European project should make clear statements and concrete actions to support democracy in all its possible facets. We need consistency to have the support of citizens. The Member States of the EU should take their responsibility and make it a real and essential drive for the future. Our Union should be better than it is today – but it should not be abolished as a project, rather improved. We achieved a lot together, and all processes aiming at destroying it are extremely dangerous.

The following points help explain this position:

Democracy, development and peace are the part of the same dynamics. Certainly, social and economic development are complex processes, but there is a vast empiric recognition that the best economies, more successful and viable, are democracies – right because they are able to generate full responsibilities of citizens and therefore engender enterprises, education and long-term plans for the good of societies. Non-democracies develop, but then become stagnant. Peace, which is the most important factor of development is more preserved by democracy than by the absence of it.

The EU is a project of Democracy. It is economically successful because of that. It was built on the ashes of a terrible lack of Democracy, and we have to state that we have learned

the lesson. We should not be ashamed to remember to ourselves and to others that this is what we want and request. In development policies outside of the EU (the EU and its Member States are the biggest donor for development in the world), we should make democracy support a top priority, otherwise our counterparts will not understand what is our vision, compared to other actors who are showing up on the scene. Otherwise, the citizens of these countries will not understand the consistency of the EU support.

The EU institutions and Member States should be brave and say loud and clear that development should be linked to democracy, without being shy and afraid to interfere in someone's else governance. The EU budget supporting States, which are not democratic is also an interference – and a wrong one. We could be intelligent and strategic, but we should not be shy and fail to make our point.

Is Democracy an empty word? It is a complex one but definitely not empty - it is rather full of content and essential elements, which result to be so important when you miss them. They are also the features driving sustainable social and economic development.

Subdivision of powers is the key of the democratic principles, where judicial power is independent from governments. The action of a balanced legislative bodies, liaising with the government in a mutual form of control are the basis for limited power, which could otherwise become abused. As a matter of fact, abuse is around the corner if the system in place does not prevent it.

Democracy is the respect of **multiple ideas** and **the expression of different visions**. Finding the way to preserve and stimulate different voices (through parties, movements, activists, ...) is an essential part of the survival of democracy. Slowly but surely, closing the options means to become a regime. That regards also the protection of **minorities**, which are weaker because they *are* minorities.

Democracy is **freedom of expression, movement, and association**. And here again, only those who have all these freedoms, can think that this is “just standard”, given for granted, non-important. Freedom of movement (for example the possibility to get a visa, to register in a specific place, to live and work where needed,) and freedom of expression (not getting pressures or warnings for what one says and writes) are strongly missing in regimes. The right to associate and gather is compromised by legislation, practices, difficulties for registering association, which make it impossible really to aggregate people... and very simply, the process of decline of democracy starts. We can also mention the possibility to count on reliable and multiple **media** and information tools, as a key element for democracy.

Participation and interaction of citizens with institutions and elected leaders, at all level (national and local), are part of a lively democracy. Participative democracy, with ways of engaging with citizens and associations, defining together policies and programmes is fundamental. It raises the sense of responsibility among citizens and makes democracy a rich and productive dialogue between elected leaders, public administration, private sector and citizens, who do not *fear* the institutions.

Needless to say, elections are a key element for a true and deep democracy. Without this, the true sense of representation is not possible and we see manipulations before and during the elections, orienting with wrong information or even violence. How can we even engage with elected representative based on biased or fraud?

Democracy and human rights are interlinked, and directly connected to the protection of citizens from abuses, the respect of the rule of law, the protection of people lives, health, and freedom – for individuals, as well as for collective groups.

Are these all empty words not worth fighting? I sincerely believe that they need our full love and support. Let's say it loud and clear. And let's act consequently, urging the EU Member States to take their responsibility and build a good plan for our Europe in 2019.