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**Political Foundations in Democracy
Promotion, Development Cooperation and
Political Dialogue**

**European Network of Political Foundations
Brussels, 13 November 2008**

Your excellencies, ladies and gentlemen

I am very grateful to the members of the European Network of Political Foundations for inviting me to take part in this debate on democracy, development and political dialogue. You will understand in a pre-election year that I think you are very wise to draw on major contributions from distinguished representatives from political forces across the European democratic spectrum.

You will forgive me if I begin with some fundamentals. Democracy is the central concept in political thought. It is the expression of *will*. It cannot be imposed. It must be gained. And active efforts are needed to maintain it. Democracy is not simply about institutional engineering, it is about political culture.

Democracy lies at the heart of open societies, where all fundamental rights and freedoms are effectively upheld in accordance with democracy and the rule of law. Moreover, democracy also goes hand in hand with open economies based on open trade and investment at home and abroad.

In short, societies and economies that make exchanges with other peoples and cultures are an engine for development and prosperity. Openness has always been a condition of our prosperity and cultural and economic dynamism, and a factor in Europeans' individual achievements. It was Europe that gave birth to the concept of the "open society", developed by philosophers like Henri Bergson and Karl Popper. The open society is a society of democracy and human rights, a transparent, free and pluralist society.

Openness, like diversity, is an inherent characteristic of Europe, part of our essence: openness to other cultures and other ways of thinking, but also market opening and freedom of movement. It is the basis of our particular European model of Social Market Economy, which combines open markets with a framework of rules to ensure social justice and equity. The Europe of the 21st century is now in the process of adding a "fifth freedom", the free movement of knowledge, to the four freedoms of movement provided for in the Treaty of Rome over 50 years ago.

This openness, I believe, lies at the heart of the European project.

In the last 30 years, democracy has advanced as never before – in southern Europe, in Latin America, in Africa, notably South Africa, and last but not least in the collapse of the Iron Curtain. But there is still work to be done – in the Middle East, and in parts of Asia and Africa.

Even where democracy has made gains, building democracy is a complex business – holding free and fair elections, developing institutional and legislative reform, establishing human rights, ensuring an independent judiciary and media, carrying the fight against corruption, and last but not least *educating* citizens in the broadest sense about the importance of politics and political systems. Sometimes democracy's greatest advocates are the slowest to realise what a complex and sometime fragile process it is to create a real democracy.

So democracy building is a fundamentally important task, both within a political community, and internationally, to help others benefit from the same right to exercise the rights of citizenship in a framework of political pluralism.

What does the European Union bring to this ? Since democracy was invented in Athens some 25 centuries ago, our roadmap to democracy in the EU has involved many twists and turns, some dangerous roads, and a few dead-ends. And of course the speed of our European journey has accelerated dramatically over the last 50 years, with the European Union acting as a major catalyst for peace and democracy, with fundamental values such as human rights and the rule of law, freedom, solidarity and social justice, and respect for diversity established as the building blocks of European integration.

Today we stand, frankly rather proudly, as a Union of 27 Member States who have decided together, of their own free will, to build a common future together, based on the rule of law, an internal market, and the gradual abolition of internal borders.

Of course, we would also like to go further, in the Lisbon Treaty and in the Charter of Fundamental Rights, which indeed represents further advances in civil liberties and

fundamental rights. I remain hopeful – and determined – that we will secure the Lisbon Treaty before too long.

What we have done for ourselves in terms of bringing democracy to millions of people, we also wish to bring to others. The European Union continues to exert a major force for democratic and economic change in neighbouring countries, especially the candidate countries. I am proud to be told, as I travel throughout the world, that the EU is considered a model of economic and political integration. Many countries, like my own country a few short decades ago, see Europe as opening *their* own doors to freedom and democracy.

Of course, we are not arguing that we have a monopoly of democratic virtue or that we can serve as some kind of automatic template. But it is true to say that Europe is a kind of laboratory based on the rule of law, the pooling of sovereignty, and respect for diversity. Without arrogance, we have to be ready to show the way.

But we have to go beyond simply being a good example. The Commission employs a number of instruments to promote democratisation in third countries:

- Through political dialogue, we encourage partner countries to integrate human rights and democratic principles as part of the development plans. Indeed, we have "mainstreamed" democratic principles in all our development instruments.
- Through our financial and technical assistance programmes, we promote democracy by promoting free and fair elections; by strengthening the capacities of parliaments; by pushing for an independent and professional media, and by encouraging pluralistic political systems. Indeed, EU financial assistance in this area is growing – in 2006, governance and support for economic and institutional reforms is the single most important area of EU development cooperation, amounting to nearly 1.5 billion euros.

But why should we finance democracy beyond our borders? Is it simply a matter of values? No. It goes beyond that – to our *interests*. By investing in democracy of our

neighbours, we are investing in their openness. Their development. Their stability. And from a European perspective, we reduce the costs of social problems, the risk of wars, or religious or political radicalisation. The return on investing in democracy comes in the form of a peace dividend.

And finally, what's the policy framework within which we are promoting democracy? In my view, it is dominated by the need to respond to globalization. From trade to migration to climate change to the financial crisis, we are wrestling with problems which go far beyond the capacity of a single state to respond. But the nature of globalisation also accentuates the challenge to both democracy and indeed development. Globalisation, by undermining national and regional identities and the sense of "belonging to somewhere" poses real political challenges. In the EU, we have to tackle these policy issues with a sense of soft power, but also supranational solidarity, if we are to succeed.

The final aspect I wanted to touch on, of course concerns *your role*: the importance of foundations such as the ones assembled in ENoP who are doing such a great job in promoting the whole cause of democracy.

The process of developing democracies requires the construction of a political society. Put most simply, democracies cannot function without political parties, and parties moreover that are ready to compete fiercely for office – whilst accepting the ultimate judgement of the electorate. But modern pluralism is more complicated these days. Since the turn of the century, it is clear that civil society, including particularly NGOs, is an essential conduit for channelling political interest and political energy. Indeed, I would go so far as to suggest that the vitality of civil society is the best single guarantor of the soundness and stability of democracy. Democracy means creating diverse mechanisms for both promoting diversity of opinions, but also for mediating between different interests. The development of civil society in short has meant the creation of a dynamic public space that complements the traditional political structures.

So last but not least, we need you, the political foundations. For 50 years – as long as the EU has existed – you have played an extremely active and effective role in

promoting and consolidating democracy in Europe and in the world. As transnational structures that also have deep local roots, platforms like ENoP can be very effective in mobilising citizens around common objectives. They thus help to strengthen the cohesion of civil society within a pluralistic framework in accordance with fundamental European values.

The political foundations represented here share the values of openness and dialogue that characterise the debate about ideas and the way in which a pluralist society promotes citizenship and free enterprise. The ENoP, as a structure for cooperation among more than 50 political foundations from a large number of European countries, is particularly well placed to promote open societies and economies that are in step with the globalised world in which we live.

Actively working in Europe and more than a hundred countries to promote democracy and development cooperation, ENoP members open the path not just to democracy and development, but in policy terms have helped advance the EU agenda.

In conclusion, the great task of peace and reconciliation that gave rise to European construction is today matched by the challenges of globalisation. In the face of such challenges, we need to adapt our political institutions and our sense of democracy almost as much as we need to adapt our policies. The work that you and others do is essential. So once again, let me congratulate you on behalf of the Commission for your achievements and your cooperation with the EU, and I hope that this cooperation will become ever closer. We count on your experience and your efforts to help the long European tradition of democracy and acceptance of pluralism continue to blossom in Europe and around the world.

Thank you.