

Memorandum for Freedom and Democracy

by the participants of the International Round Table 2019

From 6 to 9 October 2019 the Peaceful Revolution Foundation hosted the “International Round Table” as part of the “Revolutionale – Festival for Change” to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Peaceful Revolution in Germany. Freedom and civil rights activists and representatives of non-governmental organisations, including writers, journalists, politicians and experts from 23 countries, contributed to a lively exchange of ideas and experience related to the basic questions of our democratic cultures and to the future of Europe. The Round Table was supplemented by two theme days about press freedom and “Climate – Justice – Visions”, which were open to the public.

Following our discussions about the topics we demand

Independent, critical historical research and analysis of dictatorships – for a culture of remembrance that is ready for the future

The culture of remembrance in a society should be supported but not controlled by the state, who should enable discourse within society about the past. Teachers and curricula should establish productive analysis of the recent past in school education. The reappraisal of the past should not be limited to socialism and communism, but also include the age of colonialism. Coming to terms with the history of the Balkan Wars is essential for eastern and southeastern Europe and will also benefit a more Europe-focussed culture of remembrance. Politics of remembrance shall not be misused to create or reinforce nationalist resentment – on the contrary, it must serve to strengthen the human rights.

End corruption, strengthen lobby control!

Lobbyism should be regulated by law and should be transparent if it is to discourage corruption. At the International Round Table we are worried to see how democratic institutions are undermined and misused by lobbyism, corruption and nepotism to serve private interests which are against the common good. Laws and good practice should form the basis for maximum transparency in administration and legislation. This includes especially the protection of free media who are independent of political and private influence and who uncover any misuse of democratic institutions, and it includes suitable possibilities

of direct and democratic control by civil society of political decisions, the promotion of local and regional online and offline structures and processes for political decision making as well as effective protection of whistleblowers who often take great personal risks for the sake of the public interest. Effective tools in the struggle against corruption are civic and political education, black-listing corrupt companies in public tender processes and strengthening anti-corruption authorities.

Peace work and non-violence

The world is experiencing a period of instability. Wars and armed conflicts with all their consequences are causing great uncertainty in our societies. We call for action to strengthen international institutions working to ensure the peace and for a return to a consistent policy for peace. Civil-society organisations who uncover human rights violations and do anti-conflict work need to be strengthened. We call for making democracy a topic in all areas of society – peacefully but decidedly – and for practicing democratic processes at an early age, countering the coarsening of language in both the public and the private sphere with manners and respect and for fighting violent and exclusive structures for the sake of peace and democracy.

Climate change and responsible resource policy

Climate change is threatening the livelihood of mankind as a whole. We have only a few years left to prevent irreversible damage. We call upon political decision-makers to drive structural change in the global economy towards a socially just, resource-generating economic and trade system with urgency. The current system must be countered with an economy that is not based on growth. At the same time, we all must make efforts to convince each and every one of the necessity to adopt a climate-compatible lifestyle, as the actions of the individual have repercussions for every human being on the planet. We need a vision of a world with climate justice. Like the Peaceful Revolution 30 years ago, the climate movement should have the power to overturn the entire system. This can be achieved with a network of all civil-society activists all over the world – support global action!

Women's and LGBTQI*rights – a challenge of its own in the context of the human rights movement

It is with great concern that we see the sexist, homophobic and transphobic discrimination of LGBTQI* persons in everyday situations, but also in public institutions, such as schools, police stations, hospitals and correctional facilities. We call for swift and systematic awareness raising and qualification of the relevant persons for a respectful, non-discriminatory treatment of LGBTQI* persons. Mandatory therapies and medical examinations of transgender persons as required by the German transsexual act are discriminating and humiliating and need to be abolished. We call for strategies for equal treatment and acknowledgement of LGBTQI* persons, for a wake-up call to all parts of society to sharpen the awareness of this challenge.

Resenting democracy as a consequence of feeling “left behind by society”

In order to actively participate in democracy, citizens need to be concerned, aware and confident of success. This requires an expansion of the mechanisms and forms of direct democracy, primarily on a local level. We call for education programmes which provide incentives for active civic involvement by being inclusive, by tackling local issues and by including topics such as protection of the environment, keeping the peace and freedom of the media as core values of civil society. There are political alternatives. Democracy means being able to choose between different pathways. Within the framework of a culture of democracy, political parties must develop alternatives to each other's current programmes. We call for incentives for cooperation between national governments and local communities in order to raise awareness for the issues mentioned above. We call upon the governments in Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, Turkey and other countries to stand up against anti-democratic and anti-European attacks, including attempts to close down institutions of the Helsinki Committee and other NGOs in Bulgaria.

The impact of state surveillance and totalitarianism

Digitalisation gave rise to an exponential increase in the possibilities of systematic surveillance by states and companies. We demand that states should be permanently banned from collecting data indiscriminately, that politicians and public servants should stop playing public security against civil rights, that an independent institution outside the existing supervisory authorities should be created which oversees the protection of civil rights to personal data and that international corporations operating in Europe should be obliged to observe European data protection laws also in their activities outside of Europe. Democracy lives on criticism and political participation. Secret services should be controlled in such a way that active citizens need not fear any surveillance.

Defend the freedom of the media, the press and investigative journalism!

We acknowledge the duty of the individual to double check the truth of media information. We expect support for independent journalism from society. We need far-reaching educational programmes for the way we as individuals use digital information. At the same time, our democracy needs local spaces for communication as a counterweight to the virtual space. We expect the national and international institutions to work harder to protect journalists and users. Parallel to the international cooperation against terrorism and crime we also demand international cooperation for information security.

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