

## Memorandum for Freedom and Democracy by Participants of the International Round Table 2018

From 7th to 9th October 2018, the 'Peaceful Revolution Foundation' (German *Stiftung Friedliche Revolution*) hosted an International Round Table with the title 'A Network of Freedom and Democratic Movements'. Representatives of freedom and civil rights organizations, among them writers, journalists, politicians, activists and experts from 13 countries including Germany took part in a vivid exchange of thoughts and experience regarding the fundamental questions of our democratic cultures.

Together we demand:

**Strengthen democracy.** Democratic processes and the rule of law are in great danger, as they are being undermined, ignored and even destroyed. Civil society and active citizens constitute the basis of a healthy democracy and should be supported and consulted in decision-making processes in the long term. The members of the International Round Table are extremely worried about reports of shrinking civic space throughout Europe. We need a vibrant and independent civil society in order to defend democracy and justice, to promote peace by means of civic education and we have to find a constructive way of coming to terms with the past, to act as watchdog against corruption and to defend the pillars of our democracy: Freedom of assembly, freedom of speech, freedom from persecution! Policies that limit citizens' rights to access information, justice and participation in decision-making, such as the recent anti-environmental legislation in Bulgaria, should not be tolerated by democratic governments.

**Strengthen Europe.** The European Union should stand firmly behind its fundamental core values: **respect for human dignity and human rights, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law.** Union institutions and member states' governments should not allow these rules to be displaced and compromised by opportunistic, greed-driven politics. At the same time the Union should make sure that the benefits, generated by its powerful economy, are distributed in a fair way to all of its citizens. Our shared, humanist values can be the only answer to the polarising forces threatening the European Union; they should be the basis of all European interior and foreign policies. Countries aspiring to a democratic future, such as Macedonia, Armenia and Georgia, should be supported in their effort to overcome the nationalist confrontations of the past. The International Round Table unanimously agrees that a democratization of the European Union is a precondition for the continuous development of the civil society. Civil society initiatives and innovative forms of direct democracy strengthen our civil society and our democracy.

**Debunk and fight populism.** Parties and organisations which attack Europe's core democratic values should not be able to benefit from public funding of parliaments, the very houses of our democracies. The political culture is being destroyed fast-growing and escalating populism which should therefore be nipped in the bud to protect democracy. Populism targets the foundations of our democratic institutions, it nourishes mistrust, erodes the participation of our citizens in political decision-making and undermines cohesion in our societies. We call upon the EU to give citizens a real voice in decision-making – as giving true power to the people is the antidote to populism.

**Eradicate corruption and nepotism.** Corruption deprives millions of citizens of their access to quality infrastructure, education, journalism, health and social services, and should be fought with focus and determination. We are particularly alarmed by the situation in Bulgaria, Romania, Macedonia and other countries, where corruption seems to be rife and authorities are unable or unwilling to control it. Such countries need assistance and control by fellow EU member states. Countries should limit trans-border corruption, often involving their own corporations' and officials' actions abroad.

**Defend freedom of the press, freedom of speech and watchdog journalism.** We call upon the European Union to actively intervene in order to prevent further use of EU funds for mass media organisations which do not abide by ethical norms and spread hate speech and propaganda undermining the Union's core founding principles. Harassment and imprisonment of opposition and critical journalists should be instantly brought to an end in Belarus, Russia, Turkey and other countries. Immediate action is necessary in EU member states in order to stop the takeover and abuse of independent and public media for government propaganda as for example in Hungary and Poland; to guarantee plurality and consolidation of oligarchic ownership as for example in Bulgaria; to defend investigative journalists from threats against their lives and wellbeing, and to bring the perpetrators and initiators of assassination attempts against journalists to justice – as for example in Slovakia and Malta.

**Guarantee a safe and democratic Internet.** The Internet and social media should be governed in a responsible manner, guaranteeing equal participation of civil society to ensure that they are not turned into instruments of propaganda and manipulation undermining democracy, wellbeing and citizens' rights. At the same time, surveillance, control and preventing access to humanitarian organisations are extremely worrying developments. We urge citizens to be critical and aware in their use of social media and recommend the use of alternatives (e.g. "Diaspora"), if necessary. We urge for policy solutions guaranteeing that our Internet remains free for all, safeguards our right to information and protects the privacy of our citizens and their freedom to participate in the political and public life.

**Defend human rights, release political prisoners!** Governments should tackle violations of human, social and minority rights, in an effective way. Violence and harassment of civic advocates and protesters by authorities, especially in Russia and Hungary, need to stop immediately. We call upon governments of these countries to abandon the advancing of policies that hamper civil society work in support of refugees, and release detained activists where arrests have been made. Death penalty, still possible in Belarus, needs to be eradicated in

Europe. We encourage Germany and other developed democracies to firmly support human rights' protection on an EU and global level, including in the UN's Security Council.

**Guarantee women's rights and gender equality.** Equality and women's rights have recently been under attack in Turkey, Poland and Bulgaria, among other countries. Significant inequalities and discrimination still exist in almost every European country. We call upon their governments to condemn fundamentalist and extremist trends and to guarantee the respect of European standards of equality and the rights of people, regardless of their gender. The International Round Table congratulates Ireland on the decisive step to enable women's freedom of choice, and Romania, on the refusal of the people to limit the rights of gender minorities in two respective referenda.

**Democratic opposition without borders – show solidarity.** In light of populist movements against democracy all throughout Europe it is more necessary than ever to build a network among people “driven by democracy” and civil rights activists, inside and beyond the borders of the EU. The members of the International Round Table decided to maintain the connections established at this event for a further exchange of ideas and experience, and in order to keep encouraging each other. The Peaceful Revolution Foundation will use this growing network to carry out the prearrangements for the conferences planned for the future. This year's conference turned out to be an experience of strong community for all of us. It was regarded as ‘extremely meaningful, fertile and interesting’ as an ‘instrument of defense’ of freedom and democracy.

Leipzig, 9th October 2018

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