



The EU and the Community of Democracies

**-Why greater EU Engagement better serves the international community
and is more consistent with EU values and norms -**

Contents

1. Introduction	2
2. What has so far been the EU policy regarding the CD?.....	3
2. Demystifying unfounded fears and misinformed perceptions:.....	5
3. Why a bigger EU engagement in the Community of Democracies?	8
a. Strengthening the Common Foreign and Security Policy:.....	8
b. Consistent promotion of democracy and human rights:	8
c. Strengthening the UN system:	10
4. Conclusion	10

By Claudia Caldeirinha

Ms. Caldeirinha is the Director of the Joint Office of the Democracy Coalition Project and the Club of Madrid in Brussels and is an External Expert of the European Commission.

This presentation was made on behalf of the Democracy Coalition Project.



The EU and the Community of Democracies

**-Why greater EU Engagement better serves the international community
and is more consistent with EU values and norms -**

1. Introduction

This presentation assesses what has been the EU policy toward the Community of Democracies (CD) since its inception in 2000. I will discuss the inherent contradictions and evaluate two policy options for the EU, its Member States, and its institutions: "inconsistent participation" (the current policy) or "greater engagement" (a new approach more consistent with the EU principles).

As the previous speakers have presented in detail, the Community of Democracies (CD) is a gathering of more than 100 nations from all regions of the world that share a commitment to building and strengthening democracy in their own countries, their respective regions and globally. Even though the principles underlying this process are entirely consistent with the European values and policies, the CD process has been marked by inconsistent European participation: on the one hand, three of the EU's Member States are part of the 10 country convening group and all the EU countries have participated and signed the main documents coming out of the CD meetings; on the other hand, there has never been a clear political message of engagement from the EU as a whole defending the participation in the CD process or any sort of attempt to be more proactive in this process.

I will argue that the current "inconsistent participation" approach undermines the ability of the EU to consistently promote democracy and human rights around the world, disappoints partner countries in the developed and in the developing world, and makes it easy for civil society actors and the public in general to criticize the European Commission and the Council for inertia.



In contrast, “common engagement” in the Community of Democracies process offers the prospect of a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) improvement, a higher international profile for the EU, greater effectiveness, greater consistency with the EU treaties and Council conclusions, greater coherence with the activities of the Commission’s European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights, and responsiveness to key actors in Europe and abroad.

2. What has so far been the EU policy regarding the CD?

In fact there hasn’t been ONE EU policy regarding the Community of Democracies, but distinct -often contrasting- positions and initiatives from the different member states and the different European institutions.

An important political gap is the fact that the **EU Council** does not have any official position on the Community of Democracies. This is due to varying levels of interest from the **Member States**, some of whom welcomed the CD and are even part of the Convening Group (CG) while others viewed it as a lower priority. Among the EU Member States, Portugal, Poland and the Czech Republic are members of the Convening Group and Italy has frequently participated in the CG activities as a sort of honorary member. In addition, Germany, Denmark, Sweden and UK have provided financial assistance to the process. All the European Union members have signed the founding document of the CD, the Warsaw Declaration and supported the Seoul Action Plan.

In this contradictory environment, it has been difficult for the **European Commission** to be actively involved. While participants from the EC have attended both the Warsaw and Seoul meetings as observers, no formal position exists regarding the CD and no funds from the European Initiative on Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) have been yet specifically allocated to support CD-related activities.

Through regular meetings with the Cabinet of Commissioner Chris Patten we have fostered the development of greater understanding about the CD with Commissioner Patten’s staff. In order to give the CD the chance it deserves in Europe, Commissioner Patten’s high level staff members felt that a new beginning for the CD was essential. While a few internal documents were written and several inter-service discussions occurred no concrete policy or funding results have been seen.



The **European Parliament** is the European institution which has shown more interest and commitment in defending the relevance of the CD and the importance of greater EU engagement in the process. Several Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) from various political groups have called repeatedly for the EU to be more engaged in the CD. In September 2002, two months before the November CD meeting, the EP hosted a conference with representatives from the EP, OSCE, several personalities involved in the Governmental process (e.g. the former Foreign Minister of Portugal Jaime Gama) and several NGOs from different European countries to debate the European strategies for the upcoming meeting. In October 2002, just before the Seoul event, the EP pressed the Commission to be more actively involved, noting that the CD's objectives "coincide with the commitments and principles solemnly declared on several occasions by the European Union in connection with the need to consolidate and promote democracy, the rule of law and human rights in the world on the basis of a joint effort by all the countries governed by democratic systems." Once again no concrete results in terms of political clarification were seen.

By the end of 2003, the EP had approved the 2004 European budget which asked that some funding be allocated to activities related to the CD and to the UN democracy caucus. Article 19.04.03 was dedicated to "the development and consolidation of democracy and the rule of law, respect for human rights and fundamental freedom" and indicated that part of the additional resources granted were to be allocated to "support for efforts to foster the establishment of groupings of democratic countries within United Nations bodies, specialized agencies and regional organizations; support for efforts to increase the number of countries belonging to the Community of democracies; support for the efforts of NGOs working towards those objectives by mobilizing civil society to consolidate democracy, the rule of law and human rights."

Moreover, in a report approved by the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Security and Defence Policy on the relations between the European Union and the United Nations (dated 16 December 2003), the EP "calls on the EU institutions to support the setting up of an inter-group of the democratic countries within the UN system (as defended by the Community of Democracies) and invites these countries and the EU Member States to promote the participation in this inter-group, and assist the NGOs in their efforts in favour of this objective, in particular those aiming at mobilising civil society".



Several MEPs have been involved in other activities related to the CD, from Brussels to Seoul, from Geneva to Washington. For example, an event that raised some interest in Brussels was the **European Regional Conference** of the CD organised by Romania in November 2003. This conference, which followed the CD model of a concurrent Governmental and Non-Governmental meeting, attempted to assess democratic progress and follow-up on the Seoul Action Plan. It was organized in consultation with the CD's Convening Group and with European regional organisations (e.g. OSCE) and it included the participation of the representatives of the European Commission.

2. Demystifying unfounded fears and misinformed perceptions:

Why has the EU such an erratic attitude towards the CD?

There are surely several reasons related to the EU's own difficulties in reaching common positions and consensual policies. However we should not ignore that there has been a pervasive lack of public information that has fed misperceptions and fallacious arguments. These misperceptions have been counterproductive to the creation of a forum that the EU could use to coordinate activities and to implement its pro-democracy assertions. In addition, this lack of information has diverted attention from the real advantages of this process and has created a 'smoke-screen' based on the following two arguments:

1. The US predominance in this process: Under the leadership of the former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and with the support of Poland and other countries that shared the initial enthusiasm for this initiative, the CD took its first formal steps.

However, due to the gradual deterioration of relations between Europe and the Bush Administration, this initiative has frequently been perceived as too American, especially by some of the European countries that have demonstrated a greater anti-Americanism.

Initially the US did have greater influence over the CD process, however it is important to stress that since its inception the CD has gone through important changes and has gradually created a more global profile as new countries have taken greater ownership in the process. The best example is the role of Chile, the country presently



chairing the CD process and organizing the third global ministerial conference in **Santiago, Chile**. Chilean FM Soledad Alvear is determined to make the CD a truly global process, and has expressed her hope that the EU will be more actively involved in the process.

Precisely because the EU can act as a counterweight to the big countries in the Convening Group, namely the US and, to a lesser extent, India, we now find several countries asking the EU to become more formally and actively engaged in the CD process. Apparently the EU still does not understand that the best way to counter-balance the role of a big power is by becoming part of the process, bringing its own positions ideas, and influencing the process of decision-making.

At the Non-Governmental level, both European and non-European actors feel too that active involvement by the EU will only enhance the global character of the CD. NGOs and civil society organisations around the world have welcomed the CD as a positive contribution to the promotion of democracy and human rights, and worked hard to shape its evolution. For instance, **Human Rights Watch** has called on the Community of Democracies to become “a caucus of nations committed to the universally recognized human rights without which democracy cannot thrive. It should allow democratic nations to share experiences, to coordinate policies and to reach out to non-governmental actors with similar goals. It should offer a forum for those still struggling in repressive societies to solicit support and to tell their stories to the world.”

The most supportive non-governmental actors have been representatives from non-democratic countries who understand the potential importance that a forum like the CD can have in changing their own realities (e.g. actors from the Arab countries, Central Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, etc). Among many of the well-known names that have been actively participating in CD events and debates are Yevgeny Zhovtis, a leading democracy and human rights campaigner in Kazakhstan; Gibson Sibanda, Vice President of the Movement for Democratic Change in Zimbabwe; and Riad Malki, Director of the Panorama Centre in Palestine.

2. Another of the arguments feeding some EU's reticence in embracing the CD process has been the argument that a process like the CD could undermine the UN



and create an alternative set of international norms and procedures that would weaken the present world forum.

While there is a legitimate concern behind this reasoning -especially at the light of last year's developments in international relations- we have to distinguish between fears and reality. As it is framed today, all the principles set in the main documents of the CD support and reinforce the importance and legitimacy of the United Nations system. Confirming this opinion, the Secretary-General Kofi Annan welcomed the initiative in Warsaw and expressed his hope that one day the UN itself could be called a Community of Democracies.

The founding document of the CD, the Warsaw Declaration, commits the Community of Democracies' members to collaborate on democracy-related issues in existing international and regional institutions and to form coalitions and caucuses that support resolutions and other international activities aimed at the promotion of democratic governance and human rights.

On several occasions, ministerial meetings of the Convening Group of the Community of Democracies were purposely held at the margins of the UN General Assembly in order to advance cooperation among democratic states, to increase cooperation between the UN and the Convening Group, and to strengthen a process of consultation and coordination at the UN. The Convening Group has constantly stressed the importance of adhering to the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and fundamental principles of international law. At the 60th session of the UN Human Rights Commission, Romania and other CD members of the Commission sponsored a resolution calling on the UN to work with intergovernmental, regional, sub-regional and other interested organizations on the ways and means of promoting democratic values and principles.

Conclusively, where we stand today, strengthening of the CD is not only consistent and complementary with the UN values and existence, but it is also necessary to advance and reinforce the democratic debate and cooperation that should take place at the core of the UN itself.



3. Why a bigger EU engagement in the Community of Democracies?

As a conclusion to the previous narrative of facts and developments, it can easily be stated that the EU and the CD share their founding principles and values and that a wider engagement of the European Union would be mutually reinforcing. EU engagement would **increase the potential of the CD** becoming more consistent and effective at defending core European values -democracy and human rights.. At the same time, greater engagement **would give the EU increased coherency and dynamism in its external policy**. Indeed, the EU would only gain from developing a substantive approach towards the Community of Democracies. Among other advantages, more EU involvement would mean a successful development at the level of its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP); a more consistent promotion of democracy and human rights internationally; and the reinforcement of the United Nations system.

a. Strengthening the Common Foreign and Security Policy:

The present crisis in the EU's Common and Foreign and Security Policy highlights the need for policy initiatives that can unite the current and future Member States and demonstrate to the world that the EU is capable of speaking with a united voice on international affairs. Participating in the CD would be a CFSP initiative that should be acceptable to all Member States since it is about commonly accepted European values, and would be broadly applauded by the European Parliament, interlocutors abroad, and civil society in general. It would increase the EU's internal consistency, since such a decision would be consistent with the EU's commitment to the promotion of democracy as reflected in its treaties and in various Council conclusions. Greater engagement would also improve coherence between the CFSP and the activities of the Commission's European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights, which now provides more than 100 million Euro per year for projects around the world.

b. Consistent promotion of democracy and human rights:

The EU and its Member States have long been committed to promoting democracy and human rights around the world. This is reflected in both the Treaty Establishing the European Community and the Treaty on European Union. The TEU affirms that



the EU is “founded on the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law, principles which are common to the Member States” (art.6) and it identifies the development and consolidation of “democracy and the rule of law, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms” as an objective of the CFSP (art.11). Likewise, Articles 177 and 181a of the TEEC declare that Community policy on development cooperation “shall contribute to the general objective of developing and consolidating democracy and the rule of law and to that of respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms.”

The Seoul Action Plan reaffirms the democratic principles embraced in the Warsaw declaration and international instruments on human rights such as the UN Charter, and provides guidelines for the “promotion, consolidation and protection of democracy worldwide and fostering cooperation for the upholding of democracy against the emerging threats of the 21st century.” The Seoul Plan of Action has 6 concrete goals: promoting regional democratic action; responding to threats to democracy; strengthening education for democracy; promoting good governance; promoting volunteerism; and co-ordinating democracy assistance. All these are relevant European interests.

Participating in the CD would better enable the EU to influence the CD process from the inside, defending its principles and policies in a more effective way. In particular, it would help ensure that the CD advances a form of democracy (closely linked to human rights) that is consistent with European values. Another area in which the European experience could be of assistance to the CD process is the further definition and implementation of **criteria of membership**. In Seoul, the CD’s Convening Group adopted a set of “Criteria for Participation and Procedures” that establishes rules for the participation of States and international organizations in CD meetings and creates an “observer” status for democracies facing problems or countries in transition. Although Portugal chaired the drafting committee for this document, formal EU participation in this process could give additional support to the implementation of these standards and contribute to the debate about incentives to compliance.



c. Strengthening the UN system:

The EU and its Member States have long believed that strengthening the system of international law based around the United Nations is essential to international peace and security. Article 11 of the Treaty on European Union reflects this view very clearly. This objective is especially important in an era of regional instability, terrorism, and trans-national organised crime. Therefore, participating in the CD's democracy groups at the UN fora can represent a crucial step for the EU in achieving its objectives on these issues.

4. Conclusion

Following the previous reasoning, it should be recognised as being in the EU's own interest to adopt a new approach regarding the Community of Democracies – including a common formal statement in support of the Community of Democracies; greater EU/EC contact with the convening group and host government; and higher level EU/EC representation at CD meetings. The common position should ideally commit the EU's Member States and institutions to engage actively in the CD process. This engagement should be focused, *inter alia*, on emphasizing the linkage between democracy and international human rights law, and on strengthening cooperation among democracies within the UN General Assembly and UN Commission on Human Rights. It should also help ensuring the development and implementation of a rigorous set of 'standards for participation' in future meetings of the CD; achieve greater coordination and transparency of the convening group; and achieve greater interaction with the non-governmental sector.

Finally, if the EU decides to continue its inconsistent policy of 'engagement/non-engagement' it will fail to respond to the increasing calls from partner governments in the developing world, from Members of the European Parliament and from prominent actors world-wide for greater EU engagement in the CD process. Moreover, if the CD gains international prominence, then this approach denies the EU an opportunity to shape the process. On the other hand, if the CD loses prominence or disappears, then this approach will have denied the EU an opportunity to pursue one of its core objectives – the promotion of democracy. A substantive policy move would increase the EU International Profile and it would ensure a strong EU presence in the CD –



complementing the role of the other members (including the US) where appropriate, and balancing it where necessary. At the same time, this increased EU engagement would represent an enormous qualitative development for the CD that would be able to develop more consistently and efficiently with the assistance of the proved experience and know-how of a region which is in itself a truly *Community of Democracies*.