

## **REGIONAL ROUNDTABLE FOR EUROPE**

### **29 April 2005**

The regional panel for Europe was held under the leadership of the Foreign Minister of Ukraine, Mr. Boris Tarasyuk, who was supported by the Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan, Mr. Elmar Mammadyarov, as co-chair, Mr. Gianni Buquicchio, Secretary of the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, as motivator. We also counted with the most valuable presence of very distinguished former heads of Government who integrate the Madrid Club, Mr. Petre Roman, former Prime Minister of Romania, and Mr. Andrés Pastrana, former President of the Republic of Colombia.

There was a general sense in our group that democracy has reached a significant point in its development in Europe. More Europeans live in democracies and more Europeans subscribe to the values of Democracy than ever before.

Regional institutions have played an important role in this regard. There was a general agreement in recognizing that Europe disposes of one of the most elaborate and effective regional machineries for the defense and promotion of democracy. Such institutions as the Council of Europe, the European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), have played a fundamental role in this regard. On the other hand, the prospect of accession to the European Union or diverse forms of association with it, has acted as very powerful incentive for the consolidation and deepening of democracy in interested countries. Regional solidarity is a basic principle of European institutions, allowing member states to support through different means the economic and political development of fellow countries.

Europe seems to be the least problematic region in terms of democratic institutionalization. However, the continent has its own challenges. During the past fifteen years many countries of Central and Southeastern Europe and the former Soviet Union have experienced dramatic transitions to market economies and democratic institutions. For several of them, this transition has been largely a success. Very recently, and after very courageous efforts, the democratic wave has reached countries such as Georgia and Ukraine.

Some delegations expressed their concern about the latest democratic setback in Belarus.

In others European countries progress has been more challenging. New economic and social institutions are being constructed, multiparty parliamentary systems are under consolidation and civil societies are discovering their own power. In several of the new democracies, most governance-related activity is focused on institution-building, and in the cases of countries recovering from severe conflicts, state-building. Strengthening governments at all levels has been the primary focus of many institution-building initiatives.

First among challenges facing several of the new democracies is the modernization and strengthening of governmental structures and institutional capacities to effectively manage development and to allow participation in European institutions. Outdated practices and approaches, limited resources, corruption, limited experience of government-civil society partnerships in policy-making, and weak civil services hamper the effectiveness of government.

In this context, it was suggested to consider three ideas for a better consolidation of democracy: democratic and civil education, improved electoral legislation, and the strengthening of political parties.

Special emphasis was also placed on the need to uphold the principle of separation of powers and the strengthening of an autonomous judiciary.

Some delegations raised the issue of equal rights to all minorities, stressing the important role that already many European institutions are playing in this regard.

There was general agreement on the interdependence between democracy, development and security. Democracy cannot be consolidated within an environment of instability and latent conflict.

Democracy in some European countries also faces threats. Representatives of civil society mentioned terrorism, which can provoke an erosion of civil liberties. Some delegations expressed their concern on the dissolving effect of corruption. There was also a mention to the danger of populism, which was not only present in the new democracies but also in the more established ones.

All delegates agreed upon the need of constructive engagement for the consolidation of democracy. In this regard, they valued the organization of

special missions upon the request of interested countries. Willingness to cooperate with these missions on the part of all sectors of the government is essential for their success.

Some delegations expressed their concern for the danger of duplicating efforts in the support of democratization. Many European institutions are already involved in this enterprise. While much can still be done, and new institutions such as the Budapest International Centre for Democratic Transition are certainly most welcome, there is need to build upon existing resources and look for special niches for the newcomers.

With respect to the Community of Democracies, some delegations expressed their concern about the criteria for participation. Although representatives of the Convening Group mentioned the existence of these criteria, questions were raised about their effective enforcement.

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The European regional roundtable also agreed upon three regional commitments.

- To support efforts and initiatives that might contribute to enhance democracy and the empowerment of civil society in Europe.
- To emphasize the role that the European institutions are playing in the strengthening of democracy at the regional level within Europe.
- To share with other regions of the world European experiences in the support of the democratization process, in order to encourage and assist emerging democracies to develop and strengthen their own political institutions.