



Puente Democrático

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Conclusions of the Warsaw Dialogue for Democracy

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By Jerzy Pomianowski



Puente Democrático is a program of the Political Opening and Development Area of the Center for the Opening and Development of Latin America (CADAL), with the objective of internationally promoting civic and political freedoms.

The first edition of the *Warsaw Dialogue for Democracy* is drawing to a close. I consider the meeting to be very successful and useful – it filled me with a wonderful sense of genuine dialogue. The traditional lines of divisions between participants and panellists have been wiped out. Comments and assessments that have been made from the floor supplemented and competed with panellists' contributions. Indeed, anytime during the conference we could have switched places and no one would have noticed the fact that someone was put down in the agenda as a speaker and somebody else as a listener. This is a very satisfactory feeling for us, the organisers, and it was confirmed by many people. I wish to express my deep appreciation to all of you for this. This sense of good communication, good dialogue between us leads me to believe that we should continue the *Warsaw Dialogue for Democracy*. I would like to declare our readiness, both in terms of logistics and finances, to continue this project with all those present here who would wish to co-create the Warsaw Dialogue for Democracy. This is just the beginning of our debate; we can conduct it not only here in Warsaw, but also on our conference's website www.warsawdialogue.pl. We encourage you to voice your opinions on this site.

We heard many different answers to the questions asked during the two days of debate on democracy. On the one hand, this in itself is comforting, but on the other hand it could be frustrating. The many answers that were given would suggest that the right answer does not exist. But I do hope that that this is not so and that the multitude of opinions is evidence of the existence of different cultural, social and political contexts. Our discussions about similarities and differences permit us to get a fuller understanding of what needs to be done in our specific situation to effectively implement democratic changes “here and now”.

In listening on to our debate I – like presumably all of us – have learned a few important lessons.

First of all, our discussion made me realise, once again, that democracy has one very important feature, brought to our attention by our friend from Libya: “Democracy has a price which has to be paid.” Indeed, there is a price that we have to pay for democracy. This applies equally to individual nations and international relations. I shall never forget the bitter, but how true remark made by a participant from Syria who reminded us that Kaddafi, Assad, Ben Ali or Mubarak could continue to act as long as we, representatives of democratic countries, shook hands with them.

This is an important issue postulating that international relations be built on values. How to resolve this moral dilemma between political stability and economic benefits based on a “contract” with dictators and the observance of human rights and the promotion of democratic values. Today we know that political stability at any price is not possible. Indeed, this price needs to be very well calculated so that

pragmatism does not prevail over fundamental values. Stability built on false or weak foundations, lacking a binding agent in the form of human rights protection and civil freedoms which together represent the fabric of a democratic system is a fake, sooner or later it turns into chaos. It does not matter whether we are talking about Poland, Belarus, the United States, Russia, the European Union, African countries or Asia.

Another issue that moved me deeply is the problem of relations between democracy and democratic values. Democracy is only a general term describing a political system, on that I fully agree, while democratic values are indeed the thing we are fighting for and what is in our hearts. Democracy is a system that allows us to enhance democratic values, but democracy in itself is not a value. Perhaps there is a better system – to paraphrase Churchill - which can better cultivate democratic values, but no one has invented it yet. Democracy as a system requires citizens' attention and focus, at an appropriate level, and the capability of states to preserve it and to continually modernise it. Many discussions have been conducted on this subject, because when a state is in transition, it loses ground and its political system is shaken, while democracy is at risk of being replaced with the old authoritarian rule. We have been shown a curve illustrating how state capabilities shrink when the process of transformation is initiated. Obviously those who oppose democracy and democratic values have at their disposal excellent arguments – Russia's or Ukraine's examples illustrate this fact. They say: “Well, now democracy signifies anarchy – nothing can be controlled anymore. Previously, we felt safe although we had no democracy.” This is a very difficult and demanding challenge to make people believe that transformation is a transitional process and that it brings change for the better. In this context, we may note the importance of transitional justice and of care for presenting the history of transformation, as the transitional justice panellists underlined so strongly. Truth and reconciliation are not only ideas, but also a state of spirit of the society that goes through the process of transformation. How should politicians approach them? How should they be managed? How can justice be managed during the transition? Our debate could go on forever, but every individual, every nation has to work out their own answer.

In this context, the need for satisfaction and compensation, instead of vengeance, was strongly emphasized. The discussion participants' confidence that justice and compensation, instead of revenge, or vengeance are integral parts of the whole process of transformation, fills me with optimism.

The need to support democracy from the outside that has been raised is a very important element of our discussion. I am confident, as ultimately reassured by all the speakers in this debate, that democracy is not something that can be

exported or imported. Democracy must be built by people who want to observe democratic values and build a political system based on democratic values which they are ready to defend. We cannot export democracy, but we can help those who are trying to build it. We can show our solidarity towards them. In Poland we know very well that solidarity crushes walls and breaks chains. And all bureaucratic barriers created by institutions whose role is to provide funding for the development of democracy should be reduced to a minimum so as to provide quick and effective support consistent with expectations. This philosophy has been expressed by the Polish Presidency of the EU Council, when Minister Radoslaw Sikorski launched the idea of calling into being the *European Endowment for Democracy (EED)*. This new flexible instrument of supporting democratic processes in the European neighbourhood will begin financing specific programmes in the next few months. Poland has allocated EUR 5 million to EED.

A large part of the debate focused on the role of the media. I found the discussion extremely inspiring, because it made me realise the types of risks arising from the use of the Internet and the new media in political struggle and civil activity. They represent a new opportunity for fighting dictatorships, but can equally well be manipulated by the opponents of

democracy, authoritarian regime officials who try to stamp out all manifestations of civil liberties. The problem is both interesting and important not only for the building of democratic systems, but also for the development and consolidation of existing democracies. New media have created a new type of social movements without clear leaders, anonymous and without a formal structure. In the past we had been accustomed to leaders who gave a political shape to the strive for freedom and democracy, such as Lech Wałęsa or Nelson Mandela. While now, thanks to the Internet, everyone can have their say and rally people around a revolutionary cause which usually lasts just a short time and serves to diffuse tensions, rather than build solid foundations for democratic changes. It was thanks to your discussions yesterday and today that I realised this new aspect of the democratic revolutions that took place in the

last few years. This discovery also teaches us something else: it is very easy – as one participant has put it – for a revolution to be kidnapped, or stolen. A self-proclaimed leader tries to wage “his own revolution” on the engagement and dreams of others in order to ultimately pursue his own political plan, very different from the dreams of the web-based community. It is very difficult to turn leadership on Facebook into real leadership. This is a very interesting subject and should be taken up further.

The last point that I want to raise, widely discussed during the last session of our meeting, concerns relations between democracy and the mindsets of ordinary people. Let me add to the many very inspirational remarks on how to educate societies for mature democracies that from my perspective, changing people’s minds involves convincing them that caring for democratic values together – with solidarity being the key value on which a democratic society is built – makes sense. In other words, if we can make people work together, think together and help each other and thus express their solidarity, then we can build the foundations for a democracy. I am confident that the responsibility for changing people’s mindsets rests not only with democratically elected governments, nor does it depend solely on the organisation of a civil society, though they play very important roles in this regard. We are all responsible for this change, each one of us individually. Professor Antoni Dudek, during our conference’s first session said that approximately 40% of the Polish people, according to his surveys, would be prepared to accept authoritarian rule. So, only a half of Poland’s population accepts democracy, the other half is indifferent to it. Therefore, the task is rather simple, jokingly – if every convinced Pole is able to convince another person to recognise democratic values as important, then we can gain 100% support for democracy. If it were only 25% of the population who espoused democratic values, every one of them would have to convince 3 persons, and if the percentage was less than 10 – then the path to democracy would be neither easy nor simple, but still feasible.

Thank you for being here with us and see you again next year in Warsaw.

Jerzy Pomianowski is the Executive Director of the European Endowment for Democracy. He is a professional diplomat (holding the rank of Ambassador) and has been on the staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Poland since 1991. He has been the Undersecretary of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs since 1 July 2011 until December 2012. His primary responsibilities included non-European policy and democratization agenda. From 1980 to 1989, he was an active member of the democratic opposition in Poland: he was a member of the board of Independent Students’ Association and the co-founder and head of the independent publishing house “Student Publishing House SOWA-NZS”. He graduated from the University of Warsaw, majoring in Sociology (1987). He was awarded the following state distinctions: Order of the Rising Sun, Gold and Silver Star (Japan) and Award for Merit in Sport (Minister of Sport and Tourism of Poland).