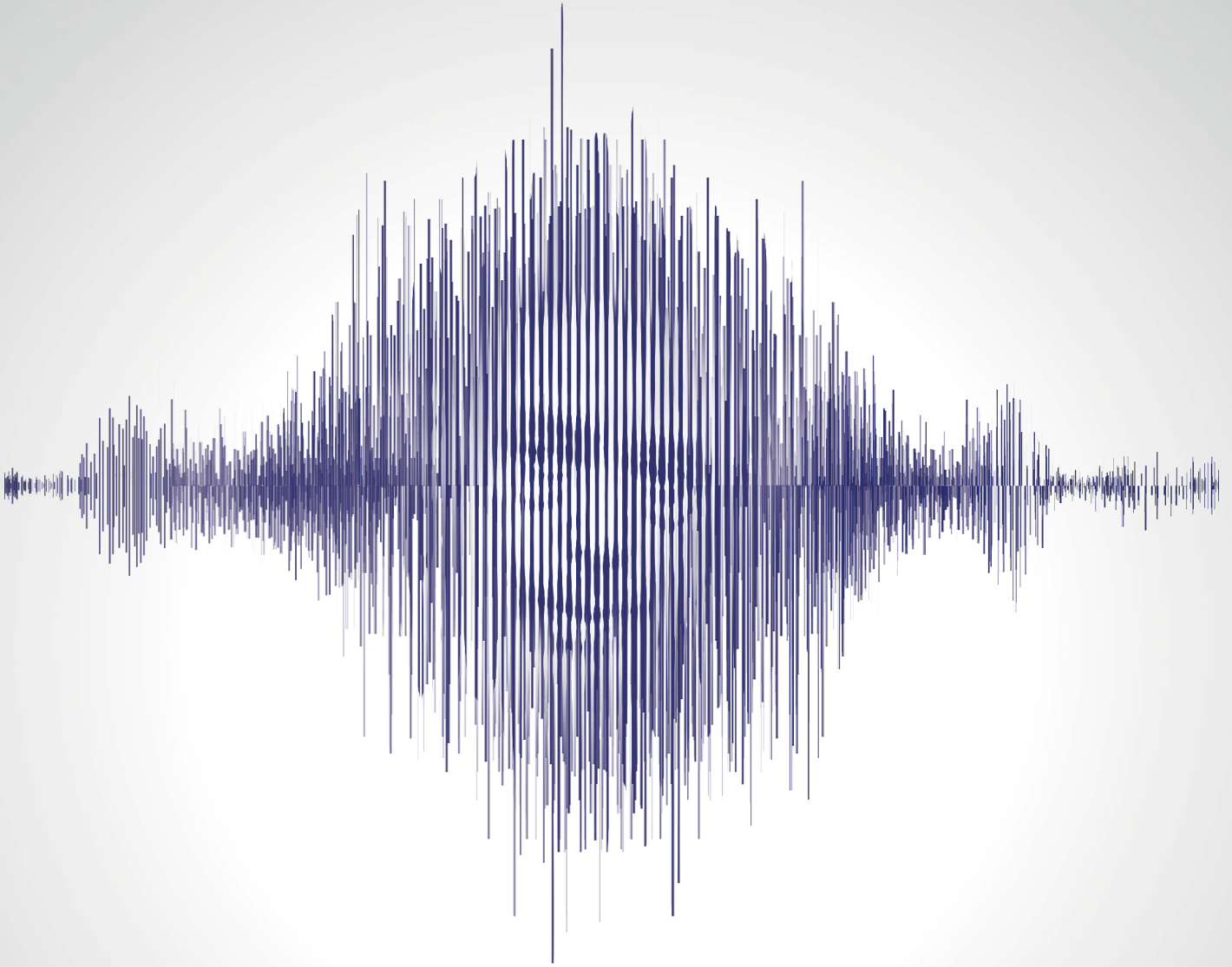


WHAT NOW? BUILDING BACK DEMOCRATICALLY

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5 BIG IDEAS



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5 BIG IDEAS

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DEMOCRACIES ON A GLOBAL SCALE NEED TO ENHANCE THEIR COOPERATIVE EFFORTS



Over the last two decades, democracy's primacy as an international norm has been seriously questioned. While world democracies have become embroiled in internal structural problems and populism, alternative forms of government are offered by totalitarian and authoritarian regimes, such as in China or Russia, who attack democratic countries to destabilize them both internally and internationally. "Through gray zone activities, military threats, and informative manipulation, authoritarian regimes aim to erode our citizens' confidence in democratic institutions and polarize our societies" (Tsai Ing-wen, President, Republic of China – Taiwan).

Authoritarians also use business opportunities to influence democratic societies. Through the export of raw materials or foreign investment regulations, trade partners become riskily dependent and blackmailable. Through commercial deals, they access technologies that are used against democracy. China makes efforts to increase its influence in international institutions, such as the UN and WTO, in order to redefine some of the primary international concepts according to its undemocratic principles. In this context, Neelam Deo warned that "we cannot have democratic countries in an undemocratic global system" and called for more active participation of all democratic states in these institutions.

Democratic societies must respond to these challenges jointly by developing a common strategy against the tide of authoritarianism. Their cooperation, which – besides the traditional security dimension - should also prominently include a democracy and values dimension, is the only way to prevent the world from being ruled by a dominant totalitarian superpower. "We need to redouble the effort to strengthen and broaden democratic cooperation and democratic unity" (Carl Gershman, Former President, National Endowment for Democracy, USA).

**"WE CANNOT HAVE
DEMOCRATIC COUNTRIES IN
AN UNDEMOCRATIC GLOBAL
SYSTEM"**

Neelam Deo

ALLIANCE FOR DEMOCRACY SHOULD EMBRACE A VARIETY OF ACTIVITIES AND ACTORS IN SUPPORT OF DEMOCRACY

“There is a growing understanding that we need to internationalize our efforts to defend and develop democracy” (Reinhard Bütikofer, Member of the European Parliament, Germany). It is time to create an inclusive coalition for democracy that incorporates all democratic societies around the globe. Democratic leadership should not be exclusive to the West; diversity of democratic systems among global democratic actors is desirable. Non-western democracies offer fresh perspectives on democratic values and show unaligned countries that the spread of democracy is no form of neo-colonialism or coercion to westernize.

The global alliance for democracy needs to be flexible, effective and must have clear objectives, such as the defense of shared democratic principles and the support of transforming countries in their democratization effort. “Democracy is a process, not a destination. Defending it and making it work requires consistent effort and dedication...” (Maia Sandu, President, Moldova).



“THERE IS A GROWING UNDERSTANDING THAT WE NEED TO INTERNATIONALIZE OUR EFFORTS TO DEFEND AND DEVELOP DEMOCRACY”

Reinhard Bütikofer

In addition to intergovernmental cooperation, a functioning network on the level of civil society, business, media, or democracy donors should also be developed. The promotion of democracy must be prioritized, even if it comes at the risk of losing profit. Democratic leaders must never sacrifice democratic values and human rights in the name of political and business interests. “Being democratic countries, we should never succumb to totalitarian regimes, even on the account of temporary economic advantages, because totalitarian regimes never give something for free, they take back much more” (Miloš Vystrčil, President of the Senate, Czechia).



DEMOCRACIES MUST JOINTLY DETERMINE GLOBAL RULES AND STANDARDS FOR DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES



Hedging against challenges in the digital realm should be considered one of the most important goals of the cooperation of democracies. Authoritarian regimes employ digital technologies in their propaganda and disinformation apparatus, spreading their anti-democratic influence. Russia uses social media channels internationally to subvert democratic principles, influence electoral processes, and encourage anti-science narratives. "China is exerting its influence around the world, spreading the techno-authoritarian model" (Eileen Donahoe, Executive Director, Global Digital Policy Incubator, Stanford University, USA). It encompasses the use of AI for tracking citizens and the effort to shape an international regulatory framework for digital technologies according to non-democratic principles.

Democracies all over the world should react to these challenges simultaneously. They must cooperate on improving their digital capabilities, protecting themselves against digital interference, and building a digital regulatory framework that would guarantee

human rights and democratic principles. Such standards of use of new technologies should then be diffused globally. In this effort, "collaboration between democratic governments, tech companies and NGOs, especially those promoting demarcating values, is crucial" (Francisak Viacorka, Vice-President, Digital Communication Network, Senior Advisor to Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, Belarus). They must jointly develop regulations that will prevent the abuse of the internet without restricting freedom of speech. "The Rule of Law is something that we have to defend overall online and offline" (Thibaut Kleiner, Director for Policy, Strategy and Outreach at DG Connect, European Commission, France/Belgium). Stricter rules regarding which technologies are shared with authoritarian actors are needed as well. Technology companies must be held accountable if providing technologies or data that are subsequently misused by authoritarian regimes for state surveillance and human rights violations. Democratic governments also need to establish mechanisms to regulate big tech companies and protect the liberal, open, and rules-based environment in their domestic digital space.

DEALING WITH INTERNAL CHALLENGES OF DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE MUST GO HAND IN HAND WITH PROMOTION OF DEMOCRACY

Vaclav Havel once said that the worst enemies of democracy are our inner weaknesses. So our prime responsibility should be “physician, heal yourself; the defense of democracy starts at home” (Timothy Garton Ash, Professor of European Studies, Oxford University, United Kingdom). The most important thing that can be done to defend and promote democracy is its internal renewal and update. There are legitimate criticisms of democratic governance today, but unlike the pitfalls of authoritarianism, these can be tackled. The unresolved internal problems of democracy, like inequality and corruption, are being exploited by internal and external undemocratic actors to boost populism and polarization. “A lot of people think it is discontent with democracy or democratic rules that fuels populism. It is not discontent with the system itself, but discontent with the outcomes of democracy in the realm of equality of income, of social justice, etc.” (Anna Lührmann, Member, Bundestag, Alliance 90/The Greens, Germany).

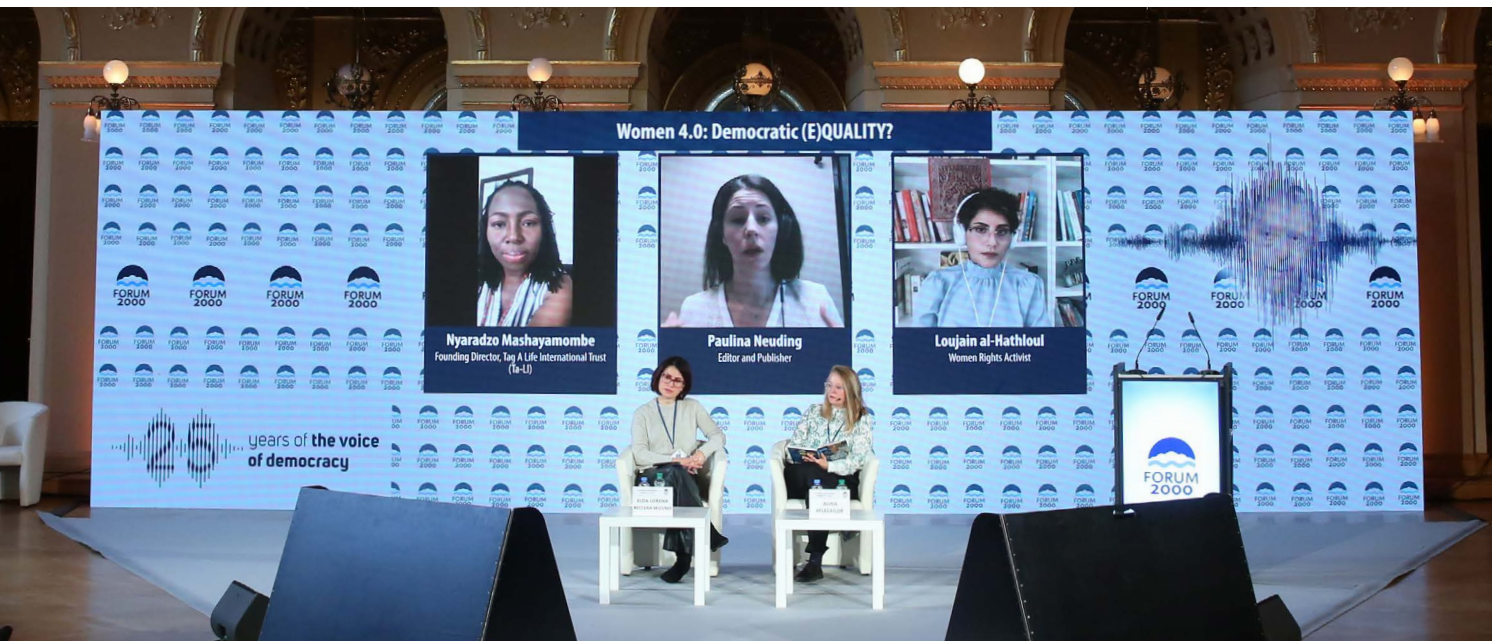


In addition to addressing these shortcomings, democratic societies must focus on improving education and citizen participation, which are essential tools against radicalization and the spread of disinformation. “Democracy can only function when people are fully included, their rights are protected, their voices are heard, and their votes count” (Shanthi Kalathil, Coordinator for Democracy and Human Rights, National Security Council, USA). Democratic societies must strengthen their legitimacy by placing common ideals, values, and virtues above personal interests and profits. They also need to address the intergenerational and social divisions that are the breeding ground for polarization and extremism.

“DEMOCRACY CAN ONLY FUNCTION WHEN PEOPLE ARE FULLY INCLUDED, THEIR RIGHTS ARE PROTECTED, THEIR VOICES ARE HEARD, AND THEIR VOTES COUNT”

Shanthi Kalathil

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IS THE WAY FORWARD



Active and participatory citizenship is one of the fundamental principles of a functioning society and needs to be nurtured. “Every person must contribute to the rebuilding of the civic community and the world. We have learned this lesson through the pandemic, just as we have appreciated it through the climate crisis” (Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew). Although we are witnessing the backsliding of democracy in many countries, we can also see signs of hope in the awakening of active citizenship, such as peaceful civic resistance in Belarus or the growth of civil society in Ukraine. The results of the recent Czech parliamentary elections, which suggest a shift away from populism, were possible only due to active civic engagement.

In this context, we need to strengthen international support for civic activism in places where it is resisting despotism. Apart from Belarus, this applies to Myanmar, Hong Kong, and a number of countries in Africa and Latin America. International aid should also consist of support for civic education and free journalism. “I believe that what we need is actually to create a network of support by democracies for independent media sources” (Adam Michnik, Editor-in-Chief, Gazeta Wyborcza, Poland). Sharing knowledge and experiences between activists from different countries is also important. The Coalition for Democratic Renewal represents one of the platforms that serve these goals.



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