



Democracy International. *Let's just do it!*

Founding Statement

„Our Constitution ... is called a democracy because power is in the hands not of a minority but of the greatest number.“¹

I. Why Democracy International?

The challenge of European integration and globalization

Democracy is the basic condition for and the key to an open and peaceful society of free human beings.

In an increasingly globalized world, policy and decision-making become more and more distant from the citizens. The processes of European integration and globalization lead to an ever expanding centralisation of power in the hands of governments and non-elected bureaucrats. The power of citizens and parliaments is constantly weakened because of the ever greater role of international organizations like the WTO, the IMF, NATO and the European Union. The autonomy and independence of states is significantly reduced, national policy becomes more and more limited. The power of lobbyists and corporations increases.

Currently the EU decides more than 60% of all new legislation that is applied in the member states. It already has law-making power over almost every area of policy including the most important ones like foreign, defence, economic, monetary and social policy, justice and home affairs. The new draft constitution gives even more powers to the EU-level. The lack of parliamentary and public control of the law-making process makes the European Commission dependent upon national governments, corporate lobbyists and civil servants.

For all the foregoing reasons the fight for a better democracy can no longer be limited to our communities, regions and states. If we are really concerned with democracy, we need to develop international answers to the ongoing capitulation of policy and the substantial loss of democracy. We should begin with the European Union. It is the largest and most integrated supranational state-like entity in the world and is increasingly becoming a model for other regions in the world. In addition, the EU is in the process of giving itself a constitution. It's up to us to ask the right questions and to develop the right answers. The very minimum would be referenda on the draft constitution in all member states.

The case for direct democracy in the EU

In the long run it is much more important to establish binding instruments of direct democracy in the European Union (initiative and referenda) than merely to have one-off referenda on the constitution.

Direct democracy on an EU level could

- enable citizens to actively participate in European politics
- really implement Art. I-1 of the draft European constitution (“Reflecting the will of the citizens... to build a common future”) and put European citizens in a sovereign position
- actively promote a real European citizenship and European identity
- lead to more informed and engaged citizenship resulting in a better democratic culture

Power relations can be questioned by direct democracy. The institutional design of the EU could be changed (e.g. by strengthening the European Parliament and democratising the European Commission). The division of competences could be redesigned (powers could be transferred back to the member states and regions while the Union could be given stronger instruments to solve problems with a real transnational, European dimension) and the content of the Union's policy be altered. The struggle for a more just and more democratic world and Europe does not mean that it is no longer or less important to democratise our nation states. The latter is at least equally important and this will help us to transform international organizations and the European Union. On the other hand, a more democratic Europe can foster democratic reforms in our countries. National and international democratisation could and must go hand in hand.

¹ Thucydides II, 37. This was the first sentence of the preamble of the draft treaty establishing a constitution for Europe (in the version of the European Convention). The Heads of State and Government deleted it during their Intergovernmental Conference.

II. Short history

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In 1998, More Democracy established a working group dealing with European and worldwide issues. After several years of discussion and information a first proposal for integrating elements of direct democracy into the existing EU treaties was presented in 2001 (updated version available on our homepage). We established the Network of Direct Democracy Initiatives in Europe (NDDIE), an informal cooperation of initiatives that organised three conferences (Munich 2000, Prague 2001, Bratislava 2002) to bring committed activists together. On the eve of the Convention for the Future of Europe we decided to work in two different fields. We started the European Referendum Campaign and opened an office in Frankfurt. In parallel we pushed for the inclusion of initiative and referendum in the final text of the Convention.

Both strategies proved very successful. With our campaign we have contributed to the fact that (as of 1.1.2005) nine member states have declared that they will ratify the European constitution by referendum. And our Convention work led directly to Art. I-47 (4) of the draft European Constitution, the so-called European Citizens' Initiative that enables at least one million citizens from a significant number of member states to ask the European Commission to take legislative action. This would be the very first tool of international direct democracy – if the constitution enters into force. In the meantime, the European Referendum Campaign and the Convention work have come to an end and after several discussions we have decided to formally found Democracy International. Six committed and long experienced activists Heiko Dittmer, Carsten Berg, Ronald Pabst, Gerald Häfner, Roman Huber and Michael Efler took the initiative and started the process of founding Democracy International.

III. Goals

III. The overarching goals of Democracy International

Our basic goal is the establishment of direct democracy (initiative and referendum) as a complement to representative democracy within the European Union and in the nation states. We also work on the general democratisation of the European union, democratic reform and more direct and participatory democracy worldwide.

IV. Tasks

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- Development of a network of NGOs, citizens and interested politicians for direct democracy
- Initiation of or participation in Europe-wide campaigns
- Website, newsletter, events and media work
- Representation at conferences, meetings etc.
- Material on direct democracy in some European languages
- Being active in Brussels and in the nation states for the development of laws that establish and strengthen direct democracy.
- Advising and supporting NGOs, politicians, organization etc. with respect to direct democracy. In the future offering advice to initiatives that want to use the ECI.
- Research Work
- Cooperation with the Initiative and Referendum Institute Europe

For pragmatic reasons we should initially concentrate on the European Union. In the long run we could broaden our scope on issues like world democracy, United Nations' reform etc. This should include the participation of Democracy International in international forums such as the World Social Forum.



V. Organizational Structure

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We propose to build a network of initiatives and individuals that are committed to our goals. The support of individuals is possible and welcome especially from countries where no such initiative exists. Currently a close legal and personal relation to More Democracy in Germany is necessary.

Democracy International will not become a membership organization. We know that some of our friends would prefer to found a membership organization. The main reason why we do not propose to do so is that some of them already exist in our countries. Democracy International could not and shall not substitute for or compete with membership organizations in our countries. In addition, founding a formal organization would mean much more bureaucratic and administrative effort than just establishing a network.

We propose to create a cooperation team. It will consist of 6 members to begin with people who have been authorized by the participants of the founding meeting. Team meetings should be held physically and by phone.

An important task of the cooperation team is to work towards a more international membership of the team.

We also propose a yearly conference which all affiliated initiatives and individuals can participate in.

An office of Democracy International should be established in Brussels to support and implement the activities and decisions of the network. Working groups for individual projects may be set up.



VI. Projects

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One project that is already underway is the struggle for a citizen-friendly European Citizens' Initiative. In close cooperation with other movements, NGOs, academics and politicians we will develop and present a draft implementing law for Art. I-47 (4) of the European Constitution. Its purpose is to make a strong case to the European Commission for developing an implementing law which is sympathetic to direct democracy.

A permanent ECI working group should be established for this purpose.

A new project could be the further development of our more far-reaching proposals for direct democracy within the European Union. This means discussing and redesigning our proposals in the light of the constitutional process, taking into account possible new instruments such as obligatory referenda on (new) applications for membership of the EU. New projects should be discussed in the cooperation team and adopted by the conference.

VII. Finances and staff

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Until now the work of Democracy International (which is strictly project-oriented) has been made possible by donations from individuals and More Democracy. Democracy International will maintain its autonomy at all times. We will not make Democracy International financially dependent on organizations, corporations, individuals or official institutions such as the European Commission or the European Parliament.

The current areas of responsibility of the individual staff members will be published on the website.

VIII. Outlook

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There is no European organization or network that focuses on direct democracy and the democratisation of the EU. Most groups that work on these issues have an one-sided agenda in the sense that they are either integrationist or EU-sceptic. For the former integration comes first, democracy second. Democratic procedures such as the European Citizens' Initiative are judged on whether they increase the "European character" of legislation or not. For the latter, nation states and national parliaments are superior. National representative democracy is regarded as the highest form of democracy. They deny the possibility of transnational democracy.

But we need a network that puts democracy and the sovereignty of the citizens at the centre. We want to create new possibilities which enable the citizens to influence the decision-making process. We raise the question of power. It is really time to found Democracy International.



**democracy
international**

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