

2016: On With The Struggle!

Our striving for more democracy

Dear friends,

2016 was a challenging year for Democracy International and for all the people who are striving for more democracy and more co-determination in the world in general and at the European level in particular.

Challenging because (direct) democracy was attacked and criticised and the attempt was made to dump it onto the political scrapheap!

What a blow it was, for example, when early on the morning of 24 June it became clear that a majority of the British voters wanted to leave the EU. That decision led a lot of people to say that it was a mistake to allow citizens to have a direct vote on such an important issue.

And what were we supposed to think about the political system in the USA that had allowed a man to become president who had stirred up animosity towards minorities during his election campaign?

That isn't the kind of democracy that Democracy International stands for. Democracy activists everywhere are committed to the belief:

that societies function better when citizens are able to be involved in the decision-making process and can initiate draft laws in a 'bottom-up' process - instead of merely voting in elections every few years and only being allowed to vote on an issue when it suits the interests of the government or head of state. In other words: We demand a direct democracy based on human rights and co-determination!

Nonetheless, Democracy International carried on unflinchingly this year:

We improved the European Citizens' Initiative to make it easier for European voters to launch an EU law proposal. Right after "Brexit", we started the campaign "For a democratic relaunch of the EU", which demanded the institution of a democratic constitutional convention that would create a new foundation for the EU. At the Global Forum on Direct Democracy we brought people from all six continents to San Sebastián in northern Spain to discuss direct democracy and citizen participation at the regional level. We agreed necessary standards for a democracy that is in accordance with the rule of law and which respects human rights. And we helped democracy initiatives to develop their digital infrastructure.

Read about our work in detail on the following pages.

For a more democratic Europe

For a democratic relaunch of the EU!

Brexit and Bratislava - for Democracy International there's a close connection between these two words. After the British voters had said 'yes' to an exit from the EU on 23 June it was clear to us: It's now or never! The EU has to finally become genuinely democratic if it is not to collapse entirely. And so, immediately after the "Brexit" referendum we demanded a fundamental restart for the EU. We launched an online petition and collected signatures for an EU Convention - which would allow individual citizens, civil society groups, politicians and academics to come together to determine the constitutional status of Europe anew. The outcome of the Conventions' deliberations would then be subject to Europe-wide referendums. In this way the EU would acquire the respect and recognition of the citizens which it so urgently needs if it is to continue to exist.

On 16 September, the EU heads of state and government met in Bratislava for the first time since the "Brexit" decision. This was reason enough for Democracy International to travel to the Slovak capital. We organised a parallel 'mini-summit' - with the transparent



and open "Democracy Dome" as its symbol. At the foot of Bratislava Castle we discussed the future of the EU with people from the length and breadth of Europe. And we handed over to the EU heads of state and government the 60,000 signatures that we had collected in support of a more democratic Europe.

Save the European Citizens' Initiative!

Although it has been in existence since April 1, 2012, the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) is still far too weak and ineffective. So for Democracy International and other democracy activists it has become a constant struggle to improve this unique instrument - the only participatory tool at the transnational level in the world. The ECI makes it possible for draft legislation to be submitted to the EU Commission if a minimum of 1 million signatures can be collected in support of it.

2015 had ended with a success: the European Parliament had voted to adopt most of the reform proposals of Democracy International, Mehr Demokratie Germany, WeMove.eu and The ECI Campaign. We had developed the proposals for a revised EU directive which legally defines

the rules for the ECI. The next stage of the legislative process would be for the Commission to adopt the reforms.

But 2016 began with a setback: the Commission announced that it would not amend the ECI law. This meant that the very existence of the ECI was threatened. But we were not prepared to accept this rejection. In view of the rapidly declining public trust in the EU we felt responsible for continuing the campaign for a strong and effective direct-democratic provision at the EU level.

And so, in April 2016, together with our partners The ECI Campaign, WeMove.eu and Mehr Demokratie, we began to collect signatures for a strong European Citizens' Initiative under the slogan: "Final Call - Save the European Citizens' Initiative Now". Our aim was also to persuade the EU Commission to include the ECI in its 2017 work programme.

On 24 October we were in Brussels to hand over the 41,000 collected signatures to a member of the team of EU Commission Vice-President Frans Timmermans. But the Commission declared that it was not prepared to amend the ECI law, and when we saw the Commission's 2017



Work Programme the following day there was nothing in it about the ECI. We find it very hard to understand the Commission's behaviour, given the crisis in which the EU finds itself at this time - another reason for pushing ahead with the campaign for a stronger ECI in 2017.

Transparency in EU politics!!

The lack of transparency in relation to lobbying has proven to be one of the greatest weaknesses of the European Union. Companies and their lobbyists are not so far required to be officially registered, to reveal their names and who they work for, or to make public how much money they invest in their lobbying work. This deplorable state of affairs is one of the reasons why 70 percent of EU citizens consider the EU institutions to be corrupt.

Democracy International is fighting for greater transparency in Brussels and is demanding a legally binding lobby register and a legislative 'footprint' that would reveal when lobbyists meet EU politicians and high-ranking EU officials. In 2016 Democracy International pushed hard for these goals with two big campaigns:

- In April we continued to put pressure on the EU Commission until it agreed to include EU citizens in a survey on lobbying transparency. We had worked with the organisation “Europe-wide Alliance for Lobbying Transparency and Ethics (ALTER-EU)” to develop proposals which EU citizens could send directly to the EU Commission. This enormously increased the number of submissions reaching the highest EU body.
- In September the European Parliament was supposed to vote on the report “Transparency, Accountability and Integrity in the EU Institutions”. Before the vote and together with ALTER-EU and Transparency International, Democracy International organised a large-scale email action: 3022 people from 23 countries took part, sending a total of 73,159 emails to the MEPs, calling upon them to vote for transparency in the EU and ethical lobbying. These emails had such a powerful effect that the MEPs postponed the vote until 2017. As soon as the new date is fixed our campaign will resume!

Sharing knowledge and experience

In our high-speed digital information age one of Democracy International’s central aims is to generate knowledge that withstands the passage of time. It should be there so that



democracy activists from around the world can access it and learn from it. Researching direct democracy and campaigning for better democratic laws is only possible if one has a solid and reliable source of information.

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The “Navigator to Direct Democracy” is THE big research project of Democracy International, the University of Wuppertal and IRI Europe. It is sponsored by “Swissinfo” and “People2Power”. By going to www.direct-democracy-navigator.org anyone can compare direct-democratic instruments across the world. In 2016, Dr. Klaus Hofmann, who heads the research project, added on average one new instrument of direct democracy every day. Currently the Navigator lists 1500 cases. Dr. Hofmann has upgraded the website and intensified the cooperation with Wuppertal University.

Another way of spreading the good news about direct democracy is to create opportunities for democracy enthusiasts to meet and exchange knowledge and experience. Learning from others in live meetings of people from many different countries is a central goal of the **“Global Forum on Modern Direct Democracy”**, which took place this year in



Donostia/San Sebastián in northern Spain. 200 people from all six continents came to this year's European Capital of Culture to talk about forms of citizen participation and direct democracy at the local and regional levels. Democracy International was one of the main organisers.



On the evening of 17 November, together with our media partner Zocalo Public Square, we invited people to discuss the topic: "Is the digitalisation of journalism endangering democracy?" After the Global Democracy Forum, which ended ceremonially with the "Declaration of Donostia/San Sebastián", Democracy International held its 2016 annual general meeting.

In view of the attempts by authoritarian leaders in more and more countries to violate **democracy and human rights**, Democracy International has compiled a series of criteria - contained in a compact background dossier - which allow the state of democracy and the rule of law to be objectively assessed. Using these criteria, we have investigated a number of countries. In a talk given by Prof. Dr. Nowak, Professor for Human Rights at the University of Vienna and former UN Special Rapporteur on torture, the causes of the current "crisis of democracy" and why compliance with universal human rights is a sine qua non for the functioning of a modern democracy were outlined.



Help and Support

One of Democracy International's main concerns is to help new democracy groups and to pass on our experience in building up an organisation. This year we advised activists from "Meer Democratie" in the Netherlands and "mehr demokratie!" in Austria in how to carry out online campaigns and how to fundraise. We trained them in how to use the database to manage contacts efficiently and how to upgrade it. In January we were in Amsterdam and in October in Wels in Austria, where we met our Dutch and Austrian friends and traded know-how person-to-person.

As the year draws to a close

Our warm thanks go to our colleague Sophie von Hatzfeldt, who is leaving us, as she has found a new calling in Berlin. Over the past three years, Sophie has driven forward the European work of Democracy International. She contributed to improving the ECI and pushed the idea of the EU Convention with politicians and civil society groups. She leaves behind her a big gap which we will fill early in 2017.

Big thanks, too, to the many volunteers and our members who have translated texts for us, helped us with our campaigns and generally supported us. We can only continue our work effectively together with these many hands.

For one thing is certain - there is only one thing that we can do: carry on determinedly in these tempestuous times, when democracy - which must be based on human rights and co-determination - is under attack.

