

Warsaw Declaration

Roadmap to democracy



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Two decades ago, in June 2000, with democratic transitions across the world in a spirit of optimism at the dawn of the new Millennium, representatives of 106 states gathered in Warsaw for the opening Ministerial Conference Towards a Community of Democracies. The Community of Democracies (CoD) was then born as a shared initiative of former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and Polish Foreign Minister Bronislaw Geremek. “He wanted this city- his city- to be known for something other than the Warsaw Pact; the Warsaw Declaration.” – Secretary Albright, speaking of Geremek at the opening conference.

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By adopting the founding document, the Warsaw Declaration, the participating states recognized the universality of democratic values and agreed to respect and uphold these principles, making the Community of Democracies a unique coalition of democratic states that differs from other intergovernmental groupings in that it is built not on linguistic, geographical or economic criteria but on the commitment to shared democratic values enshrined in the 19 principles of the Warsaw Declaration.

For much of the first decade of its existence, the Community of Democracies consisted primarily of Ministerial Conferences, held every two years under a changing presidency. In the last ten years, a number of steps have been taken, such as establishment of a Permanent Secretariat under the Secretary General in Warsaw, creation of a Governing Council, establishment of multi-state Working Groups which actively engage civil society and adoption in 2018 of the first five-year strategic plan, which has refined the mission of the CoD.

The Historic Role of Poland

Speaking in 2019 at an event hosted by the Polish Ambassador to the United States, former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said „No country is more closely associated with the quest for freedom than Poland and few countries have paid a higher price to secure it (...) twenty years ago, on March 12, 1999, we gathered at the Truman Library to welcome a democratic Poland into NATO. It was only a few weeks later, at NATO’s 50th anni-

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versary celebrations, that my friend Bronislaw Geremek and I first discussed the idea for the Community of Democracies.”

Poland has a historic role not only in the founding of the Community of Democracies and the drafting of the Warsaw Declaration, it has been critical to maintaining the CoD through two decades of growth, a commitment that has not wavered through successive changes in government. Warsaw serves as a home to the Permanent Secretariat and Polish diplomats around the world actively participate in CoD activities, from hosting events in diplomatic missions in Geneva and Washington, D.C., to participating in CoD High-level Delegations in Mali and The Gambia.

Most recently, Poland served as a rotating Chair of the Executive Committee. In turning leadership over to Romania, Foreign Minister Czaputowicz noted, “Even though the Polish chairmanship of the Community of Democracies’ Executive Committee has come to an end, our goals remain unchanged: Poland will continuously strive to share its experiences gained during the process of peaceful political and economic transformation and continually support democratisation processes in other parts of the world”.

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Community of the Warsaw Declaration

The CoD is a global intergovernmental coalition, founded in 2000 to bring together governments and civil society in the pursuit of a common goal: promoting democratic rules and strengthening democratic norms and institutions around the world.

The Mission Statement of the Community is built upon the 19 democratic values agreed in the Warsaw Declaration, defines the essential practices and norms for the effective establishment of democracy and emphasizes the interdependence between peace, development, human rights and democracy. Especially today, as authoritarian regimes grow more aggressive in opposing democratic norms and undermining democratic societies beyond their borders, its 19 core democratic principles remain fully relevant. They form an interlinked and mutually reinforcing framework of norms that provide for conditions for democratic rule and development. The Warsaw Declaration includes the following principles: (1) free and fair elections, (2) equal access to public service, (3) equal protection of the law, (4) freedom of opinion and expression, (5) freedom of thought, conscience and religion, (6) equal access to education, (7) right of the press to collect, report and disseminate information, news and opinions, (8) respect for private family life, (9) freedom of peaceful assembly and association, (10) the right of minorities or disadvantaged groups to equal protection of the law, (11) the right of every person to be free from arbitrary arrest or detention, (12) rights enforced by a competent, independent and impartial judiciary, (13) an obligation of elected leaders to uphold the law, (14) the right of those duly elected to form a government, (15) the obligation of an elected government to refrain from extra-constitutional actions, (16) that government institutions are transparent, par-

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ticipatory and fully accountable, (17) that legislature is duly elected, transparent and accountable, (18) the principle of democratic control over the military, (19) and that all human rights – civil, cultural, economic, political and social – be promoted and protected.

The principles cover a wide range of issues, from ensuring universal human rights dedicated to personal freedoms, social rights like safeguarding right to education, to rights and obligations addressed to public institutions, that work to guarantee the rule of law. This varied list of rights enshrined in the Warsaw Declaration makes of it a unique political document containing a universal “check list” for a functioning democracy.

A unique global voice on democratic values

With the adoption of the Warsaw Declaration a process of formalization of intergovernmental cooperation on democracy and human rights has started. Since its establishment in 2000, the Community of Democracies itself has changed and gradually developed from a conference initiative into a global intergovernmental coalition of democratic states and a multi-stakeholder platform for dialogue and discussion on issues affecting democracy and its institutions. The global context in which the Community operates has also transformed, and with a number of complex internal and external challenges to democracy the Community’s mission is even more important today than 20 years ago.

The Community of Democracies provides Member States a forum to work together, learn from each other and to identify global priorities for diplomatic action to advance and defend democracy, including through collective dip-

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lomatic action at the UN and in other multilateral fora. In addition to facilitating joint diplomatic action, the Community provides an international forum that facilitates mutual dialogue, learning, and exchange of experiences among Members. Since 2010 the Community of Democracies has been operating with its own Secretariat – the Permanent Secretariat of the Community of Democracies, based in Warsaw and established under legal conditions granted by the host government of Poland.

The CoD's Governing Council currently comprises 31 member states that commit to abide by the common democratic values and standards outlined in the Warsaw Declaration and make contributions to strengthening the Community of Democracies and its mission. The Governing Council cooperates with a formal civil society pillar and other affiliated bodies of the CoD.

The diversity of the Governing Council's voluntary Membership, which includes countries from most world regions as well as states at different stages in their democratic journey, provides the potential to draw on a wide pool of experiences and information sources to stimulate action and facilitate peer learning. The Community of Democracies does not implement programs but serves as a platform for increasing attention and spurring regional and global action. The CoD's Executive Committee is composed of elected Governing Council Member States and provides strategic recommendations and opinions to the Governing Council to inform decisions on the activities of the Community of Democracies. As of September 15th, 2019, the Executive Committee comprises Norway, Poland, Republic of Korea, Romania, United Kingdom and the United States of America.

The role of the Presidency of the Community of Democracies is fulfilled by one of the Member States of the Governing Council elected for the period of

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two years. This position is held by Romania for the period 2019-2021. The Presidency oversees, coordinates and facilitates the activities of the CoD and provides leadership to meet the strategic objectives of the CoD. The Presidency works with the Governing Council, the Executive Committee and the Secretary General. Past Presidencies include the United States of America, El Salvador, Mongolia, Lithuania, Chile and the Republic of Korea.

The Community of Democracies is supported in its tasks by an independent Civil Society Pillar represented by the International Steering Committee. Engagement with civil society forms an important part of the organization's activities and its input is widely recognized. In line with the Community's Strategic Plan for 2018-2023, Member States of the Governing Council, with support from the Community's Permanent Secretariat, work with civil society to cooperate to encourage adherence to the Warsaw Declaration principles in countries within and the Community of Democracies, provide sustained support for key democratic consolidation in transitioning countries outside the Community and increase and deepen their dialogue on the challenges that they face as democracies.

The Community of Democracies takes an active role in multilateral fora and initiatives aimed at promoting and advancing democracy and human rights. It participates in conferences and democracy related forums such as the UN-HRC, UNGA, the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM), the Annual Democracy Forum of International IDEA, Geneva Summit for Human Rights and Democracy, World Forum for Democracy of the Council of Europe, Warsaw Dialogue for Democracy, Forum 2000 Conference, Personal Democracy Forum and the Bali Democracy Forum, among others. With broad geographical participation, from new and old democracies both from the Global South and developed countries, and the involvement of different

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stakeholders, in particular civil society, the CoD has a structure that facilitates a multi-stakeholder and cross-sectoral approach necessary to respond to complex challenges to democracy and promote democratic values. Again turning to Secretary Albright, "...through solidarity, established democracies can come closer to fulfilling their potential. Struggling democracies can find the help they need to deliver on freedom's promise. And future democracies can draw inspiration in their quest for social progress and political change."

By the adoption of the Five-Year Strategic Plan for the period 2018-2023, the Community is determined to address several specific sets of challenges to democracy, including backsliding along several principles of the Warsaw Declaration such as free and fair elections, core civil and political rights, and democratic checks and balances. The plan articulates how the countries participating in the Community will respond to the challenges and opportunities it faces in the current global environment, while considering the diplomatic tools and capabilities at their disposal, resource constraints and demands, as well as the potential for strategic partnerships to further advance.

Looking ahead: democratic solidarity in the new decade

As authoritarian regimes present non-democratic alternatives within and beyond their borders, the mission of the Community of Democracies is more relevant today than at any time since its founding in the year 2000.

Covering a broad list of "democratic essentials" makes the Warsaw Declaration a unique document providing both a roadmap for aspiring and transitioning democracies as well as a "check list" for established ones. But it is not the adoption of a set of principles that makes countries a

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community - it is democratic solidarity and ongoing mutual encouragement to adhere to, uphold, and promote these universal values.

Democracy is never a finished product and in today's complex and fast-moving environment it needs constant adjustment. In 2000, Professor Geremek rightly pointed out that democracy doesn't only move from triumph to triumph. Since then, the world has witnessed democratic backsliding and growing lack of public trust in representative government, even in established democracies. But there have also been wonderful examples of inspiring activism and new energy in many countries across the globe, particularly generated among young people. Rather than dwell in despair over democracy's decline or accept decline as a new normal, democratic countries and their civil societies need to move to a proactive position, to accept there are complex challenges democracies will always face and agree to work together to resolve them.

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For more information on the Community of Democracies visit: www.community-democracies.org and follow CoD on social media @communityofdem on Twitter and Facebook for news and updates on current events.

Centre for International Relations (CIR) is an independent, non-government analytical centre established in 1996 which deals with Polish foreign policy and the most important issues of international politics. CIR is active in research, education and publishing, organises conferences and meetings, and participates in international projects in collaboration with similar institutions in many countries. CIR creates a forum for debate and exchange of ideas in matters of international politics, relations between states and challenges in the global world. CIR's activities are addressed above all to local-government officials and to entrepreneurs, as well as to officials of the central administration, politicians, diplomats, political scientists and the media. In 2014, CIR was again recognised as one of the best think-tanks in East-Central Europe in the study "The Leading Public Policy Research Organisations in the World" conducted by the University of Pennsylvania.

