



## Is populism a problem ?

Strasbourg, 8-10 November 2017

### Call for lab submissions

#### WHY IS THE WORLD FORUM FOR DEMOCRACY SPECIAL?

The World Forum for Democracy is a platform for dialogue and innovation dedicated to democracy which promotes the Council of Europe principles across the world. A unique event of its kind, it deals with challenges facing democracy taking as a starting point innovative initiatives and practice, and fostering debate between different actors in order to find **SOLUTIONS**. The Forum highlights and encourages democratic innovation to strengthen the foundations of democratic societies. A democratic exercise in itself, the Forum aims at giving the people – *demos* – their rightful place in political decision-making. It thus contributes to the evolution of democracy towards more participatory and inclusive structures and institutions.

#### WHAT IS THE 2017 WORLD FORUM ABOUT?

A growing disconnect between citizens and political elites and dramatic changes in the media ecosystem are a challenge for democracy as we know it. At the same time, new political and media actors and practices are emerging, offering new opportunities for members of the public to participate in political life. Legacy media and political parties are both threatened by these new developments but can also learn from them in order to adapt their own models and functioning to new realities.

The objective of the World Forum for Democracy 2017 is to review novel initiatives and approaches which can enhance democratic practices and help parties and media, but also other

political actors, to re-connect to citizens, make informed choices and function optimally in 21<sup>st</sup> century democracy.

### **a) From democracy of parties to democracy of citizens?**

Traditional political parties are losing their popular base, legitimacy and membership. The boundary between “left” and “right” in the political spectrum is being blurred. Populist parties/leaders emerge to occupy the vacuum, exploiting the fear of globalisation and the increased insecurity perceived by many people. Traditional parties are criticized for their lack of long-term vision and responsibility, the inability to engage younger generations, minorities and a representative amount of women, as well as the failure of offering convincing alternatives beyond mainstream paradigms. Opinion polls also show that political institutions are largely perceived as lacking integrity. However, they remain a key player in representative democracy, bringing structure and continuity to political debate. Many are trying to reinvent themselves, reconnect with citizens and regain their trust.

New social movements also emerge, but most do not develop a comprehensive political vision and die quickly. Some call for more direct, liquid democracy – they have a loose structure, have not yet proven themselves in governing positions, and are vulnerable to voter disaffection as they have not established a solid, loyal base. Others become hybrids between movements and parties. But are these movements opening new democratic opportunities for those who feel excluded from politics? How can we make sure that they have a transformative effect on political parties and do not destroy democratic pluralism? How can democratic elites be diversified – do we need them or can we do without elites altogether? Are there public spaces in which genuine citizen deliberation beyond party politics is possible?

### **b) Media - friend or foe of democracy?**

In modern societies, the functioning of democratic politics is linked to the role of the media in the creation and dissemination of information and ideas. Citizens depend upon, and hence trust, media to inform and educate them about a broad range of issues. A plurality of views is critical for the health of a democracy, free media should provide quality information and promote vigorous debate on issues of common concern, and be aware that the editorial choices they make and the language they use can reinforce stereotypes, even when the intention is to combat them .

Media concentration and restrictions of media freedom are a concern in Europe and worldwide. Moreover, austerity measures weaken public service broadcasters and therefore limit the scope of independent reporting.

The internet further challenges legacy media’s business models and compels them to resort to populist content to attract users & advertising revenue. In the world of social media high-speed, media outlets provide citizens with fewer in-depth reports and analyses. Online media

and social media escape regulation, conventional media ethics, and through direct access to users create a totally new game. Social media are about speaking up, not about speaking with. Anonymity online encourages political extremism and hate speech. As a result, democracy is struggling to create a real debate, a long-term vision, and stability. At the same time, online and social media increasingly benefit from user-generated content, increasing the opportunity for citizens' democratic expression. Can democracy and media be reconciled in the 21st century? What media formats and spaces can ensure quality information and debate in the democratic arena?

## Key questions

In this period of transition from representative to post-representative democracy, the World Forum for Democracy will explore ideas and initiatives which address questions such as:

- Given the complexity of political agendas and the vacuum of convincing answers, how to express protest or accede to power without populism?
- How to nourish political culture which embraces a long-term perspective and resists populism? Are there social structures that can replace political parties in building social capital and providing frameworks for grassroots political debate participation and decision making? How to include more women and younger generations? Is there a danger of such social structures (e.g. faith groups) becoming more politicised?
- Should stronger intra-party democracy be encouraged or would internal leadership debate only lead to more personification of politics and weaker parties?
- How to make sure that online media and communities foster pluralism, taking a gender dimension into account and deliberation rather than extremism and polarisation?
- Can we support the emerging online media with user-based rather than advertisement-based business models which have a strong ethos of pluralism and user participation?
- Should there be changes in the voting systems (issue-based voting in addition to or instead of party-based voting, limitations of mandates, non-partisan legislatures, popular recall etc.)?
- Should we support further decentralisation of governance in order to bring power closer to the people and counter populism?

### HOW DO THE LABS WORK?

The labs are the ♥ of the World Forum for Democracy. Their idea is to address specific issues through the critical analysis of tested initiatives. The initiatives will be presented in short speeches of ten minutes and critically assessed by multidisciplinary panels and participants in the labs. The key conclusions and lessons learnt from the labs will be discussed in a summing up session in order to prepare the overall conclusions for the Forum. The Forum participants will vote to choose the winner of the Democracy Innovation award among the presented initiatives.

**Interested organisations/institutions (and in particular media outlets and political parties) worldwide are invited to express their interest in presenting an initiative aimed at re-building trust in media and in political parties and promoting changes in their ethos, organisation, funding and operations to bring media and parties closer to citizens and more responsive, and accountable.**

Examples of possible initiatives (non-exhaustive):

### Media

- Initiatives that enable media to fulfill their role as key agents of a balanced, fact-based political debate by introducing sustainable business models (eg. crowd-funding or on shared financial support structures for smaller media, gender-sensitive journalism, diversity-inclusive journalism etc. );
- Initiatives to ensure quality journalism and in particular investigative journalism, accountability journalism and solution journalism. Initiatives related to the training of journalists or encouraging solidarity and cooperation between different media;
- Initiatives aimed at redressing the balance between news and information/analysis.
- Fact-checking solutions based on crowdsourcing or big data; user education initiatives against “fake news”;
- Media convergence and infotainment solutions to increase outreach;
- Initiatives aiming at making media more attuned to issues people really care about, give a platform to unheard voices and encourage media community outreach, while taking a gender dimension into account.
- Initiatives by social media to comply with the professional and ethical standards binding legacy media

### Political parties

- Initiatives that address concerns around parties’ and elected politicians’ integrity, corruption, lack of accountability for policy failure, elitism and disconnect from the popular base;
- Initiatives aiming at structurally connecting parties to civil society organisations and movements for the purposes of wider debate, programming and campaigning;
- “Radical democracy” initiatives which seek to transcend the divide between demos and elites, eg. online primaries to engage young people;
- Internal democracy initiatives opening up party decision-making (on programmes, strategies, candidates) beyond party members, incl. those which focus on involving greater numbers of women in political life;
- Initiatives seeking to limit the professionalisation of politics;

- Initiatives seeking institutional reforms to devolve decision-making at lower levels of government and thus closer to citizens;
- Policy responses to popular demands for social justice, while committing to the principles of liberal democracy and fundamental freedoms.

Submissions should be made by answering the questionnaire in the appendix and sending it to [forum\\_democracy@coe.int](mailto:forum_democracy@coe.int) by **30 April 2017**. The World Forum Task Force will select the most interesting and relevant proposals in May 2017.

Any public or private organisation is eligible to apply. One presenter for the selected initiatives will be invited to Strasbourg to take part in the World Forum. Travel and accommodation expenses may be covered by the Council of Europe if required.

For further information about the World Forum for Democracy 2017, please visit the following websites:

[www.world-forum-democracy.org](http://www.world-forum-democracy.org)

[www.facebook.com/wfdemocracy](http://www.facebook.com/wfdemocracy)

[@WFDemocracy](https://www.instagram.com/WFDemocracy)



## Is populism a problem ?

Submission of initiative  
at the World Forum on Democracy, 8-10 November 2017

Country:
Organisation/institution:
Title of the initiative:
Contact person (Mr/Ms):
Address:
Telephone:
Mobile phone:
E-mail:
Website:
Social media (Facebook, Twitter etc.):
Brief presentation of the organisation (legal status, number of members/employees, field of operation, goals, other relevant information).
Brief description of the initiative (max. 200 words): goals, actions, scope, participants, partner

What is the origin of the initiative (sources of inspiration, relevant academic debate etc.)?

How is this initiative contributing to re-building trust in media and political parties as an antidote to populism?

How was the initiative implemented?

What have been the results so far?

Which indicators did you use to assess the initiative's results?

What challenges have been encountered in the implementation phase?

How does your initiative differ from other existing initiatives? What makes your initiative a democracy innovation?

To what extent is your initiative transferable to other organisations and countries?

Any additional relevant information/references.

Please indicate who will present the initiative, as well as a replacement in case of an emergency that prevents the first presenter from participating in the Forum (Mr/Ms, name, position, city, country, e-mail, telephone):

Language of presentation :
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>o English</li><li>o French</li><li>o other (please specify, presentations in other languages will be an exception)</li></ul>
Will you need a Visa for entering France?
Yes No
Are you in position to fund your participation in the World Forum?
Yes No
Will you be able to prepare a 2-3 min. video about your initiative prior to the Forum, in case you are selected?
Yes No