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The Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe CONF/PRES/SPEECH(2012)7

Speech by the President of the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe, Jean-Marie Heydt,
in the civil society debate on “Inclusive Democracy”, Strasbourg, 7 October 2012

Madam Deputy Secretary General,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Democracy is often invoked, often held up as an example, often criticised, and frequently flawed...!

This is hardly surprising given that it takes different forms in different parts of the world... It has enabled the best possible progress to be made for women and men yet, at the same time, its positive aspects have been thwarted and undermined, in some cases to the extent of entire populations being excluded.

How can there possibly be democracy if certain sections of society are not included? What kind of democracies are these that have no women? No young people? No elderly or disadvantaged people?

A few years back, we came up with the notion of **participatory democracy**, in which civil society organisations would play a key role in building good community relations. Our hopes, however, have been bitterly disappointed. Participatory democracy has not succeeded in narrowing the divide between peoples and their leaders. Within Europe, of course, our societies have developed differently around the shared, fundamental value of democracy. And with attention focused on the economic crisis in a great many countries around the world, the gap has widened further.

What is needed in these circumstances, and needed urgently, is a paradigm shift.

In future, therefore, our position must be that the word “democracy” should always be preceded by the adjective “**inclusive**”.

What do we mean when we talk about **inclusive democracy**? As we see it, inclusive democracy clearly expresses the idea that no one should be left out of the democratic process. This approach requires us to revise the ways we think and the ways we develop things with a view to designing and building an inclusive democracy where every individual, including the most vulnerable, is taken into account, but in a way that makes democracy “accessible” to them.

For it is not just the economic and financial crisis that has painful consequences for **vulnerable groups**: we know only too well how someone who is vulnerable is liable to remain so, for a whole host of reasons, including origin, discrimination, outdated attitudes, etc.

In addition to this, there is another ongoing crisis that is affecting social cohesion and hence possible democracy, namely the threat to the universal principles of equality that we at the Council of Europe are seeking to promote. I am thinking in particular about **equality** between women and men (I will not go into details here about how women are forever being targeted by one group of fundamentalists or another); I am also thinking about **rights** to high-quality education and training for all, which includes being understanding of individual lifestyles, and about **citizenship** education which incorporates the notion of responsibility, solidarity, respect for other people’s dignity and, more broadly, the full range of human and social rights. We are likewise aware, and firmly believe, that meaningful improvements to social rights can also offer a **real way out** of the current economic crisis. It is worth remembering, too, that

membership of the Council of Europe carries with it certain responsibilities and obligations to abide by these principles.

As you can see, the debate is by no means over and today we are going to try to move it forward.

This debate, on human rights and inclusive democracy, will precede two workshops which will look at the concept of democratic inclusion, one from the angle of the media, "**Building inclusive democracy through media**", and the other from the angle of women, "**Building inclusive democracy with women**". In our view, this is a way for us at the World Forum for Democracy to offer policymakers high value added of a practical kind.

Europe, as the purveyor of numerous values, has a duty to improve the way inclusive democracy is implemented because otherwise, democracy will become a spent force and will cease to have a future.

Thank you for your attention.