

**DGII “Open Doors” Information Meeting for Permanent  
Representations**

**25 November 2019**

***Snežana Samardžić-Marković, Director General of Democracy***

Dear Ambassadors, Ladies and gentlemen, Dear colleagues,

I would like to extend a warm welcome to you all, at this new “Open Doors” event of the Directorate General of Democracy and thank you for responding to our invitation.

This is also a great opportunity to thank you all for another reason.

Our new programme and budget for the years 2020-2021 has just been adopted and I would like to take this opportunity to thank you again for all the questions, comments, proposals and suggestions you have made to improve and make our programme of activities even more relevant.

It was a long and laborious process, but useful and valuable, because it allows us to build together a shared responsibility from the design to the implementation of our actions.

I would also like to thank you, on behalf of my closest collaborators and all my colleagues, for adopting a budget that gives us hope and confidence in the accomplishment of our task

We have mainly taken this initiative for the organisation of “Open Doors” to share with all of you some highlights of our work and draw your attention on some key messages related to our mission as DG Democracy. Together with my four Directors we do not pretend, of course, to give you in one hour and a half a full picture of everything we do. So, we have decided to be short and focused, and organise our conversation today in two parts:

- A **first part** focusing on the priorities of our programme and some major achievements, followed by presentations by each Director that will illustrate the implementation of the objectives of the DGII in their field of activity,

- A **second part** focusing on our commitment to the reform processes of the Organisation;

This will be followed by an open conversation with questions, comments and answers.

Let me **introduce first my team**, my closest collaborators:

- Matjaz Gruden , Director of Democratic Participation
- Claudia Luciani, Director of Human Dignity, Equality and Governance
- Jeroen Schokkenbroek, Director of Anti-Discrimination, and
- Susanne Keitel, Director of the European Directorate for the Quality of Medicines and Healthcare

### ***[ WHY? ]***

The first observation we could have when looking at the titles of our four directorates is about “diversity”, but if we go a little deeper into the contents of our common actions we will quickly understand that there is a “unity”, translated by a **common**

**vision** that explains the reasons and the basis on which DGII's activity is built:

“Safequarding and realising a genuine democracy”.

It is a vision that derives from our fundamental texts and to which all Member States have acceded and first of all from the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights

This vision we try to fulfil thriug the core elements of our

**strategic mission:**

1- Reinforcing democtratic institutions and citizens’s trust in them;

2- Building inclusive societies free from discrimination, hate and violence;

3- Empowering people to be engaged and confident in a common European future;

We translate these core mission elements through specific actions undertaken by our four Directorates and reflected every two years in our biannual programme of activities.

DGII implements **5 of the 9 operational programmes** of the programme of activities for the next two years, and in particular:

- Equality and Human Dignity
- Anti-discrimination, Diversity and Inclusion
- Action against Crime, Security and Protection of citizens
- Democratic Governance
- Democratic Participation

***[ How : ]***

This is done through multilateral work, notably **intergovernmental cooperation**, by developing policy, good practices and legal standards, and by **monitoring** and supporting their **implementation**.

- we do it through the “strategic triangle”: standard setting, monitoring, cooperation
- and we do it with our Member States

## **So who are we in numbers?**

Overall, the Directorate General of Democracy employs as of today around **705** people and ensures the management of

**32** Intergovernmental, Ad-Hoc and Experts Committees,

**6** Monitoring Bodies,

**9** partial agreements and

**33** Council of Europe/ EU joint programmes carried out in the field.

Our budget for both years 2020-2021 is around **386 million euros**, all budgets included.

### ***[During 2018]***

**395** Activities were organised in **49** Countries 37 of which were Member States

**136** Bilingual Activities (in both official languages of the Organisation)

**26** European Conferences

**4 500** National Experts took part in DGII events

**1 200** National Experts took part in the EDQM work

**355** Independent Experts from 44 Member States were associated in DGII work (advice, studies, analyses..)

**26** High Level Representative missions were organised in member States

**22** countries and **4** organisations financially supported DGII's activities

**50 000** people were following DGII on Twitters' accounts

### ***[ What ]***

I would now like to focus briefly on a **few key aspects** that have dominated our discussions and action over the past year.

### ***[Artificial Intelligence]***

A week ago, we attended the first meeting of the new committee on **Artificial Intelligence**. This marks an important turning point in the life of the organization and opens up new perspectives.

## **Why is this important?**

Because the discourse on AI seems at times very technological and AI solution focused, to which the general public, people should be adapting – whilst we should actually be interested in the societal, political and cultural reflection: turning to the question of **what flavour of democracy we want in the information society**, and who has oversight of it.

AI will likely have a tremendous impact on the way public authorities are constituted (so on elections), on the way citizens are involved in decision making concerning the life of the polis (on citizen participation) and on the way public authority is exercised (i.e. on governance). Such impact can be very positive but can also present fundamental risks.

So, if we want to pursue a distinct European, human-rights-centred and humanistic oriented AI culture in the future, our driving question is not about what technology can do, but what we want it to do! This is a different access angle and indeed one



that refers straight to the question of **awareness and empowerment**.

If the Internet, digital tools and AI are for people, then the focus in the debate -but also on action- must be on **people, on transparency and participation**.

Protection through regulation and legal guarantees will not work without investment in our citizens and their sense of agency, their capacity to be in control, their skills to adapt and master the world in which technology will be playing an ever more important role. This is why investing in education for digital citizenship, in culture and arts and working with young people is essential. Children and disadvantaged people require special attention in this regard.

Children must be empowered and prepared to grasp both the risks and opportunities offered by information and communication technologies. Investing in digital education and parenting is therefore crucial

And it is not only about being aware of developments and knowledgeable to use latest technologies – but indeed about being **equipped with a critical understanding of technologies' benefits and risks, and related rights and duties.**

Here is where the **Directorate General for Democracy has its important place**, in complementarity to the work that is being carried out on regulation in other parts of the Organisation. Actions carried out by DGII under both Finish and French Chairmanships are good illustrative examples of such a place.

### ***[Anti Discrimination ]***

The rise of populist political forces which aim to divide societies along national, ethnic or religious boundaries, remains a **major concern for the Council of Europe**. Ideologies based on an assumed incompatibility between national/ethnic or religious groups present a **danger to inclusive societies**, they nurture hatred and fear and pitch different groups against each other.

Nationalism has become, in the 21st century, the most prominent dividing line in democratic politics on all continents, and an ever-useful weapon for authoritarian regimes.

Nationalism is often expressed in the form of anti-immigrant or anti-minority hate speech - speech which denigrates or vilifies, harasses, insults, stigmatizes or threatens. Extreme nationalism and ethnocentrism may take the form of the public denial, trivialisation, justification or condoning of crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes which have been established by courts and of the glorification of persons convicted for such crimes. This is not only a problem for members of the vulnerable groups targeted, but it is an overall threat to democracy and political stability and to peace and security.

The DGII addresses the combined threat of populism and nationalism through a wide range of its work programmes in the fields of democracy, youth, anti-discrimination and education. This work will be intensified in the next two years **with the**

## **establishment of a new intergovernmental anti-discrimination committee**

Furthermore the work carried out on both CM Action Plans on Building inclusive societies and Integration of Migrants Children illustrates the role played by the DG Democracy in fulfilling the Organisation's mission;

### ***[Good governance & Integrity]***

The last aspect I wanted to focus on briefly concerns the **wider crisis of trust**.

In a situation where trust in institutions in Europe is at historic lows, resolute action must be taken at all levels in order to improve their functioning and their relations with ordinary citizens. For this, we need both to improve the way institutions involve citizens in decision making and the way they function. Corruption is another important factor influencing the level of trust of citizens.

Therefore, good governance, transparency, integrity, accountability should be reinforced at all levels of government. DGII tries to address these challenges from different angles, ranging from public administration to decentralization at the local level, as well as from education to sport.

Understanding better corruption in higher education and sport, but also addressing obstacles to the prosecution of corruption in these fields, designing mechanisms and new standards on prevention policies and practices, reinforcing the role of governments in promoting transparency and integrity are some of the areas that will continue to be at the heart of our action.

[...]

After this introduction, I would like to give the floor to our four Directors. They will go in more details in some of their cooperation areas.