

Action Plan

Support for Deliberative Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe In the context of President Biden's Summit for Democracy 2022

Joint Working Group of
Central and Eastern European Deliberative Democrats Group of
Democracy R&D Network and
the S4D's Cohort on Deliberative Democracy & Citizen's Assemblies

For sign off at the joint meeting on Thursday 22 September.

The Action Plan below is designed to support and operationalise the Cohort's shared international commitment

2 . Create a Global 'Marshall Plan for Democracy' to empower countries with new or fragile democratic institutions by supporting and funding deliberative projects.

Priority will be given to Central and Eastern Europe given the threat to new democracies there.

In the context of the Central and Eastern European region, including Western Balkans, it outlines three interlinked streams of action required to facilitate the uptake of deliberative democracy initiatives:

- 1) **garnering support and commitment** from governments and politicians to implement representative deliberative processes; and
- 2) **strengthening know-how, capacity, and securing resources** required to scale their implementation ensuring high-quality standards, as outlined by OECD;
- 3) mobilising efforts and resources to **create an opportunity for Ukraine to benefit from deliberative democracy initiatives** in its process of rebuilding.

We fully realise that agreeing on this Plan within the Joint Working Group is just the beginning. While much of it can be achieved cost free and by goodwill, the rest will require careful discussion with partners, including President Biden and the State Department, the European Commission, NATO, UNDEV and others who can bring resources to bear to make real the strong commitments voiced recently in Warsaw and elsewhere.

Please see **Annex 1** for a brief note on the promise of deliberative democracy in the region and **Annex 2** for great work already going on that might be replicated.

STREAM 1

Garnering support and commitment from governments, elected representatives, and citizens to implement representative deliberative processes

Academics, social movements, and independent civil society organisations in the region continue to engage in democratic innovations, work to increase participation of citizens,

responding to the crisis of representative democracy. They experiment with new ideas and practices and spread these ideas within institutions. Democratic experiments within civil society and social movements in Europe and globally have been inspired by the same principles of participation, deliberation, and citizen agency. These actors are carriers of innovation in institutions, performing this role in a variety of ways, and with different results. However, they are often on their own or under pressure from the populist, right-wing political elites as they deeply challenge their governance.

A coordinated push for implementing deliberative democracy initiatives in the region and simultaneously building ties and links between actors in the region to enable a more coordinated approach is needed.

	Action item	Potential vehicle
1.1	<p>Raising awareness and securing high-level commitment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Organising a series of discussions with international and regional experts as well as regional government authorities to discuss the applicability of deliberative processes in the region - highlighting their use in sensitive contexts, focusing on how to ensure the resilience and overcome any potential risks posed to these processes stemming from the presence of autocratic neighbours.</i> ● <i>Organising a series of informational workshops that would bring together international experts, public servants and legislators to ensure elected representatives are informed on the array of democratic innovations which are proving effective, and to generate an understanding of the critical success factors for their use.</i> ● <i>A regional target for every country in Central and Eastern Europe holding a (in many cases its first) Citizens' Assembly, preferably on the national level, on a topic jointly decided by relevant institutions and citizens. With financial support and international expertise provided to ensure that these first implementations meet the international standards outlined by the OECD and are thoroughly evaluated. These high quality first projects would serve as proof of concept and good practice examples.</i> 	<p>Summit for Democracy Deliberative Democracy Cohort</p> <p>Democracy R&D network</p>

1.2	<p>Central and Eastern Europe, including Western Balkans, emphasis in coordinated global actions (amongst other possible priority areas)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Ensure priority for CEE and WB countries that want to be considered as early participants in developing the Cohort's Commitment to a Global Citizens' Assembly.</i> • <i>Ensure priority access to the evidence and advice from the Cohort's Commitment to a global What Works Centre.</i> • <i>As one of the What Works Centre's first activities, conduct a regional comparative study to identify specific recommendations for strengthening and advancing deliberative democracy in CEE and WB region.</i> • <i>Encourage and allow CEE and WB countries to be leading National and NGO signatories in publicly committing to a global Declaration on Deliberative Democracy.</i> 	Summit for Democracy Deliberative Democracy Cohort
1.3	<p>High-level coalition building and strengthening networks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Building high-level CEE/WB multilateral coalitions (academia, civil society, associations, journalists, and where possible public institutions from different levels of governance) that will be able to engage into the significant coordinated work leading to establishing the pilot deliberative initiatives throughout the region that will address the most pressing issues.</i> • <i>Initiating and funding regional networking and collaborative research actions that would allow the widest use of research on deliberative and participatory democracy in backsliding democracies/hybrid regimes/young democracies.</i> • <i>Organising annual in-person regional CEE and Western Balkans Deliberative Democracy experts' community meetings to enable coordinated action, sharing of experience.</i> 	Summit for Democracy Deliberative Democracy Cohort Democracy R&D network European Commission DemocracyNext FIDE

STREAM 2

Strengthening know-how, capacity, and securing resources required to scale the implementation of deliberative processes ensuring high quality standards, as outlined by OECD

There have been successful Citizens' Juries and Assemblies on a local and national level in Poland, Hungary, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Estonia, in addition to pilot deliberative processes in Serbia and Montenegro.

Infrastructure and means to share best practices, learn from these examples and best global practices, and build a solid foundation for deliberative democracy in the region is needed. To this end, a program could be formed under the auspices of already functioning US agencies (USAID, NED), with the support of the European Union and other interested parties.

	Action item	Potential vehicle
2.1	<p>A program on strengthening deliberative and participatory democracy efforts in Central and Eastern Europe, including Western Balkans, via capacity building.</p> <p><i>The program should enable intervention on the macro (CEE/WB regional), meso (national) and micro (local) levels, considering relevant interdependence and linkages for a coherent approach under a three-level (individual – organisation – system) capacity development approach.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Capacity building programs for policy makers and practitioners entailing mentoring, twinning with non-CEE organisations, implementing successful techniques, and exchanging ideas at both political and NGO levels.</i> ● <i>Proliferating the number of and ensuring financially supported access to deliberative democracy Autumn schools for CEE and WB participants (such as the Tartu Autumn School by FIDE and Eupen Autumn School by G1000).</i> 	<p>Democracy R&D network</p> <p>European Commission</p> <p>Summit for Democracy Deliberative Democracy Cohort</p> <p>FIDE</p>

<p>2.2</p>	<p>Exploring routes to institutionalisation</p> <p><i>We are inspired by some of the examples of institutionalised deliberative processes implemented by Cohort's members' - such as the Permanent Citizens' Council in Ostbelgien, Belgium and the Permanent Paris Citizens' Assembly in France. We believe such new permanent democratic institutions have enormous potential to strengthen democracies in the region and across the globe.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>A series of workshops, led by key experts who have participated in establishing and running institutionalised deliberative processes, to explore how such models could be applied in CEE and Western Balkans on different levels of governance</i> 	<p>Democracy R&D network</p> <p>European Commission</p> <p>DemocracyNext</p> <p>FIDE</p>
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STREAM 3

Mobilising efforts and resources to create an opportunity for Ukraine to benefit from deliberative democracy initiatives in its process of rebuilding

The regional community of deliberative democrats should prepare for and be ready to help Ukraine rebuild stronger than ever and help it accomplish its path toward European Union membership. Now all efforts are focused on helping Ukraine end the war that Russia has brought upon it, but once it is over, rebuilding must begin without delay. Rebuilding will require a lot of public decisions to be taken on all levels of government. Ukrainian citizens are risking and losing their lives fighting for their country, and they should have a say in how their country should look once it is threat free again.

	Action item	Potential vehicle
<p>3.1</p>	<p>Program aimed at providing support and assistance to Ukrainian public institutions to meaningfully involve citizens in taking decisions central to rebuilding their country, different regions and cities</p> <p><i>The program would include technical, financial and implementation support to organise deliberative processes in different regions/on different levels of governance of Ukraine to collectively identify the most urgent and divisive issues and agree how to address them.</i></p>	<p>Summit for Democracy Deliberative Democracy Cohort</p> <p>European Commission</p> <p>Council of Europe</p> <p>DemocracyNext</p> <p>Democracy R&D</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Conducting a research study where biggest opportunities lie in implementing deliberative processes in a post-war context.</i> ● <i>A dedicated fast-track training program for Ukrainian practitioners and policy makers about the benefits of deliberation and how it works.</i> ● <i>Building a ‘task-force’ of international and regional experts, on a stand-by and ready to help with technical and financial assistance to help implement deliberative processes across the country on most pressing issues.</i> 	
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Next steps

1. Ieva Cesnulaityte and Gazela Pudar Drasko (on behalf of the CEE Democracy R&D group), Iain Walker and Graham Allen (on behalf of the DDCA Cohort) will open exploratory conversations from the Joint Working Group with potential partners. These include President Biden & the Summit for Democracy (via the State Department), the European Commission, NATO, UNDEV and others who can bring experience and resources to bear to make real the strong commitments voiced recently in Warsaw and elsewhere.

2. Any progress on the above will be reported back in due time to the political leadership of the Cohort (Art O’Leary and Gaetane Ricard-Nihoul), the DDCA Cohort (Iain Walker), the coordinator of the Democracy R&D (David Schechter), and CEE Democracy R&D group before any action is agreed and progressed.

Annex 1

Note on the promise of deliberative democracy in CEE and WB region

For the past six months the freedom and wellbeing of our neighbours in Ukraine has been brutally attacked by autocratic Russian forces. As we do what we can to help by hosting Ukrainian refugees, donating funds and informing the world about the consequences of the aggression on civilians, we also reflect upon the political impact this war has on the European region as a whole. Autocratic powers in our close proximity as well as the global democratic backslide, including countries within our region, such as Hungary, Poland and Serbia have been threatening the order of democracy and peace. Most of the studies on the state of democracy, as well as the reports of Freedom House, V-Dem Institute, Bertelsmann Foundation’s BTI Country Report show that the region of Western Balkans and Central Eastern Europe has experienced an extremely worrying wave of autocratization and democratic backsliding in the past decade. States in the region that were long considered stable democracies are now also showing authoritarian tendencies - such as Austria, which was recently downgraded in the latest V-Dem report. Such tendencies risk undermining the stability of the European Union and NATO, which is paramount at this moment. Russian

aggression in Ukraine exacerbates the dangers of leaving non-democratic forces to thrive in the region.

However, the region has also seen many social movements and citizens' initiatives mobilising against growing authoritarian tendencies and calling for more deliberative and participatory democracy, and effective inclusion of citizens in public decision making. The momentum garnered by citizen engagement efforts in the framework of the Conference on the Future of Europe, the OECD's documented wave of over 600 deliberative processes taking place across the world in recent decades, coupled with President Biden's priorities, which include a new push for democracy on the global level, including the suggested Marshall Plan for Democracy, are reasons for hope.

Our future depends on how resilient our democracies and our citizens are today. We know that deliberative democracy and meaningful citizen engagement is a key ingredient to trust between governments and citizens, better policy decisions, and active, engaged, informed citizens. It can help us be stronger when facing disinformation campaigns, but also stay united and reduce polarisation and the threat of nationalism and populism internally. As we become stronger, we can also be there for Ukraine and help it rebuild back.

Background

It is still less than a year ago that a broad cross section of colleagues in the field of deliberative democracy wrote to President Biden [Letter to the President December 2021] about the Summit for Democracy.

The Presidents' ringing call to action for democracies to face and defeat autocracies had inspired all of us, but had not been matched with a comparable plan of action. Indeed deliberation - democracy's star performer with over 600 successful citizens' assemblies in recent years - had not merited a mention let alone the recognition that it and citizens' engagement in general could be the superpower that autocrats dread. To their great credit the State Department in particular responded positively to our respectfully put case.

As we recapped in our recent Letter of thanks [to signatories of the letters to the President and his Under-Secretary] our progress has included the creation of a Cohort on Deliberative Democracy and Citizens' Assemblies [DDCA Cohort] under the political co-leadership of Ireland and the European Commission.

We then set out the case for strengthening the work in individual nations by their signing up to specific steps in their respective countries and also - as we go on to explain - by their support for having access to supportive democratic infrastructure across the planet.

To this end the Cohort has included amongst its 11 Commitments, three global projects - a global What Works evidence centre free and available to all, a global Citizens' Assembly in permanent session to consider issues around democracy at the request of the Summit, and a global "Marshall Plan" for democracy to energise and focus activity not least in those new democracies threatened by Autocracy.

Working groups of the Cohort are now looking at how each of these Commitments can be taken forward.

Annex 2

Examples of work already taking place or planned in the region

There is much practical and inspirational activity already taking place in the region.

[Please add examples briefly and with costs that you have participated in]

- [Autumn school on deliberative democracy](#) for public servants and activists of Eastern Europe, 13-14 October 2022 in Tartu, Estonia. Organised by FIDE - Federation for Innovating Democracy in Europe, co-organised by the collaboration platform Green Tiger (which also organises climate assemblies in Estonia).
- European Conference on Democratic renewal: Innovating with Deliberative Democracy, Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 20-21 September 2022. Organised by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the Council of Europe.
- Training camp for Citizens Assemblies coordinators in Prague - Center for Blue Democracy 19-22.05.2022
- 2021-2022: Numerous workshops for mayors and local councillors in Burgenland (Austria's easternmost province), Adult Education Centres. Budget: appr. 20.000 Euros. Next project (2023): cross-border projects in the Centrope region (Austria-Slovakia, Austria-Hungary) at local level. Funding pending.
- The School on Participatory Democracy Tools organised by the Division of Elections and Participatory Democracy of the Council of Europe in cooperation with the University of Belgrade/Serbia and the University of Rijeka/Croatia. (October 2022)
- Co-creation of the European Capital of Democracy bid-book. First ECoD will be announced soon. Focus on strengthening democracy on the city level in all Council of Europe member states. <https://capitalofdemocracy.eu/> (contact: Tamara Ehs)
- Recently a [series of](#) Climate Assemblies were organised at local level in Hungary and currently Budapest [is organising](#) a Citizens' Assembly on improving air quality of the city.

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