

Democracy in Europe Working Group

Statement of Principles

We have come together out of alarm that the erosion of democratic principles and weakening of democratic institutions among some of our European allies is putting at risk U.S. peace, security, and prosperity. Respect for the rights and liberties of all citizens is the essential foundation of any democracy. It is currently being assailed by illiberal and authoritarian forces, both internal and external, that are weakening the transatlantic community and NATO alliance. This threat must be met head on.

We speak out, not as Democrats or Republicans, but as citizens committed to the core principles of democracy. It is these principles that make states strong, peaceful, and constructive partners. We come together connected by our shared values and to safeguard the security and interests of the United States.

For decades, the United States has benefited from its commitment to preserving and restoring democracy and liberty in Europe. Together with our freedom-loving allies, we faced and defeated tyrannical adversaries determined to eradicate our way of life. Today, we confront new and resurgent threats. The United States will again need to look to its NATO allies to help counter next-generation autocrats, rogue states, and radical, violent ideologies.

Our adversaries know that America's alliances, built upon a common commitment to democracy, are our greatest strength. Hostile powers seek to weaken the United States by dividing us from our allies, as Russia already endeavors to do, through disinformation and other means. For if our allies no longer share our values, they will have little reason to help shoulder the burden of protecting our interests.

The democratic principles and institutions of our European allies are also being weakened from within. Many democratic societies are engaged in much-needed debates about how best to respond to changing post-Cold War social, political, economic, and technological dynamics. It is the sovereign right of states to set policies that best reflect the will of their people. But citizens' legitimate grievances and countries' real security concerns cannot be addressed by granting governments unchecked powers. Doing so only undermines democratic institutions and individual rights, planting the seeds of tyranny.

We disagree among ourselves on many issues—including immigration, faith, family, and nation. This is as it should be. Respectful debate is the underpinning of a healthy democracy. We agree, however, that only democracy can provide the dynamism necessary to tackle the vexing problems of the 21st century effectively and humanely.

Only when all people have the equal right to participate in the process of governing are political decisions legitimate. However, democracy is not defined by elections alone. Self-government is only possible within a framework that safeguards the rights of all individuals, including minorities, to freely pursue their own vision of happiness. While elections matter, they do not

April 4, 2018

grant unlimited power to those who win nor are they a license to limit the rights and liberties underpinning democracy.

We urge the U.S. Congress and executive branch immediately to use the full diplomatic voice, tools, and resources at their disposal to continue upholding our commitment to democracy. And we expect that our European allies will hold us to these same standards. Specifically, actions that no democratic state should take include:

- Denying any citizens fundamental political liberties and civil rights;
- Inciting, supporting, or engaging in antisemitism, racism, and other forms of discrimination and hatred;
- Restricting pluralistic expression and free debate;
- Stifling a free and independent media;
- Suppressing peaceful political opposition;
- Constraining civil society;
- Undermining rule of law that is equally enforced and independently adjudicated;
- Eroding the separation of powers;
- Hampering legitimate economic competition, limiting government transparency, or otherwise contributing to corruption;
- Impinging on free and fair elections.

When these bedrock democratic principles and institutions are put at risk, our bipartisan group will call for the U.S. government to take action. Specifically:

- We call on Congress to hold hearings to address Central Europe's growing democracy deficit, its implications for NATO, and the security of the United States. Hearings should lead to appropriate policies, actions, and resources needed for countering this grave threat to U.S. interests.
- We urge the Congress and executive branch to work together to put in place a comprehensive strategy that dramatically increases diplomatic engagement, development assistance, and security cooperation in support of democracy in transatlantic and NATO countries.

We cannot afford complacency. When our shared principles are endangered, so too is our security.

April 4, 2018

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April 4, 2018

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April 4, 2018

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April 4, 2018

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April 4, 2018

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