

Statement
by H.E. Mr. Bogdan Aurescu,
Secretary of State for Strategic Affairs,
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania,
at the High Level Event on Democracy, Ministerial Panel,
Krakow, 3 July 2010

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I would first like to convey a word of appreciation for the generous efforts of the Polish Government to host such an important event, given the current financial circumstances, and for having initiated such a timely debate. I would also like to thank the distinguished keynote speakers for their insightful and inspiring statements.

Over the past two years different studies have been released that warn us on the stagnation of democracy as well as on the threat that the global recession resulted from the financial crisis could pose to democracy in some parts of the world. Indeed, the Economist Intelligence Unit's Index of Democracy 2008, accompanied by the studies undertaken by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance seem to indicate that, although there is no recent trend of outright regression, "the spread of democracy has come to a halt".

From everything that has been written and discussed on this topic, I would like to very briefly address and highlight a few points.

First, the alarmist idea that democracy is losing ground by association to the type of capitalism that has caused the financial crisis is to be firmly rejected. Democracy is not a concept to be associated, by its very nature, to a financial or economic crisis, neither to the systemic flaws of unbridled capitalism, especially the tendency of financial markets to bypass transparent, democratic procedures

that has made this particular crisis possible. Democracy is a set of values. As a concept, it encapsulates periodic, free and fair elections, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, rule of law, accountability and transparency, democratic governance, independent media, independent and functioning judiciary.

Second, *the economic recession generated by the financial crisis has only the potential to exacerbate the existing democracy deficits.* Already in different regions of the world, where democracy has come as a change in the political system, the gap between expectations and outcomes, on one hand, and between promises and expectations on the other hand, has widened in the past years, leading to a decrease of public confidence in the effective functioning of the government, as well as to increased frustration and fragmentation of the political public. The ongoing crisis and its effects are only likely to exacerbate these feelings and phenomena since the cost of the recovery will have to be borne by the public at large.

However - and here comes **the third** point that I want to make - *to any person of free and informed opinion there are no alternatives to democracy.* It does not mean that we simply have to lean on that assumption and wait for the people to understand the rationale behind the sacrifices that we ask from them as part of the recovery efforts, neither to continue with business as usual.

There is a lot for us to do, but, in simple words, we have to return to the values of democracy, to restore people's confidence and interest in political participation and the virtues of political culture, to increase transparency and accountability as essential features of democratic governance.

We also have to reassess the relationship between democracy and economic growth. As Ralf Dahrendorf has put it some 35 years ago¹, "Why should it be so that democracy is to some extent dependent on economic growth? Is democracy unthinkable without it? Is growth presumably growth of a gross national product?"

¹ Excerpts of Remarks by Ralf Dahrendorf, In: Michel J. CROZIER, Samuel P. HUNTINGTON, Joji WATANUKI, *The Crisis of Democracy. Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission*, pp. 188-195.

Is this the only kind of expansion of human life chances which we can think of in free societies? Are there not perhaps other forms of growth and improvement of human lives?”

If the answer to the last question is “Yes”, which I think it is, then we have to rediscover, embrace and celebrate those other forms.

On a final note, here comes a lesson from the past, also in the words of Lord Dahrendorf:

“... what we have to do above all is to maintain that flexibility of democratic institutions which is in some ways their greatest virtue: the ability of democratic institutions to implement and effect change without revolution – the ability to rethink assumptions – the ability to react to new problems in new ways – the ability to develop institutions rather than change them all the time – the ability to keep the lines of communication open between the leaders and the led – the ability to make individuals count above all.”²

Thank you.

² Idem, p. 194.