



Strasbourg, 29 January 2016

**Synopsis of the thematic session organised for  
the participants of the Schools of Political Studies  
at the World Forum for Democracy 2015**

**Democratic security in Europe, regional perspectives**

(18 November)<sup>1</sup>

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Moderator: Matjaž Gruden, Director of Policy Planning, Council of Europe

Speaker: Sonja Stojanovic, Director of the Belgrade Centre for Security Policies

Today, Europe is confronted with real threats which may undermine the democratic fundamentals of its political, economic and social order. It is exposed to terrorist and extremist attacks, highlighted again by the tragic events in Paris and elsewhere. The massive influx of people across the Mediterranean aggravates the situation and highlights the existing differences and divisions. Europe's values and institutions are more and more contested both internally and externally.

Europe's reaction to this cannot be limited only to hard security measures. Hard security has to be complemented by other measures which reinforce democratic security and provide a proper balance between the requirements of security and the fundamental individual freedoms and rights necessary to guarantee democracy. Liberal democracy must find timely and effective solutions to current threats and challenges, while respecting human rights and the rule of law. However, a clear distinction needs to be made between real and imitation democracies.

Participants took note of the Council of Europe Secretary General's second annual report on the State of Democracy, Human Rights and the Rule of Law which presents the main pillars of democratic security requirements. They underlined the role of the Council of Europe as a key institution and reference for standard setting. However, they pointed out that lasting stability and democratic rule depend on the effectiveness of the functioning system in practice. This must cover not only the existing checks and balances system of power, but also include other dimensions such as ensuring the democratic control of armed forces and intelligence services.

Public participation and discourse in which problems are openly addressed are very important, and people should not only talk but also learn to listen to each other. The impact of different

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<sup>1</sup> Reporting by Piotr Walczak, DPP

cultures and education was highlighted. There is a need to raise the level of trust, in particular as regards the eradication of corruption. The issue of discrimination should also be addressed. More attention should be paid not only to the religious dimension, but also to interethnic relations. Environmental and family friendly policies should be addressed as well.

Another important question concerned the division and polarisation of contemporary society. In that respect, some participants wondered to what extent it is possible to maintain inclusive dialogue with those who challenge democracy and what are the limits of such dialogue.

The issue of the existence of influential informal groups was raised with regards to countries where the state powers are de facto in the hands of dominant elites. It was observed that this erodes the democratic basis of the state. The existence of such 'informal, but powerful groups' undermines the political order and has adverse impacts on political culture. It restricts public debate and erodes public trust, thus leaving more space for suspicions and uncertainty. This, in turn, may open doors to populists questioning the legitimacy of state authorities and legality of their policies and actions. Here again, participants stressed the important role to be played by civil society and in particular by the media in revealing and opposing such phenomena.