

**TRANSCRIPT:
DEMOCRACY DAY**

KEYNOTE SPEECH BY DR. WALTER SCHWIMMER, VICE PRESIDENT OF CGDC

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Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Also very good morning. It is my privilege to welcome you on behalf of the Board and the Founders to the second day of the 2nd Annual Meeting of the Center for Global Dialogue and Cooperation. Yesterday we had interesting debates on one of the burning issues of contemporary life – energy. “To heat or eat?”, was one of the cynical questions. But on the same day, in Greece, which is considered to be the origin of democracy, the new parliament was running just to be dissolved again, because they failed to form a government. So, we are turning to another hot issue: what is the state and what is the future of democracy. You know, politics is the ability to foretell what is going to happen tomorrow, next week, next month, and next year; and to have the ability afterwards to explain why it didn’t happen. I hope we are more successful.

On the one hand, we’ve had never before so many people living in democracies. The fall of the Iron Curtain brought democracy at least to Central-Eastern and South-Eastern Europe. The Arab Spring demonstrated the desire of the Arab youth for democracy. Latin-American countries returned after dictatorship to democracy and brought the people, responsible for suppression and crimes against humanity, before the courts. Big Asian and African countries prove that democracy can work and survive even under difficult circumstances.

But on the other hand, you can see the people’s reaction to the consequences of the financial crisis; the most dramatic one, just during the recent days, as I’ve mentioned, in Greece. There, approximately three quarters of the voters want to stay in the European Union, and want to keep the Euro. But at the same time a similar sample is totally opposed to the conditions and the necessary reforms to be able to stay in this zone. So, the first Parliamentary elections, after culmination of the debt crisis, and the installation of a government under the leadership of a technocrat failed; and it doesn’t look like the forces who were responsible for the disaster on the one hand, but also are ready to take the burden of reform on the other, will succeed. Not only in Greece, but in many European countries, we can see the rise of populist and extreme movements. And not change, is the most popular objective of political competition in Europe now, but on the contrary, if not the extremists, then at least those politicians seem to be

successful for the moment, who are promising that nothing has to be changed, one can continue with business as usual. It was already Winston Churchill, who said: “The best argument against democracy is a 5-minute conversation with the average voter”, but Winston Churchill also said: “No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise, indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of government, except all the others that have been tried.” And here we are “except all the others that have been tried”. The benevolent and all-wise dictator did never and will never exist. So, we have to face challenges, difficulties, and deficiencies of democracy in order to overcome what is wrong, and to use the opportunities the current crisis – the financial, the economic, the societal, the political crisis is providing us with. Of course, we have to be courageous and innovative. But only the pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity. The optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.

Today, we will discuss the state and future of democracy from two angles: Democracy vs Economic Power, and the Global Challenges of Democratic Leadership. Many people, ladies and gentlemen, not only the protestors of the “Occupy” and the “Indignez-Vous” movements are concerned about the influence and impact of economic and financial powers in the political life. But economic decision-makers want to be independent from politics, but do they also want to refrain from influence on politics? And for example, one cannot blame only the Greek politicians and the Greek citizens that they lived for decades beyond their means. Who financed this policy, well-knowing that one day the Greeks will not be able any more to pay their debts back? But until that day they cashed quite high interest rates. They had their profit already even when they had to reduce their claims now. I find the standards of the rating agencies very poor when they were not able to warn in due time. And I understand the Greek pensioner, the Greek jobless when they do not want to pay the bill. Talking about global dialogue and cooperation, this Greek pensioner or the Greek jobless people should also be partners of the dialogue. Yes, the reforms must be implemented and completed, but at the same time the Greek people, not only the Greek state or government, needs our solidarity.

I found another quote of Winston Churchill and I apologize and hope I’m not boring you with my Churchill quotes, but I found it amazing what recipes and not only explanations this statesman had. For example, I will never stop admiring that Winston Churchill in the middle of the Second World War, in 1943, suggested in a public radio speech, his weekly radio speech, very famous, to create after the War a Council of Europe including the enemies of these days. What I wanted to quote is the following: “If the human race wishes to have a prolonged and indefinite period of material prosperity, they have only got to behave in a peaceful and helpful way toward one another”. “Toward one another”. Why not creating a solidarity fund to support the poorest in the Greek society? Such a solidarity fund could be supplied by small donations of individuals, as well as by contributions of banks, insurances, and other institutions. And why not creating

a GRP – a Greek Recovery Program, which would give loans to Greek small and medium enterprises; similar to the European Recovery Program or Marshall Plan after the Second World War. Only if the Greek economy can recover, Greece will be able to fulfill the conditions of the European Financial Stability Facility. So it is clearly in the interest of the Europeans that the Greek economy can recover. What did Winston Churchill say, we have “only got to behave in a peaceful and helpful way toward one another”. Of course, to find solutions like that, we need a trustful dialogue between politicians and business, between democratic and economic power. I am looking forward with great interest to the first panel of today. Now, to the challenges of democratic leadership; I pointed out before, the benevolent and wise dictator did never and will never exist, but there’s certainly a desire for benevolent and all-wise leaders, in whom one can trust, on whom one can rely. But are these still the politicians? Four days ago, I listened to a speech of the Austrian Commissioner in the European Commission – Johannes Hahn, who praised the Italian Prime Minister Monti and his government. Why? Because they can do the right things, because they don’t have to go for elections, they don’t have to care about votes. Will that be the democratic system of the future? A kind, I would call it, Republican monarchy with a ruler appointed for a certain period and not elected; the role of the elected Parliament reduced to the control of the government and the approval of the laws? Could it be that this is what Baron de Montesquieu had in mind when he described the division of powers, based on the British Constitutional system of that day, of course, in which he perceived the separation of powers among the Monarch, Parliament and the Courts of Law? Or do we witness a development of more informal leadership in Europe as well as at the global level?

For example, you will not find the model of what was called “Merkozy” or now probably replaced by “Merkhollande” in the Treaty of Lisbon or in any other treaty of the European Union. But you will not find the President of the European Union, who was introduced by the Treaty of Lisbon, somewhere in the center of decisions of the Euro crisis. And I’m not sure that everybody in the room will know his name. Even the President of the European Commission did not really do more than issuing some statements. Maybe the only one, who acted within his statutory mandate, was the head of the Euro group, Jean-Claude Juncker, and his authority is certainly not based on his national position, being the Prime Minister of one of the smallest EU members – Luxembourg. But he is a personality of great renown, a convinced European, in my view – a real leader, but unfortunately he seems to be tired of his European job.

At the global level, the real decisions are not taken by the United Nations, as the only comprehensive global organization of states. Know what kind of global governments is now claimed by again informal structure, as there are G8 or G20. So, I’m curious for the second panel today, who are the leaders, how are they challenged?

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me an additional remark, in particular as Former Secretary General of the Council of Europe. Beside the new questions and challenges of democracy, we should never forget the basics of democracy, which are rule of law, and respect for human rights. These are interdependent principles. Without democracy, rule of law and human rights are not guaranteed. And without rule of law and human rights, democracy will not work. We cannot take them for granted. They are endangered by the same threats. We have to be careful when extremist forces are abusing democratic freedoms. We have to be careful when certain government structures get out of democratic control. I have been shocked when veterans can march 67 years after the end of Second World War, through the capital of a European country in uniform of Waffen-SS, but even more, when the same capital in the first half of May, young soldiers wearing the same Nazi uniform, came with weapons to a kindergarten to give lessons in patriotism. And the government of the same country seems not to be able or willing to protect citizens against continued human rights violations.

The program of our Meeting calls today the Democracy Day. Let us use this day, ladies and gentlemen, to have an open dialogue on how to safeguard one of our highest values – democracy – and make it even stronger. Thank you for your attention!