

**Statement of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Governing Council of the Community of Democracies  
Virtual Meeting, 23 – 24 November 2020**

The Warsaw Declaration Principles have withstood the test of time and continue to guide our efforts in promoting and defending democratic principles and institutions in an international environment characterized by a resurgence of authoritarian practices and evolving and complex challenges and opportunities.

Free and fair elections (Principle 1); Freedom of opinion and of expression (Principle 4); The right of the press to collect, report, and disseminate information, news and opinions (Principle 7); Transparent, participatory and fully accountable government institutions (Principle 16) are among the key areas where information and communication technologies are already contributing to the better functioning of our democratic societies and institutions.

The Governing Council of the Community of Democracies notes with appreciation the Report of the UN Secretary-General *Roadmap for Digital Cooperation*, which aims to chart a way forward on the recommendations of the High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation for strengthening multi-stakeholder cooperation in the digital space.

We know that trust in democracy is being undermined and new technologies are sometimes being misused to put strain on its key tenets, such as good governance and human rights. The misuse of existing and emerging technology resulting in authoritarian or undemocratic practices has been a particular cause for concern. Use of digital technologies to surveil citizens, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as collection of personal data, creates the possibility for governments to target civil society activists.

Community of Democracies Member States have also witnessed the misuse of digital technology as a tool against democratic systems, a clear demonstration of which are cyber-attacks that many countries have experienced. Therefore, it is of high importance to foster the resilience of open societies and to prevent the harmful use of digital technology.

Yet, there is another side to the digital world. While acknowledging the challenges of this age of unprecedented connectivity, we underline the vast opportunities and potential for positive change and development presented by digital technologies, including to make our governments more transparent, accountable and inclusive. As demonstrated by the current pandemic crisis, we should fully harness the positive potential of technology for supporting democratic governance.

Many Community of Democracies Member States already utilize a range of new technologies to the benefit of their citizens, including use of cloud computing, artificial intelligence and data-driven algorithms that facilitate improvements in democratic decision-making, along with digital platforms for accessing government services that enable greater participation, inclusion and availability of public services.

Community of Democracies Member States have used digital technologies to fight corruption, deliver health services to isolated regions, facilitate remote voting, enable distance-learning, and improve the accuracy and transparency of land registry.

Convinced that, by its composition and flexible approach, the Community of Democracies can bring a valuable contribution to current undertakings, the Governing Council emphasizes the importance of coordination among all stakeholders, including governments, civil society, the private sector, and academia. This multi-stakeholder cooperation is particularly needed when bridging multiple digital gaps and building digital capacity.

In this regard, we welcome the establishment of the Working Group on Democracy and Technology (WGDT), chaired by Governing Council Member Georgia. The Working Group aims to foster multi-stakeholder collaboration around the development and use of digital technologies and innovations, such as digital governance platforms and open data tools, to strengthen inclusive democratic governance and institutions, including by improving government services, increasing citizen participation, and enhancing government transparency and accountability.

Committed to bringing our support to the planned activities of the WGDT, it is expected that this new Working Group will cooperate across borders, sharing the experiences of digital development, promoting a democratic approach to the use of new technologies in line with our shared democratic values, spreading opportunities to improve democratic participation and accountability through technology, as well as discussing measures needed to prevent the misuse and negative impact of new technologies on the activity of civil society organizations. We look forward to its conclusions and recommendations.

Effectively responding to disinformation that aims to undermine democracy requires approaches that uphold the rule of law and respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression. In line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, technology companies have a responsibility to respect human rights and should seek to minimize the risk that their products or services are misused to violate or abuse human rights, including by designing them in a way that mitigates relevant risks. Technology companies could help provide new means to advocate, defend, and exercise human rights and fundamental freedoms and foster democratic principles. At the same time, human rights must be respected and protected both online and offline, and we encourage respect for human rights, democracy, and the rule of law in the design, development, procurement, and use of digital technologies.

We strongly reaffirm our resolve to step up efforts to foster multi-stakeholder cooperation to promote the use of digital technologies to support democracy and democratic governance and to counter the misuse of digital technologies aimed at weakening democratic institutions and eroding trust in democratic principles.