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ASSISTANCE TO PARLIAMENTS OF NEW AND EMERGING DEMOCRACIES

Speech by Mrs. Anna Elisabeth Haselbach,
Deputy Speaker of the Austrian Federal Council
(Transcript)

Mr. President, dear colleagues,

I think that our thanks must go first of all to the task force for the report that they have submitted and most of all for the very committed work that has been done in that task force.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is true that our deliberations have consultative status, but I am sure that the results of these deliberations and the results of this task force are a good signpost for the necessary policies of EU member states vis-à-vis the young and new democracies in the neighbourhood in the future.

If our commitment to international recognition of and assistance to emerging democracies and their democratic institutions are not to be only element of Sunday speeches, then we will have to share our expertise and skills in the most efficient manner possible and by using state of our technology.

Democracy is not something that you achieve once and for all; it is something that has to be developed in an ongoing process. That is to say all of us, old and new democracies must keep our ears to the ground and find out precisely to what extent our citizens are satisfied with the prevailing democratic system.

Let us not forget one thing, not only we dispose of good ways of sharing information and of state of our information technologies, our citizens as well dispose of these technologies and at the same time they are ready to make their skills, their enthusiasm and their free time available to topical consent. They are increasingly

ready to be part of the democratic decision-making process. In order to make their contribution to the development of appropriate solutions and very often, of course, they will then - at one point in the future - get a political mandate. But accepting decisions, having respect of how political will is formed, tolerating minority opinions, these are things that one must learn. And I think, in this context the recommendations of the task force have to be seen.

Within the framework of eastern cooperation, Austria is also involved in a number of projects that will be carried out over a longer period of time. There is a long list of such projects; they are very interesting projects, and they are also carried out in cooperation with parliamentary committees, for example one parliament that is a relatively young state in the Balkans, allow me not to be more precise. But I think especially in that case it is very important to provide technical assistance and it makes a lot of sense.

The task force has done its excellent work and now it is our task to provide the best possible framework conditions so that parliaments can learn and countries can learn to promote democratic processes at a wide range of levels, because the sensitivity for human rights, human dignity and equal opportunities are prerequisites for a well-functioning democracy.

Ladies and gentlemen,

What I am going to say next is something that has also been mentioned by the previous speakers, but I think it cannot be repeated often enough. The transparency of decisions and reliability of implementation of rules, those are some of the cornerstones of democracy. These are values that are taken for granted by us, and we should be ready and prepared to help our neighbours in the spirit of sympathy and sensitivity, without any patronizing attitudes, but with all the necessary steadfastness. In order to make our contributions so that these values that we regard as so important are taken for granted also in the new and emerging democracies.

Thank you for the attention.