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Summit for Democracy: Belgium is committed to democracy and the rule of law

Prime Minister Alexander De Croo is participating today in the Democracy Summit hosted by the White House at the invitation of US President Joe Biden. Both nationally and internationally, Belgium continues to defend democracy and the rule of law.

"After the fall of the Iron Curtain, we were lulled into a false sense of security. We thought that democracy would become easier, that it would be the obvious choice. But we forgot that it was never going to be like that. Liberal democracy is not the easy answer, but it is the right one because it allows everyone to have a say in the direction we take as a country and as a society," said Alexander De Croo.

"Liberal democracy is not about having a strong leader, but strong leadership based on diversity and inclusion. A democracy seeks nuanced answers to complex questions. The greatest enemies of democracy are oversimplification and divisive, black-or-white thinking. This is also what makes democracy fragile," the Prime Minister said during his speech at the Summit for Democracy.

Lowering the voting age and the Human Rights Council

In the framework of the Democracy Summit, our country has made a series of concrete commitments to bolster democracy, both at the national and international levels. These include lowering the voting age to 16 in European elections, the launch of the online participation platform on modernising democratic principles in our institutional structure and citizens' panels on the future of Europe. At the Parliament's initiative, the federal government is also working on a transparency register to better identify external actors who want to influence politics.

At the international level, Belgium is freeing up budgets, via Belgian Development Cooperation, for strengthening the civil society in its partner countries and finances international NGOs active in the defence of human rights. Belgium is also a candidate for a new mandate at the United Nations Human Rights Council (2023-25) and will increase its contribution to the general funding of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights by 25%.

[Click here to view the statement of Prime Minister Alexander De Croo.](#)

Overview of commitments

At a national level:

- Adopting a national action plan to combat racism
- Implementing the new national action plan to combat gender-related violence (adopted on 26 November 2021)
- Starting a participatory process by creating an online citizen forum about modernizing, improving the efficiency and deepening the democratic principles of the State.
- Lowering the voting age to 16 for European Parliament elections.
- Ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Access to Official Documents (Treaty 205).

- Ratification of the Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority (Protocol 207).

At an multilateral level:

- Promotion and protection of human rights, the rule of law and democracy, including through the Belgian Trust Fund, established in 2018 at the Council of Europe, with additional resources in December 2020 (Foreign Affairs, EUR 2 million).
- As a member of the Team Europe Democracy initiative, Belgium will promote democracy and human rights around the world as part of a joint European effort.
- Belgian Development Cooperation call for proposals to expand civil society in Burundi, Tanzania and Uganda (€1.95 million)
- Increase in the contribution to the multi-year core funding (2021-2024) of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) by 25 per cent compared to 2017-2020 (Belgian Development Cooperation, 10 million EUR) and allocation of unearmarked funds to four OHCHR country offices in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea, Palestine and Uganda.
- Funding of international human rights NGOs (Belgian Development Cooperation, 1.585 million EUR).
- Funding allocated to the Rule of Law and Democracy Division of the OHCHR (Foreign Affairs, '600,000) and to the project "Harnessing Digital Potential for Human Rights" (Foreign Affairs, '300,000).
- The federated entities will continue to support multiple multilateral organisations.

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