Re: **A seat for the I&D Group on the Board of Governors of the European Endowment for Democracy**

Dear Mr. David Maria Sassoli,
Dear Mr. David McAllister,
Dear (Co-)Presidents of political groups of the European Parliament,
Dear Members of the EED Board of Governors,

We are deeply concerned with the decision of the Conference of Presidents of the European Parliament to offer a seat on the Board of Governors of the European Endowment for Democracy (EED) to a member of the far-right Identity and Democracy (I&D) political group of the European Parliament. The I&D group represents divisive, polarising and deeply illiberal ideology employed to subvert the raison d'être of the European Union and undermine European values such as human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights.

We strongly believe that the presence of members of the I&D group on the EED Board of Governors is in direct conflict with the main objective of the EED, which is "to foster and encourage 'deep and sustainable democracy' in transition countries and in societies struggling for democratisation".

As organisations engaged in the work with civil society in Eastern Partnership countries, we are too well aware of the malicious activities of the parties represented in the I&D group – activities that disrupt, rather than foster, democratisation in the region.

- In 2017, members of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) and Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) played a role of "international observers" at a "constitutional referendum" in Nagorno-Karabakh, a territory disputed by Azerbaijan and Armenia. The "referendum" was not recognised by the international community, and the actions of the AfD and FPÖ naturally hampered the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute.
- In 2018, an FPÖ MEP publicly supported the convicted Moldovan corrupt politician Ilan Shor, and thus undermined Moldovans trust towards the European Parliament.
- In 2019, members of the AfD and Italian Lega "observed" illegitimate "parliamentary elections" in South Ossetia occupied by Russia since 2008, and the efforts of these "observers" aimed at legitimising the occupation.
- In 2014-2017, members of the FPÖ provided support for the far-right, misleadingly named Liberal-Democratic Party of Belarus, a fake opposition party, the purpose of which was to side-line the real opposition to the brutal dictatorship of Alexander Lukashenko.
- In 2020, members of the AfD and Czech "Freedom and Direct Democracy" monitored the parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan and praised their conduct, while monitoring missions of established and reputable institutions such as the OSCE ODIHR and OSCE PA criticised the way they were held. Thus, the actions of members of the AfD and "Freedom and Direct Democracy" aimed at legitimisation of the problematic elections in Azerbaijan, strengthening of the authoritarian rule of President Ilham Aliyev, and damaging the reputation of the OSCE.

- In 2014, members of the Belgian "Flemish Interest", French National Front (now National Rally), Lega, and FPÖ "observed" the illegitimate "referendum" in Ukraine's Crimea that was followed by its annexation by Russia. Since 2014, members of the parties represented in the I&D group have multiple times illegally travelled to Crimea and, thus, further undermined the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. In 2018, members of the Flemish Interest, AfD and Lega, as well as the current representative of the I&D group on the EED Board of Governors, "observed" the "general election" in the so-called "Donetsk People's Republic", therefore trying to provide international legitimacy to the Russian occupation of certain parts of eastern Ukraine.

Apart from their illiberal and nativist rhetoric, European far-right parties, including those represented in the I&D group, have historically been known for lobbying for European and non-European illiberal regimes and dictatorships. As we see from the facts listed above, I&D parties have been long engaged in attempts to legitimise controversial, illegitimate and unfair elections and plebiscites conducted by authoritarian states; discrediting European institutions; providing support for corrupt politicians and officials; undermining sovereignty and territorial integrity of Eastern partnership countries; and impeding resolution of territorial conflicts. It is difficult to understand why the I&D group was offered a place on the board of the organisation, the primary objective of which is "to promote the values of freedom and democracy in the European Neighbourhood and beyond".

We cherished hopes that a place on the board of the important international organisation such as EED would have positive effect on the members of the I&D group and make them stop undermining democratisation in the Eastern Partnership region. Unfortunately, our hopes have proven to be in vain. In July 2020, a delegation of five MEPs from the I&D group headed by the current member of the EED Board of Governors Thierry Mariani illegally travelled to Russia-annexed Crimea to "observe" the "all-Russian voting" on the dubious amendments to the Russian constitution there. Their trip was none other than further proof that the I&D group is fundamentally opposed to European values.

In light of all of the above, we call upon the Conference of Presidents of the European Parliament to reconsider granting a seat on the EED Board of Governors to the I&D group and re-allocate it to any political group that respects European values and stand by the objectives of the EED.

With kind regards,

Anton Shekhovtsov, Centre for Democratic Integrity (Austria)
Stefanie Schiffer, European Exchange (Germany)
Aleh Hulak, Belarusian Helsinki Committee (Belarus)
Anar Mammadli, Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Center (Azerbaijan)
Anastasija Stefanovic, International Elections Study Center (Lithuania)
Artur Sakunts, Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Vanadzor (Armenia)
Elene Nizharadze, International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (Georgia)
Ion Manole, Promo-LEX Association (Moldova)
Olha Aivazovska, Civil Network OPORA (Ukraine)
Sona Ayvazyan, Transparency International (Armenia)