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A New International Democratic Union

Democracies worldwide face growing pressure from a combination of economic, political, social, and environmental developments. These include rising costs, greater institutional complexity, restrictive political frameworks, limited individual prospects, migration, challenges to social cohesion, climate change, environmental degradation, and the international spread of autocratic tendencies. Although these developments have distinct causes and effects, they create conditions in which ostensibly simple political solutions can gain support. Such responses, however, tend to reinforce exclusion and isolationism rather than address the underlying challenges.



Addressing these developments requires established democracies to coordinate their positions and communicate more consistently in international affairs. Existing unions and alliances provide important mechanisms for cooperation, but their mandates, membership structures, and regional limitations may restrict their capacity to formulate and implement a comprehensive joint response.

Strengthening democratic structures should therefore be considered in conjunction with the economic capacity of democratically governed states. One possible institutional approach would be the establishment of an International Democratic Union whose combined market power could increase its influence on international affairs. Potential members could include democratic states from the European Union, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia.

A New Goal

For the purposes of this proposal, eligibility would require demonstrable adherence to constitutional government, competitive elections, the rule of law, judicial independence, the protection of fundamental rights, and transparent public institutions. These criteria would need to be operationalised through measurable indicators and an independent review procedure.

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The primary objective of the International Democratic Union would be to strengthen shared democratic norms rather than to prioritise economic integration, as is the case in the European Union. Its activities would focus on the following areas:

- education,
- transparency,
- eye level in all areas,
- community and coexistence as well as
- good and effective communication.

Decisions within the IDU could be adopted by a simple or qualified two-thirds majority, depending on their institutional significance. Such a system would be intended to limit the risk of persistent veto-based deadlock while requiring broader agreement for decisions with substantial consequences.

Numerous Advantages

An International Democratic Union would have numerous advantages:

- A community that is not regionally limited.
- The union could combine economic influence with normative conditionality by encouraging members to give preference to commercial relations with states that meet its democratic standards. Transparent communication of these standards might create incentives for other states to undertake reforms and seek membership. The effectiveness and potential distributional consequences of such an approach would, however, require further assessment.
- Reduction of dependencies (raw materials).
- No tariffs.

Taken together, the economic areas of the European Union, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada encompass approximately 560 million people. This population size indicates a substantial potential market, although population alone does not determine economic or political influence.

In the longer term, the scope of institutional integration could be expanded in several areas:

- Dissolving the "patchwork" of associations, agreements, alliances and economic agreements.
- Unification of military technology.
- Lean bureaucracy with shared IT.
- Possibly even replacement of the EU.

Simple Rules

Membership would be subject to compliance with a defined set of democratic standards and reviewed every three years. Periodic assessment could help identify institutional backsliding and provide a basis for remedial measures, suspension, or the non-renewal of membership.

Implementing such a union would require a systematic assessment of its legal basis, institutional design, membership criteria, decision-making procedures, economic implications, and relationship with existing international organisations. Subject to such an assessment, the proposed International Democratic Union may offer a framework worthy of further conceptual and empirical examination.

Editorial Notes

About the Authors

Wiebke Brüssel and Dr. Heiko Heinrich Stutzke are managing partners of Das Strategiebüro.

We structure and facilitate planning and change processes, including their preparation and documentation. Our work ranges from addressing individual strategic questions to supporting comprehensive corporate planning. Our clients include established companies and organisations in the private, social, and public sectors, as well as early-stage companies and founders.

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