



*Government of Armenia  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
Gouvernement de l'Arménie  
Ministère des affaires étrangères*



FFD(2010)3.2B

Strasbourg, 29 September 2010

**Council of Europe  
Forum for the Future of Democracy**

**Yerevan, Armenia  
19-21 October 2010**

**Perspectives 2020  
Democracy in Europe -  
Principles and challenges**

Issue paper: Working Session 2B

**Democracy and Global Governance**

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## **Democracy and Global Governance**

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### **Democracy's uncompleted mission**

At the dawn of the new millennium democracy appears to be the victorious political system. It has come to be seen as the only form of legitimate political authority which includes and represents the interests of all as providing a non-violent solution to social conflict. Furthermore, democracy has been praised as an instrument for economic prosperity, peace and stability. People all over the world have chosen democracy, and indeed fought for it, giving rise to a powerful, transnational mass movement which has achieved great change with surprisingly little bloodshed. This is perhaps the best indication that democracy is developing into a widely shared system of values.

But this does not mean that the journey towards democracy is over, nor that it can ever be. Democracy is an open, interactive and progressive political system which to survive needs to adjust its content and procedures to changing political, social and economic circumstances and at the same time incorporate new demands arising from civil society. Democracy's progress is indefinitely open-ended and unpredictable and in this lies its vitality as a political system.

The current ideological victory of democracy, associated with the predominance of Western liberal countries, is certainly good news for democracy. However, it may carry the danger of "democratic colonialism" from the West to the rest, which seems at odds with the very essence of democracy as a bottom-up political system. This requires a major effort to identify what democracy means for different peoples, how their expectations can be satisfied from their own political system and, more importantly, what each political community can learn from each other.

One of the major challenges that democracy has to address in a global age is how to define the various levels of authority and of decision-making powers. Democracy was born and has grown within confined political communities. It has been by deciding who is a citizen and who is an alien, that democratic communities have managed to work out rules, majorities and minorities and decision-making procedures. Thus, one of the major problems of democratic practice is that in order to work, it has always had to take harsh decisions on who should be included and who should be excluded.

In theory, one of the basic assumptions of democracy is that all those affected by a decision should be involved in the decision-making process either directly or through their representatives. In practice it is difficult to identify and to involve all those who are affected by a decision. And globalisation is making this more and more difficult. Issues such as nuclear energy, financial flows, migration and foreign direct investment are just a few matters that involve more than one state. The

contemporary world is made of a variety of “overlapping communities of fate”, to use David Held’s expression (Held, 2004), and these communities are not necessarily also *political* communities. At present, devices that allow democratic deliberation and decision-making among the affected citizens beyond the boundaries of states are still in their infancy.

How to preserve the values and norms of democracy in the new global setting emerges as one of the major challenges to be addressed by political theory and practice in the XXI Century (Archibugi, 2008). However, this issue has not yet received sufficient attention, not even in the most consolidated democracies. Their leaders have been eager to promote democratic practice in other countries, urging them to generate and consolidate appropriate institutions, but at the same time they have been reluctant to expand some of the norms and values of democracy to global governance. This has created a paradox, a form of schizophrenia in which, on the one hand democracy, is promoted as a universal value for legitimate authority within states whilst on the other hand, there is no desire to also apply the same values and norms to global governance.

#### *Points for discussion*

- to what extent can the agenda to promote democracies, so actively pursued by consolidated liberal democracies, be credible for people living in unstable democracies or in authoritarian regimes, in particular if consolidated liberal democracies are not equally prepared to also apply the same principles in global governance?

#### **Effectiveness and representativeness in global governance**

Global governance can be defined as “*the political actions undertaken by national and/or transnational actors aimed at addressing problems that affect more than one state and/or where there is no defined political authority able to address them*”. Political parties, public administrators, the business sector and the public opinion at large often demand that global issues are addressed through appropriate actions and levels of decision making (König-Archibugi, 2002). Even when these demands are addressed by individual states, either acting alone or in collaboration with other states, at least one of the following conditions should be at work:

- 1) The issue in question is not limited to an individual state;
- 2) The possibility of successfully addressing the issue would be facilitated by the participation of political players based in more than one state.

While global governance has grown exponentially in the last twenty years,<sup>1</sup> this does not necessarily mean that we are approaching a *democratic* form of global governance. Global governance is often evoked for timely and effective decisions. For example, during and after the

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<sup>1</sup> For example, soldiers displayed with UN peace-keeping forces have grown from less than 10,000 in 1988 to more than 100,000 in 2010.

financial crisis of Autumn 2008, the business sector, trade unions and public opinion demanded an effective intervention to prevent the collapse of economic activities.

Governments with the largest financial reserves undertook a series of coordinated actions to prevent the financial crisis spreading further. Many of these decisions were taken in G8, G20, G4 or G2 Summits. This can be considered a case of effective global governance, even if not many parameters of democracy were satisfied: a selected number of governments took part to the negotiation, deliberation was far from transparent, and the outcome was not accountable to citizens.

In the face of an emergency, the lack of appropriate democratic *fora* does induce the search for alternative decision-making devices. But this does not necessarily imply that these devices should be preferred to more formal and equally effective global governance institutions.

*Points for discussion*

- Is there a trade-off between the effectiveness and representativeness and transparency of global governance?
- Are there advantages to weaker input legitimacy if it helps obtain greater output effectiveness?
- What actions can be taken in order to reconcile input legitimacy and output effectiveness?

Calls for global governance often get louder in emergency and crisis situations. In situations as diverse as financial crises, natural disasters or gross violations of human rights, public opinion asks those “in charge” to intervene. The commitment and the resources required in such situations generate fierce controversies up to the point that many of these crises are not addressed at all.

Interventions generally get the commitment and resources from coalitions of willing states. For example, inter-governmental summits have committed financial resources to prevent the deepening of the financial crisis, international organisations and states have implemented civilian rescue operations, national armies have taken part in military interventions dictated by humanitarian motivations. Emergency situations mean that these global governance interventions occur with no or little democratic accountability. Neither the citizens in the states committing the resources nor those in the areas where interventions are made have an opportunity to assess ex-ante the purpose, resources and effects of these interventions.

*Points for discussion*

- if an emergency crisis is addressed through a multilateral intervention, and if there are good reasons to assume that similar emergencies could occur again, which institution-building actions should be taken?
- Can these institutions be effective, representative and accountable?

## International Organisations and democracy

Most of the current global governance is provided by international organisations (IOs). Although the resources are often provided by their members, IOs have their own agency and most of them cannot be considered just governments' "agents" (Zweifel, 2005). In comparison to other forms of global governance, such as i) unilateral actions undertaken by individual states, ii) bilateral or multilateral inter-governmental initiatives, or iii) the activities performed by the private sector, IOs already incorporate some of the values and principles of democracy such as:

- IOs are based on Charters, Conventions, Treaties and other public acts. This makes them bound to the rule of law and, in particular, to international law;
- Some IOs have judicial methods to address disputes;
- Most of the activities carried out by IOs are transparent;
- IOs activities are accountable to member states and to public opinion at large.

Are these elements sufficient to consider IOs democratic institutions? The criteria listed above will certainly not be sufficient to qualify any state as democratic (Patomaki and Teivainen, 2004). It is therefore not surprising that a leading democratic theorist such as Robert Dahl (1999, 2001) has challenged the idea that IOs could ever be democratic institutions. Dahl has indicated a few key criteria that qualify the modern term "democracy" in order to show that none of them is fully applied in IOs (see left column Table 1). However, the fact that IOs do not currently satisfy democratic criteria should not imply that they could not satisfy them if appropriately reformed. The right column of Table 1 indicates a list of actions that could be considered for IOs reform.

**Table 1 – Can international organisations be democratic?**

Dahl's democratic criteria	Possible extension to international organisations
Final control over important government decisions is exercised by elected officials	For some areas it is possible to envisage elected officials (for example through elected Parliaments on the model of the European Parliament). Elected officials can also be appointed for activities where intergovernmental organisations have a strong territorial activity (such as those involving health care, food provision, and assistance to refugees)
These officials are chosen in free, fair and reasonably frequent elections	The electoral principle may be applied at various levels. Other forms of democratic participation can also be conceived
In considering their possible choices and decisions, citizens have an effective right and opportunity to exercise extensive freedom of expression	Since freedom of expression is often repressed by authoritarian governments, intergovernmental organisations could also protect individual freedom of expression and provide the instruments to exercise it

<p>Citizens also have the right and opportunity to consult alternative sources of information that are not under the control of the government or any single group of interest</p>	<p>So far, information and media are still national in scope. Attempts to generate regional or global public opinion have so far limited effect. But media are more and more under the pressures of globalisation and they are globalising even without explicit political request. New ICTs, including internet, provide a variety of information channels that are more difficult to be kept under government control</p>
<p>In order to act effectively, citizens possess the right and opportunities to form political associations, interest groups, competitive political parties, voluntary organisations and the like</p>	<p>National political life can be expanded into trans-national levels. Political parties, trade unions and NGOs already have linkages across borders and they are already increasing their significance. Strengthening global institutions may also lead to a reorganisation of political interests and delegation of powers</p>
<p>With a small number of permissible exceptions, such as transient residents, all adults who are subject to the laws and policies are full citizens who possess all the rights and opportunities just listed</p>	<p>The UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights already sanctions individual rights. Other forms of citizenship applied at the UN level or within regional organisations may extend political equality to the individual and strengthen their rights vis-à-vis their governments</p>
<p>Source: Dahl, 2001, p. 28</p>	<p>Source: author's</p>

If there would be enough consensus among member states to implement all the suggestions indicated in the right column in any IO, the outcome will be a more democratic IO, but certainly not as democratic as we conceive democracy today in a state.

Groucho Marx once said: “I don’t want to belong to any club that will accept me as a member”. He anticipated what has become one of the most frequent criticisms of the European Union and other regional organisations, including the Council of Europe, that accept members with democratic constitutions only: “If the EU were to apply for membership in the EU, it would not qualify because of the inadequate democratic content of its constitution” (see Zürn, 2002, p. 183, also for a convincing answer to this position). This leads to the question: which criteria and threshold of democracy should be found within IOs?

*Points for discussion*

- Which democratic criteria are needed for international organisations?
- Can some regional organisations apply more democratic criteria?
- Which reforms can be implemented to make the Council of Europe more representative and democratic?

## **Is global democracy possible?**

If democracy is emerging as the sole legitimate political regime, shouldn't the world also be governed democratically? Cosmopolitan democracy has been already been advocated as a normative project (see Archibugi and Held, 1995; Archibugi, 2008; Held, 1995). But what should be the criteria for a global democracy? According to König-Archibugi (2010) a global democracy should be compared with the following criteria:

- (1) Encompass all the regions of the world;
- (2) empower supranational bodies to make binding decisions on a range of (enumerated) issues of global relevance;
- (3) ensure that the members of those bodies are representative of, and accountable to, groups of citizens, through electoral mechanisms or other formal and transparent relationships of political delegation;
- (4) promote equal representation of all world citizens in conjunction with other principles such as balanced representation of the constitutive territorial units and, possibly, forms of functional representation;
- (5) allow the supranational bodies to take decisions in accordance with a variety of decision rules, but exclude veto rights for small minorities, except when they are based on legitimate and impartially determined vital interests;
- (6) empower independent supranational judicial bodies to resolve conflicts in accordance with constitutional rules; and
- (7) include robust mechanisms for promoting compliance with decisions and rulings, possibly, but not necessarily, through the centralised control of the means of coercion.

If all these criteria are met, the world political community will be very similar to a world federal state, a political prospect that it is not only unrealistic, but that also generates anxieties.

### *Points for discussion*

- Will a world federal state be able to provide more satisfactory and more democratic global governance?
- What would be the disadvantages of such a political option?
- To achieve a more satisfactory global governance, which of the criteria listed above should be introduced and which ones should be rejected?

## **The participation of civil society as a democratising force of global governance**

Global civil society and non-governmental organisations are taking a more and more active role in global governance (Scholte, 2002). On the one hand, these groups are often very active in pressing national governments and inter-governmental organisations into providing global governance. On the other hand, they are also active providers of global governance in areas as different as environment protection, human rights enforcement, humanitarian relief and health care. There are a

number of devices that mobilise global civil societies. In some cases, they are mobilised through governmental resources or in collaboration with international organisations. In other cases, global civil society has a strong self-mobilising potential which can anticipate, pressure or even contrast the priorities of more institutional forms of power (Bexell et al., 2010).

While there is a general consensus on the important role played by civil society in global governance, its representativeness is often questioned. It is argued that the areas covered by civil society are selective, that it can be influenced by specific lobbies and that there is no certainty that public opinion at large will share the same values and priorities of the groups directly involved in campaigning for more democratic global governance.

*Points for discussion*

- Is global civil society helping to make global governance more democratic?
- How can global civil society be made more representative?
- What is the role that global civil society should play within International Organisations?
- Are there satisfactory channels of consultation of global civil society in the Council of Europe?



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