

The passage from democratic government to democratic governance

Dear Colleagues

As common characteristics of modern societies we note, the small participation in elections, the general discontent with party politics, the lack of reliability of political parties and, last but not least, the lack of trust towards politicians. They are troublesome issues, which are met mainly at national but also at European Union level. They cannot however be treated by choosing only to recourse to conventional remedies. Political and administrative decentralization or democratization of internal party organization is indeed necessary factors but, in present conditions, they are not enough. Essential in addition is *the strengthening of ties between the political and the civil society, the modification of the relation between economic power and*

political decision-making and the adjustment of the relation between the sources of mass information and politics.

If liberal democracy is to function properly today, it needs not only political pluralism -as its liberal dimension- and political and party participation -as its democratic dimension. The guarantee of equal terms and opportunities for the political forces is, in any case, the subject of electoral law. What is inevitably needed in this case is *social pluralism and social participation*. In other words, it is necessary to establish a strong third arena between the state and the market. An arena where citizens participate actively in organizations that operate on the basis of neither political party nor economic market logic.

One of the major characteristics of democracy is that it requires citizens who are not totally absorbed by their personal and private concerns. Democracy requires and is nursed by citizens who are meaningfully engaged in the public sphere. And the public sphere consists not only of party and political organizations. The public sphere also consists of those non-governmental, non-party organizations, which are concerned with the promotion of the public good.

Being less particularistic and more universalistic and focusing on specific issues, those formations appeal and move the citizens according to each one's special sensibilities, concerns or expression needs. In a modern society where, as was mentioned, individualism reigns the way for participation to the public sphere that those organizations provide is very important. Where 'public good' in general terms is vague and not clearly viewed, usually becoming insignificant, its more specific parts concerning for example, the environment, children welfare, minorities or culture is easily accessible and more appealing, making participation not only easier but more effective.

From what is being argued so far, it is obvious that democratic governance in our days implies close collaboration between governments and civil-society groups. This kind of collaboration though, can only be fruitful if the government relates to the civil-society groups in a way that does not undermine their autonomy and vitality. Any governmental attempt to control or "integrate" civil-society organizations or movements into their administrative or party structures will utterly defeat the purpose of the exercise.

It is very crucial that the collaboration does not result to the manipulation or the patronizing of civil society. Nor to the canceling of its autonomy through the regulatory possibilities that a government possesses such as the institutional framework, the facilitations or the financial assistance. It cannot be argued that the strength and the power acquired by the organized civil society makes it a moving target of the political and the economic powers in order to use it for each own benefit. Thus the collaboration between the state and the civil society should primarily be based on the guarantee of autonomy by the political and the economic sphere.

It has been argued that globalization leads, on the one hand, to the decline of the nation-state, and on the other to the development of forces that undermine national democratic politics. The thesis of the decline of the nation-state is a myth. Nation-states do not decline. European nation-states redefine their role being part of the European Union, without being suspended. On the contrary, because of their cooperation and integration they restore their effectiveness in the globalization environment. Nation-states shift their emphasis from geopolitics and surveillance to developmental goals.

The factor that may and does indeed decline is statism. Statism, with the context of the tendency and the capacity of national governments to control developments directly and in particular parts within the political arena and also within the economic, social, and cultural spheres. To apply this type of control has become much more difficult today and it inevitably results to ineffective practices; in fact, it can no longer be realized at all without adopting authoritarian policies of entrenchment and isolation.

Of great importance is the fact that the decline of statism creates a vacant space. A space, which can be covered by either the market or the civil society. In the first case statism or statocracy, becomes agorocracy as market values tend to become dominant in not only the economy, but in all other institutional spheres as well. This is our basic difference with the conservative ideology that either directly aims or in anyway tolerates the uncontrolled dominance of market power even outside the market field.

On the other hand, the void is covered by the strengthening of civil society, entailing also the empowerment of non-profit, non-governmental organizations. This case creates a more satisfactory

balance between politics, economy, and society. Such a balance is the main subject in question for progressive governance. For one thing, it can reduce the *market democratic deficit* of modern societies; for another, it can also help governments to increase civil-society groups in a variety of fields: ecology, community development, care of the aged, drug addiction, juvenile criminality etc.

The course of action in order to overcome political apathy and therefore make citizens interested and involved in public matters, is through the development of a strong civil society. Through the empowerment of organizations striving to achieve a variety of non-particularistic goals in a manner, which avoids the logic of both political party and economic market. In other words, the passage *from democratic government to democratic governance* entails the development of a third sector, which can operate as a counterweight to the “colonizing” tendencies of both the state and the market.

The balance between the three sectors -state, civil society and market-, their collaboration, the guarantee of their autonomy and the parallel promotion of their central claims for democracy, solidarity and

development is the progressive answer for the realization of freedom and equality in the 21st century.

Athens, 10th September 2001

Dis. Y(1)/EL/1-DemocracyPMforStockholm.doc/7.9.2001/p.1-3