

Global Governance in the XXI Century

Series of debates about the international political and economic outlook
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It is my pleasure to participate in this series and address a subject I assume to be of immediate interest to us all, which is the question of global governance in the twenty-first century.

Being more specific, I will share with you some thoughts about the prospects for democratic global governance.

Let me start by stressing what Leibniz would call a *vérité du fait*.

Democracy has never enjoyed so many followers and so much prestige as it does today. In all continents democracy stands second to none as a standard for legitimate political authority.

I am not saying that every American, European, African or Asian agrees on the decisive importance of the value of democracy. What I am suggesting is that the prevailing assumption nowadays is that people, anywhere, have good reason to see democracy as valuable.

While thirty years ago such an assumption did not sound plausible at all, the appeal of the democratic ideal currently seems all but on the wane. The shift in attitude has been dramatic. Suffice it to recall the lengthy discussions Latin American intellectuals used to hold during the sixties about what countries in the region would be fit for democracy.

Now the debate is centered on how to become fit through democracy. The nature of the debate has changed. And so has the political mindset of national communities long associated with authoritarian vices. Globalization is much to be credited for this new state of things.

Not in the sense that trade among nations has finally lived up to the civilizing role predicted by Montesquieu and other advocates of the *doux commerce*. It is rather in the sense that new technological patterns have facilitated cross-border dissemination of democratic values and practices.

Information technology has empowered individuals and local communities worldwide, enhancing citizenry and broadening public space. One might even speak of a technology-driven democratic synergy among nations.

In times of Internet, it is unlikely that any community can remain oblivious for long to what is thought and discussed beyond its borders. Ideas and expectations now travel fast and can flourish wherever sensitive minds are available to pursue them.

All the more so as social demands are increasingly generated by emulation. Consumption styles become global, regardless of cultural or national differences. No less relevant is the fact that, with the advent of technology information and the expansion of mass media, demands are being conveyed directly to governments, dispensing with traditional means of representation.

As a result, not only political parties are put under pressure to update their means of interaction with society, but governments are asked to deliver services at a pace they were not used to. Office holders do not derive their legitimacy any longer from sustaining the "right cause" or launching the "good combat", but from delivering well what their constituencies expect them to.

Today's motto is not "what to do", but "how to do" in the most efficient and cost-effective manner. The information age has thus not only contributed to the spreading of democracy, but also helped introduce new patterns of legitimacy.

But what matters most is not to trace down the roots of the democratic wave. Much more important is to ascertain how sustainable such a trend is. On what grounds could one assume that democracy has a long life in its new and old settings? Are democracy and capitalism in its current phase destined to thrive side by side?

I am afraid no credible evidence bears such a sanguine conclusion. History has not reached a happy end except for those determinist minds that take it as a libretto to be duly performed without variation.

One might at best speak of a mutually beneficial but open-ended coexistence between the information age and democracy. Hence the utmost importance of paving the ground for a continued expansion of public liberties. This implies anticipating and tackling potential challenges to democracy. Some of these challenges are of a conceptual nature.

Let me call attention to a fallacy some analysts and public figures have lately incurred in. I refer to the presumption that what has won broad acceptance is not democracy as a value, but concrete forms of representative government.

Some circles in the West have gone as far as producing road maps to guide newcomers in the realm of democracy. Signs vary from one map to another, but they are customarily derived from the historical experience of a couple of mature Western democracies. It is as if democracy as a good is subject to intellectual property rights.

Those who coined the currency first would be allowed to control any of its following issues. New democratic experiments would only amount to variations around a single and long established theme. Such a view is not

deprived of philosophical backing. It has recently been couched upon absolutist ethical viewpoints like those set by Leo Strauss.

Back on the public agenda is the belief that it is worth striving for the good, rational and perfect society. To those gifted with a magic or metaphysical eye, it would be possible to know what the best polity is, if not the best life for us all.

I need not stress the risks this belief entails. Let me quote Sir Isaiah Berlin, who spent his entire life alerting against the damage the idea of an all-embracing solution to human problems is likely to inflict upon societies.

If a ruler, a class, a party or a country is convinced that it holds the key to collective happiness, Berlin used to say, any price would be considered worth paying to see the redemptive mission duly accomplished.

To make the ideal omelette, there would be no limit to the number of eggs that should be broken. The twentieth century abounded with examples of how costly monist views are when acted out in the political scene. No effort should be spared to ensure that the twenty-first century fares better.

It is true that there appears to be no ready-made prescription against fundamentalisms. But it seems only sound to stress now and again the relevance of value pluralism.

It is indeed high time policy-makers were reminded that the world is increasingly less prone to absolute notions of good and evil. They simply do not fit the world as it is. The international community is too diverse and complex to be straitjacketed into Manichean schemes.

Why not recognizing that we live under conflicting but equally true values? Instead of ranking ultimate ends as right or wrong, we had better balance them in the most satisfactory and legitimate manner. After all, this is how our societies work. This is what democracy is all about.

Democratic rules are nothing but the provisional outcome of conflicts of values and interests, being liable to revision whenever the majority so wishes. Here lies the explanation for our democratic experiments being different from one another.

An institutional arrangement struck in Berlin on the question of social welfare, for instance, will hardly prove relevant or even possible to Canadians, Albanians or Australians, as it is meant to reflect power disputes, social expectations and traditions that are specific to the German people.

This does not mean that Germans value social justice and neglect individual autonomy, while Australians go the other way round.

It only shows that nations, when self-governed, strike balances among values in line with their own set of priorities and resources. The corresponding results cannot but look unique. What democratic experiences do have in common, let me insist, is the guarantee that decisions emanate from a rule-based deliberative

process.

If there is a feature that distinguishes decision-taking processes in democracies, it is indeed a permanent trade-off among the actors involved.

It comes thus as no surprise that contemporary thinkers, like Albert Hirschman, have suggested that modern democracies base their legitimacy on deliberation, rather than on a predetermined general will. A legitimate decision would represent the deliberation of all, and not the will of all.

One may be tempted to ask by now why nations that have grown so accustomed to the exercise of give-and-take domestically continue to be so reluctant to abdicate from their sovereign rights when operating on the international scene.

How come the significant increase in the number of democracies over the last decades has not been translated into a decisive drive to do away with the remnants of the Westphalia Order?

The usual answer has been that, pending the establishment of a legitimate supranational authority, the nation-state continues to be the sole safe haven for the exercise of popular sovereignty.

One could always replicate that democracy among nations can only be built through its very exercise, as it has been the case in the domestic dimension. Be it locally or at world level, democracy is essentially a *cosa a fare*. Or, in other words, an open-ended process.

It is, therefore, only contradictory to hold up the construction of a democratic experiment until conditions are deemed mature. But one must recognize that some important steps have been taken over the last decade in the direction of democratic global governance, most of them under the aegis of the United Nations.

Let me recall the series of sovereignty-limiting agreements in the fields of disarmament and the environment that were negotiated after the reactivation of the UN in the post-Cold War.

Even more promising was the creation of the International Criminal Court. The ICC has indeed been a daring step toward a cosmopolitan jurisdictional system. If domestic remedies fail, the Court can, through mandatory decisions, hold individuals accountable for systematic violation of human rights.

What is vindicated by developments like the ICC is the universal validity of human rights. These rights relate to individuals not in their capacity as citizens of a particular State, but for their human condition, deserving, therefore, supranational protection.

How should one interpret these ground-breaking developments during the 1990's? Would it be fair to assume that what Immanuel Kant termed as the cosmopolitan condition is, after all, a feasible goal? It is too early to tell.

The absence of major powers in this process is not an encouraging factor. Neither is the political stalemate caused by the latest disagreements on international security. Some have come to the point of fearing a return to a pre-hobbesian state.

The appalling threat of terrorism stands as a sword of Damocles over us all. As the international community has not succeeded in defining a common strategy to fight such a lethal though diffuse enemy, unilateral responses have been in the vogue again.

But there are some countervailing trends to be reckoned with. The most meaningful one seems to be the emergence and gradual consolidation of a world civil society. I refer to the public space set by the widening and diversified network of non-state actors.

It is true that not everything that emanates from this new arena sounds progressive. Now and then regressive utopias are brought to the floor.

The radical ecology discourse is a case in point. On denying our capacity to command nature through science and technology, it places modernity under a negative sign.

Others have been preaching isolationism as the best therapy. The level of a country's exposure to economic and security risks would be commensurate to the extent of its interaction with the outside world.

It goes without saying that neither way is sustainable in the long run. After all, the clock of history is unlikely to run backward. Nor should it do so. If we are to succeed in dispelling global threats, it will be through more rather than less technical innovation.

Our very capacity to tell how concrete and imminent those threats are is contingent upon available knowledge and technological resources. We know for certain that we are not speaking of local phenomena. No place on earth is impervious to the effects of occurrences like climate change, infectious diseases, financial crisis, drug trade or terrorism. They cut across national jurisdictions. There is no room for autarchic solutions.

Transnational problems require global responses. Hence the importance of the gradual, but decisive, emergence of a transnational civil society. It is as if issues of universal validity have found their Alma Mater.

Suffice it to bear in mind the crucial role played by civil society groups in the convening and development of the global conferences on the questions of the environment, human rights, women and racial discrimination. Not to mention the contribution given by them to the negotiation of important instruments like the Land Mines Treaty and the Convention on Climate Change.

It is exactly on their activism, rather than on any external mandate, that rests the legitimacy of non-state actors. They are what they do. I only hope they think bigger and do bigger, moving beyond an issue-oriented approach and addressing questions like the deficit in global governance.

Instead of piecemeal claims against globalization, it is time we hear a consistent call for the renewal, not the destruction, of the multilateral structure. Economy has turned global, but politics has not. The interdependence of markets has not been matched by an updating of the Bretton Woods system.

The international community is still lacking mechanisms that could effectively follow up and control financial volatility. Such a lacuna was first noticed and discussed long before the recent financial crises. The Founding Fathers of the International Monetary Fund themselves, Lord Maynard Keynes and Harry Dexter White, were in agreement as to the need for some "measure of intelligent control" of capital flows.

Let me recall that their point was duly reflected in Article VI of the IMF's Articles of Agreement, which allows for the Fund to request a Member State to exercise controls so as to avoid the necessity of drawing on the organization's reserves. Is it not high time that such a dead letter is brought into force? Rather than charting into rough waters, we would be simply doing justice to the historical vision of Keynes and White.

Other improvements in the Bretton Woods framework should also be pursued, to the benefit of global governance. Why not update the voting power system of the IMF so as to better reflect today's world?

Claims for greater transparency in the Fund's procedures could also be met, especially with regard to stabilization plans.

The United Nations system is not exempt of reform either. The composition of the Security Council has long become obsolete. A more representative Council would certainly mean a Council that delivers more and better. The methods of the organization could also be improved so that it could better favor the goals of the Millenium Declaration.

A step in that direction has been the decision by Secretary General Kofi Annan to broaden the discussion on ways to strengthen the participation of civil society in the UN system. I am perfectly aware that governments hold the primary responsibility for improving the multilateral financial and political architecture.

But, again, nothing prevents the world civil society from adding its voices to causes of interest to the welfare of millions. By arguing, denouncing, proposing and innovating, civil society groups can make a difference.

More than that: they can help produce and disseminate a new ethics for international relations. The goal of democratic global governance is unlikely to be attained by political engineering alone. A new and more inclusive order will only prosper if informed by the cogent and universal values of solidarity and tolerance.

Thank you very much.