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“Reinventing transnational government”

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By its very nature, democracy is a *universal* concept, rooted in human dignity and fundamental human rights. It is the source of legitimacy of any political order – domestic, international or supranational. The *raison d’être* of political organization – whether in the framework of a sovereign state or in relations *between* states – lies in the articulation of the political will of the citizens. *Representation* of the people will only be democratic if it is based on and complemented by genuine forms of *participation*; the latter will only develop its full democratic meaning if it transcends the confines of domestic governance.

In the context of *globality*, the rationale of democracy – namely participation – is tested in an entirely novel fashion. Transnational economic and information networks are spanning the globe in an ever more complex form and directly affect the decision-making processes at the national level. These processes expose every citizen to influences from beyond the realm of the traditional nation-state, whether in regard to employment opportunities, environmental quality, domestic and regional security, etc. The political entity (in most cases: the traditional nation-state) to which each citizen belongs is itself

transformed by these complex interdependencies and increasingly reaches the limits of its capacity when it comes to the protection of the interests of the citizens within the domestic realm. These developments have led to the gradual emergence of a *global civil society* which articulates a common awareness of the problems facing the human race and brings about a new *transnational reality* that goes well beyond intergovernmental relations in the classical sense.

The structures which are presently in place for the conduct of international relations are lagging behind the realities of our “global village.” Global civil society requires new forms of democracy that transcend the conventional forms of intergovernmental decision-making. The lack of adequate opportunities for the emerging global civil society to influence decisions at the transnational level has led to a serious credibility gap of international organization in general.

The “democratic vacuum” at the global level has been one of the major concerns of the International Progress Organization. Unless a corresponding structure of transnational democracy is being developed, democracy and civil liberties will be eroded at the domestic level too. Civil society is an indispensable element of democracy not only within domestic, but international politics as well. The dynamic of the globalization process has made us increasingly aware of the interdependent relationship between these two levels.

In view of the need of global civil society for asserting its role vis-à-vis traditional governmental and intergovernmental structures, the *democratization of international relations* and the *strengthening of the international rule of law* go hand in hand. Since its foundation in 1972, the International Progress Organization has made proposals for the reorganization of the international system, and in particular the United Nations Organization, along democratic lines – with a view of bringing international politics in tune with the aspirations of global civil society (particularly in the fields of environment, social and economic development, and peace). The application of the democratic principles not only in relations *between* states – on the basis of sovereign equality –, but *within* intergovernmental organizations has been one of the major concerns of the I.P.O.

The essence of democracy in the sense of *participation* – with civil society reaching beyond the borders of the nation-state – indeed requires the *reinvention of transnational government* as such. What is needed, in that regard, is a major *paradigm shift* in international relations: the democratic principles that have, up till now, almost exclusively governed domestic affairs, must correspondingly be applied in the

transnational realm. This major process of reorientation of the international system is driven by the increasing importance of global civil society and the citizens' awareness of the interrelatedness of their own problems and concerns with those of the people in other countries and distant regions. This process, resulting from the dynamics of globalization, has transcended the very confines of the nation-state and cannot be pushed back towards the era of the nation-state without a loss of democratic legitimacy.

In designing the elements of such a reinvention of transnational government, one may draw from the experience of transborder co-operation within the framework of existing regional organizations or supranational entities such as the European Union, but should concentrate on the United Nations Organization which is virtually *universal* in membership and represents, through its affiliated organizations, the most essential aspects of international co-operation. In order to adequately involve global civil society, the United Nations General Assembly – as a forum of state representatives – should be complemented by a Parliamentary Assembly consisting of representatives of all regions of the globe on a proportional basis and functioning as a kind of Second Chamber. In this era of the global citizen, politicians should not merely be accountable vis-à-vis their domestic constituency; a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly could be the forum where they explain their policies to the global community.

In addition, the Security Council's composition should be made more representative of the realities of today's world and include representatives of the major regions (instead of individual states only) on a *permanent* basis; i.e. the concept of "permanent membership" should be redefined in the sense of *regional* membership. Furthermore, the decision-making procedures would have to be democratized by abolishing the veto privilege (at present enjoyed by the five permanent members) in favour of the requirement of a qualified majority (or "supermajority"). The International Progress Organization has worked out possible guidelines of such a "democratic overhaul" of the world organization in its colloquium on "Democracy in International Relations" held in commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the UN in 1985, in the "International Conference On A More Democratic United Nations" (CAMDUN) in 1991, and at an experts' meeting at the University of Cambridge (1996). We welcome the Secretary-General's recent reform proposals in his report "In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all," while stressing the need of major *systemic* reform particularly of the Security Council in order to make the supreme executive organ of the

international community conform to the requirements of democratic decision-making. In our analysis, only a *fair* and *balanced* distribution of the enforcement powers vested in the Council among the countries, peoples and regions of the globe will enable that body to safeguard international security and peace in a sustainable manner. This, however, will necessitate a major paradigm shift from state-centered international law – where national sovereignty reigns supreme – to a system of norms that give equal importance to the inalienable rights of the citizens of each and every state, being understood as the source of legitimacy of any political system, whether national, international or supranational.

Such measures of adaptation of the United Nations Organization to the global realities of the 21st century (which basically differ from the power balance of 1945) are long overdue – and urgently needed if the world organization is to preserve its paramount role as guarantor of peace and the international rule of law. The universal nature of global civil society has to be matched by generally recognized democratic procedures among sovereign states. The emergence of the global citizen has made the reinvention of transnational government an imperative of democracy.
