

Effective participation and representation in democratic societies

***10 stimulating hypothesis as introduction to the Human Dimension
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1. We will never live in perfect democracies. But today we could really reduce their deficits. One of them concerns the unbalance between participation and representation. Or: Today's polities do not allow their societies to realise fully their democratic potentials.
2. Effectiveness, participation and representation are only in first glance conflicting demands. By reducing the degree of representation for allowing increased real citizen participation in the real decision making process we may even increase the quality of the representation that is inevitable for every modern society. Essential is the question who evaluates their effectiveness? The citizens by judging the quality of their lives.
3. Prof. Bronislaw Geremek, Polish historian, former Foreign Minister and still MEP sees a discrepancy between the expectations of democracy and its actual outcome as one of the major reasons why democracy is losing the support of many people: "Every government has to be judged on its ability to improve the life of the weakest and poorest. Deficits in this sense are essential causes of the crises of democracy."
4. A German professor recently wrote, that our societies lack even the notions to establish a demanding theory of democracy, both of them seen as conditions in order to realise really high quality democracies. I would not be so harsh. But we really face a kind of a banalisation of key notions of democracy, which we have to overcome, if we really want to realize better democracies. I think about the notions like freedom, people, politics and democracy itself. Perhaps we should also add the term constitution.
5. One of the biggest political paradoxes of our time in the context of democracy is, that never ever so many people lived in democracies and so many accepted democracy as the only way to legitimize the use of political power – but never ever also so many people seemed to be disappointed by their democracy(ies).
6. Democracy is not only a set of rules, rights, institutions and proceedings, but also a substantial promise to produce fair life chances for all and a fair distribution of the goods and richness our world is able to produce. Here, perhaps, we face the largest disappointments and institutional failures.

National democracies do not balance transnational market forces any more; the primacy of politics has been largely replaced by the dominance of market forces.

7. In order to overcome the crises of today's democracies we have to indeepen democracy and enlarge it to the transnational, continental and even global level. Representation is not the only and most essential way of realising democracy; the nation-state is not anymore the highest level of a democratic polity.
8. Concrete reforms would be: Decentralise the political power in order to enlarge the share of the local and the regional level and increase on all levels the direct involvement of citizens in the law- and decision-making processes by popular initiatives with a special attention to a citizen friendly design and to popular referendums. Such a dose of direct democracy would not undermine but improve the quality of the representative democracy. It might slow down sometimes the political process but it would increase it's effectiveness.
9. Such a democratisation of democracy would soften politics: It would become more communicative, more responsive; it would increase individual and collective learning processes and (re) establish and increase the trust of citizens in democracy, politics and collective political actions.
10. Like this we could create the conditions we need to constitute new transnational polities: A European constitution with a real European direct- and indirect democracy as well as a UN-Parliamentary Assembly as well as a global convention for Human Rights with a globally respected jurisdiction on basic social needs for all Human Beeings.

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For further arguments see the Council of Europe Report, Resolution and Recommendations concerning the State of Democracy in Europe, April 2007, www.coe.int or www.andigross.ch