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# PROSPECTS OF PLURALIST DEMOCRACY IN AN AGE OF ECONOMIC GLOBALIZATION AND WORLD-WIDE MIGRATION

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## SUMMARY

The author inquires how are societies to cope with economic globalization, migration and ethnic and religious diversity without sacrificing electoral responsiveness and governmental accountability. He also asks how to deal with grossly unequal distribution of political resources, skewed power structures, structurally embedded participatory barriers that resurface in a more dangerous forms in the new context. For answers he turns to a classic of democratic theory Robert Dahl and his ideas that are in sharp contrast to the present trend of introducing corporate management as a best way to run political affairs. Dahl, instead, proposes introducing democracy into the economic sphere and especially in large corporations. For the growing diversity of present societies, the author only partly advocates for the consociational recipes of Lijphart and the multiculturalism of Kymlicka pointing out that without resourceful political individuals and their political participation pluralist democracy cannot flourish. The author concludes that political science should again develop visions about how a “good society” might be designed – and how it might be politically brought even remotely closer to being attained. Such a discipline might then work as a science of democracy.

KEY WORDS: Ivan Prpić, Robert Dahl, economic democracy, pluralism, political science

This article intends to pay tribute to two distinguished colleagues, who passed away in 2014. Nothing better illustrates the global character of political science than the fact that one of them was Croatian, the other American. The first is Ivan Prpić; the second, Robert Dahl.

Ivan Prpić was just honoured by a conference,<sup>1</sup> to which it was my privilege to contribute. Therefore, I would merely like to recall now one primary reason for my enduring gratitude to him: In 1992, more than twenty years ago, he decided to include a translation of my book *Pluralism between Liberalism and Socialism* in the collection *Biblioteka politička misao*, of which he was principal editor.<sup>2</sup> In a new preface written specifically for the occasion, I expressed my hope that the work might contribute by some small part to a spirit of tolerance for different, even controversial positions in the states of former Yugoslavia. However, the capacity for tolerance soon proved exhausted. The tragedies that ensued from there continue to be remembered, and – I presume – to affect the lives even of some among those present today. Precisely for that reason, it seems to me that once again to talk on pluralism may be a fitting choice for this time and place.

Robert Dahl died in February, 2014, at the advanced age of 98, having worked for Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal administration during the 1930s, having fought in Europe as an infantryman during World War II, finally teaching forty years at Yale University. After he had started raising, from the mid-1970s, the normative question how one might proceed "to achieve the best potentialities of pluralist democracy" (Dahl 1982, 170), he became ever more critical of political inequality and institutional rigidities. The pluralism which he expounded during the rest of his career aimed at a more participatory democracy and an employee-controlled economy (see, particularly, Dahl 1989).

Dahl never ceased to emphasize that unequal *social* resources – such as income, education and status – will unavoidably translate into unequal *political* resources with regard to political activity and control over political agenda-setting. The lesson which Robert Dahl left us is that reducing disparities in political resources is of prime importance if we wish to ensure the accessibility, the accountability, and – in the final instance – the legitimacy of supposedly 'representative' government. Again, it seems apt that political science should take up Dahl's foremost topic, inquiring how pluralist democracy might be affected by the sweeping changes which, in recent years, have been working on nation-states everywhere.<sup>3</sup>

1 "Conceptual Contestations and Political Change", Faculty of Political Science, University of Zagreb, November 7, 2014.

2 Rainer Eisfeld, *Pluralizam između liberalizma i socijalizma*, Zagreb: Informator 1991 (translated by Mirjana Kasapović).

3 For an overview of some relevant issues, see also my edited volume: *Pluralism. Developments in the Theory and Practice of Democracy*, Opladen/Farmington Hills 2006, with contributions by Philip G. Cerny, Avigail Eisenberg, Theodore J. Lowi, and myself.

## I

Both in Europe and North America, societies are being transformed from *inside* and *outside*, first by growing economic-financial globalization and permeation, secondly by regional and global migratory movements, which have resulted in increasing ethno-cultural pluralization and diversification. The sovereign power of legislatures is thus being undermined on two fronts.

Compliance with the demands of international investors and with foreign competitive pressures has radically eaten into the use of monetary and fiscal tools by parliaments and governments to regulate national economies. Governmental and market players alike have rivalled each other with neo-liberal recipes for organizing a “slimmed down” state along the lines of private industry, bent on cutting regulation and expenditure, opting for the privatization of public services. The “reform” label has been put to service as a façade for such programs. At the same time, ongoing fiscal and economic globalization definitely did not happen without political intervention. Quite the contrary, it has precisely been pro-market state intervention which has been on the increase (Cerny 1999, 19/20). The mere threat by large transnational corporations of moving capital or economic enterprise of a country has gained so much in credibility that, to prove “competitiveness”, welfare states have been “traded down to minimal safety nets” (Hirst 2004, 155). Cutting public outlays reduces resources available for allocation by representatives to constituents, weakening state legitimacy and citizen loyalty to the democratic process (Putzel 2005: 12; Hirst: *ibid.*).

Due to a largely parallel process of prolonged migratory movements, patterns of societal cleavages and linkages have been changing, with emerging ethno-cultural cleavages more often than not exacerbated by – again – economic inequalities. The fragmentation of special interests is being furthered, adherence to traditional institutional loyalties put in jeopardy. Arthur Schlesinger, for one, more than two decades ago sceptically wrote about the “disuniting” of society and polity in the United States by a fundamentalisation of group values (Schlesinger 1992). When additional ethnic, religious, and cultural groups are demanding self-determination, self-determination for the polity as a whole may be reduced.

How, then, to accept economic globalization and migration without sacrificing electoral responsiveness and governmental accountability? How to prevent the same issues – grossly unequal distribution of political resources, skewed power structures, structurally embedded partic-

ipatory barriers – from resurfacing in different contexts?<sup>4</sup> What democratic arrangements are both required and feasible for meeting internal and external challenges, working in the direction of a 'common' (group-related, national, *and* global) good?

A brief retrospect over time may help to further clarify some of the problems which I will be addressing. When Alexis de Tocqueville visited the pre-Civil War United States more than 150 years ago, he observed an abundance of voluntary associations, governed, as he wrote at the time, by their members' "reason and free will". The French visitor to America, however, also foresaw the decisive contribution of the emerging "large manufacturing establishments" to a new "inequality of conditions" (Tocqueville 1959, 160/161). Increasingly, the joint-stock company came to replace the privately owned and managed firm; increasingly, small enterprises evolved into giant corporations. The extemporaneous assemblies witnessed by Tocqueville were changing, too, developing into large-scale blue collar, white collar and other professional organizations. Governmental interventionism in the economy resulted in ever more formidable administrative bureaucracies: If trade unions and labor parties were pushing governments to assume an active role in stabilizing the economy to prevent cyclical mass unemployment and misery, large corporations in their struggle for security also became interested in governmental regulation. The result was political capitalism, as implemented between the wars and increasingly after World War II (Kolko 1963, 287).

Business, labour and farmer associations developed into unequal partners bargaining for legislative and administrative intervention. Inequality increased further as business organisation continued to evolve: To evade high wages, taxes and restrictive monetary policies, nationally based large enterprises spread their subsidiaries over the world, penetrating other economies and changing into multinational corporations. Four decades before the term „globalisation“ gained currency, it was predicted in the early 1970s that the multinational enterprise, without being bound by "any notions of constituency, responsiveness and accountability", would reshape world-wide values and behaviour patterns, including prevailing perceptions about the "forms and content" of politics (Osterberg/Ajami 1971).

Empirical research on political involvement has demonstrated widespread individual apathy and alienation existing alongside the institutionalized activities of business corporations and other large associations. We are obviously living in an era characterized by notable discontinuities between the ideal of pluralist democracy and actually prevailing conditions. It is precisely this state of affairs which British political scientist

4 In Western Europe, the French *banlieus*, at present, offer a particularly instructive example.

Colin Crouch has labelled “post-democracy” (Crouch 2004, 19 and *passim*), defining “the major imbalance... between the role of corporate interests and those of virtually all other groups” as “the fundamental cause of democratic decline in contemporary politics” (ibid., 104). Constrained by such a policy environment, social plurality is translating into political pluralism to a diminishing extent.

Having emphasized these predicaments, we have still not arrived at the end of knotty political problems and thorny issues. Learning “to live with the public expression and institutionalization of ethno-cultural diversity” may justly be considered, as Canadian political philosopher Will Kymlicka and Eastern European expert Magda Opalski have jointly noted, a further key precondition for any “stable and just democracy” (Kymlicka/Opalski 2001, 1). Both made their observation after the civil wars in the Balkan countries had shocked the world with the atrocities of “ethnic cleansing”. Taking into account the warning provided by that experience – how to promote the further ethno-cultural “pluraliation” of already existing societal pluralities without inviting the fundamentalisation of group values?

To accommodate enduring ethno-cultural differences, politics of recognition and inclusion is required which must attempt to steer a delicate course between cultural fragmentation and forcible assimilation. Any such politics unavoidably implies limiting the political power of ethnocultural *majorities*. Just as minorities have been doing, however, these majorities may (re)discover ethnicity as a source of belonging, of identity, of ostensible “certainty in an uncertain world” (Durando 1993, 26) – particularly when bedeviled by economic anxieties and ideological disorientation.

Clearly, new inequalities and conflicts are interacting with old inequalities and conflicts. The relationship between societal plurality and political pluralism “becomes more and more complex and problematic”, as plurality is augmented, while pluralism is potentially undermined. On the one hand, the transformation of plurality into pluralist practices requires supportive structural, institutional, even mental factors. On the other hand, that process will always face contestation by embedded inequalities, clashing norms, new claimants (Cerny 2006, 88, 91, 110).

## II

“Pluralist democracy” is a term at once positive (descriptive) and normative (prescriptive). Descriptively, it refers to the existence of a plurality of interests and corresponding groups which, as latent centres of power, may (and are permitted to) organize into associations. Normatively, the notion endorses the transformation of this diversity into public policies shaping society by a process of conflict, negotiation and compromise, on

condition that individual rights are respected and constitutional rules of the game apply.

After World War II, pluralist democracy was supposed to exist in Western-type capitalist countries, particularly in the United States as it had emerged from the New Deal reforms. Even so, American pluralists, particularly Robert Dahl and Charles Lindblom, conceded that capitalist democracies offered “unusual opportunities” for “pyramiding” resources such as income, education and status into structures of political influence and political power (Dahl/Lindblom 1953, 315, 329; Dahl 1963, 227).

Looking for ways “to achieve the best potentialities of pluralist democracy” (Dahl, 1982, 170), Dahl and Lindblom singled out the large business corporation as the major target for structural, participatory reforms. “Nothing”, they argued, “could be less appropriate than to consider the giant firm a *private* enterprise” – because whether you look at sales, at assets, at the number of employees, or at the impact of corporate pricing, investment, or financing policies, business corporations have developed into *social and public* institutions (Dahl/Lindblom 1976, XXVIII/XXIX; Dahl 1970, 119/120). They have, in fact, acquired political dimensions. Suggesting that the executives of large corporations are subject neither to effective internal control by stockholders, nor to adequate external control by governments and markets, Dahl went on to propose a determined effort at further democratization – the “enfranchisement” of blue- and white-collar employees, realizing economic democracy. If you buy government bonds, you do not control government policy – so why should investors be entitled to govern the firms in which they invest? Control should, therefore, be transferred to those who would be able to effectively exercise it – to the employees (Dahl 1982, 199, 204; Dahl 1989, 327 ss., 331-332).

Such spill-over of democratic norms from polity onto economy would, of course, be diametrically opposed to present neo-liberal ideas about reorganizing the state as a quasi-enterprise association. The adjective “political” would henceforth relate to any form of group decision-making. Such pluralistic democratization would be intended to reduce disparities in control over political resources, to secure the more equitable representation of social interests by broad political participation and, in the last instance, to make democratic governments more responsive and more accountable to their voters.

The recent, barely overcome financial and economic crisis not only demonstrates the need for a return to more robust regulatory policies. To secure citizens’ loyalty to the democratic process and their political commitment, a determined effort at economic democratization should be put high on the agenda of our thinking about democracy.

### III

When the term “cultural pluralism” was first introduced by Horace Kallen in 1924, immigrant subcultures were flourishing in the eastern United States, after nearly 15 million immigrants – mostly from Southern and Eastern Europe – had been admitted to the United States between 1900 and 1920 (see Menand 2001, 381). Arguing against assimilationist pressure and “melting pot” conformity, Kallen offered his vision of a “commonwealth of different cultures” (Kallen 1924, 11, 116). Convinced that society’s creativity would benefit from different ethnocultural strains, he proposed granting equal treatment to every such tradition. Affirmative action procedures (which means favouring members of a disadvantaged group in selection processes for education and employment positions), introduction of official multilingualism, a composition of political bodies reflecting the existence of various ethnic groups may work to reinforce cultural pluralism.

Conversely, public policies may remain neutral toward ethnocultural differences. Within such a framework, discrimination on ethnic grounds is legally prohibited; benefits are provided according to *individual* eligibility. The unit of attribution for equity considerations is always and irrevocably the individual.

During the 1980s and 90s, and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, most of the debate has been centring on these policy alternatives (see Bellamy/Hollis 1999). So far, the discussion has achieved nothing which even remotely resembles conceptual clarity. The extent of differential treatment to be accorded to ethnic groups in order to protect and develop their special cultural characteristics is and remains controversial. This includes the extent of self-determination and of participation in the larger society as corporate bodies with political status and rights. Should liberal principles and procedures, developed as a guard against the power of majorities over minorities, be reinterpreted in favour of ethnocultural groups, or is there insufficient reason to modify the liberal emphasis on *individual* rights (Kukathas 1997, 230)? Obviously, groups as well as states may violate individual human rights. Would not any determined movement in the direction of group rights prevent individuals from “opting out” of their group by adopting ideas and practices running counter to their own ethnocultural heritage?

Should not, for these reasons, compromises rather than clear-cut solutions be sought? Countries such as India, post-apartheid South Africa, Canada, Belgium or Switzerland offer a wide array of varying, more or less successful models. Available options (which, of course, may overlap) include legal protection and public funding for the expression of cultural peculiarities; federalism as a form of self-government; finally, the more complex arrangements of consociationalism, meaning group-based political representation.

It is this latter regime of consociational governance which has been attracting increasing attention (see Kymlicka 1995, chs. 2, 7). Put in optimistic terms, group-based representation may result in the ability of “the state to offer an emotional identity counterbalancing the emotional loyalties to ethnic and religious communities, thereby preventing the fragmentation of society into narrow, selfish communalism” (Modood 1999, 88). Would a high degree of group-based political representation indeed meet expectations of contributing to a more – not less – vibrant democracy?

Consociationalism includes the following basic elements (see Lijphart 1977, 25): Considerable autonomy for each involved group in the management of its internal affairs; application of a proportional standard in political representation, in civil service appointments, and in the allocation of financial resources; right of mutual veto in governmental decision-making; finally, and decisively, joint government by an either official or unofficial grand coalition of group leaders.

A case study of consociational democracy in the Netherlands during the 1950s and 1960s has spelled out a number of significant negative consequences (see Lijphart 1968, 111, 129, 131) – elite predominance, the arcane character of negotiations, a large measure of political immobilism. Such immobilism may “entrench an unjust *status quo*” (Lijphart 1977, 51), leading to morally reprehensible deadlocks. At an even more basic level, group autonomy (as I already indicated earlier) may involve internal restrictions on the rights of individual members “to dissent from traditional practices” (Kymlicka 1995, 154), thus running counter to liberal-democratic conceptions of minority rights.

There exists no general answer to the question how far the serious disadvantages of consociationalism may be offset, except in the case of severely divisional cleavages, which could lead to either dictatorship or civil war. In any case, growing ethnocultural demands in ever more countries suggest that the load on democratic political systems to accommodate the diversity of minority groups will be increasing.

#### IV

Any democracy will continue to require, first and foremost, “resourceful” individuals – by which are meant, quite literally, individuals committed to *pluralist* orientations *and* with increasing, rather than decreasing, access to political resources. In the last instance, the uncertain future of pluralist democracy will be determined by a political culture which puts a premium on the educated citizen, prepared and able (resources!) to involve him- or herself.

To the extent that societal (definitely including ethnocultural) and political groupings maintain democratic practices internally, they signifi-



cantly contribute to such a political culture through the transfer of norms and values. To the extent, on the other hand, that both groups with democratic practices and involved individuals should be found increasingly few and far between, solutions for the persistent problem what it might mean to live democratically will become anything but easier.

Last but far from least, a political science is needed which, by a determined effort, redresses its present “neglect of the citizen” attested by 2009 Economics Nobel Laureate Elinor Ostrom (see Toonen 2010, 197).<sup>5</sup> By being critical of power structures skewed in favour of either politically and economically privileged minorities, or of ethnically privileged majorities, political science should help prepare citizens for civic involvement. Pursuing research and teaching in a humanist spirit, it should emphasize broad societal participation in the shaping of public policies.<sup>6</sup>

Addressing relevant issues requires the re-emergence of normative notions as an indispensable part of the discipline, though definitely not at the cost of empirical rigor in researching constraints and perspectives. Put in a nutshell: Political science should again develop visions about how a “good society” might be designed – and how it might be politically brought even remotely closer to being attained. Such a discipline might then work as a science of democracy.

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<sup>5</sup> Ostrom tragically died of cancer in 2012, before she could address – as had been planned – the XXII IPSA World Congress of Political Science in Madrid.

<sup>6</sup> See also this author’s article: “How Political Science Might Regain Relevance and Obtain an Audience: A Manifesto for the 21st Century”, *European Political Science* 10 (2011), 220–225, reprinted in: Rainer Eisfeld, *Radical Approaches to Political Science. Roads Less Traveled*, Leverkusen/Toronto 2012, 13–19.

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## SAŽETAK

### IZGLEDI PLURALISTIČKE DEMOKRACIJE U DOBA EKONOMSKE GLOBALIZACIJE I SVJETSKE MIGRACIJE

Autor postavlja pitanje kako se društva mogu nositi s ekonomskom globalizacijom, migracijom te etničkom i vjerskom raznolikošću, a da ne žrtvuju ideal izabrane vlasti koja odgovara narodu. On se također pita kako se može nositi s ogromnom nejednakošću političkih resursa, zatvorenim strukturama moći i strukturnim preprekama političkoj participaciji koji se, u novom globaliziranom kontekstu, pojavljuju u još opasnijim oblicima. Odgovore traži u klasičnoj demokratskoj teoriji Roberta Dahla i njegovim idejama koje su u oštroj suprotnosti s postojećim trendom primjene metoda korporativnog upravljanja na upravljanje državom. Nasuprot tome, Dahl je predlagao širenje demokracije na ekonomsku sferu, osobito na velike korporacije. Kao 'lijek' za rastuću pluralnost društva, autor dijelom zagovara konsocijacijska rješenja A. Lijpharta i multikulturalizam W. Kymlicke, ali i naglašava da bez individualne građanske participacije i osiguravanja dovoljno političkih resursa za nju, pluralistična demokracija ne može napredovati. Autor zaključuje da bi politička znanost trebala razvijati vizije o „dobrom društvu” i načine na koji se one mogu politički ostvariti. Takva bi politička znanost bila prava znanost o demokraciji.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI: Ivan Prpić, Robert Dahl, ekonomska demokracija, pluralizam, politička znanost.