

THE TAMPERE CLUB

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Democracy and Globalisation – the Second Meeting of The Tampere Club

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I. Spreading Democracy

According to the popular “the end of history” thesis, advanced, for instance, by Francis Fukuyama, liberal democracy will become – or has already become – the only viable governmental model in the globalised world. The thesis includes the contention that liberal democracy is the only possible way of governance if a country wishes to maintain its economic growth. In other words, the thesis claims that the globalisation of economies will force every country to become a more or less liberal democracy. The economic side of the thesis is often paired with a structural side that emphasises the interconnectedness of the global network economy and the role of new technology, especially that of information and communication technology, in bringing about an end to the increasingly old-fashioned alternatives to liberal democracy. As Ronald Reagan succinctly put it in 1989: “The Goliath of totalitarianism will be brought down by the David of the microchip.”¹ However, the inevitability of this process has been contested both on theoretical and empirical grounds. If we consider, for example, the economic growth of China together with the country’s democratic situation, the status of human rights and its relative success in constraining the effect of new information technology by, for instance, a surprisingly effective censorship of the Internet, some doubts gather over the empirical determinacy included in “the

1 Quoted in Kalathil, S. & Boas, T.C., (2003), “The Conventional Wisdom: What Lies Beneath?”, in *Open Networks, Closed Regimes: The Impact of the Internet on Authoritarian Rule* by Shanthi Kalathil and Taylor C. Boas, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2003; also *First Monday*, volume 8, number 1, (http://www.firstmonday.dk/issue8_1/kalathil/kalathil_chapter1.html), (Availability checked 2.4. 2004)

end of history” thesis. Also the methods so called liberal democratic countries, like United States, use for their ‘democratic’ purposes could be in strong contradiction with the ideals of democracy. Nevertheless, a theoretical-cum-practical belief in the superiority of liberal democracy over other governmental forms in a global world is doing well, not the least because of the absence of tenable alternatives. In addition, whatever the actual democratising effects of economic globalisation, the increased co-operation and mutual dependencies created by globalisation have been seen as beneficial, especially in the sense of pacification.

One of the possible corollaries of “the end of history” thesis is the question of whether democratic countries have a right or perhaps even an obligation to bring about democracy in non-democratic countries. A strange dialectics is involved in the combination of these two themes. On one hand, the inevitability of democratisation through globalisation in terms of a network economy seems to make all extra effort – for instance, the use of military force – in exporting democracy unnecessary, if not actively harmful. However, on the other hand, if liberal democracy in some more or less objective sense has been shown to be the ultimate form of government, then forcing a democratic change – even with the possible collateral damage created by the use of force – might be justified. Faced with this thorny dialectic and the empirical and theoretical grounds of the thesis itself, it is clear that an answer to the question of the rights or duties of democratisation necessitates a more careful analysis of the concept and practices of democracy. As the president of the Tampere Club, Professor Ernesto Garzón Valdés pointed out in his opening speech of the Club’s second meeting, even if the theoretical arguments against democratisation were not valid, still the practical problems included in a process of democratisation are remarkable.

Consequently, the analysis of the concept of democracy is made more urgent by the recent developments in international politics that have vividly accentuated the issues of democratisation, international governance and the rule of law. This set of questions formed one of the focal points of the discussions of the Club. What, exactly, are the relationships between globalisation as an economic phenomenon and democratisation? What are the relevant extra-economic factors for democratisation? And, furthermore, what kind of freedom do political actors, be they national, international or global, have given the ‘inevitably’ of economic globalisation?

The last question of the list naturally leads to the other focal point in the discussions, that of the democratic nature of global governance, whether in terms of international organisations such as the UN, the World

Bank or the International Court of Criminal Justice or in terms of global economic actors such as supranational companies. If the conditions that shape the life of individuals and nations are increasingly shaped on a global level where the actors have a mixed set of agendas and a widely varied set of backgrounds in terms of legitimacy, authority and power, how can the global stage of politics be democratised?

II. Measuring Democracy

The second meeting of the Tampere Club took place between the 18th and 20th of August, 2004. The topic of the meeting was framed by two key concepts of contemporary political thought, “Democracy and Globalisation”. The productive atmosphere of the discussions around these contested concepts was, no doubt, partly created by the fact that about half of the members present in the second meeting took part in the discussion already last year. This familiarity with the other members and the *modus operandi* of the Club provided the basis for a good take off for discussions. Also the fact that many of the participants in the second meeting had a background in political economics may have helped in finding a common ground for the conversations. However, the members of the Club emphasised that it could, in fact, be a sign of a problem if the members of the Club would find themselves in absolute agreement. Considering the nature of the topics discussed, such an overwhelming consensus could reflect the absence of certain important perspectives and theoretical positions. One challenge for the Club is to extend its academic and social background. Also the proportion of female members and participants of the club meetings must be greater in the future.

The first session of the second meeting started with a heated discussion on the statistical facts concerning globalisation that were produced from international publications and presented to the members. Professor Michael Baurmann emphasised that there are always measurement problems and from that point we have to look statistics very cautiously. Professors Bruno S. Frey and Geoffrey Brennan insisted that the numbers that are generally being presented as facts are, in fact, politically most tendentious. In this, the discussants saw an area where the research community can function in a beneficial way by raising the bar with regard to the quality of statistical information and its interpretation. Responsible politics demands a responsible use of the statistical and other facts used in decision making. Again, the need for a heightened consciousness about the role and nature of statistical information is made more pressing

by the ever increasing proliferation of information and research results offered in various media.

Professor Ruth Zimmerling emphasised the importance of reflection on the reliability of information provided by the research community by pointing out that whether the statistical information that goes around in mass media is biased or not, it still forms part and parcel of the political reality in which people live. Even though it may seem impossible to measure the precise effects of globalisation, different statistics and other numerical information, similar to the information presented to the members in the second meeting, form the effective background that politicians, bureaucrats and international organisations base their decisions on.

The importance of responsible presentation and interpretation is not limited to the 'hard' facts of science. Also the received ideas concerning unfamiliar cultures may well be as one-dimensional and tendentious as statistical information. That is why it would be important to uncover the systematic distortions in all the information presented concerning globalisation. The matter must be discussed in a genuinely multicultural environment that would ascertain the open and self-corrective 'peer review' of cultural information. As Professor Abdou Filali-Ansari remarked, many of the ideas central to the self-understanding of Islamic cultures are almost totally unknown to western countries. This will form a real threat, if the rough western generalisations will remain as dominant ways of speaking. The members of the Club agreed that media should pay careful attention to how the material concerning the effects of globalisation is collected, interpreted and presented.

III. Democracy as Stabilising Force

The conversations of the second day concentrated on the relations between globalisation, market-economics and multinational companies. Young democracies and non-democratic countries pose a special problem for democratisation, partly because they are often countries that do not belong to the core of the economically successful countries. It was quite generally agreed that economical globalisation is not a democratising force as such in the absence of other cultural factors. Effective democratisation requires specific historical circumstances that in the case of the old established democracies occurred before the current trend of globalisation. The Club discussed also ambiguity of the concept 'globalisation'. It was remarked that often when speaking about globalisation it would be more precise and fruitful to talk about individual phenomenon, such

as the spread of technology, military power, world trade and ecological problems.

Economical globalisation may work for stabilisation, but as Professors Raimo Väyrynen and Philip Pettit emphasised, even though multinational companies have also interests that benefit the progress of democracy, their ultimate goal is not democratisation but the stabilisation of the circumstances they are acting in. In other words, increasing the freedom of movement of people, capital and information is likely to increase the stability of countries, and this is valuable to multinational companies. Thus the companies have an interest in that the countries they operate in are ruled by law, and that the governmental officials are not corrupted. However, the sheer stability of the institutions and socio-political functions of a country does not mean that the country is carrying out the people's will. On the other hand, unpredictability and possibility of quick changes in the political-economic environment are an essential part of democracy. In view of these facts, Professors Pettit and Michael Baumann warned also about the dangers of regarding democracy as an absolute value. Prof. Pettit even declared that he would rather live in a dynastic country that carries out the rule of law than in a populist democracy where the civil rights are not guaranteed by constitution.

In addition, the current political situation with an ever-present threat of terror may be contributing to a trend in which the increase in the free movement of people is seen not only as a positive phenomenon. Globalisation may, in fact, make the international system more vulnerable. The threat of terrorism is one of the largely unpredicted if not unpredictable 'network effects' of globalisation that is transforming the attitudes and actions of individuals and governments. In this sense, the greatest effect that terrorism has might not be due to the material destruction it produces, but in the effect it has on the founding values and symbols of the international system, including those of human rights and the implications of citizenship.

The members also analysed the position of the United States in the globalised world. The current international stage is characterised by the presence of one superior power, and thus presents a new challenge also to the analysis in terms of political science. The members pointed out that the US may have strong interests for acting alone when need be, even though traditionally the American mentality has been counter-imperialistic. However, the members saw clear indications of the fact that the US wants and needs allies. Even though its cultural, economic and military position is strong, it can not accomplish its democratic or undemocratic aims by acting alone.

IV. Tampere Club: Spreading the News

The most intensive conversation of the last day of discussions took place when the club was assessing itself. Professors Aulis Aarnio and Geoffrey Brennan emphasised the power that intellectual communities have in influencing the public opinion. According to them, the Tampere Club members are authorities who do have an effect on their surroundings and that in this way they can help to overcome false or harmful views. Some of the members, especially Prof. Frey, were more sceptical. He warned not to put faith in paper tigers –like political proclamations that are easy to produce, but are actually old-fashioned and practically ineffective. As a consequence, the Club saw its mission not in the production of unanimous declarations, but in the advancement of enlightened discussion on the topic of globalisation and democracy, and the mutual challenging of different points of view. The relation of a social scientist and political power seems to be one of greatest questions for the scientists themselves and to other commentators. The role of researchers is qualitatively different from that of the politicians that aim at concrete changes in circumstances in a relatively short period of time. Thus the Club saw itself as a part of the research community, and its task as the public criticism and argument against views that are one-sided or incoherently or even misleadingly formulated.