

TOWARDS A GEOPOLITICS OF DEMOCRACY

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Is it possible to speak of the “geopolitics of democracy”? The diffusion of forms of democracy precedes quite clearly and noticeably, both in time and in space. Currently, democratization processes are almost exclusively analyzed from a juridical perspective. To our knowledge, notwithstanding a small number of isolated cases, a systematic study of the reciprocal influence of geopolitics and democracy has yet to be conducted¹.

Two recent phenomena have restored the “democratic question” to the center of the public debate: the Arab Spring and the acceleration of the European integration process, which many perceive as authoritarian as much in its method, as in its effects. It is plausible that this debate could prompt a geopolitical approach to the study of democratic forms. The aim of this article is to offer a few modest points concerning the geopolitics of democracy.

I. The Regional Factor

1. Democracy is a political phenomenon that moves on the geographical map. According to the theory that Samuel Huntington outlined in 1991, the process of the diffusion of democracy proceeds by geographical area: firstly, North America and Western Europe; then Southern Europe, Latin America, and select countries in Asia; and ultimately, Central and Eastern Europe. A potential “fourth wave”, which began after Huntington’s passing in 2008, encompasses not only the Middle East and North Africa but, some say, may also potentially extend into several of the former Soviet republics that were only partially touched in the wake of the USSR’s dissolution².

2. Can one speak of the diffusion of democracy by geographical contiguity? Among the elements that induce a democratic transition, Huntington cites the “snowball effect”, or “demonstration effect”: the establishment of democracy in one country acts as a regional detonator that galvanizes states that are either adjacent and/or historically and culturally similar to follow the lead of their newly democratic counterparts. Indeed, the “demonstration effect” helps to explain the democratization of Portugal, Greece and Spain in mid-1970s, what occurred in Latin America approximately ten years later, the

¹ A *Geopolitical Democracy*, by Bernard Owen, published in France in 2008 (Studyrama, Levallois-Perret) is essentially a comparative study of the different electoral systems. The text that better meets the requirement of a geopolitics of democracy remains that of Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late 20th Century* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1991). Among the “classics”, it is necessary to indicate the article “Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy”, by Seymour Martin Lipset, appeared in *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 53, No. 1. (March 1959), pp. 69-105.

² Ion Tăbîrță, *Community of Democracies – Geopolitics of Democracy Institutionalization*, Institute for Development and Social Initiatives “Viitorul”, Chişinău, Issue 35, September 2011.

transitions witnessed in Eastern Europe and Southeast Asia, or what is currently transpiring in the Middle East and North Africa.

3. A coercive outside factor, or “outside constraint,” may be a more prominent factor in influencing democratization than the more simplistic adjoining contagion factor. This was the case, for example, of the force of attraction exercised on the non-democratic of southern European countries by the integration process in Western Europe. At the end of the 1980s, the same dynamic was even more obvious in Central and Eastern Europe. In other cases, the constraint acts in an explicit manner as a series of “democratic rules,” such as those imposed on the candidates wishing to enter the common European house, and in particular, on those candidates (Turkey, Serbia, Croatia, Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Montenegro) that, for one reason or another, are ostensibly being groomed for entry. Typically, the coercive factor is exerted in regions of close geographic proximity, where the influence of the dominant power is stronger.

4. The political forms of a country can also evolve toward democracy for the opposite reason: a decline in the influence of a previously dominating power. This was typically the case with regard to the European states that were dominated by the Soviet Union. In the same context, it is plausible that the decline of American influence contributed to the democratic transition witnessed in many Latin American states. Today, it is plausible that the weakening of both American and European influence in the Middle East and North Africa has helped accelerate the political crises in this region. In any case, the previously dominating power always leaves behind a political heritage impacting a country’s future political development. In their 1985 text on political democracy in the 1960’s, Kenneth Bollen and Robert Jackman assert that Great Britain’s former colonies were, upon achieving sovereignty, consistently better positioned to establish democratic institutions than were the former colonies of the other European colonial powers.³

II. Democracy as an exporting commodity

5. The case of the rules that the European Union imposes on its candidate countries represents one of the numerous unprecedented aspects of the continental integration process. Properly speaking, it would be inaccurate to talk about “imposition,” since every candidate country is formally free to accept or reject any EU demand. Conversely, any club is free to draft and amend its entry standards with the express intent of alienating and discouraging an undesirable applicant. In these instances, the rules have an excluding significance rather than an including one (and Turkey’s bid for full EU membership, for instance, has been following this pattern). The EU-Turkey dynamic is one of the reasons why the contribution of the European Union to the processes of democratization represents a *unicum*. Consequently, the EU’s integration and expansion processes must not be confused with another one of the democratization factors considered by Huntington:

³ Kenneth A. Bollen e Robert W. Jackman, “Economic and Noneconomic Determinants of Political Democracy in the 1960s”, *Research in Political Sociology*, Volume 1, 1985, pp. 33-34.

the direct or indirect actions of states, institutions, organizations, and political movements which promote human rights and democracy.

6. Attempts to purposely export (or import) democracy have rarely proved to be successful. As a matter of fact, a power only has the capacity to successfully impose a favorable political regime on another state when it is able to exert a predominant influence in intensity, extension, and duration. The US position in Western Europe and Japan following WWII, the Soviet domination in its post-1945 sphere of influence, and even, to some extent, the European Union is all examples of this reality. In recent years, outside powers have frequently attempted to impose democratic structures following *ad hoc* military interventions; such was the case with Bosnia in 1994, Kosovo in 1999, Afghanistan in 2001, Iraq in 2003, and Libya in 2011. However, the absence of a predominant outside influence in intensity, extension, and duration made the democratic stability of the new regimes at least unpredictable.

7. Huntington cites the Catholic Church as among the outside vehicles that helped drive democratization processes. Its influence in this regard has been suggested might be an indirect result of the “transformation of national Churches from defenders of the status quo to opponents of authoritarianism and proponents of social, economics, and political reform.”⁴ Pope John Paul II’s presumed “decisive role” in the fall of several regimes that were subservient to the USSR has become a platitude, even though Karol Wojtyła himself once described this hypothesis as “ridiculous.”⁵ In fact, it is difficult to understand any stance taken by the Church unless one bears in mind that the Church does not act in order to bolster one political form or another, but is motivated by *ad majorem Dei* (which is to say, the Church itself) *gloriam*. In the same years in which the Church was contributing to the construction of Solidarność in Poland and to the fall of the Marcos regime in the Philippines, the Catholic hierarchies maintained very tight relations with many of the infamous Latin American military juntas. With respect to the current political disorder in some Arab countries -- today Syria, yesterday Libya, and previous to that, Iraq -- the Church’s relations and rhetoric are far from being hostile to the existing authoritarian regimes in the Middle East and North Africa.

III. Income and democratization

8. It goes without saying that the processes of democratization are the result of the combination of different factors. Among the factors Huntington considered when explaining the “Third Wave,” there is one that appears to play a special role: “the unprecedented global economic growth of the 1960s, which raised living standards, increased education, and greatly expanded the urban middle class in many countries.”⁶ Huntington states that, from the perspective of the 18th century’s leading political

⁴ *The Third Wave*, p. 45.

⁵ «It would obviously be ridiculous to claim that the Pope brought down communism single-handedly» (*Memory and identity. Conversations at the Dawn of A Millennium*, Thorndike Press, Waterville, 2005, p. 165).

⁶ *The Third Wave*, p. 45.

theorists, “the wealthy countries were likely to be monarchies, while poor countries would be republics or democracies.”⁷ The 18th Century’s relationship between political form and national wealth was reversed in the 19th Century when agrarian society was replaced by industrial society. Bollen and Jackman, while insisting on a multi-factorial analysis of the processes of democratization, assert that the “level of economic development has a pronounced effect on political democracy, even when other noneconomic factors are considered.”⁸ But does a measure of this level exist?

9. According to Huntington, “a country is likely to develop democracy when it passes a certain economic development threshold, achieving a particular level of per capita gross national product (GNP), or a particular literacy rate.”⁹ In 1989, Huntington notes,

“the World Bank classified twenty-four countries as “high income” with per capita income ranging from \$6,010 (Spain) to \$21,330 (Switzerland). Three of these countries, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates, were oil exporters and nondemocratic. Of the remaining twenty-one high-income countries, all except Singapore were democratic. At the other extreme, the World Bank categorized as “poor” forty-two countries with per capita incomes ranging from \$130 (Ethiopia) to \$450 (Liberia). Only two of these countries (India, Sri Lanka) had any extensive experience with democracy. Among the fifty-three “middle income” countries, ranging from Senegal (per capita GNP of \$520) to Oman (per capita GNP of \$5,810) in, there were twenty-three democracies, twenty-five non-democracies and five countries that could be plausibly classified as in transition from non-democracy to democracy.”¹⁰

10. In 2008, Fareed Zakaria addressed the trend described by Huntington, and explained that China was not an exception to this rule. In 1989, at the time of the “Third Wave” (and of Tiananmen Square), the People’s Republic was the world’s ninth-largest economy, with an annual per capita income of \$400, a little more than Pakistan and a little less than Togo - - and so the problem did not exist. In 2008, with China about to become the second world power, the situation was quite different. For Zakaria “the threshold for democratic transition” is at a per capita income of roughly between \$5,000 and \$10,000.¹¹ A level simply not yet attained by the People’s Republic. The IMF calculates that China reached this level only in 2011: at \$5,184 GNP per capita, up from \$4,382 in 2010, China is still ranked 90th in the world (between Thailand and Angola). 2011 marks the first year that China entered Zakaria’s GNP per capita zone where democratic transition is to be expected.

11. In light of the “Arab Spring”, however, the causal relationship between income per capita and democratic transition seems severely weakened. If a per capita GNP of \$4,382 in 2010 in China was not sufficient to trigger a call for democracy, why was it sufficient in

⁷ Ibidem, p. 59.

⁸ “Economic and Noneconomic Determinants of Political Democracy in the 1960s”, cit., p. 38.

⁹ *The Third Wave*, cit., p. 32.

¹⁰ *The Third Wave*, cit., pp. 59-60.

¹¹ Fareed Zakaria, *The Post-American World and the Rise of the Rest*, Penguin Books, New York, 2008, p. 100.

the Tunisian (\$4,199), Egyptian (\$2,808), Syrian (\$2,823) or even Yemeni (\$1,284) cases? The African Development Bank and the Asian Development Bank have a lower threshold for the transitions than does Zakaria. According to these institutions, a “middle class” income of between \$730 and \$7,300 a year is the origin of the democratic demand (a level already reached by 90% of Chinese and 86% of North-African and Middle-Eastern populations).¹² If, on the one hand, this new threshold may help to understand the “Arab Spring,” on the other it further confuses the Chinese case.

12. It is true that both Huntington and Zakaria refer to the wealth per capita as *one* of the indicators of *global economic growth*. This indicator can be useful and even enlightening, when making a generalized summary (as shown by the similar trends, in the long term, between wealth per capita and the spread of democratic forms, fig. 1). However, if one switches from broad generalizations to a more detailed analysis, this indicator proves approximate and insufficient. Economic growth regularly follows a pattern of increased polarization of wealth, especially wealth in the form of property ownership. As development proceeds, the less it makes sense to consider per capita income a suitable tool.

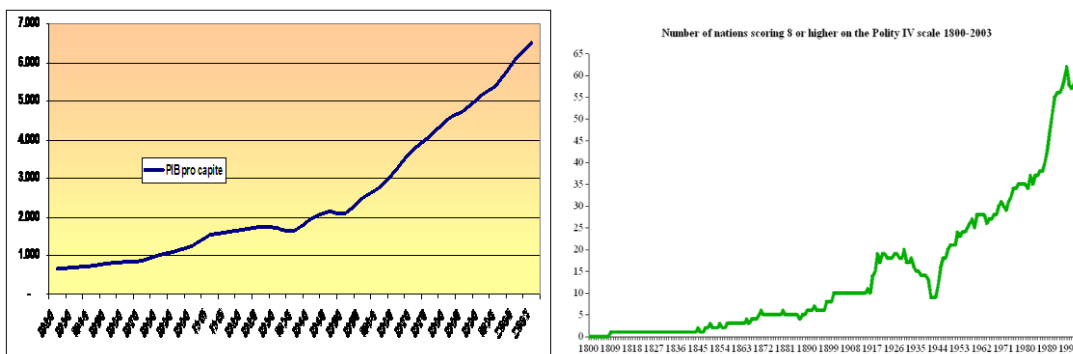


Fig. 1. GDP 1800-2003: Angus Maddison, *The world economy from year 1 to 2030. A quantitative and macroeconomic outline*, Milan, Panta Rei, 2008. Evolution of democracy (1800-1998): Monty G. Marshall and Keith Jagers, *Polity IV Project: Political Regime Characteristics and Transitions, 1800-2010*, Societal-Systems Research Inc. and Colorado State University, 2011.

IV. The “best political shell for capitalism”

13. Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson have dealt with this issue by pressing beyond a mere quantitative calculation. In their view, democratization is the “shift of power” from a privileged elite to the mass of citizens. This movement is triggered when the risk of “strikes, demonstrations, riots and -- in the limit -- a revolution” makes it more costly (economically and politically) for the ruling elite to defend its privileges than for it to abandon them.¹³ Democracy would thus be, in short, the less costly way to reduce social conflict. This description appears to fit what happened in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and Syria, and has the merit of offering a more vivid representation of the social dialectic than mere average income.

¹² Asian Development Bank, *Key Indicators for Asia and the Pacific: The Rise of Asia’s Middle Class*, Manila, 2010, p. 6. Martin Ravallion, World Bank, set a similar threshold, defining the *middle class* between \$730 and \$4,745 per year.

¹³ Daron Acemoglu e James A. Robinson, *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2006, pp. XII-XIII.

14. In real life, however, the shift of power from an authoritarian to a democratic form *is not* the transfer of power from the elite to citizens, but the way in which the elite can preserve its power (or at least most of its privileges) by other means. The political transition from authoritarian to democratic forms has never called the nature of the social system into question; on the contrary, when the social nature was really called into question, democracy played a major role in the defense of the system (the Assembly of Versailles vs. the Paris Commune in 1871; the Constituent Assembly vs. the Soviets in 1918; the Weimar Parliament vs. the workers' *Räte* in Germany in 1919, for example). It is predictable that, if the conflict continues in Tunisia or Egypt, the legitimacy of democratically elected parliaments will be opposed to the street as "not representative of the majority of the country" (the very same street which has brought down the previous autocrat.)

15. Often the transition to democracy does not even threaten the positions of those we might call the "physical elites," that is to say, those influential individuals and groups that occupied the same roles under the dictatorship as they do in a democracy. It is known, for example, that in the first decades of its existence, the Italian Republic worked primarily on the basis of codes, standards, institutions, administration, civil servants, and teachers created, recruited and trained under fascism; that all the major corporate structures continued on as before with nearly all the same CEOs, and that the policies in defence of small business and landowners, characteristic of the Mussolini period, were secured and perpetuated by De Gasperi's Christian Democrat governments¹⁴. It is true that sometimes a transition is accompanied by the settling of old scores and a redistribution of power and influence (as in post-Soviet Russia); but it is also true that when this type of activity takes place, it happens within the elite itself, without the involvement --if not indirect-- of the mass of the citizens.

16. According to Acemoğlu and Robinson, conflict is the first spark of democratic transitions. This conflict, however, is not between the elite and the citizens, but among different sectors of the elite. The elite are never a monolithic group; it always comprises different and competing interests. Recently, Francesco Sisci has defined the clash between state-owned and private enterprises in China as a major threat to "social and political cohesion" of the state. If China wants to solve its problems, says Sisci, Beijing must quickly prioritize democratization in conjunction with its privatization agenda, "which is the way to regulate and bring to the open the murky political jockeying." The purpose of democracy, Sisci continues, is precisely "about peacefully mediating power struggles (which exist in any political system) in an open, regulated manner that provides long-term stability... Hidden power struggles are dangerous and highly destabilizing."¹⁵

17. This argument is not new, but is often forgotten. Indeed, the ultimate liberal fashion

¹⁴ There is substantial literature on the subject, of which I tried to give my account in *The Failure of Italian Nationhood: The Geopolitics of a Troubled Identity*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2010, pp. 153-154.

¹⁵ Francesco Sisci, "Power bubbles are Hu's big challenge", *Asia Times*, May 6, 2011.

today consists precisely of considering democracy as a bulwark against the omnipotence of “markets” and “wealth.” Yet, nearly a century ago, one of history’s most notorious political thinkers wrote that “the omnipotence of ‘wealth’ is better secured in a democratic republic, is that it does not depend on the faulty political shell of capitalism.” And, in order to avoid any misunderstandings, the author added that democracy “is the best possible political shell for capitalism... [because] no change, either of persons, of institutions, or of parties” can bring it to a crisis¹⁶. In these lines, Lenin was just systemizing into a theoretical point of view the framework of “pure” experience of the American Republic, where a complex architecture of checks and balances had been established to regulate and mediate, the first moment they appeared, the diverse and often opposing interests of farmers, the urban bourgeoisie, southern plantation owners, and heterogeneous cities and states; precisely in order to avoid the scenario where these opposing interests and groups would degenerate into “dangerous and highly destabilizing” conflicts.

18. If the arguments of Sisci and Lenin (and de Tocqueville) are correct, we must deduce that the more stable a country is, the more it is democratic, and that, reciprocally, democratic institutions contribute to its stability. If 20th-century history is any indication, in clashes between democratic powers and authoritative powers, it is the democratic powers that emerge victorious. History also teaches us that “reverse waves” --the relapse into authoritarian forms of government mentioned by Huntington-- have always been the result of profound social and economic crises, *i.e.* the breaking of the social compromise (or contract) of a system of checks and balances on which the democratic system of controls and counterbalances is based. It teaches us, in short, that so-called “strong states” are in reality weak states, and that the most obvious indication of the capitalist health of a country resides in its reaching a democratic form of government.

V. The worst shell for capitalism?

19. Yet, in comparing India and China, Zakaria identifies some aspects that seem to contradict the arguments of “the best shell.” Even if “democracy may bring certain advantages for long-term development”, writes Zakaria, “autocratic governments are able to plan and execute major infrastructure projects with unrivaled efficiency.”¹⁷ Zakaria acknowledges that in India, democracy “means not the will of the majority, but the will of organized minorities -- landowners, powerful castes, rich farmers, government unions, [and] local thugs.”¹⁸ In spite of this, having to pass through the bottleneck of parliamentary procedures, the will of these “organized minorities” can only materialize with great difficulty. A senior member of the Indian government explained the reason for this: “We have to do many things that are politically popular but are foolish. They depress

¹⁶ Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, Synergy International of The America, Miami, 2007, p. 11.

¹⁷ *The Post-American World*, cit., p. 136.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

our long-term economic potential but politicians need votes in the short-term. China can take the long view.”¹⁹

20. At every latitude, the difficulty of accommodating the short-term interests of the voters with the long-term interests of the country is the main predicament faced by the people’s representatives. Very often, this difficulty is circumvented by putting the interests (and, often, the whims) of the electorate before the strategic interest of the country. One of the most eloquent examples of this phenomenon is immigration policy. The European Commissioner for Home Affairs, Cecilia Malmström, recently noted that in summit meetings, “almost all” of the EU’s Labour ministers talked about the need for an increasingly massive influx of immigrants to Europe, “hundreds of thousands, millions in the long-term.” However, when those same ministers publicly address national audiences, “this message is not to be heard at all.” “The need for immigrants -- Malmström concludes-- is hard to explain in a climate of high unemployment, riots in the streets, financial crisis and people in extreme difficulties.”²⁰ The result is that, in order to secure power, politicians consciously put in place immigration policies that, in the mid- and long-term, will prove disastrous to the core economic interests of their countries.

21. A second way to juggle the contradiction between electoral interests and strategic interests is the technique that one might call the “Gyurscány method.” The former Hungarian Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurscány (2004-2009) was caught saying that, to win elections, he had knowingly lied to Hungarian voters for years. This “doublespeak” is a quasi-structural element of political practice; by a bizarre convention, this common practice is not only known to all but is also accepted, on the condition that it never be openly acknowledged by the parties concerned. In 2002, Jacques Chirac, the incumbent candidate in the French presidential election, won re-election with a resounding 82.21% even though he was widely known by the moniker “*Super-Menteur*” (Super liar). Chirac is said to have created the aphorism that “electoral promises engage only those who believe them”; legend or not, this motto seems to fit his character perfectly, along with the character of many of his famous predecessors on the throne of the Elysée.

22. This is all deeply immoral, of course. But the people who have struggled, and continue to scramble, in the attempt to moralize parliamentary politics are very seldom successful. Some malicious people could even imply that the “moralization” project is part of the immense panoply of professional “doublespeakers.” If democracy has any efficacy (but not always)²¹ in limiting corruption, it undoubtedly has a multiplier effect on the “doublespeak;” an effect sometimes no less devastating than corruption itself.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 95.

²⁰ Tony Barber, “Fortress Europe: Immigration”, *Financial Times*, June 14, 2011.

²¹ According to Transparency International, not exactly democratic countries such as Singapore and Qatar would be less corrupt than France and the United States; Bahrain, Kuwait or Ghana less corrupt than Italy; China and Gambia less than Greece; and other democratic countries, such as India, Argentina, Mexico and the Philippines are ranked respectively at the 95th, 100th, 101st and 129th place of out 180 countries considered (Corruption Perceptions Index 2010, August 24, 2011).

23. Take, for example, the “doublespeak” about the topic being discussed here. Democracy is generally regarded as the aim (if not the end) of history, and all genuine democrats wish it for themselves and for the entire world. Reality, however, tells us that very often this desire is not accompanied by consistent attitudes. It is universally known, for instance, that the leading Western democracies were perfectly at ease with their various Arab satraps, and then, while jumping on the bandwagon of the anti-authoritarian uprising in Libya, they tacitly approved the Saudi tanks sent to Bahrain to crush the local protests. Again, many of those who claim today the incompatibility between Islam and democracy endorsed the coup against the winners of the Algerian elections in 1992, and reacted with dismay at the electoral success of Hamas in 2006, then subsequently applauded President Abbas when he got rid of the elected prime minister and replaced him with one of his Fatah subordinates. However, the episodes that have rocked the democratic boat most in recent months have occurred in the heart of the European process, where anathematized referendums and the removal of elected heads of government have taken place.

VI. Democratie ist Ramsch? (Democracy is Rubbish)

24. “Demokratie ist Ramsch” (Democracy is Rubbish) read the headline of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* when the Franco-German tandem unequivocally rejected Greek Prime Minister Georgios Papandreou’s idea to submit the financial stabilization plan imposed on Greece to a national referendum. “Whoever appeals to the people becomes a menace for Europe,” Frank Schirmacher, co-director of the newspaper noted bitterly.²² “The furious power struggle between the supremacy of the economy and the supremacy of politics,” continued Schirmacher, ended with the sacrifice “of the values and beliefs that Europe should embody.” Schirmacher’s surprised indignation, which was shared that day by hundreds of commentators, is surprising; in fact, it was not the first time that Europe short-circuited the will of the people in the name of *Realpolitik*. In 1993, the Danes, who voted against the Treaty of Maastricht in 1992, were sent back to the polls to vote on it again. Irish voters were asked twice, in 2002 and 2009, to correct the mistaken opinions expressed in referendums about the Nice and Lisbon Treaties in 2001 and 2008, respectively.

25. It is also surprising then that the eulogy of European democracy has been delivered only now, after many decades of commentators going hoarse repeating over and over that it is the unelected bureaucracies that truly rule the European Union. If put to the European Commission, supposing that they have real power, this charge would be mitigated because the commissioners undergo the scrutiny of the European Parliament and are designated by the member states’ national executives, which are, in turn, elected democratically. The charges made against the EU’s functionaries could easily be extended to those *grands commis* of the national ministries, which, in the implementation of government decisions, often have more decision-making power than the ministers

²² Frank Schirmacher, “Demokratie ist Ramsch”, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, November 1, 2011.

themselves. Paradoxically, the least targeted by these accusations is the least democratic and the most powerful of all the federal European bodies: the board of the Central Bank. Regardless, in no democratic country do the managers of the central banks occupy their positions by virtue of popular selection.

26. What is certain is that the speed of events and technology today tends today to amplify the time gap between movement in the economy and movement in politics. No European leader was elected in order to implement the measures and institutional changes that, in a couple of years, have profoundly changed the face of the European Union. Not only that, but those elected leaders who have, in one way or another, become an obstacle to the European integration process have been removed, by election (in Ireland, Portugal, Spain and Slovakia), or by a Europeanist *große Koalition* (Greece and Italy). In all of these cases -- and others will follow-- the principle is basically the same as that which was applied to Danish and Irish voters: the public is (or will be) invited to express themselves in a manner that best suits the needs of the European process; when there is a danger of lack of compliance, as could likely have happened in Greece, their place will be taken instead by a rubber stamp emergency government.

27. The reason is that the European Union represents a vital strategic interest for the different member countries. For France, it is the very condition necessary for its survival at the international level. For Germany, it is the very condition necessary to avoid finding itself once again in a situation similar to that of 1914 or 1939. For the other member states, clinging to the Franco-German duo means the opportunity to participate, even if in secondary roles, in the world's economic and political affairs. The federation of the euro is such that no member state can afford to disengage from the ongoing process, especially at this stage; and if voters are slow to understand it means that democracy has to wait for them to understand better. It is not, though, only the voters who are behind the times: politics in general remains ideologically structured around Cold War-era themes, and has trouble re-organizing itself around the theme of today's and tomorrow's politics: Europe. Warily, "right" and "left" political wings are, little by little, leaving room for large Europeanist coalitions, opposed to the nationalist currents, following the example of the 2005 French referendum about the European Constitution, or the German parliamentary vote about the European Financial Stability Facility.

28. The French referendum of 2005, which shelved the European Constitution, is a good example of how the political will and strategic interests of the ruling classes can be checked by democratic mechanisms. As long as they are Danish or Irish, voters can be sent to the polls again a year later; but when it comes to French, and presumably the Germans, this strategy is no longer possible. Actually, the risk of a "no" vote in France was dreaded even in 1992, when President Mitterrand suddenly revealed his long-hidden personal health issues. Shortly thereafter, a tight 51.04% vote in favor of the Treaty of Maastricht was extracted from a fundamentally royalist electorate. In this instance, Mitterrand's prostate played, in the destinies of France and the European Union, a role similar to that attributed by Blaise Pascal to the nose of Cleopatra for the destinies of Rome

(and “the whole face of the Earth”).

29. Obviously, there is not always a nose of Cleopatra available to captivate and bring to reason the unstable moods of the electorate. In 2005, for example, one was not found, and a long crisis began for the European Union. What is certain is that prior to the 2005 referendum, France’s leading politicians put a lot of energy, in front of the public, into attributing the country’s successes to themselves while attributing the country’s failures to the overbearing and villainous European bureaucratic class in Brussels. This cheeky use of electoral propaganda, which is usually called “populist,” has already born fruit, and this rhetoric, and others types, even more bitter, could arise in the future. In the not-too-distant past (1933), a democratic system was dismantled through democratic means. Clearly, nobody can exclude the possibility of another reverse wave arising in the face of an economic and social crisis of similar weight.

VII. The fourth wave

30. Presently, the media’s attention is fixated on the *fourth wave*, which is rising on the eastern and southern shores of the Mediterranean Sea. There are many considerations that one could discuss with regard to the half-hearted enthusiasm displayed by public opinion and democratic governments vis-à-vis the “Arab Spring.” But this would require another article. We will restrict ourselves here to see once more how the democratic game is accepted and even praised when the West’s favored side emerges victorious in an election or struggle; and vice versa considered a dangerous tool in the hands of “immature” peoples when the “correct” side is not chosen. Behavior, even though on a much smaller scale, that the Italians have grown accustomed to because of the parochial squabbles of the past fifteen years, with the noble race between the center-right and center-left voters over who was better able to debase the opposite political side: “morons,” the fans of the *Cavaliere*; more explicitly “*coglioni*” (“stupid pricks”), the voters of the center-left Democratic Party (with the result that, today, the votes of the “morons” and those of the “stupid pricks” are brought to the same Professor Monti’s Europeanist mill).

31. To conclude this discussion, we must quickly return to considerations pertaining to the relationship between economic growth and democratic trends. If, from the very long-term we move to a narrower time frame (fig. 2), we see: a) confirmation that economic expansion corresponds to a democratic expansion; b) that this parallel path is revealed only *as a last resort*, after passing through several stages, even quite long, of non-correspondence. In other words, through phases in which an expansionary cycle in the economy has not provoked the spread of democracy, or, conversely, a depressive cycle has been accompanied by the extension of democratic forms. In 1945, a decline in world output (the United States was experiencing a downturn of 12.7%) corresponded to an anomalous wave (Huntington’s second) of democratization. Alternatively, the strong economic growth of the 1950s and 1960s was accompanied by a spread of authoritarian regimes in Asia, Latin America, and Central and Eastern Europe. Finally, intense but steady development at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s corresponded to a sudden eruption

of new democracies.

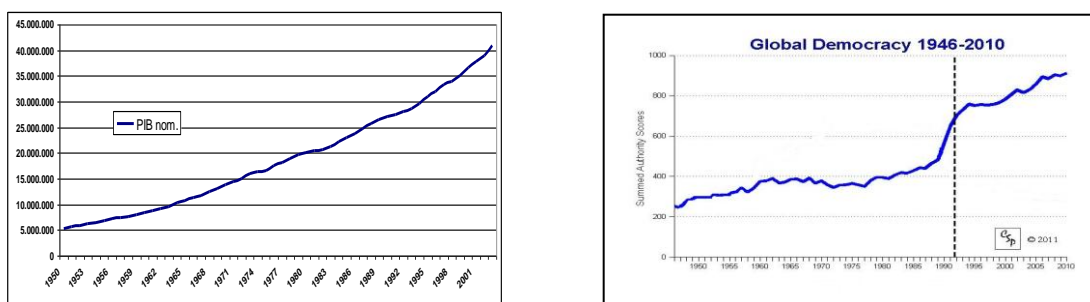


Fig. 2 Nominal GDP 1950-2003, Angus Maddison, op. cit. Global Democracy 1946-2010, Monty G. Marshall and Keith Jagers, op. cit.

32. The origin of this lack of correspondence can be found, in part, in macro-geopolitical phenomena: the rigid application of the *cuius regio eius religio* principle to the territories occupied by the Soviet Union and United States in 1945, the “Cold War,” and, in the 1980s, the USSR’s military-political failure to maintain control over its European empire. Today, again, we are faced with a clear phase of “non-correspondence,” with a dramatic slowdown in global economic growth occurring simultaneously with an explosion of a new “democratic spring.” We can try to draw some general conclusions that should necessarily be discussed and deepened.

33. The processes of democratization are generally triggered by the need of emerging social groups to represent their interests politically. “No taxation without representation,” the slogan of the “first wave,” summarizes this principle. Incidentally, both Huntington and Zakaria have noted that the major Oil-producing countries are an exception to the rule of correspondence between income and democracy.²³ This is not only because the proceeds of oil production are distributed very unequally, and in general give rise to a shrivelled and corruptible middle class; but also because the oil production industry, in many producing countries, occupies nearly the entire spectrum of production activities, leaving little room for other sectors and interests to gain a foothold. Still, other sectors and interests will inevitably arise, grow, and assert themselves, to the point of requiring, at a given time, a *representation* equal to their *taxation*.

34. It is inconceivable, however, that all these new sectors come to the same degree of maturity in different countries at the same time. The synchronicity of democratic claims in Central and Eastern European countries in 1989, and in Arab countries today, implies the existence of other factors. Certainly, Huntington’s “snowball” effect is a plausible factor but this effect requires there to be a beginning somewhere. Probably, the most decisive factor is a change in the international system, a shift of geopolitical weights that, when it reaches a certain *a priori* unpredictable limit, “frees” some more or less Long-withheld tendencies and forces. This was the case with the USSR crisis in 1989. It seems to be the case today, with the weakening of the United States and Europe, and the simultaneous rapid rise of “emerging” countries (which, in fact, emerged long ago). America’s

²³ *The Third Wave*, cit., p. 59. *The Post-American World*, cit., p. 102.

difficulties in Iraq and Afghanistan, the stalemate of the European process since 2005, and the 2008 financial crisis have accelerated this movement.

35. From the point of view of the new “emerging” powers, things are clear. “The regional tectonic shift,” wrote the *People’s Daily* last April in reference to the Arab Spring, “has nothing to do with the ‘awakening awareness of democracy,’ but more likely is the fallout of the geopolitical devastation triggered by financial crisis.”²⁴ Beyond the fact that a democratic demand was made, however, the coincidence between this and the “geopolitical devastation” is more than plausible. The Arab countries, first frozen by the Cold War, then by American interventionism, are adapting themselves to the political possibility, now more ample than ever, of diversifying their international relations, court new strategic partners, and even find new protectors. In other words: political and economic pluralism at international level empowers internal political and economic pluralism.

36. The United States and, perhaps, Europe will still retain considerable influence for many years; but their voice is no longer the only one, and those of the others will be heard ever more strongly as time passes. This shift of power may cause unpredictable reactions. It is known that the clash and combination of different political wills produces a final outcome that does not correspond to any initially intended purpose; the disorientation produced by an unprecedented context may produce a sort of entropy of political wills that is out of control. For the old Western powers, strategic goals could be permanently sacrificed to the “electoralist” logic: Greek (or Italian, or French) voters, if persuaded that Europe is the origin of their problems could, in the relatively near future, provide parliamentary majorities to royalists, isolationist, or protectionist coalitions. American voters, if persuaded that China and India are the source of their problems, could react similarly. Thus, while the younger powers discover that democracy is the “best shell” for their development, the old powers could transform it into the “worst.” The old powers could even be forced to put democracy aside in order to save democracy. Once again, unequal economic development would correspond, as a last resort, to uneven political development. Consequently, the geopolitical map of the world would be devastated.

²⁴ Li Hongmei, “Play the Middle East Card Subtly and Deftly”, *People’s Daily Online*, April 13, 2011.