

EU AND DEMOCRACY – INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL CHALLENGES **(15-minute introductory remarks)**

There are some concepts in political science which are subject to such varying interpretations, that any discussion encompassing them is usually controversial and generally highly charged. I daresay that 'Democracy' is one such subject. Let me therefore take a moment at the outset to define my understanding of the concept which I believe that we are seeking to discuss this evening.

Certainly, we are not seeking to debate the EU's policy on democracy in relation to any particular form of government, for across the spectrum of governance structures, there are elements of democratization which, in the view of the respective political administrations, adequately uphold the rights of citizens in any given sphere of political, economic or social activity.

What I believe therefore that we need to be examining is how the EC and its member states treat with certain principles of governance, particularly democratic principles, that have assumed priority importance as common criteria in EU external policy . Most specifically I should like to consider how those democratic principles impinge on the EU's political engagement and development cooperation with third countries.

Since I represent one of the countries which maintain a partnership with the European Union, through the Cotonou Agreement, let me use that parameter as a point of departure for our discussion. First of all let us not forget that the Cotonou Agreement is a partnership agreement between the European Community and its member states on the one part and the Group of African Caribbean and Pacific states on the other part. What is the significance of that partnership arrangement? It means that there is an inherent right to equality in the application of the provisions of the agreement. In other words, each Party has as much right to expect adherence by the other Party to any principle to which they have mutually agreed, as Partners.

Let us consider more specifically what the partners have agreed to with respect to democratic principles. The Political Dimension of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement provides for cooperation on a range of issues including democratic principles and it further identifies those issues as essential criteria for sustainable development. If we are to follow the text faithfully, it reads:

'The Parties reaffirm that democratization, development and the protection of fundamental human rights are interrelated and mutually reinforcing'.

The text defines democratic principles as:

'universally recognized principles underpinning the organization of the State to ensure the legitimacy of its authority, the legality of its actions reflected in its constitutional, legislative and regulatory system and the

existence of participatory mechanisms. On the basis of universally recognized principles, each country develops its democratic culture'.

Certainly, we cannot take issue with that kind of agreement, which establishes a reasonable framework for engagement between the Parties. However, myriad questions arise in the process of implementation of the partnership agreement. If I might raise a few of the most obvious ones:

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- Are the democratic principles underscored by the EU imperative for the achievement of global development objectives?
- Does the EU fully appreciate the extent to which cultural diversity impinges on the process of democratization in individual states?
- Is the EU consistent in its insistence on the observance of democratic principles in all partnerships?
- Finally, are partners demanding of the EU what it demands of them?

Let me seek to make some initial remarks regarding each of those four questions:

1. Firstly: **Are democratic principles essential for development?** I am sure that we can cite multiple examples of states where development has been steadily taking place in a context where democratic ideals have not been fully observed. These include the democratic ideals of justice, truth, equality, diversity, the right to life and liberty, common good and popular sovereignty. I use the term 'democratic ideals' quite decidedly, because there is no country that can claim to have fully adhered to all of those principles. After all we live in imperfect societies governed by fallible people and institutions.

With specific reference to the Cotonou Partnership Agreement it must be acknowledged that the democratic principles under reference were mutually agreed by the parties and were not unilaterally imposed by the EU, even though the negotiating process indicated that those concepts were initially introduced into the text by EU member states. Moreover, those principles are not confined to the relationship between the EU and the ACP Group but also to both Parties and their respective relationship – collectively and individually – with the rest of the world. Indeed Cotonou agrees, inter alia that:

'... democratic principles ...which underpin the ACP-EU Partnership, shall underpin the domestic and international policies of the Parties and constitute the essential elements of the Agreement.'

The topic of our debate this evening, however, presupposes that there is an inordinate emphasis by the EU on the observance of democratic principles in comparison to the level of significance which the international community accords to democracy in the relations amongst countries globally. Clearly there are governments and international organizations which subscribe to the view

that development is a pre-requisite to democracy and not the converse. It seems to me therefore that the challenge for the EU and indeed the rest of the world is to find the right balance in the quest for the achievement of sustainable development, without prejudice to the ongoing pursuit of democratic principles.

2. The second issue worth considering is: **How much flexibility is the EU prepared to exercise in respect of democratic cultural diversity?** Certainly, the gradual expansion of the EU over half a century to its current membership of 27 member states will have been a lesson in itself of democratic diversities. Within that diversity, there is a increasing level of new political thought, as the baton passes from one generation to another. We can certainly cite instances within the EU where many of the democratic ideals are flaunted – in respect of various forms of discrimination and exclusiveness, to name but a few – but where the imposition of any kind of sanctions against the offending states would have proven inimical to the Union’s long term interests of increased policy coherence and integration.

Similarly, if the European Union were to seek to impose a ‘one type suits all’ approach to democracy, then there would be virtually little opportunity for the Community and its member states to engage with any country or politically integrated entity which does not maintain a system of government which is a carbon copy of their own.

It is essential therefore that in partnering with other countries, the EU first seeks to develop a better appreciation of the cultural diversity which drives the process of democratization in those countries. In fact, by virtue of significant social and economic development within the framework of their own brand of democratization which is often opposed to the democratic ideals of the EU, countries have managed to command the attention of the EU as those countries assume new leadership roles in the global financial and economic environment. Indeed, the current global challenges precipitated largely by the economic downturn in the United States and Europe will be a singular opportunity to test how countries with a different brand of democracy fare during the ensuing months.

By and large the democratic principles pursued by my own Government coincide with those of the EU. One longstanding point of controversy however is the EU’s insistence on amendments to national legislation governing homosexuality. In that regard, individual EU member states have periodically suggested the possible curtailment of development aid, but successive Jamaican Governments, supported by popular opinion on the issue, have determined that they will not yield to that demand, not even on the threat of withdrawal of development assistance. Apart from that single issue, which is driven by the prevailing democratic culture in Jamaica, the country enjoys excellent relations with EU partners. The question arises therefore: will the EU throw out the baby with the bathwater?

3. Thirdly, emerging global developments outside of the primary control of the European Union beg the question as to whether **the Community and its**

member states do set aside some of the democratic ideals, in the context of certain strategic or economic interests that may emerge at any given point in time? Surely, we have seen the EU develop strategic and economic relations with countries whose democratic records falls short of EU expectations.

I think, however, that the European Union and other industrialized countries have had to pause and reflect on how countries from different democratic cultures have managed to form formidable political and economic alliances with other countries. Some of those emerging relationships pose significant threats to partnerships which the EU had always regarded as sacred, by virtue of being enshrined in commonly agreed democratic principles. While our debate this evening should not seek to focus on specific relationships, the ever increasing bonds of friendship and cooperation between China and developing countries around the world has certainly not escaped the attention of the EU. South-South cooperation therefore represents a dichotomy which places development cooperation at the axis of relations amongst that group of countries.

The fact is that in developing countries such as those in the ACP Group development goals supersede ideals and many countries feel obliged to reposition democratic principles in the pecking order of priorities. The international community must face the reality that while Development Goals cannot be put on hold, the evolution of some democratic principles may need to be predicated on the attainment of those goals, without prejudice, of course, to our long-term commitment to democratic ideals. In the current volatile political and economic environment, the EU may therefore need to review its priorities in the common good. The EU does not need to compromise its principles; it simply needs to adopt a spirit of compromise in its engagement with partners, particularly those from the developing world.

4. My final question is directed to the partners of the European Union. **Are partners seeking to ensure accountability on the part of the European Union in respect of principles to which they have mutually agreed?** Let me revert to the provisions of the ACP-EU Cotonou Partnership Agreement in that regard. There are clearly defined guidelines for dialogue between the Parties on a range of issues including the promotion of human rights, support for the process of democratization, consolidation of the rule of law and good governance. Of course by virtue of the differences in the stages of development between the ACP Group of States and the EU member states, the agreement makes provision for the European Community to provide support to the ACP states to undertake political, institutional and legal reforms as well as for building capacity in those areas within the public sector and civil society.

It is worth noting, however, that the difference in development status and the attendant development aid which accrues to the ACP states, does not impinge in any way on the fundamental principle of equal partnership, having regard to right of the ACP states to insist that the EU takes the same measures to ensure the exercise of democratic principles in the process of providing development assistance. In other words, the ACP countries have every right to expect the EU

to adopt a spirit of fair play in negotiating trade agreements as a means to development; they have a right to expect the exercise of principles of good governance in the disbursement and management of aid resources and they have a right to expect all members of the European Union to uphold the same democratic principles which they demand of partners.

The truth is that in the ACP-EU partnership, not unlike most partnerships between developed and developing countries, it is usually the developed partner that takes the initiative to seek to define and direct the course of the relationship. With respect to Political Dialogue which ensues between the Parties under Articles 8 or 9 of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement or in instances where the Parties have taken recourse to more rigorous dialogue under Articles 96 and 96 of the Agreement, it has always been the EU that has initiated the request for such dialogue. It may therefore be time for the ACP Group and other partners to begin to assume a more assertive role in the partnership and to take greater initiative in exercising their authority as equal partners in such arrangements.

With that I can conclude in saying therefore that we must not lay blame for the challenges related to the pursuit of democracy solely at the feet of the European Union. Indeed, in the new era of dynamism in the global environment, the ball may very be in the court of partners, including the ACP partners and it is time that we seek to bounce it back in an attempt to maintain the balance in the democratic cultures that define the relationship between the Parties.

I trust that these initial observations will serve as a springboard for some further discussion on the variables relating to the EU's application of democratic principles in its external relations policy.