

## The Democratic Multilateralism's Urgency

(*El País*, March, 17, 2012)

On February 29, in this same newspaper, there was an editorial entitled "Syria: No Solution. Al Assad's regime steps up repression under the powerless gaze of the international community". In view of the complexity of the conflict –including *intra* religious conflicts- and the ineffectiveness of the Western powers, the Arab League and the UN have appointed former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan as special envoy to Syria. But the effectiveness of this excellent choice is limited by the lack of the required unanimity, since Russia and China don't believe in the possibility of overthrowing Al Assad in favor of the mixed "Free Army".

Yes, the first priority is to effectively address the grisly situation in Syria. As I have already underscored on various occasions, it will be necessary to call an urgent extraordinary session of the United Nations General Assembly to unanimously appoint a representative as sole negotiator who, as spokesperson for the entire world, would be able to put a halt to this enormous bloodshed, and to adopt subsequent measures to pacify the situation with a system of genuine public liberties.

And the same applies to similar emergency situations, such as those in Somalia, Iran, Libya...

In this same extraordinary session the decision would be taken to initiate a "re-founding" of the United Nations based on: 1) a General Assembly in which 50% of the representatives would be from Member States while, in order to fulfill the "We, the Peoples" of the UN Charter, the other 50% would be representatives from civil society, both from institutions and those who would be expressly elected; 2) a Social and Economic Security Council and an Environmental Security Council would be added to the present Security Council.

In any case, votes would be weighted and there would be no veto powers, which presently prevent democratic process from prevailing in this great multilateral organization.

In addition to the aforementioned institutions, there would be an International Court of Justice with new rules and guidelines, incorporating all of the present international courts within a sufficiently agile and efficient framework.

Similarly, all multilateral institutions would eliminate their anti-democratic practices, such as the unanimity required in the European Union.

Multilateralism is particularly urgent because globalization has only enriched the 20% of mankind that lives in the most prosperous neighborhood of our global village. The other 80%, in a progressive state of deprivation, live in such precarious conditions that (and I will never tire of repeating this, because this is truly a problem of conscience) over 60,000 people die each day from hunger, in a genocide of neglect and abandonment. As was to be expected, we have witnessed the failure of the G-6, G-7, G-8,... groups of plutocrats that neo-liberalism put in charge during the 1980s while alienating the United Nations System, and we still don't know the full impact that this failure will have.

The G-20 was formed in 1998 to address the Asian crisis, being limited to a forum for ministers of the economy. Although President Obama had already been elected, the G-20 later was revived by George Bush in November, 2008 to remedy the failure of the United States' major financial institutions. What has become clear in the interim is that the G-20 is not representative of anything (only wealthy countries are members) and that it has proved totally incompetent to regulate finances and eliminate tax havens, two of the solemn promises that they made when they demanded colossal amounts of money to rescue failing banks. The IMF, the Financial Stability Forum, the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision... are all now accountable to the G-20, as was agreed in the Pittsburgh Summit. But the G-20 has not been able to address the great challenges it has faced, since it lacks a permanent secretariat and the necessary structures and has, in effect, been placed at the service of the most powerful nations.

Consequently, in the future global economic coordination should be entrusted worldwide to entities controlled by the Social and Economic Security Council mentioned above.

As for security matters, everyone agrees that it is urgent to expand the concept of security, which is presently limited to terms of defense and military capacity. This would include a *social security*, encompassing energy security, climate security, security vis-à-vis natural or man-made disasters and, certainly, territorial security. It is immoral to see the latest military hardware being sold to countries that are practically in economic bankruptcy or that live below the poverty line. Investing 4,000 million dollars daily in military spending and weapons is truly a provocation to which we have unfortunately grown quite accustomed.

I have also referred to an Environmental Security Council, because it is truly a lack of responsibility toward future generations to shirk the difficult tasks that we must perform so that the legacy that we leave to those who follow in our footsteps will not endanger the habitability of our planet. In the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit we must demand that special attention be given to the health of our environment. If not, this should warrant a formidable mobilization of all of the world's youth, both in person and in cyberspace, to demand attention for what is crucial for the future of humanity.

Democratic principles have been replaced by the rules of the marketplace. And now the newly-rescued markets are hounding their impoverished rescuers. Europe has reached an extreme in which the "great domain" is appointing governments without elections. And to top it all, this has been done in Greece and Italy, both cradles and symbols of democracy. Between the markets and their rating agencies, we've gone from bad to worse.

"Europe risks a democratic reversal", declared European Commissioner for Justice Viviane Reding in early March. Europe is still determined to treat its symptoms rather than its illness by solely applying austerity measures and "untouchable" debt reduction goals, coupled with enormous military spending and a system of alliances with the United States (NATO) that should have been revised and updated long ago when the Warsaw Pact disbanded.

In previous articles I underscored that in contrast to the European Union's incapacity to create a fiscal federation (issuing euros to stimulate job creation, such as Eurobonds or Euro credits), in a very few months Obama achieved medical care for over 30 million Americans (and that, without a single Republican vote in favor); he has taken significant steps toward nuclear disarmament and, what should particularly be emphasized, he has ordered the Pentagon to commence reducing military spending and arms purchases by a third, having likewise issued 300,000 million dollars to stimulate small and medium-size enterprises and, above all, for large public investments.

Can there be anything less democratic and inefficient than having to adopt decisions by unanimity, as is the case in the European Union? And in other respects, some of the members of the European Parliament were elected in countries in which voter turnout was less than 20%. It's clear that in the future a minimum voter participation rate of 51% should be required.

Democracy will no longer be limited to voting in elections every three, four or five years. The internet revolution with its capacity for distance participation will mark a turning point in history. Peaceful popular mobilization, with more proposals than protests, will permit changes in many of our present tendencies.

It's clear that the present situation requires rapid conceptual and structural changes. It is now the moment to proclaim a Universal Declaration of Democracy, the sole context in which Human Rights can be fully implemented.

Only then can the great pending transitions be made: from an economy of speculation, de-localization and war to an economy of sustainable global development; from a culture of imposition, domination and violence to a culture of engagement, dialogue, conciliation, alliance and peace.

Federico Mayor Zaragoza

March 17, 2012