



# Accountability

in Politics

2015

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# Accountability in Politics

## Preface

The European Liberal Forum (ELF), as the umbrella foundation of liberal institutes, think tanks and political foundations in Europe, has as its core issues strengthening democracy and rule of law all over Europe.

„Europe“ - today - is synonymously for the European Union. But Europe encompasses more states than the Union. For, we liberals of Europe should all share the same principal ideas. This means more than legitimization of power of governments through elections. In modern democracies, decision makers have to accept a daily control over their work by civil society, which is watching their measures, their behavior in power and their attitude towards the public. Democracy today must not be reduced to parliamentary elections. It requires a lot to make the control of the authorized persons effective. Free media and transparency are ensuring that the citizens are well informed.

A cornerstone within this system is the individual responsibility of the elected, which requires accountability in politics. Accountability is leading to this responsibility and helps prevent the misuse of power by the elected rulers. Corrupt behavior disrespects accountability to law. People are right to have a strong mistrust of such politicians. We know that corruption damages everybody.

Corrupt leaders often refer to their power and its legitimization by elections. Functioning civil society can ensure that democracy is not limited to formal procedures. Establishing a common sense of accountability in politics is a major step in fighting corruption. That is why this principle is so important to all democratic societies. Civil society brings the entitled representatives to accountability through many different means - free media, open and transparent government procedures, parliamentary committees or inquiries and, at last, through assistance of a functioning penal prosecution.

There cannot be any trustworthiness of institutions without accountability to law of the people in power.

The European Union has to address this principle of accountability and ensure that the issue is not forgotten amid various problems of day to day politics. That is why ELF and other liberal institutions are encouraging people to demand accountability in politics.

Today, with this publication, I am proud to present the outcome of a series of congresses, seminars or other events dedicated to the issue of accountability in politics, organized by the European Liberal Forum with the support of Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom.

Dr. Jürgen Martens

Vice President of ELF

## Political legitimacy – the power of information



Opening Conference in Belgrade, May 27, 2015

*Introduction by Charles du Vinage, FNF Project Director for the Western Balkans*

We came to ask for accountability in politics because it is a topic gaining more and more weight. Have you read the news today? We seem to live in a world of conflicts, not just distant ones but conflicts on our doorsteps or in our backyard. Media, so it seems, display a firework of ongoing and unresolved problems and we as a reader or an observer don't know where to look first. It appears that this is intentionally done. To a certain degree I can understand prime ministers eagerly spreading the good news: everything will be fine. But at the same time these people blame the media for not reporting (enough) the success stories but looking exclusively on estimated failures of governments.

For the media it is an ungrateful job. As a journalist you might have your ethics for reporting as investigative as possible, but you have your family as well. And you'd like to stay with the newspaper or the radio or TV because it generates monthly income. This gives you guarantees for your future. Who wants to lose his job because of his convictions? This is no ironic comment of mine. As a journalist you write or report about topics which your newspaper editorial board asks you for. Still there may be a lot of stories you would be interested in but you get the clear message that this kind of news is not wished for. Because of economic dependency media can be easily instrumentalised. But who really believes that what the media is writing or reporting is true? Less and less people.

The benefactors of using the media are – so it seems – the politicians. There are conflicts – ethnic or social ones either at the fringes of their own country or in a neighbouring country (Macedonia is a good example). In case people focus on these conflicts they are diverted from everyday problems: more pension cuts, rising poverty, bad education and gloomy future prospects. Oh yes, I forgot one thing: as in my country, the politicians in our countries too promise their voters a fight against corruption, more job opportunities, more child care and, generally, more wealth. But in order to keep these high stake promises they have to adopt and implement reforms. After gaining victory they are hesitant to do so: their electorate seems likely to be the target group for the reforms promised. Taking away privileges might result in protests. It might result in not being re-elected next time. But this is what politics is really about: to gain power in order to implement reforms not for your personal benefit but for the biggest possible group of citizens.

Is it so difficult to put yourself into the shoes of a politician in one of the Western Balkan countries who wants to stay in power? What we observe is that the longer politicians stay in power the more they are afraid of the people they rule. There are number of reasons for that. One is that politicians who stay for quite some time in power in a transition democracy enrich themselves. Since they are or they became part of a political elite which is often linked to organised crime, they fear that losing elections would put them into jeopardy. A new elite might use the media – again – in order to reveal this politician's link to organised crime, to prove his involvement in corruption, etc. As a consequence he might be brought to court. So he does everything in his might to stay in power in order not to lose his immunity and influence.

But from time to time people get fed up with the existing government, as it happened in Bosnia last year or as it currently happens in Macedonia. What do presidents or prime ministers do when they cannot brand the protesters as terrorists? Right you are, they look for a victim: a minister or the head of the intelligence service. Skillfully, media is used to divert attention from his personality to others. And if the entire government comes under threat, then any conflict comes in handy. Don't take it amiss: this is nothing particular for the countries of the Western Balkans, but could be met as well in Western democracies. But in established democracies media play a more independent role due to their ownership structure, the parliament is able to establish caucuses for inquiry into things and CSOs pinpoint the abuse of power.

This is no reason to be desperate. On the contrary: it is our responsibility to stick to our partners in these countries. With the German taxpayers' money we are accountable for, we should establish new lines of communication between politics and civil society. We should promote politicians who want to make a change to the existing practice. A free media is essential for any free and modern society. Together we have a chance for change – thank you for your attention!

## **NGOs as a part of accountability chain in Serbian politics**

*by Irena Djuric, political analyst*

### INTRODUCTION

At the heart of good governance are the ideas of accountability, transparency and participation. These ideas have grown in popularity after democratic changes in 2000; hence it could be said that the concept of accountability is relatively new in Serbia. Accountability has different meaning in different political systems, but in general “by accountability is meant the imperative to make public officials answerable for their behavior and responsive to the entity from which they derive their authority. Accountability also means establishing criteria to measure the performance of public officials, as well as oversight mechanisms to ensure that standards are met.” Advocating for greater accountability in Serbian politics has mainly been a task of NGOs and international organizations. On the contrary, politicians have always circumvented discussions about accountability and have successfully avoided consequences for unresponsiveness, violation of laws and poor results of their policies. The issues I would like to address here are the role of NGOs in the accountability chain and readiness of Serbia’s civil society to participate in politics.

### WHO IS ACCOUNTABLE TO WHOM IN SERBIAN POLITICS?

“Public sector accountability can be thought of as a linked chain of participants each with unique accountability functions.” The roles and inter-relationship of these participants need to be clearly defined within the political system that strives to be accountable.

Citizens are at the highest level of the accountability chain in Serbia and all authorities are accountable to the citizens. “Genuine elections – no matter how free and fair – are insufficient in ensuring that elected officials are accountable and responsive to citizens.” Therefore, citizens need to participate in political processes between elections and parliaments are citizens’ institutions that should initiate and enable participation. “As the representative branches of democratic governments, parliaments are meant to provide citizens with links to the policy-making process and with methods of holding the executive branch to account.”

While the Government is accountable to the Parliament, on the bottom of this structure are various public bodies, agencies, etc, to which the Government assigns power and responsibilities through regulations and policies. Independent bodies working together with the Parliament on the oversight function play an important role in the chain of accountability.

“Participants can discharge their accountability functions effectively only if they know to whom they are accountable and for what. Likewise, they can hold others accountable only if they understand who is accountable to them and for what.” In Serbian political practice, public officials do not have understanding of these matters or they try to avoid responsibilities. Only at the highest level – Government towards Parliament - participants are familiar with their accountability functions, while at the lower level it is not always clear to whom exactly different bodies are accountable. Moreover, in aspiring democracy as Serbian is, the government does not consider its accountability to be a duty, but rather

amatter of good will. For this reason, the Parliament does not have genuine power to control the executive branch.

Finally, policy development, which is important to effective accountability, is at the beginning stage in Serbia. The fact is that objectives are broad at the highest level in the chain of accountability and more specific at the lowest level, but participants do not have defined clear objectives as the expectation of what should be achieved. Consequently, citizens do not know what to expect from their representatives. Besides clearly defined objectives, each participant need be delegated authority, and financial, physical and human resources, in order to achieve its objectives effectively and efficiently. “The delegation of resources and authority should be matched by an appropriate requirement to report and account for its use”. All the information provided through reports of public services need be verified by the parliament and thus proved credible and reliable.

Accountability in Serbia is understood in its traditional meaning, as compliance-based accountability – responsibility for obeying rules and following procedures, while it is rarely comprehended as performance-based accountability – responsibility for achieving objectives, informing the public about activities and providing information on objectives and results. In a country with undeveloped political culture and weak rule of law, it is hard to expect that public officials felt responsibility for broken election promises or for unachieved objectives.

Additionally, it is hard to say that accountability in Serbian political system truly exists, because judgment and sanction - penalties or rewards – do not operate for the actions of the authorities. For the systems in which accountability is appreciated as a genuine value, it is crucial that good acts are rewarded and wrongful acts discouraged. “At the highest level, the community exercises its judgment of parliamentary representatives at the periodic elections. At the parliamentary level there are variety of ways in which the actions of Ministers, officials and public bodies can be scrutinized. These include the Parliamentary Question Time, the committee stage in debate on bills and the committee system itself.”

#### THE ROLE OF SERBIAN NGOs

In recent years, the number of Serbian NGOs dealing with the accountability, transparency and participation has increased significantly. By focusing on these issues, NGOs act as a link between citizens and government structures, thus representing a vital part of the accountability chain. A strong, independent and well organized civil society plays an important role in holding government in account and in increasing transparency and citizen participation. In many cases, NGOs have generated new ideas that have subsequently become a core part of the Government’s agenda in the field of good governance. Much of their inspiration has been drawn from international declarations and good practices in other countries, while some priorities were initiated by international organizations which have established their missions to Serbia.

Even though effective civil society is based on independence from the state, it is important that government and NGOs cooperate. It is always a challenge for the NGOs, particularly those in countries still undergoing a transition to democracy, to decide if they should only criticize government or they would act like a partner that could offer expertise. In the public sector, NGOs and authorities have some common goals and NGOs work with, or for, governments in order to achieve those goals. Mechanisms for cooperation may vary, but the most common ones are negotiated agreements on participation, access to information, consultation or public funding.

For instance, the Center for Research, Transparency and Accountability (CRTA), an organization for which I used to work, has signed Memorandum of Cooperation with the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia. This official cooperation enables access to parliamentary data and firmer cooperation with MPs and parliamentary staff members on empowering Parliament’s capacities and citizen engagement. Furthermore, Serbian NGOs have launched various joint initiatives towards the Parliament

with the purpose of changing legislature, establishing strong mechanisms of control over executive power, or connecting citizens with the Parliament. I had an opportunity to hold consultative meetings with representatives of 30 NGOs, aimed at finding the joint approach for strengthening the scrutinizing role of the Parliament and involving those organizations in the work of Parliament's committees. Many organizations dealing with accountability in Serbia are oriented toward cooperation with the Parliament. This is somehow expected, since the Parliament is more open for citizen participation than the executive branch.

From my professional experience and on the basis of cooperation with the most significant NGOs in Serbia, I could conclude that representatives of civil society devoted special attention to several issues which could lead to effective public sector accountability.

#### 1. Transparency and Accountability

Transparency and accountability are inseparably connected. Information is essential to effective accountability and many NGOs' projects are based on the idea that data should be freely available for everyone to access, use, as well as republish without restrictions. If public officials are ready to publish information on their work, they will act accountably. On the other hand, publishing of these data has proven to be very important for holding politicians in account. When public officials are aware of the fact that all information are recorded and published, and that citizens follow their work, they will be more cautious in giving promises or making statements.

For example, my former organization (CRTA), implements two projects, one of which is the Truth-Meter, focused on accountability and assessment of public officials' statements and promises, while the other is the Open Parliament, related to the parliamentary transparency and openness. Journalists involved in the Truth-Meter project use the Open Parliament website as a reliable source of politicians' statements. Open Parliament website is a unique digital tool that enables citizens, media, NGOs and politicians to find relevant and up-to-date parliamentary information, as well as to communicate with the MPs. An overall project goal is achieving a complete parliamentary openness that "enables citizens to be informed about the work of parliament, empowers citizens to engage in the legislative process, allows citizens to hold parliamentarians to account and ensures that citizens' interests are represented." Establishing effective and efficient representative body will put more power in the hands of the parliament, required in order to control the work of the executive branch and the implementation of laws.

In the field of transparency, the main focus of Serbian organizations is to initiate a switch from reactive disclosure of information – whereby information need to be requested in order to be disclosed - to proactive disclosure whereby information is published before it is requested.

Furthermore, organizations in Serbia find fiscal transparency and accountability for all public expenditures to be essential issues. Budgets are the link between policy design and policy implementation, and citizens have a right to be informed about what the Government spends their money for. Moreover, they should have access to Citizens' Budgets – budget reports presented in a manner understandable to the citizens – as well as to legislative discussions on budget. "Fiscal transparency allows for better-informed debate by both policymakers and the public about the design and results of fiscal policy, and establishes accountability for its implementation." The results that NGOs and donors' community have achieved through various fiscal transparency projects are insignificant; despite great efforts they have put in project implementation. The situation is not surprising, particularly because information on money spending is connected to one of the major problems facing Serbian society, and that is the ubiquitous corruption.

#### 2. Citizens' engagement and Accountability

Citizen engagement is a vital link between transparency and accountability. Citizens' input is valuable for decision-making. It provides public officials with a public support required for effective public policy implementation. If citizens participate, they will be able to control the government's work and they will

have more trust in their government. It is not enough if citizens are engaged with the government only through periodic elections. Citizen engagement between elections enhances democracy, political legitimacy and implementation of policies. Furthermore, active citizens will use the power of information and benefit from it if they have free access to institutions' and organizations' data and reports. They do not always need media interpretations as a source of information, but they can find reliable information from direct sources. Therefore, it is significant that NGOs promote the utilization of new technologies designed to foster citizens' participation. Digital tools, such as: specialized web platforms, social media, or the institutions' websites, represent a place for publishing information and a channel of communication between decision-makers and citizens. A good example of interactive and fast communication between citizens and their representatives is 'Ask the MP' section on the Open Parliament website, through which citizens can ask questions or advocate different initiatives.

In the end, important elements of holding government in account are policy monitoring and evaluation. NGOs in Serbia are not successful in developing tools, frameworks, methodologies, ratings and indexes for assessing the quality of governance and the policy effectiveness. An improvement in this field would lead to understanding accountability not only as a respect for the rules but also as a responsibility for the results.

Sources:

<http://www.acag.org.au/epsa.htm>

<http://www.opengovguide.com/>

## **Censorship in Serbia: between the myth and journalistic courage**

How the absence of professional courage and solidarity provides fertile ground for censorship in Serbia and where does it lead

*by Slobodan Georgiev, Balkan Investigative Regional Network*

We spent a whole year discussing if there is any form of censorship within Serbian media market, and the mainstream of public understanding is that there is no censorship, but there is a perception of censorship and a strong belief that there is a sort of self-censorship.

So, what is the problem then and who is responsible for that "perception"? And, at the end, is it possible to have self-censorship without censorship? These are the questions that are the biggest burden on the weak media shoulders in Serbia, on media that are trying to survive and to save some of their respect among the public.

The EU progress report in 2014 showed that officials in Brussels had identified a problem, but when the report was presented in Belgrade last autumn our Prime Minister Mr. Vucic said that he wanted to see the evidence that he or his political party were in control of the media in Serbia.

"Show me the proof" he said. "Do you really think that I'm calling the editors and journalists asking to publish or not to publish something?" he rhetorically asked. The debate moved from the examples of controlled media content towards personal relationship between Mr. Vucic and media.

But, that is not the problem. It's been normal in democratic states that a journalist or editor had relationships with different sources. It is good for them to have important people in their address book. If you want to work as a journalist, your potential employer will ask you if you had any sources who you knew, because those contacts could supply you with "the news". So, the debate on personal relationship between Mr. Vucic and the media is not a debate on the freedom of expression.

Where's the problem, then?

The main problem - in my opinion, based on off-the-record interviews with journalists from different media – is their attitude towards Serbian ruling party when they prepare their talk shows or features.

If someone has a talk show at a TV station, he first calls Mr. Vucic's cabinet to determine who's going to come from that "side", because it's been necessary to have had a representative from the strongest party. After the cabinet decides who's going to represent them, the journalist is obliged to disclose who else is going to participate in the show. If some of the others are not "in the line" with the ruling party, it shall not provide the TV station with a representative.

We have got two things here: firstly, unofficial regulation towards production of TV debates – if you do not follow the rule you do not have your show; secondly, journalists without courage are unable to do their work properly. No one wants to confirm that on the record, but it is known that some journalists or analysts are on the "black list" of the national TV or other, commercial TV stations.

Thus, RTS presenter Olivera Kovacevic once said at a conference in the Media Centre in Belgrade that she could not invite to her debate show an editor of the Vreme weekly Mr. Dragoljub Zarkovic, because "no one wanted to be with him in that debate". That is, no one was available from the ruling party.

From my point of view and understanding of the role of media, this is an example of censorship, even though we do not have a formal censorship body which monitors media reporting and approves if something is going to be broadcast and published or not. We encounter a situation that media go and ask for an approval someone from Mr. Vucic's cabinet, or from the ruling Progressive Party, and that is censorship. If journalists and editors had strength to work as professionals, they would never allow treatment like that. But the media are financially ruined. Most of the money from the advertisers goes through media buying agencies to the political parties, while media are blackmailed by financial uncertainty.

The ruling party controls media market money through media buying agencies and through money from the budget. Since there is less money in circulation, media practitioners know that if they don't follow the unofficial regulation they are quickly going to be destroyed by "the laws of the free market". In 1990s, independent media enjoyed support from abroad, because they were recognized as leverage against Milosevic's regime. After his fall the rationale disappeared and "the free market" has shaped the environment as we have it today. Scared and financially dependent journalists cannot fight corruption and advocate for the public interest. They cannot do their reporting following professional standards. They can only promote the ruling administration.

Journalists believe that if they lose their job they will never be able to work as journalists again. That is how they justify the absence of professional standards in their work. Can one judge them? No, but the absence of personal courage leads us to the media which only serve the administration and not the public interest. In the long term, this is not sustainable. Such kind of media will disappear.

On the other hand, we have a new force, on the internet: journalists turn to non-profits, or they start blogs of their own. They cannot make their living out of that, but at least they have a platform whereon one can freely report on issues important to the wider public.

It looks like we have closed a full circle and got back to the very beginnings of journalism, where one wanted to say something that had happened in the world which they thought someone might want to know. Personal sense of public interest is above the idea of making profit out of that. That is what stood at the beginning.

Money comes later.

Maybe, but not necessarily.

## Corruption in the media: how to counteract corrupt practices?

*by Lejla Ibranovic, Acting Executive Director, Transparency International Bosnia and Herzegovina*

Media play a crucial role in the fight against corruption as the fourth pillar of democracy. Media are essential for holding those in power to account. They monitor, investigate and expose the actions of political and corporate elites and provide unbiased information to citizens, thereby raising awareness of detrimental effects that the corruption has upon society. However, notwithstanding this role media should play, it would be extremely wrong and highly illusionary to assume that media and journalists are immune to corruption. In times of economic crisis, deep cuts in editorial investments and restructuring of media economy, media and journalists are faced with many challenges that in many ways devalue professional journalistic standards and encourage unethical journalism. Decreasing levels of ethics, devaluated status of journalistic work, controversial and non-transparent funding, as well as pervasive lack of transparency over advertising ownership and corporate and political affiliations, characterise the entire media sphere, which makes the scope for corruption within the media really widespread. In those countries where there is a weak political and economic environment and where policies fail to protect the public interest and operate only in the narrow particularistic interests of a very few, media are the most vulnerable, as the opportunities for influence of political or economic elites are enormous. In these contexts, media are inevitably forced into corrupt relations with various centers of power in order to ensure their survival and sustainability.

Most of the research and literature on the topics of corruption and media primarily address the crucial role which media play in preventing and fighting corruption, while research and awareness of corruption within the media is still largely missing. Media are very often confronted with a combination of factors, such as low professional standards, limited financial resources, lack of training and technical skills, inadequate legal frameworks, or non-transparent or government-controlled ownership structures, which create a fertile ground for corruption and severely hamper and prevent them from exercising their watchdog role. Corruption in the media can take various forms, from bribery in the form of cash for news, staged or fake news, gift giving, or concealed advertisement, to nepotism and capture by vested private or political interests. Therefore, strategies to counter corruption in media require a wide range of approaches, starting from raising awareness of ethical standards, strengthening legal frameworks and ensuring proper enforcement of media policies and legislation, towards ensuring full transparency of ownership structures and political and financial interests and affiliations of the owners, as well as supporting and encouraging investigative journalism through technical training.

As it is very often noted, freedom of expression is one of the most important preconditions for media to provide unbiased information to citizens and report impartially. Adequate legal framework protective of public interests, where freedom of speech and press are constitutionally guaranteed and where media and journalists have timely and undisturbed access to relevant official information is of crucial importance for the overall environment in which media operate. In this environment, media are then enabled to effectively play their watchdog role, expose and investigate the actions of those in power. However, even in those countries where there is a solid legal framework in place, weak enforcement of laws, as well as failure of media regulations and institutions to adequately protect journalists in their work make media even more vulnerable to corruptive practices. Another factor likely to breed corruption in the media is also the way media and journalist licensing and registration are regulated, as governments use these mechanisms to keep control over media. Furthermore, media ownership structure also has potential for undue influence on media reporting by either the government or other private interests. Lack of transparency over ownership structures and revenues is highly damaging for journalism. Moreover, low professional standards of journalism, lack of awareness of media ethics, lack of adequate trainings, or low salaries of journalists are also some of the factors likely to breed corruption in the media.

Corruption in the media can manifest itself in various yet very subtle forms. At a first glance one would not even label those practices as corrupt. Corruption in the media manifests itself in forms starting from bribery and direct payoffs, or cash for news, up to more dangerous forms such as nepotism or media capture by government or private interests. Journalists, editors and media can accept bribes or extort money either for publishing favourable stories or for not publishing damaging ones, which has really concerning consequences for the integrity and impartiality of media reporting. Another way this can be manifested is when journalists and editors accept to suppress negative information after pay-off or when advertising is withdrawn after critical reporting. Nepotism is yet another form of media corruption which can have direct influence on media coverage. This is, for example, particularly evident in those countries where supervisory bodies are weak and where the government appoints managerial personnel following highly suspicious professional criteria, so that political influence is ensured through managing and editorial structures. Media capture is perhaps the most dangerous form of corruption in the media, as media are captured by governmental or other interest for their own benefits, this either involving bribes or distorting policy processes to suit narrow particularistic interests of media owners.

From all these it is evident that the media are prone to corruption as they are increasingly dependent on various centers of power, either political or corporate, to ensure their financial sustainability. Trends in terms of financing, transparency and ownership of media are extremely negative. Independent and critical reporting is facing serious challenges and it is quite clear from the situation all around the world that independent journalism has really had hard times surviving. Media are used by powerful elites as tools for pursuing and promoting their own interests and it is hardly possible to expect from media, who depend on very few sources of funding, to keep under loop those very elites on which their survival and existence depends. Therefore, counteracting corruption within the media must be of utmost priority and must involve a wide range of approaches. Firstly, there needs to be an adequate legal framework in place which is effectively implemented to guarantee media freedom and a right to information. Access to public information must be fully ensured, as well as registration and licensing procedures significantly simplified in order to decrease room for government control over media through those mechanisms. Journalists need to be ensured that their confidential sources of investigative stories are adequately protected and that journalists are protected from political arbitrariness and a sort of arbitrary retribution, legal punishment or physical harm. Moreover, freedom of expression must be strengthened and legal and constitutional provisions to prohibit censorship must be set up. As regulatory bodies manage the rights to information and freedom of expression and media, they need to be fully independent and free from any interference as they play an important role in monitoring the media and ensuring that ethical standards are met by the profession. When it comes to ownership, the government-controlled media influence needs to be reduced and principles of editorial independence should be fully recognized and enacted. Strict rules and public interest criteria should be defined when it comes to the allocation of state advertising to media, as well as having ensured that proper monitoring of performance of these funds is in place. Conflict of interest legislation should be in place to counter the concentration of media ownership and to ensure multiple sources of information. Moreover, internal systems for disclosing potential conflict of interest and structures for dealing with complaints need to be established.

Special attention should be given to raising the professional standards, including a full commitment to transparency and openness of all relevant information related to all financial and political interests and affiliations of the owners, managers and journalists. Journalists should be provided with adequate technical and ethical training on investigative techniques. Socio-economic conditions of journalists should be improved and they need to be paid adequate salaries in order to be able to work independently and ethically. In this way incentives to engage in corrupt practices could be decreased. Trainings on why and how to avoid taking cash for news coverage also need to be implemented. Paid content need to be clearly identified and separated from the editorial and journalistic work. As ethics in the media is a largely neglected dimension, it needs to be constantly highlighted that transparency and ethics represent a cornerstone of responsible journalism. Media owners, managers and editors need to adopt, publicise and

implement a firm policy of zero tolerance for any form of cash-for-news coverage, from simple “facilitation” payments to paid ads disguised as impartial and objective news. Activities and trainings need to be undertaken that promote ethical journalism. Among other things, this entails providing trainings to journalists on raising awareness of ethical challenges they face along their work, promoting code of ethics and adhering strictly to the code of ethics which condemns corrupt practices. Journalists should also be trained on investigative techniques depending on the context in the country they are living.

As mentioned earlier, there is still very little analysis and awareness of corruption within the media and therefore there is a need to further analyse and document various forms which corruption takes and factors that create fertile ground for corruption occurrence within the media. It is particularly important to raise awareness on this topic in order to be able to recognize it and condemn it. There is not only one successful and easy recipe or solution to countering corruptive practices in the media, but there needs to be a variety of strategies to curb this phenomenon in the media so that they can rise up to fulfilling the role in the society that they are expected to.

## Political Legitimacy – minority governments



Sofia Conference, May 29, 2015

## Active citizenship lies at the core of the political accountability

The Project Director of the FNF SEE, Daniel Kaddik, opened the event and gave a brief overview of the topic, before giving the floor to the keynote speakers. First, Dusan Gamser, international secretary of the Liberal Democratic Party, from Serbia, expressed his concerns on the “lack of a culture of accountability” in the entire Balkans. There, he said, “all the present political parties are linked, in one way or another, to the former communist heritage. They didn’t have neither the time, nor the will to reform.” In her turn, Vanya Kashukeeva-Nusheva, the Programme Director of the Transparency International Bulgaria, pointed out that politicians do not actually feel the need of being accountable before the public, simply because the system allows them circumvent the law. “But the problem lies in the society as well, because it is not active and it is not engaged,” remarked the associate professor Gergana Radoykova. She added that people in the streets demand a direct democracy and stronger citizen control without knowing either the true meaning of those terms or what is expected on their part.

## Democratic Accountability as a Key Legitimizing Factor for the Public Institutions

*by Gergana Radoykova, PhD, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” European Studies Department*

“A body of men, holding themselves accountable to nobody, ought not to be trusted by anybody”

Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man* (1791)

When we elaborate on the important topic of accountability in politics, it is wise to start with an attempt at definition. What does accountability mean and stand for? How can it be measured? Why do we bother about accountability in politics at all?

Accountability is considered and generally accepted to be a “golden concept”, which is supposed to be a key component and one of the most important features of all democratic governance. That means that in most of the cases accountability has mainly positive connotations. Why? There could be at least two reasons. First and foremost, public institutions are obliged to explain the decisions they make on behalf of the electorate and also to give clear account about the way in which they spend public money. Second, the adjective “accountable” is often associated with transparency, reliability and truthfulness.

In reality, accountability is a very broad concept, which serves as an umbrella for quite different concepts. There is no doubt, however, that accountability is the key legitimizing factor of the public institutions.

We choose to follow the definition of Mark Bovens and Deirdre Curtin, according to which accountability is a social relationship between an actor and a forum, in which the actor has an obligation to explain and to justify his or her conduct, while the forum can pose questions and the actor may face certain consequences. Analyzing accountability from that perspective gives the opportunity to study the whole chain of interactions between citizens (as the forum) and public institutions (as the actor), as well as the positive and negative aspects of accountability arrangements.

Each accountability relationship should consist of at least three main elements. First of all, there comes information. It is very important that the actor regularly informs the forum about his conduct and political decisions, as well as about concrete procedures and accomplished results. But proper informing of the forum (the citizens) does not simply consist of providing detailed data to the general public. It also includes the obligation towards the forum to explain and justify the actor's conduct.

The second facet is the debate. After receiving the information, the forum should have opportunity to ask any questions, concerning the information or the legitimacy of the decisions. The actor has the obligation to give an answer to all the questions. That is why the term "accountability" is often equalized with "answerability", but the latter is actually one of the "ingredients" of accountability.

Third and most important, the forum can pass judgment on the justification of the actor. The judgment could be positive, i.e. of approval, or negative. And if there is enough evidence of misconduct, the actor may face sanctions. It is the possibility of sanctions that makes the most important element of an accountability relationship.

There are different opinions among researchers, however, whether or not sanctions are actually an element of accountability. The term "sanction" itself is quite formal and legal and has quite negative connotations. It excludes forums of accountability which do not have the authority to formally impose sanctions albeit their opinion still matters a lot. That is the reason why in this context we prefer to remain neutral by saying that the actor may face consequences - rather than sanctions - for its behavior.

There is a common practice to use the term "transparency" instead of "accountability." The above mentioned definition, however, shows us that transparency is not enough to cover the constitutive elements of the accountability relationship. Transparent government, freedom of speech and information are just important prerequisites for accountability, especially when it comes to providing information. Transparency, however, lacks something very essential – it does not involve scrutiny and monitoring from the forum. While accountability implies mainly the obligation for the actor to justify political decisions and actions, transparency stands for the type of behavior that makes the actions of the actor visible for the observers.

It is also important to distinguish accountability from participation, openness and responsiveness. It often happens, especially in the official documents at the EU level, that accountability is related to issues of representative deliberation. Hereby, a very important detail seems to be forgotten – the actors (politicians) are to give account to the forum (citizens) after they act, so the essence of accountability is retrospective. Responsiveness, openness and deliberation are very important for enhancing legitimacy, but they do not form accountability and are more likely to be a prerequisite for it. What is missing is the element of sanction and consequences, good or bad, for the actor.

We have to admit, however, that the difference between retrospective accounting and active policy making is quite thin at times. It makes sense that the actors should give account for their decisions and for their participation in the decision-making. Accountability is not only about ex-post monitoring and evaluation, it is also about prevention. Political decisions and the behavior of the actors should be adjusted and bettered through accountability.

Accountability is also often identified with control. Some researchers and politicians would even put a sign of equality between them. What seems to be forgotten here is the following definition: "An agent is accountable to a principal if the principal can exercise control over the agent." So, accountability is a form of control but not all forms of control are actually mechanisms for accountability.

And last, but not least – there is a difference between accountability and responsibility. Responsibility as a virtue demands an answer to the question "What is right to be done?" It also implies trust, prudence, stability and erudition. That is why responsibility is not equal to accountability. It creates and strengthens accountability. If we choose to follow the famous Lincoln definition for "government of the people, by

the people, for the people”, we should conclude that legitimacy has two faces. Input legitimacy stands for government by the people, while output legitimacy is based on the concrete results and is about government for the people. When we discuss and evaluate the results, we can clearly observe the importance of accountability for legitimizing the work of the public institutions.

But to what extent are citizens allowed to hold the public institutions to account for their actions? The answer is quite simple: the most important thing is to have a “point of intersection” between the level of political decision-making by the actor (politicians) and the level on which the forum (citizens) could demand accountability from those whom they had previously empowered through elections. A crucial question is whether or not citizens can understand who is responsible, and assign responsibility and accountability accordingly. The capacity and willingness of citizens to take active part in the political debate and the decision-making process and to urge the politicians to give account for their actions is undoubtedly the hallmark of good governance and real democracy.

## **Do more frequent elections necessarily mean more political accountability?**

*by Dušan Gamser, Belgrade, Serbia*

Elections are the ultimate test for politicians and the citizens` ultimate leverage for enforcing political accountability upon the former. But, is it really more beneficial for democracy to have as many elections, and as frequently, as possible? Down below, two features of the political culture in Serbia will be analyzed, that actually hinder true accountability in politics as a mutual relationship between the citizens and the elected mandate holders: holding early elections too often and holding elections at various tiers of government on the same day.

Early parliamentary elections in Serbia have become rather a norm than an exception. Between November 1989 and March 2014, out of eleven multi-choice elections for the parliament of the Republic, as many as nine were held before the expiration of a four-year term of the previous legislative. Just two were held – more or less – in their due time. Similar goes for (direct) presidential elections. Few countries in this part of the world have had more snap elections recently.

Thus, snaps have almost become a constituent part of the political culture in Serbia. Constant asking for them has been among the most frequent talking points of any opposition party (regardless of whether or not they were actually ready for them). Likewise – either agreeing to a snap election at a particular moment or not – each and every ruling party has claimed its readiness to call an election immediately and to win it. A grotesque boasting around with one`s omnipotence and macho-style short-selling of one`s political opponents has been among the most picturesque (however pitiful) elements of the political folklore (including at the local level, where, by the way, snaps have been somewhat less frequent).

Additional peculiarity is in that a demise of the entire Government of Serbia (the PM included) quite rarely led to even an attempt, let alone actual installation, of a new Government without changing the entire Parliament at snap elections. That, in spite of the provisions of both Serbia`s latest constitutions (as of 1990 and – especially - as of 2006) which put no obstacles to such continuity, but even somewhat encouraged it. Moreover, a few mid-term-built cabinets (as of 1991, or 2000, or 2003) were short-lived. They were just preludes to early elections. During the turbulent 1990s, with the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia, with the first steps made into the multi-party democracy and with the adjacent instability, holding snaps occasionally might have had been justified. Also, taken the autocratic rule of Slobodan Milošević, it was easy to understand why the-then democratic opposition demanded free and fair elections

all the time, following so many consecutive fraudulent ones organized by the regime. But after the changes of 2000, frequent snaps have become bad for the political culture, for accountability and for the development of democracy.

Utter uncertainty of the length of term in office of the MPs or of the members of Government has been an obstacle to any long-term planning, including any substantial reforms. If the Government is afraid that a temporary fall in its popularity - as caused by unpopular yet necessary measures beneficial only on a middle or long run - will immediately unleash a wave of opposition rallies in demand of snap elections, it will refrain from any reforms and keep business-as-usual approach as long as possible. Then there would be no reforms initiated from inside the country, but just those imposed by outside actors (EU, IMF, or alt), and even those just if or when the said (f)actors themselves found that important. Frequent talk on, and the custom of, holding snap elections prevents a normal political cycle, during which a freshly elected government could be given free hand to implement - uninterruptedly - the most demanding (including unpopular) reforms at the very beginning, i.e. during the first year or two of the term, then awaited results, and then, during the last year or two of the term, have harvested the political fruit of success (or paid the political price for failure).

Moreover, the benevolence of the broader public towards those who loudly demanded snap elections in between cycles, i.e. the widespread notion of “normality” of such demands, encouraged not least opposition parties but, more dangerously, parts of the ruling coalition at various tiers of government, to manipulate with the issue of snap elections. That adds to the deterioration of the anyway feeble culture of sticking to written political promises. Everything, each and every agreement, implicit or explicit alike, and verbal or written alike, thus becomes just a matter of an immediate, daily balance of power. Capacity to blackmail political partners is among the most desired resources, while its practicing is quite an acceptable behavior on the political scene.

That way, the country has been, ever since the late 1980s, in a sort of continuous (and to it, dirty) election campaign. To it, a probability of early elections motivates voters to take more hazardous decisions when choosing their political options. Thus, on the ballot, one has a number of political options that promise various, quite revolutionary changes, or at least dramatic and instant improvements, often with very little touch with reality, while after elections one has got too cautious politicians in office, who refrain from even those reforms which could be quite viable (alas, initially unpopular). All those add to the disillusionment of voters and to their notion that “all politicians are the same”.

Finally, political parties themselves are also among those who suffer due to a climate of permanent election campaign. Instead of drafting long-term political and/or party infrastructure development strategies, of establishing durable relations to their target groups, of maintaining a true dialogue with (not just promotional talk to the) citizens and of having their internal activities, finances, training of activists and inner-party development planned for a decade ahead, political parties use to live “hand to mouth”. Only instant results (hence short-term projects) matter to the party leaders, who are themselves always just a day away from a would-be kick-start of the next election campaign and adjacent uncertainty of their jobs, while ordinary rank and file act accordingly, adjust to the signals from the top and stop even proposing (let alone implementing) longer-term activities on the ground.

It was only recently, and sporadically, that some political scientists or analysts started complaining that the constant talk on (and the frequent practice of) early elections are actually harming the democracy. For the time being, such lone voices are hardly heard, amid speculations on whether or not, why, how, or when Serbia might face its next early general election. Perhaps, as some use to speculate, simultaneously with the next (regular) local elections, in spring 2016? Or both of those will be held a few months earlier than that? Or maybe the timing of the new law on local government, or new electoral legislation, will be adjusted to the elections, or vice versa? Or even presidential elections will be added at the last moment, a whole year

before the end of the regular term, such as it was the case in spring 2012? Who knows? And who could possibly plan anything long-term in such a pre-election continuum?

Thus we arrive to yet another detrimental practice, the one of holding elections at different tiers of government on the same day. The rationale, or better say excuse, for that is usually found in the opportunity to lower the costs. If the same or similar electoral commission counts the votes from two different ballot boxes, if the campaigning costs are likewise also rationalized, administrative ones as well, etc, almost half of the money could (allegedly) be saved. Cynics could answer that holding elections in eight-years` instead of in four-years` time would amount to similar savings, not to mention the even bigger savings in case all elections would be canceled forever.

Modern democracy is based on the division of power, not least horizontally (legislative, executive and judicial) but also vertically (central and local branches of government, or even regional ones in between). For a good reason, elections for those tiers of government are separate. Politicians have different responsibilities thereby, and should be held accountable separately.

Calling elections at different tiers on the same day actually blurs responsibility. It helps many politicians come out less accountable. It helps the less successful among them hide behind their more successful (or just more powerful) colleagues at a different tier of government. In reality, that often means misuse of central government resources to favourise the local branches of the political parties currently in power at the central level.

The result is that the vertical division of power is endangered. If the uniformity in the composition of the local councils spreads as an avalanche, regardless of the quality and performance of the actual local candidates, that considerably adds to the anyway present danger of a mob rule. Voters, many of whom born, raised and educated during the single-party system, or during the subsequent pseudo-pluralism of the 1990s, plus being functionally semi-literate in a huge percentage, plus increasingly disillusioned by all politicians, are thus additionally discouraged to learn which political body or individual mandate holder, and at which exact tier of government, has got certain responsibilities, and which political party is exactly responsible for this or that visible success or failure.

Moreover, even that little amount of fiscal and operational autonomy of the local governments that has been fought for since early 2000s is endangered. Namely, local government dignitaries owe increasingly lot to the national political VIPs from their respective mother parties, whose faces, smiling on billboards, or whose financial capacity to print and broadcast, or whose ability to discredit the targeted local opponents, during the last local elections promoted or saved their own, less known and less bright faces.

Would-be new constitutional or other legal obstacles to, or discouragement of the practices of holding early elections if there was still an opportunity to produce a majority government within the given term in office of a particular convocation of the parliament, as well as obstacles to the misuse of resources for campaigning at an inappropriate level of government, could help redefine responsibilities and produce for more accountability of the elected, for what they personally did or failed to do. More personalization of the election process, such as through introduction of a preference voting system, could give individual politicians more autonomy within their parties, more incentive and justification to oppose frequent snap elections and more incentive to mind the need of their own accountability vis-a-vis citizens, and not just to hide behind the back of the omnipotent national party leaders.

But there is much more that could be done even aside of those, purely institutional changes. The latter are anyway dependent on whether they are truly implemented or not. It is only some third (f)actor, maybe the civil society organizations, and those rare media that still maintain any autonomy from politicians, that could educate citizens what was reasonable to expect of politicians and what was actually counterproductive to expect of or demand from them. It is perhaps only them who might be taken

seriously if shouting foul in cases of unnecessary calls for early elections, either by the opposition or by the (power lusty) parts of the ruling structure. It is certainly them who could warn - while being taken seriously - at a degradation of the local government system, arising from the vicious circle of dependency of local governments (and politicians) on the central and/or provincial ones.

Besides elections as ultimate tools for holding politicians accountable, there should be other channels of their communication with citizens. More true dialogue between them is needed, of the kind completely different from the mere promotional talk so characteristic of all election campaigns. Without responsible media and without CSOs devoted to democratic development, such dialogue would hardly be possible.

Finally, no matter how themselves weak at the moment, it is also liberals who should oppose the two above described or other practices that are proving detrimental for the democracy on a middle and long run. They should sincerely and more actively engage in a public discussion on promoting more accountability in politics.

Otherwise, there again will be ever more elections that will in fact have become merely selective (hence manipulated) referenda on whom to have handed over the absolute responsibility for all political matters in the country, from the top to the bottom. Mob rule might be the first, while some new autocracy might become the final result of that dangerous process.

## Political Legitimacy – minority governments

*by Vanya Kashukeeva-Nusheva*

When analyzing the concept of "accountability" the main focus of attention should be put on three main aspects of the problem: 1) accountability in the financing of political parties and election campaigns (because through the electoral process political parties and their representatives receive access to the representative institutions); 2) accountability of institutions (most essential dimension, because the institutions of representative democracy have to be transparent and accountable to voters); 3) reporting on the property status of politicians (which is a prerequisite against the abuse of entrusted power for private gains).

Over the last decade one of the main issues dealt with by the Bulgarian branch of the international anti-corruption organization Transparency International, is the financing of political activities and the integrity of the electoral process. The attention of the Bulgarian representation was coincidentally directed to these problems because they are crucial for the effective prevention of corruption and promotion of leading international standards of good governance. In 2001, Transparency International - Bulgaria created the Index for transparency of election campaigns financing – a research tool that measures the trends in financing of political parties and candidates in terms of the three major criteria: accountability (compliance

with the legal requirement to submit reports), transparency (based on public assessments of the level of transparency in the election campaign financing) and publicity (provided access of external observers to the financial documentation).

The comparative analysis of the achieved results highlighted an especially interesting trend. For the entire period, the general index values ranged between 1.82 (the lowest value, measured during the local elections in 2007) and 4.85 (the highest value, measured during the presidential elections in 2011). These data reveal a significant problem of ensuring transparency and accountability in the political life.

Graphics №1: Trends of Index for transparency in election campaign financing during the period 2005 - 2014



In terms of individual indicators, the following paradox could be observed - although the values of the component 'accountability' increased, the values of "openness" and "transparency" showed a steady decline. This paradox is result of changes in the legislation introducing minimum reporting standards (here I want to note that the most significant changes were made as a result of public pressure and expert proposals of the Transparency International – Bulgaria). Furthermore, the insights and assessments of citizens indicate that publicity and transparency of information on the financing of political parties and election campaigns are insufficient. This was confirmed by public opinion surveys. In 2003, 52.9 percent of the citizens gave a negative answer to the question "Do you think that the financing of activities of political parties in the country is sufficiently transparent?"; in 2005 - 27.3% of the respondents gave a negative answer. In 2014, over a quarter of voters felt that opaque campaign financing was one of the leading problems:

What were the most serious issues of the election campaign?	%
Vote buying	64,9%
Non-transparent election campaign financing	25,8%
Negative campaigning with mutual accusations between the parties	22,0%
Attempts by employers to exert pressure on workers	21,0%
Lack of sufficient debate on European issues	14,8%
Insufficient information campaign for citizens	12,3%
No problems	11,5%
Proxies or observers exerting pressure on voters	9,9%

Table №1: Public opinion on transparency, accountability and integrity in the electoral process

The analysis of those seemingly paradoxical results leads to the conclusion that, at present, in this country, there have been introduced the formal reporting requirements. Political parties and candidates meet the requirements to declare "paper" data on the financing of their campaigns, but they have not yet entered the leading criteria for accountability of their constituents and party members.

In addition, the results of public monitoring of the election campaign indicate that there is a discrepancy between reality and documents. There is a gap between the reality in which people are daily witnesses to violations of accounting rules (financing by companies, using public resources for political campaigning, direct vote buying), and well prepared reports submitted to the National Audit Office. During the last years, the funding of the political activities has become a "commitment" of a narrow circle of people (minority), who have received from ordinary citizens (supporters, party members) the right and the obligation to accumulate the finances for party activities. Instead, the ordinary party activists do not ask questions about the origin of money in politics. Is it any wonder that political activity is increasingly becoming an activity which is the preserve of a minority of politically active people who lose the support and trust of the broad range of voters?

Where should one find the effective solutions to the problem?

As a researcher of the problems of financing of political activities I had the opportunity to examine the international standards and a number of scientific studies dedicated to the issues of accountability and transparency in this area. They cite one of the main approaches to solving the problem - the need to involve citizens in all phases and activities of the political process. There is no real transparency and accountability in politics without the participation of citizens. Obviously, one of the guidelines to resolve the problem is to strengthen the mechanisms of internal party democracy and active participation of citizens in various forms of participation and control in politics (not only during elections, but also during the entire period between two election cycles).

Secondly, it is necessary to strengthen mechanisms for wider participation of supporters and party members in the process of party funding. Why is this necessary? Because the donors might define the major priorities in the political programs. Because the financing by large corporations tends to "evaporate" the promises to the voters enrolled in the pre-election programs. Because one of the key problems of Bulgarian democracy is the discrepancy between political messages and pre-election programs on one and specific policy decisions and management actions on the other hand.

When we seek to address the problem of the deficit of legitimacy of institutions, it is necessary to turn our attention to this dichotomy. The adequate approach is to achieve consistency between political programs and political actions. In addition, to achieve that it is necessary to seek a formula of government which is not a result of decisions of a limited circle of "dedicated" political leaders and management but of government based on the support of a wider range of citizens (and not just at the election time).

The second direction in which it is necessary to identify solutions is to establish decision-making formula engaging much wider range of citizens (and not only during elections). Although in the last few years we have seen a growing willingness for civic participation (for example, various public councils, advisory boards, etc), there still dominates a practice whereby important decisions are made without extensive expert consultation and without broad public discussion. A number of examples could be given in this relation – decisions concerning privatization of large agricultural areas which are municipal property; decision to transfer funds between private and public pension funds, decisions for the appointments of persons with a disputable reputation to key positions in law enforcement institutions, etc. Our society needs to integrate more elements of the culture of consensus, taking into account the positions of more

stakeholders. The adoption of such elements would contribute both to ensuring sustainability and to democratizing the process of decision-making.

The third direction in which there is a clear need for change is the creation of guarantees against personal gains from power. And at this point, unfortunately, we see the gap between declarations “on paper” and the actual facts of the personal assets of some of the politicians. In recent weeks, Bulgarian citizens witnessed a series of media reports which revealed evidence of unexplained wealth of mayors and municipal councilors. Findings differ sharply from the declared data in the registers of the National Audit Office. The discrepancy shows that accountability rules are not respected and that the control mechanisms do not function properly. Obviously, measures should be undertaken in this field in order to have achieved consistency between statements and facts, and between norms and practice. Of course, it is not easy to find and implement adequate solutions to the problems which are subject of current discussion. It takes a number of systematically organized actions and policies to increase transparency, accountability and integrity in government, which cannot be given a place in the limited time and space for discussion. However, the effort to resolve those problems is an important key prerequisite for achieving genuine political accountability and higher level of public trust in the institutions.

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## Democratic Legitimacy vs. International Integration



Closing conference in Athens, June 10, 2015

## Impressions of the event

*By Dennis Gratz, MP Nasa Stranka, Bosnia-Herzegovina*

My introducing presentation at the round table organized by the ELF on the topic of „Accountability in Politics – Democratic Legitimacy vs. International Integration“ was primarily focused on the specific circumstances of the *lack* of political accountability in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is a byproduct of constitutional instability and a decade-long development of a *culture of unaccountability* due to unfinished processes of a democratization of (postwar)society.

While everywhere in Europe – and especially in Greece – we could witness a strong conflict between the responsibility of local politicians toward their voters and the responsibility of tackling reforms that are necessary for further integration and stabilization processes but basically are rejected by the general public, Bosnian society experiences a total breakdown in the relation between the voter and the elected official as the representation of voter’s will, which is caused by the systematic inability of the voter to recognize this and possibly “punish” the official for it in the next elections.

I provided some examples for this phenomenon, trying to compare the “two ends” of a same process. My argument was that the Greek crisis (which is a crisis of the European Union institutional set-up) essentially produces destructive effects for the sensitive relation voter-elected official, who only on the basis of democratic legitimacy gained in the elections is authorized to act on behalf and in the interest of the citizen. If this balance is disturbed, because, for example, the interest of the citizen goes beyond what he would support as an active voter, then the whole concept of political accountability is revealed as practically non-existent. This is already the case in Bosnia and Herzegovina; here, the extreme is that the elected officials are essentially not obliged to the will of their voters, but act irresponsibly and without the necessary political accountability. This is very much produced by a complete lack of the above mentioned balance.

The questions raised at the beginning of the panel enabled the participants to discuss the issue of democratic legitimacy and “corporate responsibility” and whether Greece’s (but also Bosnia’s) society is ready to show unaccountable politicians from the left or the right their limits.

## Accountability as a key to political change for Greece

*by Athanasios Grammenos, FNF Project Officer Greece*

Functional politics are dependent upon ethics, ethics create confidence and confidence gives birth to stability. Without stability the economy cannot work properly and turbulence may create serious political threats. Therefore, stability is very important for a society to grow and flourish. However, if the political system fails to inspire trust, then there is a serious obstacle that every political system has to take over. A recent survey by the Institut der deutschen Wirtschaft Köln, prepared by Enste and Möller, reveals the ethical crisis in the euro zone. Almost half of the countries score up to 50% vis-à-vis their trust in the political, economic and social security system. Focusing on Greece, we see some very disappointing results, as the country stands only at the last place in all three categories. Especially when it comes to the political system, the wing that is supposed to enhance other two, the trust is only 3%. This grave situation is unfortunately based on the inefficiencies of the political system.

Democracy is a demanding system of governance. It requires active citizenship and responsible representation in order to produce positive results. The European ideals are based on the foundations of

Western civilization, which treat humans as end, and not as means. If this chain breaks, then any political system is destabilized and crises will unavoidably erupt, according to lessons learned from Aristotle and Kant. That is, one is to do the right thing because it is one's duty to do so, and not because he or she expects a higher degree of utility out of it.

One crucial dimension of the interchange between ruling and being ruled is accountability. It is the major checking process that can bring balance in the system and make sure that there is no misuse of authority by anyone. In Greece, the results of the surveys show that the trust is lost. That means that citizens do not believe their politicians anymore. The reason for that is twofold: firstly, since the 1980s, when there was the first socialist government, a new sub-culture was cultivated, saying that "everything is permitted" if one has got the power. During the last thirty years, many very serious scandals have shocked the Greek public, but only a few people were persecuted and even fewer were finally punished - none of whom was a politician; secondly, the steady deterioration of the economic and social situation in Greece during the last six years, along with the non-responsiveness to the actual problems of the people by the political elite. To put it differently - people who get elected on the national or at local levels fail to be accountable for not keeping their word. As a matter of fact, every government since 2009 implemented a completely different political platform than the one they had promised before their election. That is also a reason why they did not manage to stay in power for more than 2 years, despite the regular cycle of 4-year administration.

On the other hand, accountability is not referring merely to the upper side, the politicians, but also to the lower one, the citizens. When the citizens compromise on favoritism, clientelism and corruption, accountability comes second to the "political cost" and politics becomes gambling. The austerity measures imposed to Greece as part of the bailout program aimed at smashing for good the shady relationship between the political system and the political clientele, at abolishing the occupational closure and at a diminution of the public sector and significant budget cuts. Although some of those were hurting very sensitive groups of the total population, the majority of them were oriented against ecclesiastic privileges. Consequently, the political system – governments and oppositions together - was very reluctant, if not resistant, to implementing them. As a result, there was always a need for "equivalents", coming primarily from the new taxes, to balance the budget and reach the targets. In brief, the lack of accountability as a bidirectional road has damaged severely what had been left of the "social contract" in Greece and has deepened the crisis due to the unwillingness of the "social contractors" to bear the responsibility for reconstructing the economy.

Nevertheless, Greece is still an EU member-state, and it has the opportunity to change all the negative aspects, moving forward to a new prosperous era. The question is what and how can be done from now on to change the route of the country's history. The most important change must be ethical: all citizens, with no exceptions, need adopt civic consciousness, social sensitivity and the Calvinist approach to social duty as the classical source of the Western reflective traditions of self-commitment. A response to the contemporary distinctive possibilities and difficulties would also require the change in some administrative rules such as giving essential independence to Justice and - at last - an end to the partisanship among civil servants. Electronic and open governance would upgrade clarity and transparency, preventing all those who are keen to corruption. The political system could then gradually regain the required trust.

Greece cannot afford losing any more time. A new beginning has to take place immediately and the optimum choice is to re-introduce the core liberal values, not simply as a case of proving a theory right, but as a new mentality of political thought and action to enhance human prosperity and public priorities.

## **Beyond the Economy: the Historical Roots of the Lack of Accountability in Greek Politics**

*by Dimitrios K. Katsoudas, Director of the Liberal "Forum for Greece"*

The issue of accountability in Greek politics is serious and long-standing; it constitutes one of the most serious problems in any move towards modernity and reform in Greece. In fact the peculiarities of accountability in Greece, especially its malfunction, can be traced to a period in the past, far beyond the creation of the Modern Greek State.

Having experienced a foreign domination by an oriental authoritarian power, covering several long centuries, the Greeks were inherently "taught" not only to mistrust the State and its agents at different levels but to actually devise methods for circumventing their oppressors' legislation, and/or commands as well.

This is why the various revolutionary governments found it almost impossible to exercise their authority over the rebellious Greeks following the 1821 revolution; the long lasting habit of disobedience prevailed; and this is also why the first seriously minded organiser of the Greek State, Governor Count John Capodistrias was murdered.

There is another root-cause of the Greeks' civil disobedience habit – and that bears the complicity of the Germans, specifically the first King, Otto, and his Bavarians: for, while the Greeks overthrew Ottoman rule in the declared (reflected in all the revolutionary constitutional documents) hope of acquiring not only national independence but parliamentary rule, and extensive civil liberties as well, the Bavarian administration, in the crucial formative years of the new Greek Kingdom, by insisting to govern Greece in a despotic fashion, i.e. without a Constitution and as an absolute monarchy, committed the grave error of transferring the long-standing suspicion of the Greeks vis-à-vis their Ottoman rulers to their own State, which they saw as hostile to the very principles upheld by their revolution a few years before.

Eleven years later, in 1842, they had rebelled and the King was obliged to grant them a Constitution, which he never truly respected. In any case it was too late: the new State was already in their minds just a better version of the type of rule they had learned to mistrust and, far worse, to circumvent.

Another dominant factor for the accountability problem in Greece is that, for at least a century, the country had set its mind mostly on expansion, and not on internal organisation. In this, it was much more successful, as it doubled its territory, but, despite the sweeping modernisation reforms of the visionary and able prime ministers such as Trikoupis, Venizelos and Karamanlis, this basic functional internal problem of the lack of accountability in both the politics and the administration of the new State remained.

Add to these profound historical reasons of mistrust the fact that the inhabitants of the new Kingdom were at first mostly illiterate and poor; that society was organised around communities and local chieftains; and that the geography of the country made the exercise of rule by the central authorities almost impossible - and there you have a more or less clear picture of the profound causes of mistrust vis-à-vis governance.

However you choose to define accountability in Greece, it is seriously flawed. And institutions often undermine each other: political parties and their clientelism undermine the administration, the judiciary

and the Army; citizens trust in the Law is shaken; the credibility of political programs is ridiculed even at their inception; no reform agenda is taken seriously. In fact, twice in the Modern Greek political history the electorate took it for granted that central political declarations of powerful political figures and parties were not to be materialised! These were the cases of PASOK and Andreas Papandreou in 1981 and then SYRIZA and Alexis Tsipras in 2015: in the former case PASOK's pledges of leaving NATO and the-then European Communities were not taken seriously by voters; the same was true when Tsipras swore to tear the memorandum to pieces "with one Law in just one article".

It is evident that, in this climate of unaccountability, the last thing governments were expected to do was to ignore popular pressure for largesse, appointments and new loans. To this day very few politicians openly admit the need for sweeping reforms. The calamities of austerity are basically understood as being nothing else but the lenders' demands: the Memorandum is seen as the cause and not as a result of the average Greek's problems!

It is obvious that, for any program of restoring administrative and economic accountability to succeed, four basic conditions must, imperatively, be met:

- First, the radical overhaul of the Greek administration in the direction of a smaller and more efficient entity, as far away as possible from business transactions.
- Second, the clear separation of legislative, judiciary and executive powers.
- Third, the introduction of independent checks and controls, as well as of evaluation, at all levels.
- Fourth, strict EU control of the home ownership but also the independent nature and efficiency of any reform.

Greece's economic and social tragedy is a fact. But it is also the most crucial, as well as the greatest opportunity for the country to – with the help of its partners – become at last truly accountable vis-à-vis both its citizens and the international community.

Greece's economic woes are of a profoundly political nature; and the lack of accountability lies at the heart of the political malaise that led the country to economic bankruptcy and so much human suffering.

#### About European Liberal Forum (ELF)

The European Liberal Forum (ELF) is the foundation of the European Liberal Democrats, the ALDE Party. A core aspect of our work consists in issuing publications on Liberalism and European public policy issues. We also provide a space for the discussion of European politics, and offer training for liberal-minded citizens. Our aim is to promote active citizenship in all of this.

Our foundation is made up of a number of European think tanks, political foundations and institutes. The diversity of our membership provides us with a wealth of knowledge and is a constant source of innovation. In turn, we provide our members with the opportunity to cooperate on European projects under the ELF umbrella.

We work throughout Europe as well as in the EU Neighbourhood countries. The youthful and dynamic nature of ELF allows us to be at the forefront in promoting active citizenship, getting the citizen involved with European issues and building an open, Liberal Europe.

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