

## **Peter Burnell: Support for Political Politics in New Democracies: Think Party System; Think Globalisation!**

The formation of effective parties in democracies constitutes an achievement by itself. Developing a party system that aims at promoting democracy as well as domestic peace and security in the country is an even greater achievement. In this context, globalisation may well be of service: Political parties in new democracies can benefit not only from more support but from new kinds of support as well. This is important since political parties want to make their own vital contribution towards the democratisation of their countries.

There are three patterns of party politics in newer democracies. Pattern A exists especially in countries where one political party is dominant. Here, a party may count on remaining in office although it may abuse its power. Pattern B assumes a factionalised party world that consists of a whole series of frequently short-lived parties which are, however, characterised by instability and lack of continuity. Citizens are presented with a continually changing kaleidoscope of parties and floor-crossing politicians, a fact that damages the democratic culture. Finally, in pattern C, personalist politics predominate, and the parties themselves are merely vehicles used by opportunistic party leaders who are concerned mainly about their own good.

The three patterns are neither mutually exclusive nor can they describe the condition of all the newer democracies. Parties and party systems, however, cannot be kept separate in any of the three patterns – the weakness of one will translate into limitations of the other.

The question is what political parties and party politics can do for democratisation in countries where liberal democracy has yet to be consolidated. What needs to be done is to distinguish between different kinds of new democracies, to take note of the process of political change, and to consider the present direction of the process of development. It is important that political parties should meet the needs of democratisation rather than enforce their own objectives. This maxim of action, in turn, should be based on the conviction that liberal democracy is a valuable political ideal, a 'good thing' that is not negotiable.

If we look at what international party aid has achieved so far, the record is very modest. Particularly active in this field are the German *Stiftungen*. On the part of the USA, diverse publicly-funded organisations are involved as well, such as the NED, the NDI, and the IRI as well as the United States Agency for International Development. Great Britain is represented by its Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD), the Netherlands by its Institution for Multiparty Democracy (IMD), and Australia by its Centre for Democratic Institutions (CDI). What is more, South Africa's ANC has excelled in Zambia, and even Hungary has recently established the statutory framework for a corresponding commitment by party foundations.

The sums of money involved are not vast. Funds are spent on training, conferences, workshops, knowledge exchange, advice, and technical support. Moreover, part of the money is invested in the areas of media management, fund-raising, and campaigning techniques.

Overt party assistance is avoided, since it smacks of direct interference with the domestic politics of sovereign states. Other political approaches to promoting democracy, such as diplomatic and other forms of pressure that employ coercion and conditionality are problematic, since they imply a confrontation with sovereignty.

If we look at the history of party assistance, we can see that particularly in the early 1990s, international election observation was of especially high significance. To be sure, holding free

and fair elections represented a considerable advance. However, elections alone do not ensure democracy. Next to cooperating with parties and supporting non-governmental organisations, it is of particular importance to get the civil society involved. And this is where the high relevance of globalisation for the process of democratisation as such becomes apparent.

Globalisation is a multi-faceted, multi-dimensional process of change that operates between and within societies. It is increasingly creating interdependencies between actors and institutions across political and administrative boundaries. Moreover, it serves to spread liberal democratic ideas. Thus, international party support must draw on globalisation as an instrument.

Globalisation manifests itself especially clearly in three areas. Firstly, multi-level or polycentric governance is spreading as states pass on some of their power to the regional and global level. Secondly, more and more national economies are integrating themselves in the global economy. And thirdly, revolutions in information technology are leading to an expanding global communication.

It is beyond doubt that, while globalisation creates challenges and constraints, it also offers new opportunities worldwide to the political parties. If the parties – and international party support – wish to be seen as the servants of democracy and democratisation in the future, they must take note of these developments.

At the moment, we still know little about how far party politics can influence globalisation. So far, scientists have hardly asked the question. About the impact of globalisation on party politics we know a bit more. Firstly, globalisation seems to be reducing the framework within which parties can seek to differentiate themselves. More specifically, the economic aspect of globalisation is limiting alternatives and challenging social democracy to fight harder and harder. Secondly, globalisation is increasingly urging the parties of established democracies towards a 'presidentialisation' of politics. Political leaders are directing their attention to external institutions, and relations with the party take a back seat.

Indeed, the real sites of power have by now moved abroad; the parties no longer constitute the link between the state and its citizens. And the citizens no longer turn to the parties if they want to inform themselves about politics; rather, they take a look at the internet. Globalisation leads to an increasing domination of politics by leaders, at the expense of the political parties.

In view of the first aspect, democracy without an alternative, the German political foundations enjoy an excellent reputation which is based on their partnerships with ideologically compatible sister parties as well as their shared commitment to certain defined values that build a basis for mutual trust. But also with regard to the second aspect, the 'presidentialisation' of politics, Germany's political foundations are, given their principle of long-term commitment, better positioned than other organisations, since their contribution towards the often time-consuming process of embedding the parties in society is more effective. And finally, the German *Stiftungen* are well equipped to promote relations between the parties in new democracies and relevant affinity groups, and they can contribute towards overcoming suspicion and rivalry between both sides.

It is not an easy task to explain how parties and party systems in different societies develop. In the case of established democracies, in which parties change over time, this task is even more complicated. There is a wide range of independent variables that are indispensable in explaining this phenomenon including, for example, the electoral system, the quality of the election management, social and economic dividing lines, institutional parameters, the distribution of

power, the political culture, and the influence of history. On the question of which of these variables is the cause and which the effect, there is a wealth of conflicting viewpoints and demands resulting from them. In view of the deteriorating reputation the parties now have in the established democracies, many people ask themselves whether it pays at all to get involved in party politics in emerging democracies.

It is beyond question that such a commitment is worthwhile. Political parties are central to representative democracy and democratisation. And globalisation will play an even more valuable role than before.

Due to the quality of the relationships brokered by them, and due to their long-term commitment in the field, the German political foundations are in a favourable starting position to support parties in newly emerging democracies. Moreover, they are responsible for taking up the resultant challenges.