

**Participation Now!**  
**Citizenship Education and Democracy in Times of Change**

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**Report**

**Forum III**  
**The relationship between politics and economy:  
Globalization and the ‘Repoliticisation’ of inequality**

**by Yordanka Evgenieva**  
**Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs**  
**Bulgaria**

**Inputs:**

Noha El-Mikawy, Ford Foundation (Egypt)

Fernando Vallespín, Instituto Universitario José Ortega y Gasset (Spain)

**Moderation**

Fernando Vallespín, Instituto Universitario José Ortega y Gasset (Spain)

**Summary:**

The topic of the forum touched upon some of the most sensitive, challenging and hard-to-solve issues before the world today: the crisis of democracy, the lack of control over the economy and the inequality in distribution of the economical gains. The overall mood of both sessions corresponded to a great extent to the seriousness of the issue with pessimistic and realistic comments prevailing in the discussion. The debating atmosphere itself was friendly but again the tension of the topic could be felt through it.

**Introduction:**

The main target of the forum, as defined by the moderator Fernando Vallespín from the Instituto Universitario José Ortega y Gasset from Spain, was to find a common basis between the countries from both sides of the Mediterranean Sea in respect to the socio-economic issues faced by the different countries in time of a financial crisis on the one side, and challenging political reforms on the other. By finding the common threads of the problems, we could then look for shared solutions.

### Inputs:

During the inputs of the speakers, it became evident that the countries on both sides of the Mediterranean share many common challenges that can be summarized as follows:

- There is a democratic fatigue in the Northern Mediterranean caused by the broken socio-economic contract and the inequality it has brought with it. The breaking of this contract means that the wealthy do not contribute any longer to the welfare of society and as a result the gap between those who are economically on top and the rest widens. This makes it harder for this model to be “sold” to the countries currently going through a transition.
- The democracy as a political system has not been true to its promises of freedom, equality and liberty. As a result, the “generation contract” has also been broken leaving a whole new generation without prospects for a better future.
- In the MENA region, on the other hand, the middle class has been systematically impoverished and side lined. As a result it is still doubtful whether they will be able to form an active civil society.
- Another key issue was the globalization of the economy, whereas the governments are still local and hence have restrains in controlling effectively the global economy. This contributes further to the deepening of inequality.
- From both sides of the Mediterranean there is a serious drainage of young capable force-work to third countries because of the lack of working opportunities at home. As a result the investment made into their raising and education does not feed back into the local economy.
- The educational system needs to be reformed in order to address these new challenges and provide a more sustainable model for the raising of the new generations through the training of critical problem-solving skills.

### Discussion:

After both inputs, the following problems were put forward for discussion:

- The lack of sovereignty in taking decisions, which contradicts the idea of democratic accountability since markets are not held accountable in front of no one.
- Can the EU and the Arab world overcome this challenge together and how?
- How can both politicians and businessmen be held accountable?
- The role of knowledge management and information for creating more accountable economic and political classes.

The main points of the discussion that followed in both sessions were centred on the disproportion of the problem vis-à-vis the tools that the civic society has to address it. The lack of working mechanism to control the disobedient global economy in a way that there is equality in the sharing of its gains was circled out as a global problem, which can be solved only through a political reform globally. In addition to this, the current crisis in the European Union undermines the democratic model as the working mechanism for achieving equality. However, the fact that there are many common challenges shared by Arab and European

countries gives hope that the two regions may find a common ground for solving this problem. It was proposed that for this to happen the EU should stop its policies of paying for securing stability in the MENA region, but rather concentrate policies related to the development of a resourceful civil society.

### **Conclusion:**

The Scandinavian countries were given as an example as the only remaining well-functioning social states. In particular, the role of the unions in these countries was highlighted as a tool for the civil enforcement of accountability on the bigger political and economic players.

Despite the overall pessimistic tone of the discussions, participants agreed on the importance of the civil society and the need for serious civic education in the post-revolutionary Arab countries. The current transitions has opened the door for re-assessment of the role of the NGOs from relatively powerless watchdogs to having them as concrete actors for achieving accountability and transparency in the respective societies.

It was a general agreement that the inequality as an issue should be politicized, as it could not be solved unless it is put upfront in the political agenda. There are undoubtedly many challenges on local level for which local solutions can be at least partially applied, but the general issues of an unequal distribution of profits and lack of accountability are a problem of global governance. The fact that the EU cannot serve much longer as a working model complicates things further and calls for creative and innovative ways that the civil society can apply to achieve at least some level of accountability. Both formal and informal education have a big role to play in this process and therefore it is of great importance that the educational systems are reformed in order to provide new sets skills, including critical thinking and problem solving.