



SALZBURG
GLOBAL
SEMINAR



THE FOURTH SIR MICHAEL PALLISER LECTURE

DEMOCRACY AND CIVIL SOCIETY – A SHRINKING SPACE?

LECTURE DELIVERED BY BARONESS USHA PRASHAR

Salzburg Global Lecture Series

The Palliser

Democracy and Civ
A Shrinking Space





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**CIVIL SOCIETY
ORGANIZATIONS CAN BE
A CATALYST FOR CHANGE
AND FOR REVITALIZING
DEMOCRACY. YES, CIVIC
SPACE HAS SHRUNK,
AND DEMOCRACY IS IN
REGRESSION; BUT THERE
IS A FIGHT BACK.**

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Baroness Usha Prashar

Delivered by **the Rt Hon the Baroness Usha Prashar**
Baroness of Runnymede, CBE, PC
Independent member of the House of Lords

Introduced by **Seán M. Cleary**
Member of the Board, Salzburg Global Seminar
Chairman, Strategic Concepts (Pty), Ltd.

Chaired and moderated by **Clare Shine**
Vice President and Chief Program Officer,
Salzburg Global Seminar

Kindly hosted by the Grange St. Paul's Hotel

This lecture was delivered in honor of **Sir Michael Palliser GCMG**,
held in **London, UK on March 16, 2018**

This lecture was conducted under the auspices
of **Salzburg Global Seminar** – Austria

THIS LECTURE WAS HELD IN MEMORY OF

SIR MICHAEL PALLISER GCMG PC

Sir Arthur Michael Palliser GCMG PC (April 9, 1922 – June 19, 2012) was the vice chairman of Salzburg Global Seminar's Board of Directors and a senior British diplomat.

Born in Reigate, Surrey, the son of Admiral Sir Arthur Palliser, he received his education at Wellington and Merton College, Oxford. Appointed a Second Lieutenant November 21, 1942, he served in the Coldstream Guards during World War II. In 1947, he joined the British Diplomatic Service and held a number of appointments at home and abroad, including Head of the Policy Planning Staff, Private Secretary to the Prime Minister, Minister at the British Embassy in Paris, Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the European Communities, and Permanent Under-Secretary of State and Head of the Diplomatic Service (1975 – 1982). From April to July 1982, during the Falklands campaign, he served as Special Adviser to the Prime Minister in the Cabinet Office. He was appointed a member of the Privy Council in 1983. That same year, he joined the board of the London investment bank Samuel Montagu & Co., a subsidiary of the Midland Bank, of which he became a deputy chairman. He was chairman of Samuel Montagu from 1984 – 1993, then vice chairman until his retirement in 1996. From 1983 – 1992, he was non-executive director of several industrial companies. From 1986 – 1994, he was a member of the board of the Royal National Theatre. Sir Michael has served on the faculty of many Salzburg Global Seminar sessions. Sir Michael served on Salzburg Global Seminar's Board of Directors for 16 years, 13 of which as Vice Chair of the Board. In addition to serving on the Board, Sir Michael proved himself to be an active, engaged supporter of programs in Salzburg, attending more than 25.



INTRODUCTION TO THE SPEAKERS

LECTURER AND SPEAKERS

The Right Honorable the Baroness Usha Prashar CBE, PC is an independent member of the House of Lords, where she has served on several Select Committees. She is a member of the European Union Select Committee and chairs the European Union Select Committee on Home Affairs. Since 2013, she has been the deputy chairman, British Council. In January 2017, she was appointed non-executive director of Nationwide Building Society. Her significant previous roles have included: member, the Iraq Inquiry; inaugural chairman, the Judicial Appointments Commission; First Civil Service Commissioner; chairman, the Parole Board; chief executive, National Council for Voluntary Organisations; chief executive, Runnymede Trust; chairman, Royal Commonwealth Society; chairman, the National Literacy Trust; chancellor, De Montfort University; and member of the Arts Council and president, United Kingdom Council for International Students. In the 1990s and early 2000s she also organized and chaired a number of programs on NGOs and democracy, served on the board of Salzburg Global Seminar for four years and is a Senior Salzburg Global Fellow.

Seán Cleary is chairman of Strategic Concepts (Pty) Ltd and executive vice chair of the FutureWorld Foundation. He is on the faculty of the Parmenides Foundation, and lectures on global corporate strategy, conflict resolution, and development economics in South Africa, the US, and Europe, and on national security at the South African Defence Staff College. He chairs the Advisory Board of the Global Economic Symposium, is a trustee of the South African Foundation for Conciliation, and is a strategic advisor to the World Economic Forum. He served in the South African Navy, before a diplomatic

career in the Middle East, US, and Namibia. Cleary graduated in social sciences and law and received his M.B.A. from Brunel University. He is a member of the board of directors of Salzburg Global Seminar.

Stephen L. Salyer became the eighth president of Salzburg Global Seminar in September 2005. Salyer was president of Public Radio International from 1988-2005. He co-founded in 1999 and chaired until 2005 a nationwide web service company for public television and radio stations – Public Interactive, LLC. He was senior vice-president of WNET/Thirteen, the PBS flagship program producer, and associate-in-charge of Public Issues at the Population Council in New York City. His career began as a speech writer for the philanthropist, John D. Rockefeller 3rd. He is a graduate of Davidson College, Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government and New York University School of Law.

Clare Shine is vice president and chief program officer of Salzburg Global Seminar. She previously worked as an independent environmental lawyer and policy expert for intergovernmental organizations, national governments, the private sector and NGOs. She has also served as legal adviser to the World Bank, European Union, Council of Europe and African governments. Shine is a UK-qualified barrister, an associate of the Institute for European Environmental Policy, a member of the IUCN Commission on Environmental Law, and a professional facilitator. She holds an M.A. in English literature from Oxford University, and post-graduate degrees from London University and the Sorbonne University, Paris, France.

INTRODUCTION TO THE LECTURE

DEMOCRACY AND CIVIL SOCIETY – A SHRINKING SPACE?

“It is not an exaggeration to say that liberal democracy is in a desperate state,” said Baroness Usha Prashar, delivering Salzburg Global Seminar’s fourth Palliser Lecture on March 16, 2018 in London, UK.

Baroness Prashar, one of the UK’s most experienced policy advisors, pointed to the election of US President Donald Trump and Central Europe’s populist revolt against the European Union as evidence of a shift toward “illiberal democracies.” While political regimes may be based on electoral politics, Prashar said, the rule of law, minority rights, freedom of the press and other liberal protections are in danger.

Prashar warned against dismissing such events as temporary outpourings of populism. “We must not hunker down and think this is an aberration which will pass... Freedoms once lost are difficult to regain. We must understand causes and develop strategies to respond to them.”

Prashar underscored the importance of democracy not only to ensure free elections, but also to protect minorities from the tyranny of the majority and to value dissent, dialogue, and participation.

Such democracy, Prashar said, depends on lively civil society. Civil society organizations must have the space and the ability to speak out, organize, and act together to fulfill their roles, be it as promoters of democracy,

a watchdog holding authorities to account, a humanitarian actor, a partner in implementing government policy, or a catalyst for development.

Prashar offered some examples of positive developments in civil society, including increasing public scrutiny toward technology platforms that spread extremist or false content with no regard for public interest. “Citizens are also organizing and mobilizing in new and creative ways to defend civic freedoms, fight for social justice and equality, and to push back populism,” Prashar said, noting that civil society had advocated successfully for progressive new laws on access to information, protection of human rights, and women’s and LGBT rights.

Prashar highlighted the viral #metoo movement as an example of a campaign that harnessed the power of social media to give voice to the voiceless, shape awareness around a global issue, and spur a broader dialogue around power and wealth imbalances.

Given the gravity of present threats to civil society and democracy, Prashar called for courage and leadership rooted in the civic values of human equality, social justice and pluralism. She also challenged civil society organizations to be agents of change by building alliances with businesses, academia, media, and other partners on issues such as rule of law, freedom of expression, and inequality.

“The answers will come from collaboration between sectors – not just nationally but internationally – with one thing in common: concern for humanity and public interest,” Prashar concluded.

Prashar said Salzburg Global Seminar has provided a base for such creative thinking, intercultural exchange and collaboration between sectors and countries for 70 years. “It is institutions such as Salzburg Global Seminar, the dedication of individuals like Sir Michael, and the indomitable human spirit which make this a hopeful world.”

THE FOURTH SIR MICHAEL PALLISER LECTURE

DEMOCRACY AND CIVIL SOCIETY – A SHRINKING SPACE?

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I am humbled and honored to deliver this year's Palliser Lecture. I do so with some trepidation. It is a heavy responsibility to do justice to the memory of a very distinguished vice chairman of Salzburg Global Seminar, Sir Michael Palliser. I am also very conscious that I am following the footsteps of some very eminent former speakers.

It was a real privilege to work with Sir Michael and learn from him. For decades, Sir Michael – a model civil servant [and] defender of the civil service values of impartiality and integrity – played important roles at the highest levels of British diplomacy. The most striking feature of his distinguished career was his passion about Europe and a firm belief in the European project. Sir Michael played a crucial part during the often politically fraught times when Britain sought and eventually gained entrance to European institutions.

In retirement, he remained committed to the European ideal, calling for a campaign to remind people generally of the fundamental reasons for maintaining and strengthening the European Union and for further enlarging it. He said, “The basic reasons for pursuing European unity are more valid than ever.”

And how right he was.

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Sir Michael would have been deeply troubled at the UK's decision to leave the EU. Following his retirement, he got involved with a range of business and voluntary activities. Salzburg Global Seminar was one of

them, where he was generous with his time, always contributing in a positive but low-key way, nudging discussion toward practical and constructive outcomes.

My personal memories are dining with Sir Michael in the legendary Buck's Club, home of the Buck's Fizz cocktail and the inspiration for PG Wodehouse's Drones Club, to discuss the work of Salzburg Global Seminar.

Salzburg Global Seminar – itself a nongovernmental organization which has been working for over 70 years to shape a better world, build trust, bridge divides, create space to discuss difficult and controversial issues, explore ideas for common good, inspire new thinking and action on critical issues – was an ideal fit for what Sir Michael believed in and worked for.

In the 1980s and 1990s, civil society organizations came to be seen as key players in significant areas of public and social policy. The late Sir Reay Geddes, who at that time was a board member of the Seminar, chairman of the Charities Aid Foundation, and with whom I worked at that time in my capacity as the director of the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, saw the growing significance of civil society organizations. He persuaded the Seminar and me to look at nongovernmental organizations/civil society and democracy.

I was privileged to develop and work on this program for nearly 10 years for the Seminar. I feel very fortunate to have been associated with Seminar since then – now over a quarter of a century! Nearly two decades have passed since I did that work, and it seemed appropriate to revisit the issues facing civil society and democracy.

The 1990s were an era when significant changes were taking place, particularly in Central- Eastern Europe, South Africa, among others like

Brazil, Chile, and the Philippines. Oppressive regimes had collapsed. Cold War bipolarity was disappearing. There was a feeling that we were entering a new era with a just and stable world not so far. There was hope in the air.

The role of nongovernmental organizations, civil society, and citizen participation were seen as crucial in building new emerging democracies. In Eastern Europe, dissidents such as Václav Havel used the term “civil society” to describe the sphere of civic associations which they saw threatened by the intrusive state-dominated regimes of communist Eastern Europe. So the space cleared by the rolling back of the state came to be known as “civil society” in the 1990s.

This was the impetus for the work which we developed at the Seminar. It focused on the intrinsic value of civic space, what it means in practice, its legitimacy, and what challenges it might face. It was to enable an understanding of what is civil society, how it can be effective, and what are the essentials of a vibrant democracy. All this was new territory for Fellows, particularly from Central-Eastern Europe, as they had no experience of it.

This work was significant for the Seminar itself in a number of ways.

It increased the Seminar’s global footprint. For the first time, Fellows and faculty members came from South Africa, South America, South Asia, Japan, Central-Eastern Europe, Russia, and Western Europe. This was at a time when the reach of the Seminar was not global. Maki [Makaziwe] Mandela was a faculty member. It facilitated cross-border learning and learning on equal terms. It facilitated appreciation and understanding of different perspectives and different ways of learning. Exploration of terminology was telling. For example, there is no translation for the word “accountability” in Central-Eastern Europe.

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Robert Putnam, Professor of Public Policy at Harvard University, has also argued that civil society organizations are vital for a democracy because they build social capital, trust, and shared values; help to hold society together; and facilitate an understanding of interconnected society and interests within it.

It was at that time (1993) that CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation was founded. Its first Secretary General Miklos Marshall was an active participant in this program.

I am pleased that the current Secretary General Danny [Dhananjayan] Sriskandarajah is here today. I want to thank Civicus for some of the background information they provided in preparation for this lecture.

In the intertwining years, there was an increase in the role and expectations of the civil society organizations. Global civil society organizations emerged as a powerful and influential force on the world stage. They not only influenced public opinion, but did so in effective ways due to the information and communication revolution that was taking place at the time.

By the end of the 1990s, however, civil society came to be seen less as a panacea amid the growth of the anti-globalization movement and was called to justify its legitimacy. In subsequent years, we saw a return to a more neutral stance.

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In the recent years, we have witnessed significant developments in the role of civil society organizations, not least a sense of optimism following the Arab uprisings and the impact of digital campaigning – both negative and positive. Civil society used social media to mobilize protests, and the authorities used it to suppress and intimidate.

Now the gains of the 1990s and 2000 are under threat or are being reversed. At present, almost everything is in a state of flux or under threat. We are witnessing regression both in civic

space and democratic processes. Although these two phenomena are highly correlated, they are not one and the same.

This evening, nearly 25 years on, I will attempt to examine what is happening to democracy and civil society; why the role of civil society

is critical, not just as a delivery mechanism but for its intrinsic value; what are implications of new developments such as the digital revolution; and, with the experience of last few decades, what lessons can be learned.

Vibrant, pluralistic democracies need and indeed are supported by lively civil societies. Although this term gained popular currency in the 1990s, it goes back to Aristotle, who said civil society is characterized by a shared set of norms and ethos, in which free citizens, on an equal footing, live under a rule of law.

Lively civil societies need space. Without the ability to speak out, organize and act together, civil society organizations become unable to fulfill their role as promoters of democracy, as watchdogs calling authorities to account, as humanitarian actors, as partners in implementing government policy, or as catalysts for development and change.

But there are some very unsettling developments as far as civil space is concerned, not just in autocracies and fragile democracies but also in established democracies.

Democracy too is going through a difficult time. It is not an exaggeration to say that liberal democracy is in a desperate state.

The Economist's Democracy Index 2017 saw the democratic health score fall in more than half of the countries.

Democracy Index quotes Larry Diamond, one of the world's leading democracy scholars, as saying that we have been going through a "democracy regression," and this trend has been reflected in the annual Democracy Index since its launch in 2006.

Strikingly, they say it has been most apparent in some of the oldest democracies in the world – in Western Europe, whose regression since 2006 is almost as bad as that in the eastern half of the continent, and in

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the USA. The USA was downgraded from a “full democracy” to a “flawed democracy,” meaning US voters have lost faith in their government, elected representatives and political parties. In Eastern Europe, it is now an open question whether the democratic progress of 30 years will last.

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A weak political culture and difficulties in creating institutions aimed at safeguarding the rule of law are creating a difficult habitat for democracy. Flaws in democracies have become visible. Democratic deficiencies have been exposed by the rising tides of populism. Disillusionment with politics is rife.

Many democracies are sliding toward autocracy. While maintaining the outward appearance of democracy through elections rights and institutions, equally important

aspects of functioning democracies are being eroded.

Organizations and institutions of democratic systems have come to be seen as dysfunctional.

For example, we have seen gridlock in the USA, stronger emphasis on ideological purity, less appetite for compromise, and gerrymandering; and, in the UK, there is a perception of manipulation of democracy through boundary changes. All this encourages cynicism, populist reaction, extreme views, and leads to a view that democracy is for sale.

Consequences of capitalism, the financial crisis, austerity measures, and increasing inequality have compounded disillusionment. There is a genuine crisis of inequality. It is manifesting in decreasing social mobility and diverging economic fortunes.

Decline in the quality of democracy has swelled support for anti-establishment parties in Western Europe both on the left and the right. A combination of globalization and the digital revolution has made some of the most cherished institutions look outdated and unresponsive. NGOs and lobbyists are disrupting traditional policies and making life harder for democratic and autocratic leaders alike.



The internet has made organizing action and agitation easier. In a world where people can participate in reality TV by voting every week and support a petition at a click of a button, the machinery of democracy looks sluggish.

Plato's great worry about democracy that citizens would "live from day to day indulging in the pleasures of the moment," has also proved to be true.

We are witnessing the rise of "illiberal democracies." Political regimes may be based on electoral politics, but the rule of law, minorities' rights, freedom of the press, and other liberal protections are being attacked.

Freedom of expression is being eroded. Restrictions on freedom of speech have become commonplace. Censorship is no longer the prerogative of authoritarian regimes; it is being deployed in democracies as well through defamation laws, data protection laws, prevention of terrorism laws, in the name of increased security and by those who claim the right not to be offended.

In the UK in 2017, according to the Free Speech University Ranking reported in the *Daily Telegraph* in January 2018, 21 universities banned speakers from attending lectures, debates, or speeches because their views were deemed to be offensive.

Populist leaders are getting elected by offering deceptively simplistic solutions to complicated problems. Once in power, they are increasingly restricting their fellow citizens' civic freedoms. We are seeing exercise of arbitrary powers in the name of majorities.

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What is happening to civic space? There is a clampdown on civic space.

The CIVICUS Monitor, an online research platform that tracks civic space, currently ranks civic space as obstructed, repressed, or closed in 109 countries around the world.

What is striking is that the shrinking space is not limited just to autocracies or dictatorships but is apparent in established democracies as well. In fact, only 13 of the

28 European Union member states were rated as “open” by the CIVICUS Monitor. “Open” means freedom of assembly, association, and expression.

But most countries with “open” civic space are in Europe. More worryingly, countries which used to provide an example [for] others to follow are doing so no more. We have seen reduction in the amount of resources that they used to invest in promoting democracy and human rights around the world. We have seen restriction of rights of their own citizens at home. We have seen retreat from the international institutions upholding global human rights norms and standards.

Then there are weaknesses within the civil society itself. Some civil society organizations have weak governance and accountability mechanisms – Oxfam and Save the Children, among others, being the most notable cases.

This allows governments to question their legitimacy. This erodes trust. Trust is the only currency civil society organizations have. Such shortcomings give rise to changes which lead to civic space being squeezed.

Now the civic space is both real and virtual. Much of the conversation, organizing, and sometimes the action take place online. But the increasing prominence of ICT [information and communication technology] is a double-edged sword. It facilitates increased voice and citizen mobilization in powerful new ways, but it also provides equally powerful tools to monitor and restrict the activities of civil society.

The digital civic space is owned and/or monitored by governments and commercial firms. We have seen new forms of surveillance. Controls have been introduced by states and corporations. Regressive forces have learned how to use the Internet and social media to connect, disseminate propaganda, and mobilize people around their ideas. This space has been invaded by some with fabricated news, false information and extremist propaganda.

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This “uncivil society” operates in similar ways in offline spaces, which have been increasingly coopted by anti-rights groups and notably by anti-feminist and anti-LGBT groups. So the targets of this “uncivil society” are invariably those who already suffer marginalization.

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In countries that have been swept by populist waves, hate groups have found themselves increasingly free to express ideas that until not long ago did not belong in the public conversation. For example, Nazi rallies have made a comeback in Eastern European countries. Post-Brexit, we have seen an increase in anti-migrant sentiments. What they do not agree with is described as “fake news.”

The rule of law – which the late Lord Bingham [former Lord Chief Justice of England and Wales] said “is not an arid legal doctrine, but is the foundation of a fair and just society, is guarantee of responsible government, is an important contribution to economic growth, and offers the best means yet devised for securing peace and cooperation” – is under threat, and the position of minorities in many countries is fragile.

There is an attack on those institutions which provide checks and balance to excesses. In the UK, we have seen attacks on the judiciary and the impartiality of the civil service. Attacks on the independent press and the judiciary rank high among established democracies.

In many cases, democracy has persisted but freedom is under attack. We are seeing it in the USA, Hungary, and Poland, among other advanced democracies. Attacks on the press, xenophobia, sexism, and homophobia are on the rise.

There is skepticism about those who wield power and influence. “Sick of experts” and “post-truth tendencies” have gained credence. Populist leaders are describing experts as those embodying the evils of elitism and political correctness, vilifying them as opposed to the needs and wants of the common people that have been forgotten and left behind.

Civil society organizations are being reined in.

The rise of extremist groups has led to a dominance of the security agenda. Some extremist groups have created nongovernmental organizations to channel funding, and governments have introduced burdensome restrictions on all civil society groups.

In Europe and in America, attempts to rein in progressive civil society have taken the forms of increasing regulatory burdens, restrictions on international funding, [and] limitations on advocacy.

These developments are a grave cause for concern. We must not hunker down and think this is an aberration which will pass. These developments cannot be dismissed simply as an outpouring of populism. We must understand the causes and develop strategies to respond to them.

Trump phenomena and Brexit are a blunt reaction. They have shaken the current system with nothing to offer by way of constructive alternatives. They are leading to damaging disruption. Institutional paralysis is a real danger, as is defensiveness among civil society organizations.

This is a wakeup call. Concern and outrage is not enough.

Globalization, accelerating technological change, the global spread of Internet and social media, the threat of terrorism, and widening inequality – which are the main factors in the rise of populism – mean that democracies and civil society have to look at different ways of working. The way civil society organizations operate and democracies engage with citizens and deal with some of the systemic issues needs to be rethought.

There are some positive developments.

More of the public are beginning to rebel against technology platforms that spread extremist and bogus content with no regard for public interest. There seems to be increasing attractiveness of the traditional values of journalism with integrity. But we need journalism which is trustworthy and not just newsworthy.

The trust barometer produced by Edelman records a plunge in trust for

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social media and an increase in public support for more traditional media.

Citizens are organizing and mobilizing in new and creative ways to defend civic freedoms, fight for social justice and equality, and push back populism. Civil society successfully advocated for progressive new laws on access to information, protection of human rights, and women's and LGBT rights.

The recent #MeToo campaign against sexual harassment and institutional sexism is a case in point. In this campaign, we have witnessed the positive power of the social media. It has given voice and confidence to the voiceless. It has helped to shape awareness of global issues. Ethnicity, gender, distance

boundaries no longer limit the action. It has also enabled debate about wider inequalities, power and wealth imbalances. It has highlighted how systemic inequality perpetuated abuse, harassment, and intimidation. It has highlighted the need for action on much wider issues such as women in decision-making roles, equal pay, systemic inequalities, and economic independence.

Virtual communities provide a safe space that allows for more inclusive action. Social media has the power to change opinion, policy and even legislation. But it is important that this power is used responsibly.

Given the complexity and gravity of what we are facing, courage and leadership combined with new ways of doing things, without compromising the fundamental values and principles, is needed. We need new ways of revitalizing democracy.

The answers will come from collaboration between politicians, civil society, academics, private sector, scientists, educators, media, cultural institutions, technologists – not just nationally but internationally – with one thing in common: concern for humanity and human rights.

What does this mean for civil society organizations? What do they have to do to help reverse this trend and reassert the legitimacy of civic space?

First and foremost, civil society is about civic values. Being true to the

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value base is, therefore, crucial. They should be guided by vision of human equality, social justice, pluralism, and fundamentals of democracy.

While voting in free elections is a hard-won right which many do not enjoy, democracy does not begin or end with elections. Democracy is also about protecting the minorities from the tyranny of the majority, valuing dissent, dialogue, participation, and engagement. This means not only having checks and balances to curb excesses, but it is also about facilitating participatory democracy as well as representative democracy.

Civil society organizations are well-placed to facilitate this and can help. Being hawk-like on good governance is an imperative. Civil society organizations need to demonstrate relentless commitment to their values, accountability, and transparency. This should guard against competition for resources and distorting their objectives and ethical standards. Only these will engender trust, and trust is the only currency civil society organizations have.

To make a real difference, they should highlight causes and not just respond to symptoms and offer a different vision. In other words, be agents of change. They need to build alliances with businesses, academia, media,

judiciary, and with those resisting regressive changes. They need to work with relevant partners on issues such as rule of law, freedom of expression, liberties, and inequality.

We need to understand the anger and disillusionment felt by many and deal with it constructively. There is a need to target popular anger at the parts of the state that need reform, while leaving intact the parts that make reform possible.

Civil society organizations can be places where citizens can learn the value of dialogue,

civility, [and] peaceful and respectful dissent. Valuing dissent is an essential part of any vibrant democracy, and civil society can be a vehicle for that learning.

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Socrates said that conflicts within society should be resolved through public argument using “dialectic,” a form of rational dialogue to uncover truth. According to him, public argument through “dialectic” was imperative to ensure civility and good life.

Civil society organizations are and should aim to be places which provide a training ground for this and set an example.

We need [to] make a concerted effort to protect freedom of expression, for it is essential for democracies to be sustained. As [the] late Anthony Lewis, an eminent journalist, said, free speech is “a search engine for the truth.” It is through the exchange of ideas, discussion, debate, [and] argument that society establishes the values it believes in.

In a world which is so interconnected, multilateralism – working collectively – is an imperative. Problems that transcend national borders cannot be solved nationally; they demand multilateral action. Managing unprecedented global interconnectedness in an equitable and ethical way is not a luxury but a necessity.

In a globalized world, conceding some sovereignty to gain influence and [a] better deal for citizens is sometimes necessary. Civil society organizations can set an example. Multilateralism does not erode sovereignty.

Martin Wolf in an article in the *Financial Times* eloquently argued that, “The very fact that the UK is holding this vote proves that it remains sovereign. The referendum is not about sovereignty. It is about how best to exercise power.”

He said, “States exist to serve the interests of their citizens. They can achieve that objective only through cooperation with other states. For this reason, Britain has signed 14,000 treaties – treaties do not undermine sovereignty but express it. They constrain the exercise of sovereignty with the intension of making it more effective.”

In an age of information overload, complexity, and accelerating change and disruption, there is need to embrace [a] responsible “culture of explanation.” Again, civil society organizations have a role here. They can also help to modernize democracy by responding in innovative ways to changes which are shaping how we live and work; reorganizing our social, economic,

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political institutions; redistributing power and reward; and engaging with citizens.

They can make positive and responsible use of new technology. Use technology to help implement a modern democracy and help promote civic involvement and innovation. More experiments are needed to nurture and maintain new forms of engagement and governance; and, at [the] same time, counter false propaganda responsibly.

Civil society organizations can be a catalyst for change and for revitalizing democracy. Yes, civic space has shrunk, and democracy is in regression; but there is a fight back – but better strategies and responses are needed. The responses have to be cognizant of the causes. Complex issues require nuanced, sophisticated responses not blunt instruments and craving for some golden age that never existed.

Salzburg Global Seminar – with its 70 years of history of organizing [programs] which are designed to be participatory, which prompt candid dialogue, fresh thinking, and search for innovative but practical solutions – is well-placed to provide a base for creative thinking, innovation, intercultural exchange, multidisciplinary work, and collaboration between sectors and countries.

Perhaps the time is ripe for the Seminar to take a lead as it did in [the] 1990s and provide a base where future leaders can learn the fundamentals of democracy and help to reassert the value and legitimacy of civic space for vibrant democracies to thrive.

It is institutions such as Salzburg Global Seminar, the dedication of individuals like Sir Michael, and [the] indomitable human spirit which make this a hopeful world and give me hope that we can help to revitalize democracy and civil society.

THE INSTITUTION AND ITS WORK

SALZBURG GLOBAL SEMINAR

Salzburg Global Seminar is an independent non-profit organization founded in 1947 to challenge current and future leaders to shape a better world. Our multi-year programs aim to bridge divides, transform systems and expand collaborations.

Salzburg Global convenes outstanding talent across generations, cultures and sectors to inspire new thinking and action, and to connect local innovators with global resources. We foster lasting networks and partnerships for creative, just and sustainable change.

Over 36,000 Fellows from more than 170 countries have come together through our work, with many rising to senior leadership positions. Our historic home at Schloss Leopoldskron in Salzburg, Austria – now also an award-winning hotel – allows us to welcome all participants in conditions of trust and openness.

For more info. please visit:
www.SalzburgGlobal.org

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