

**Taxpayers Association of Europe's Award
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"Only the Spoken word prevails"

The transparent subject

by Otto von Habsburg

Since the attack on the United States on 11 September by a group of crazed fanatics, war has been declared on terrorism. It is true that it was not stated precisely how and with what aims war was being waged, since there was a lack of clear talking. This weakness of language has caused a great deal of trouble, which has afflicted humanity during the wartime period after 1914 and right down to the present day. Due to the growing illiteracy of political structures, every treaty had to be written in all the languages spoken by its signatories, with each text being considered as equally authentic. Natural differences were not, of course taken into account. In the past Latin was used and that was clear. Most other languages, however, do not have the same legal precision. As a result of this, when the text was vague the version put forward by the strongest party would prevail. That accounts for the great successes of the Soviet Union after 1945.

In the new form of war that has now broken out, i.e. the war against terrorism, it has never yet been clearly stated what terrorism is. The result of this was that the strongest party has always been able to define who is a terrorist and who is not. The Chechens, for example, were transformed from freedom fighters into terrorists, since it suited Washington and also a number of European states to have a rapprochement with the Putin regime in Russia and therefore to discredit his opponents.

Equally suspect is the way in which the battle against terrorism is now being used to restrict citizens' freedoms. Certain new financial controls, introduced under the banner of the war against the terrorists' sources of funding, have all too often been used to make it easier for bureaucracies in various states to get their hands on their subjects' assets. A transparent subject has therefore been created - precisely what governments, and all too often their apparatuses, have always wanted.

Even at the beginning of the tensions there was a proposal to create a central information source, from which it would be possible to find out everything about citizens at the push of a button. This was explained in terms of protection against crime. In reality, however, it has brought a horrible danger into being. This makes it unbelievably easy for a dictatorship to operate.

With the extension of the competency of the state, or of international organisations, the bureaucracy's control over citizens has become virtually unlimited. There are no more catacombs now. Thanks to modern technology there is a risk of totalitarian domination of structures.

People talk a lot about democracy. In practice, however, the power of the ruling bureaucracy is constantly being extended. We have already gone a long way towards the creation of the transparent subject. In the past, flight to a foreign country was sometimes a route to safety for people under threat from a violent regime. The way things are developing now, a globalisation of the power of the ruling classes is being created, since in today's governmental structures democratic representatives are increasingly losing their power. Today knowledge is with the bureaucracy, since it controls the information.

In most states, democracy is therefore moving away from the grass roots and political parties are becoming bureaucracies. The right to vote for individual candidates is becoming a rarity. When we look today at how many holders of public office are afraid of offending someone in the ruling administration because they will

no longer be selected as candidates afterwards, this demonstrates the development towards fictitious democracy, since even dictatorships paint themselves in democratic colours these days. The use of the expression "popular democracy" to describe communism is telling in this respect.

There is therefore an urgent need for more work to be done to clarify what is true democracy, and therefore to restore words to their proper meaning in politics. We would be pleasantly surprised by how much this would help to clear the air.

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