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**ДЕМОКРАТІЯ ЯК ІСТОРИЧНИЙ ПОСТУП СВОБОДИ:
СУТНІСТЬ, СПРЯМОВАНІСТЬ, ОСОБЛИВОСТІ РОЗВИТКУ**

Резюме

Дослідження присвячено з'ясуванню сутності, особливостей, політичного змісту та форм демократії. Розкриваються принципи та цінності демократії в її ліберальній формі у співставленні з іншими концепціями та практиками її втілення. Тут демократія постає не тільки як політичний режим, але як більш широкий суспільний феномен. Аналізуються основні підходи до розуміння ліберальної демократії, як суспільного феномену, який найбільше спроможний забезпечити максимальне залучення до політичного спілкування та взаємодії найширші соціальні верстви, які тільки-но з'являються у процесі поступу та відповідного ускладнення суспільства. Відповідно, і чинники актуалізації демократичних процесів в сучасному світі. Проводиться історична та теоретична розвідка розгортання та поширення ідеї демократії та політичної практики втілення таких процесів. Аналізується основна, на думку автора, тенденція в еволюції демократії як феномену, а саме максимально можливе для певного історичного періоду, розширення кола залучених до політики суспільних груп через визнання їх інтересів публічними. Зазначається, що визнання державою інтересів певної групи публічними, означає, що держава санкціонує і захищає

ці інтереси, тим самим перетворює цю групу на суб'єкт права. Поза таким визнанням публічності інтересів державою новітні групи, що виникають, залишаються невидимими для політики, як управлінської сфери і виключають їх з політичного дискурсу та взаємодії. Зазначається, що завдання по розширенню кола суб'єктів публічного права як цілеспрямованої роботи держави, сприяє демократизації політичного режиму, збагачуючи та посилюючи громадянське суспільство додатковими можливостями для їх гармонійної взаємодії. Збагачення громадянського суспільства саме в сенсі збільшення кола визнаних соціальних груп, в яких індивід виступає як носій більшої кількості інтересів, захист яких гарантує держава. Зазначається, що саме така спрямованість діяльності держави може вважатися процесом розширення свободи, яка і є головною цінністю лібералізму. Така діяльність держави є консумативним результатом реалізації усіх інших демократичних процедур інститутами держави, що створені.

Відповідне впровадження ідеї соціальної і політичної толерантності щодо нових соціально-політичних суб'єктів. Вказується на особливу роль у цьому процесі саме поступальної демократизації держави, як політичної організації усього суспільства, через розгортання відповідних інститутів, свідомого цілеспрямовання їх діяльності на розширення кола політичної взаємодії задля врахування максимальної кількості інтересів при прийнятті загальнозначущих політичних і управлінських рішень. Приведенні новітніх груп до статусу суб'єктів права в державі. Умовно визначаються обмеження суб'єктного кола політики для певних історичних епох, починаючи з епохи модернізму. Узагальнюються основні принципи та норми утворення та реалізації правил всеосяжного та нічим необмеженого політичного діалогу в суспільстві, між суспільством та державою, між державами як стрижневої ідеї ціннісного виміру демократії. Стверджується, що в такому сенсі, поступ демократії можливо розглядати як мірило суспільного прогресу.

Ключові слова: політика; демократія; ліберальна демократія; політичний діалог, публічні інтереси; толерантність.

Introduction

Throughout the entire history of political thought, both the classics and contemporary scholars and practitioners who have shaped the theoretical and institutional foundations of democracy have consistently registered a stable and powerful societal demand for a democratic order. Theoretical discourse throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries among various scholarly schools of political science and philosophy, among representatives of political ideologies, as well as the concrete, practical political struggle between political parties and socio-political movements, has, in our view, demonstrated that

contemporary societies, states and international entities are, for the most part, inconceivable without democracy.

Liberalism, for the first time in political history, most consciously raises the question of expanding the circle of subjects of political interaction. It has generated new conceptions and explanations of the origin and nature of the human being, of coexistence, and of the possible rules and forms of communication among individuals in society and of society's interaction with the state it has brought into being. Owing to liberalism and to the principles and values it has proclaimed, and despite divergent interpretations of democracy and the distinction between various concepts and forms of its real-world implementation, democracy itself has come to be regarded as a political value in its own right.

At the same time, the lion's share of the scholarly contributions of both the classics and contemporary theorists of democracy and democratisation has focused predominantly on the problems of constructing institutions that would ensure the realisation of citizens' political rights through universal suffrage, the separation of powers as a safeguard against the usurpation of state power, and other mechanisms and elements.

A logical question arises as to whether addressing only these extremely important issues, to which the bulk of the above-mentioned scholars' work is devoted, is sufficient for democracy to be fully realised. The creation of institutions and adherence to procedures constitute the foundation of democracy. However, in what, then, can democratic progress consist? What should serve as the measure of the success and advancement of the established institutions and of compliance with procedures so as to avoid their purely formal implementation? How can freedom be maximised as the core value of democracy, the realisation of which ought to be the principal criterion of success for liberal democracy?

In our view, what largely escapes scholarly analysis is precisely the aspect that the historical trajectory traversed by democracy as an idea, a concept and a set of deliberate societal efforts to implement it in practice (in various forms) has its own logic of unfolding, its own consummatory function, and a rather concrete orientation. For liberal democracy, this is the unfolding of freedom.

If we consider democracy as the conscious construction of social existence, we may speak of the unity of theory and practice, where theory primarily sets the direction of movement, and practice, following in its wake — step by step, progressively and not without authoritarian regressions — may constitute social progress in that direction. This article is devoted to the examination of certain aspects of the orientation of democratic advancement as a social phenomenon and to clarifying the essence and specific features of this advancement.

Research Methods

The following research methods were employed in this study. The historical-comparative method made it possible to reveal commonalities and differences in the analysis of various conceptions of democracy and the forms of their practical implementation in particular historical periods and in different countries. The structural-functional method was applied to clarify the structural components of the organisational forms of democratic governance and the processes of the unfolding of democratic institutions. The role of each of the above-mentioned elements in the overall process of the democratisation of contemporary societies was identified, as well as the main direction of theoretical and practical advancement in countries with consolidated democracy, taken as a reference point for the political development of countries that are still on their way towards consolidated democracy.

The method of content analysis was also used in examining the scholarly contributions of theorists of democracy in order to identify the main essential characteristics of the democratic nature of political processes – first and foremost the theorists of the liberal model of democracy, whose core values, above all freedom, may serve as a central yardstick in various processes and at different stages of democratisation. The source base of the study consists of research on the theory of democracy, the rule-of-law state, and civil society.

Research Results

The question of democracy has attracted the attention of such a wide range of thinkers that it is impossible to mention all of them within a single article. Among them are Plato, Aristotle, J. Locke, J.-J. Rousseau, T. Jefferson, A. de Tocqueville, E. Bernstein, M. Duverger, J. Schumpeter, S. Huntington, R. Dahl, G. Almond, H. Arendt, F. Fukuyama and many others. They have made a significant contribution both to the development of the theoretical foundations of democracy and to the formation of the methodological instruments for its study. As a result, in contemporary political science the concept of “democracy” encompasses a broad set of interrelated phenomena: popular rule, a political regime, a form of government, a type of political system with corresponding institutional and procedural elements, and a model of the socio-political organisation of society, the state and power [1, p. 41 – 78].

Democracy is sometimes treated as the subject matter of political science as a whole, from which it follows that democracy is “a historical process, a process of the realisation of universal values: freedom, justice and others” [2, p. 143].

From the above we can see that democracy is analysed as a single yet multidimensional phenomenon, whose manifestations affect all aspects of politics and unfold in all spheres of social life, and is essentially associated with the historical process of the development of politics as a social phenomenon

[3, p. 1044-1068]. Elucidating the specific features of liberal democracy and its value dimension makes it possible to define more accurately the essence and direction of development of the political sphere of society in the full diversity of its manifestations, and to distinguish and specify more precisely the concept of “democratism”, thereby identifying the essential, core characteristic of the various forms of democracy [4, p. 207-214].

This, in our view, is precisely what makes it possible to distinguish its real, non-formal, genuine embodiment from purely formal forms, those referred to as incomplete, partial or “defective” [5]. In order to present a more accurate and generalised account of our understanding of the essence and main direction of the development of democracy as a phenomenon of social life, it is worth considering the following substantive points, which in one way or another derive from liberal conceptions of natural law, political rights and popular sovereignty, each subsequent point building on the preceding ones.

From the very beginning of human history, from the earliest primitive forms of coexistence to contemporary state, interstate and international entities, there has emerged an enormous variety of forms of human cooperation. Modern societies, including humanity in the global sense, are the cumulative result of the historical process of cooperation in all its manifestations. Depending on many factors, consciously or unconsciously, people have altered the conditions of this cooperation, historically improving them, gradually rationalising them and giving them desired forms. This has ultimately led not only to an increase in the effectiveness of human interaction, but also to a gradual awareness of the fact that cooperation, joint labour and interaction must serve common, mutual interests and the common good.

Thus, from the perspective of the task of this article, it may be noted in general terms that the emergence and development of society can be interpreted as a process of the unfolding and modernisation of the content and organisational forms of cooperation, interaction and communication, primarily with a view to securing the common interests of its participants.

There is more than one conception of the common, social or general interest and of the common good. Historically, understandings and awareness of what constitutes a common interest — common in what and for whom — have changed, thereby also altering the goals and forms of cooperation. With the historical expansion of the scale of human cooperation, ideas about the “scope” of the generality of the common interest and the common good have likewise evolved. As theorists of liberalism were among the first to note, for centuries the interests (economic, social, cultural, political, ethnic and others) of a significant part of society were excluded from the common interest, turning cooperation into a group enterprise aimed at satisfying partial interests, while the other,

excluded part was reduced to a resource, an instrument of cooperation. This was one of the foundations of what thinkers referred to as alienation.

Gradually, an entire social structure emerged as the most effective one for organising and ensuring human cooperation for the sake of this consciously recognised common interest. In other words, public interests were historically singled out as the interests of particular social groups that were recognised and satisfied by this specific social organisation – the state. The state primarily performed the function of protecting and realising these “public” interests, whose aggregate constituted the common interest. In essence, following both the classics and contemporary theorists of liberalism, we are here describing the functions and principal purpose of the political sphere of social life and characterising the state as a political institution, since politics, as one of the forms of such social interaction, has been formed and operates as a sphere for the recognition and realisation of these common interests in the course of communication that takes place in an appropriate – political, that is, public – form.

At the core of cooperation lie communication and interaction (relations) in their various forms (economic, social, cultural), that is, interaction among individuals and their groups at the local level and within society as a whole. By organising, coordinating and controlling this interaction in accordance with the dominant common interest it recognises, the state thereby meets the societal need for governance and the steering of public affairs by authoritative means [6, p. 31]. In this context it is appropriate to recall one contemporary definition of politics: “Politics is activity concerned with the leadership and administration of public affairs on the basis of public authority” [2, p. 21].

Thus, social consciousness in its various forms – from mythological and religious to scientific – has in one way or another reflected and recorded historically changing representations and knowledge about the world of the political, about politics and the state, and, accordingly, about the content, structure, mechanisms and ways of realising common interests. Gradually, with the development of society, especially from the beginning of the modern period, an ever increasing number of social subjects emerged whose interests were recognised as public and, in one way or another, incorporated into the common interest. These subjects themselves became political – functionally or situationally – with the capacity or at least the aspiration to participate in, or to exert influence upon, the adoption of administrative and political decisions, that is, upon the determination of the general interest and the ways and means of its realisation, through processes of political communication and interaction. When demands for the recognition of the interests of social groups as public were not met for one reason or another, their entry into politics took place without state sanction, in the form of uprisings, rebellions, revolutions or wars. At the level of social consciousness, such phenomena were, among other things, recorded in

the form of ideas, conceptions or even theories that justified — or, conversely, refuted — the right of these groups to have their interests taken into account within the framework of the common interest and to participate in, or influence, decision-making on the issues in question.

Within liberal philosophical and, in essence, political conceptions, though not without the influence of socialist theories, a revolutionary shift in the understanding of the scope of the generality of interest occurred for the first time: from the recognition and defence of group or partial interests as common, to an awareness of the necessity of taking into account the interests of all — from individuals and social groups to communities as a whole. This awareness emerged gradually and continues to develop to this day through the subjectivation of an ever larger number of groups and the conferral of public status on their interests [6, p.31-32] (that is, social and political, and not merely moral, tolerance).

Just as it was once maintained that there had been no cannibalism in human history, on the grounds that those who were eaten were not regarded as human beings, so too the principles now universally proclaimed and even designated as “fundamental values” of freedom, equality, justice, and so forth still do not in fact apply to everyone. Contemporary societies remain almost at the initial stages of forming a tolerant attitude toward “other interests” and toward the necessity of taking them into account.

In our view, the historical expansion — taking place precisely in the political sphere — of the circle of individuals of the modern epoch, social groups and communities included in the category of “everyone”, whose interests are taken into consideration within the common interest and influence the understanding and attainment of the “common good”, is one side of this process. On the other side, the very content of the “common good” as a common undertaking is being transformed. The gradual recognition of the necessity to understand the general interest or common good not as the partial, group interest or benefit of a certain, circumscribed circle of social strata or even of the majority, but genuinely of all (however utopian this may appear), is linked precisely with the idea of democracy, its evolution and the genuinely historical, permanent process of its realisation.

The recognition as public and the protection of the interests of “everyone” is, in our view, the value core of liberal democracy, which in this context appears as the essential nucleus of politics as a social phenomenon, transforming and shaping its purpose in accordance with the formula “the greatest good for the greatest number”. The recognition of the principle of majoritarianism as the right of the majority in contemporary democracies does not negate the importance of the idea of recognising and protecting the interests of all. The protection of the rights and interests of minorities likewise becomes an indispensable element of contemporary conceptions of politics. Politics itself, in this sense, may be defined

as activity directed toward the formation and realisation of rights grounded in the common interest. This is a very broad definition, which likewise expands the field of inquiry of political science.

Accordingly, we may speak of democracy as a historical, intellectual, ideological-theoretical and practical-political movement initiated and developed by liberal theorists and practitioners. The content of this movement cannot be reduced merely to the establishment of a particular political regime or of certain procedures in politics or other spheres of social life. It cannot be definitively fixed in the form of a set set of specific instruments. It is more general and therefore broader. It is akin to E. Bernstein's understanding of socialism, which he saw as a direction of movement rather than its ultimate goal and thereby treated as a yardstick of the "socialist" character of society. He transformed socialism from an ideal as a social state into a value dimension of social relations and progress.

In this context, democracy appears as a desired set of rules that generate and secure free political communication for all and, precisely in this sense, may be regarded as a political value serving as a standard for desirable social relations. The creation of institutions and adherence to procedures constitute the foundations of democracy. Yet the question remains as to what democratic progress actually consists in. What should serve as the measure of the success and advancement of the established institutions and of compliance with procedures, so as to avoid their purely formal implementation? How can freedom — as the core value of democracy, the realisation of which ought to be the criterion of liberal democracy — be maximally expanded?

It is precisely in this sense that these rules must ensure the entrenchment, in legal norms, of an ever broader range of individual interests, reflecting the ever-increasing multiplicity of individuals' social roles through the emergence of new social groups into which they may be incorporated, and the granting to these groups of public status through the recognition and protection of these new interests by the state. This is what makes democracy a political value and may serve as a measure of its democratic character. Such rules contribute to the all-encompassing expansion of individual freedom, with due regard for historical progress. The set of institutions, procedures, methods, techniques and forms associated with democracy are merely historically changing instruments for the formation, safeguarding and realisation of these rules, which in their overall orientation must correspond to the idea of democracy as a value. Freedom is the fundamental value of liberalism.

Once again, in general terms, the following should be noted. The idea of democracy in the above-defined sense first emerges within the framework of the Enlightenment and rationalist philosophy, and is most fully developed in the political ideologies of the modern era. Alongside the socio-economic transformations of the Renaissance and the early modern period, new broad

social strata come to the forefront of active social and political agency, which leads to significant shifts in the political sphere of social life as a whole and generates a societal demand for an explanation of the changes in the world of the political and for a justification of these strata's right to the protection of their interests, and, accordingly, for new rules of interaction and cooperation and new norms of political communication that came to replace the old ones [1. p. 41-78].

Liberalism, for the first time in political history, most consciously raises the question of expanding the circle of subjects of political interaction, generating new conceptions and explanations of the origin and nature of the human being, of coexistence and of the possible rules and forms of human communication in society, as well as of the nature of society itself and of its interaction with the state it has brought into being. Through the concepts of natural law, the social contract, popular sovereignty and the like, liberal theorists not only endeavour, in a more or less scientific way, to account for the new social realities, but also, in harmony with these explanations, propose ideas about new, desirable norms – that is, rules of political communication – and corresponding social institutions that still have to be established. These conceptions of a desirable social order were quite diverse, yet they shared common ideals and values that were gradually, and at times by revolutionary means, translated into reality.

In summary, it should once again be emphasised that they primarily concerned the enabling of free political communication in the process of the emergence and formation of a new type of state as an instrument for the construction of society. And the sphere of this communication and interaction is to be permanently expanded.

Thus, the state, acting as a common, collective undertaking for society as a whole, was intended not only to take into account the interests of all those who contributed to its construction, but also to ensure the establishment of appropriate rules – norms of communication – for society. In this context, democracy was revealed not only as a set of specific instruments and procedures for regulating a particular range of social relations, that is, for shaping the social institutions of the political organisation of society as a whole – the state – but also as a yardstick for assessing the conformity of these new relations to the desired rules of cooperation, communication and interaction in all spheres of social life [7, p 1077-1078].

In other words, democracy was already being viewed and employed as a political value that made possible free social dialogue – more precisely, polylogue – in the sense in which this term is used by Vasyl Lisovyi in his monograph [8, p. 66-67]. Naturally, in line with the above understanding of politics, the new rules of free communication on issues of public significance, as well as the content and range of those issues, took shape gradually and for quite a long time remained incomplete, retaining group-based limitations both with

regard to politics itself and to the formation of an understanding of the scope of the common interest and, accordingly, of the content of the common good.

Other political ideologies, representing and defending various, often likewise group-based, interests of social strata, in the course of the practical struggle of political forces and the corresponding ideological discourse — through analysis, criticism and rejection of the idea of democracy as free political communication [9, pp.1033-1043], understood as a way of securing the most adequate conditions of (universally shared) cooperation in politics — began to use and to interpret the idea of democracy in different ways, thereby effectively enriching it with new meanings [8, p. 70-71].

Even when they proposed restrictions or certain exceptional conditions in the rules of political cooperation (with regard to particular groups or situations), they contributed to the unfolding of political dialogue. This observation applies to most political ideologies, from conservatism to Marxism.

The most significant breakthrough in the formation of the content and principles of the development of democracy as a political value occurred at the end of the nineteenth and in the twentieth century. Major socio-economic and political changes taking place both in individual countries and in the world as a whole, which gave rise to unprecedented new conditions of human coexistence and cooperation, complicated the world of the political and prompted the search for new answers and meanings. Social revolutions, national liberation movements and world wars, in effect, demonstrated the insufficient capacity of the old political structures and the corresponding world-view systems, including traditionally democratic ones, to respond adequately to new challenges without substantially changing the rules of the game [10].

Adequate political interaction under the new conditions could not be ensured on the basis of the existing, still narrowly group-based (economic, ethnic, cultural, religious) partial interests and rules of political communication that had served as the framework for fruitful social and already international cooperation. In our view, the circumstances required intensified interaction among an ever greater number of traditional and new, newly emerging political actors, as well as the removal of a significant number of restrictions on equal political communication.

The task of expanding the circle of subjects of politics and of public law, as a deliberate activity of the state, contributes to the democratisation of the political regime, enriching and strengthening civil society by providing additional opportunities for its harmonious interaction. This enrichment of civil society is to be understood specifically as an increase in the number of recognised social groups in which the individual appears as the bearer of a growing number of interests whose protection is guaranteed by the state. It is precisely this orientation of state activity that may be regarded as the political

process of expanding freedom, which is the core value of liberalism. Such state activity constitutes the consummatory result of the implementation of all other democratic procedures by the established state institutions.

In other words, the elaboration of the concepts of the rule-of-law state and civil society within the evolution of liberal democratic theory, and the gradual unfolding of these ideas in the practice of forming political institutions and procedures, has demonstrated that a democratic state cannot but be a state governed by the rule of law. A rule-of-law state, for its part, in order to harmonise its interaction with civil society, must itself make efforts to foster the development and expansion of the structures and capacities of civil society. This is made possible precisely by the above-mentioned mechanism — the recognition as public of the interests of an ever greater number of groups that arise in the course of social development. Given that every citizen belongs to an ever-growing number of groups — social, political, economic, territorial, demographic and so forth — and appears in different social roles, the recognition and protection of their interests by the state expands the boundaries of the individual's social freedom. This is a process that is not limited in time; it functions as a direction, as a principle of goal-setting for a state that seeks to expand and secure the freedom of its citizens.

The principles, instruments and aims of politics as a phenomenon still remained insufficiently commensurate with the values of an open, unrestricted public dialogue, and politics itself remained insufficiently open to the productive resolution of questions of interest. In this sense, the social demand for democracy was actualised — first and foremost as a value-based idea in the above-defined sense, capable of setting and securing the conditions for political dialogue and polylogue within countries and between them, without any restrictions as to the subjects of this dialogue or the range of their interests.

We must acknowledge that, even in the first quarter of the twenty-first century, the idea of democracy has not become absolutely dominant. We can observe that its practical implementation is accompanied by authoritarian regressions in a number of countries and even by attempts to restrict the activity of democratic institutions in so-called consolidated democracies. The relatively recent speech by President D. Trump at his own inauguration demonstrated that the narrowing of the circle of subjects of politics and of law remains possible today. On that occasion, he stressed that from that moment on there would be only two sexes in the United States, thereby nullifying all the efforts of various gender groups to achieve recognition under public law. Regardless of one's attitude to the issue of gender, this overtly conservative move attests to a regression in the unfolding of democracy. These groups have hardly disappeared; rather, they have become "invisible" to the state, placed beyond its protection and attention.

On the contrary, this has made their persecution possible and has restricted freedom.

At the same time, we can observe the historical resilience of democracy as a form or mode of social organisation, primarily in the political sphere. The core of this resilience is the political culture acquired by society. The foregoing points less to the inadequacy of democratic institutions as such than to their imperfection with regard to a particular historical period and to the need for their reconfiguration in accordance with changing conditions. It indicates, above all, the need to intensify efforts aimed at democratic advancement.

Conclusions

We have, in general terms, considered the logic of the unfolding of the historical process of the democratisation of politics, which to some extent coincides with the logic of the cognition and practical, gradual implementation of the values of liberal democracy, with freedom as the central value. In our view, there is a certain logic to the unfolding of democracy as a process, whose sequence and orientation are aimed at tolerating the greatest possible number of public interests in the political sphere and at transforming their bearers into subjects of politics and subjects of law, entitled to participate in common affairs within the state.

Everything that pertains to the problem of political democracy – the separation of the branches of state power, universal suffrage, multiparty systems, the institutions that safeguard popular sovereignty as a whole, and so forth, that is, the principles and values developed by liberalism over the centuries – from this perspective ought to be regarded as necessary but insufficient instruments, principles, forms and methods for the implementation and maintenance of democracy as a political value. If they are realised merely formally, and their functioning does not secure free political dialogue with a tendency towards the removal of any restrictions, if, as a result, exclusive protection is afforded only to a selective portion of interests, such a form of the implementation of democracy does not correspond to the liberal idea of democracy as a political value and cannot be defined as democratic.

The imperfection of historical and contemporary forms of democratic institutions cannot be set in opposition to the very idea and value of democracy. Accordingly, we maintain that authoritarian “backslidings” in a number of countries and anti-democratic movements in others, as well as protest movements in countries of “consolidated democracy” that have arisen throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, attest merely to dissatisfaction with already existing political institutions that prove incapable of fully realising democracy in its genuinely liberal understanding. Essentially, the partial, incomplete realisation of the values of democracy – whereby it remains democracy only

for a part of society – has compromised the very idea of democracy in the liberal sense, with its aspiration to eliminate any barriers to socially meaningful political communication and to overcome alienation. By contrast, the activity of democratic institutions and the application of democratic procedures and methods, when they are democratically oriented in value terms, are capable of improving and updating the rules that secure societal and interstate political dialogue.

In this sense, F. Fukuyama was both right and wrong when he spoke of the “end of history” in connection with the final victory of liberal democracy and its corresponding form of government. For liberal democracy is indeed the form of the embodiment of democracy that is closest to the “correct” one, constructed in accordance with the value ideal and principles of liberalism, and it is a contemporary form of democratic realisation, but by no means a sufficient or historically definitive one. Progress remains possible. It is still possible to broaden the range of interests of new social groups recognised in public law and, accordingly, to create additional organisational and legal mechanisms for taking them into account. This may lead both to changes in forms of governance and to the further evolution of liberalism.

The very dialogue among diverse, often ideologically opposed, political forces over democracy, its possible forms, principles and instruments has driven the evolution of both the idea and the practice of democracy, fostering the emergence of a more open politics that is tolerant of a broader range of social interests, whose emergence has been conditioned by social progress and has led to the transformation of political institutions. An increase in the number of recognised social groups within which the individual appears as the bearer of a greater plurality of interests whose protection is guaranteed by the state may be regarded as the political process of the expansion of freedom, which is the central value of liberalism. Such activity of the state constitutes the consummatory result of the implementation of all other democratic procedures by the established state institutions.

In fact, the main credo or orientation of democratic progress lies in the striving to expand the field of political interaction without exclusions; in overcoming historical prejudices and limitations in the political, legal and cultural understanding of “we”; in identifying and conferring public status (the status of being recognised and protected by the state) on all possible social interests, even those that are still in the process of formation. Each individual is the bearer of a significant number of public interests – political, socio-economic, demographic and so on. Conferring publicity on each social role of the human being promotes a fuller realisation of individual freedom and a reduction in various forms of alienation, which may serve as a criterion of the effectiveness of democracy and, in our view, as the principal direction of democratic advancement.

Therefore, we believe that if we consider democracy as the conscious construction of social being, we may speak of the unity of theory and practice: theory primarily sets the direction of movement, while practice, following in its wake, step by step, progressively and not without authoritarian regressions, constitutes social progress in this direction. And democracy is, above all, about freedom and the expansion of its social boundaries.

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**DEMOCRACY AS THE HISTORICAL PROGRESS
OF FREEDOM: ESSENCE, ORIENTATION, AND
DEVELOPMENTAL FEATURES**

Abstract

The article examines the nature, specific features, political content and forms of democracy. It elucidates the principles and values of democracy in its liberal form, in comparison with other conceptions and practices of its implementation. Democracy is treated here not only as a political regime, but as a broader social phenomenon. The author analyses the main approaches to understanding liberal democracy as a social phenomenon that is best able to ensure the broadest possible inclusion in political communication and interaction of those social strata that emerge in the course of social advancement and the growing complexity of society. Accordingly, the factors that actualise democratic processes in the contemporary world are also considered.

The article offers a historical and theoretical exploration of the unfolding and diffusion of the idea of democracy and of the political practices through which these processes are realised. The author analyses what is regarded as the main trend in the evolution of democracy as a phenomenon, namely the greatest possible, for a given historical period, expansion of the range of social groups involved in politics through the recognition of their interests as public. It is noted

that when the state recognises the interests of a particular group as public, this means that the state endorses and protects these interests, thereby turning this group into a legal subject (subject of rights). In the absence of such recognition of the public character of their interests by the state, newly emerging groups remain invisible to politics as a sphere of governance and are excluded from political discourse and interaction.

It is argued that the deliberate expansion by the state of the circle of subjects of public law promotes the democratisation of the political regime, enriching and strengthening civil society by creating additional opportunities for their harmonious interaction. The enrichment of civil society is understood primarily in terms of increasing the number of recognised social groups within which the individual appears as the bearer of a growing plurality of interests whose protection is guaranteed by the state. It is emphasised that such an orientation of state activity can be regarded as a process of expanding freedom, which constitutes the core value of liberalism. Such state activity represents the consummate outcome of the implementation of other democratic procedures by the established state institutions and presupposes the institutionalisation of the idea of social and political tolerance towards new socio-political actors.

The article points to the particular role in this process of the incremental democratisation of the state, understood as the political organisation of society as a whole, through the development of appropriate institutions and the conscious orientation of their activities towards expanding the scope of political interaction so as to take into account the greatest possible number of interests in the adoption of generally binding political and administrative decisions, and in bringing newly emerging groups to the status of legal subjects within the state. The boundaries of the circle of political subjects characteristic of particular historical epochs, starting from the era of modernity, are tentatively identified. The main principles and norms governing the formation and implementation of rules for an all-encompassing and unrestricted political dialogue within society, between society and the state, and among states are generalised as the core idea of the value dimension of democracy. It is argued that, in this sense, the advance of democracy may be regarded as a measure of social progress.

Keywords: politics; democracy; liberal democracy; political dialogue; public interests; tolerance.

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