APPLICATION FORM FOR PROSPECTIVE WORKSHOP DIRECTORS

Proposal for a workshop at the ECPR Joint Sessions in Nicosia, Cyprus
25 – 30 April 2006

Title of proposed workshop:
Efficiency versus Democracy: Towards a New Synthesis

Abstract of proposed workshop:
Democratic structures and processes are often inefficient, whilst efficient arrangements often lack
democratic openness and legitimacy. The recognition of this tension is not new, but in the context of
globalisation it has gained new significance: The achievement of efficiency gains is the primary
objective of globalisation-induced processes of economic, political and administrative modernisation.
But what exactly does efficiency mean? Is it compatible with the demand for more accountability,
participation and empowerment? As the distribution of responsibilities between the state, the market
and civil society is being reviewed, projects of capacity building and democratic renewal are
supposed to enable civil society to play a more active role in democratic self-governance. But can
democratic gains really be achieved at the same time as efficiency gains? On the one hand democratic
deliberation and participation are widely regarded as a vital resource to be tapped in order to increase
the quality, legitimacy and effectiveness of decision making. On the other hand, democratic
participation and accountability are being recognised as obstacles to economic, administrative or
political efficiency. In many contexts rights and opportunities for democratic co-determination or
intervention are therefore actually being curtailed. The workshop invites empirical and theoretical
papers exploring the relationship between democracy and efficiency in the era of global
competitiveness. The assumption is that there is a trade-off between the two ideals which leads to a
redefinition of both of them and a new emerging synthesis.

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Outline of the topic:

Economic globalisation, demographic shifts and the changing nature of national and global politics have exposed European societies to unprecedented pressures for modernisation. In the post-ideological era, efficiency seems to be the primary objective of societal modernisation. In countries such as Britain, The Netherlands, the Scandinavian countries and Germany, to name but a few, sweeping modernisation agendas within the public sector and the welfare state have been inspired by the desire to increase the efficiency of the established structures. Not least in the name of efficiency, the relationship of, and the distribution of responsibilities between, the state, the market and civil society is being reviewed. Strategies of depoliticisation are widely regarded as highly desirable for improving the efficiency of public management. At the same time, however, there is also a perceived democratic deficit: Increased reliance on market principles and scientific expert knowledge as the basis for the formulation and achievement of the public good removes fundamentally political decisions from the arenas of political debate. The resulting perception of a democratic deficit is reinforced by the growing complexity of policy issues and the unprecedented significance of international policy regimes. European governments are, therefore, looking for ways to enhance democratic participation and accountability. Projects of capacity building, for example, are supposed to enable civil society to play a more active role in democratic self-governance. Consultation exercises are hoped to regenerate public trust in representative politics and to tap civil society as a resource helping to improve the quality and legitimacy of public policy decisions. In this context the old tension between democracy and efficiency has gained new significance: democratic structures and processes tend to be inefficient, whereas efficient arrangements often lack democratic openness and legitimacy. The management of this tension is an integral part of the day-to-day business of public administrators, policy makers and anybody involved with the co-ordination and implementation of societal modernisation programmes. It is the focus of the proposed workshop.

Democracy and efficiency are by no means mutually exclusive. But they are also not necessarily easily compatible. Their tension surfaces in a wide range of contexts. Their relationship needs to be renegotiated and redefined on a permanent basis. In many European countries, tensions between the objectives of democracy and efficiency have triggered
reflexes of societal resistance against the respective governments’ agendas of modernisation. However, the new emphasis on efficiency is not only the result of systemic pressures and government priorities imposed in a top-down fashion: *depoliticisation* and the *delegation* of competencies are also related to rapidly spreading public scepticism about the effectiveness of democratic participation and the possibility of democratic agreement. This raises questions with important policy implications:

- How do the needs for democratic participation change?
- What kind of expectations do citizens have regarding efficiency and democracy?
- How do political parties change their internal structures and strategies in response to the need for efficiency and the demand for inner party democracy?
- How do governments manage the tensions between pressures for efficiency and the demands for new forms of direct democracy?
- What kind of new syntheses between democracy and efficiency may be emerging?

These are the questions that will be addressed in this workshop. They are highly relevant for public administrators, policy makers, and managers of modernisation processes, all of whom constantly have to deal with this tension.

**Relation to existing research:**

There is a rich literature dealing with issues related to those addressed in the proposed workshop. In particular, a lot of work has been done on perceived democratic deficits and democratic renewal (at national and EU levels), on institutional reform, on local empowerment, new public management or on capacity building in civil society (e.g. Offe 2003a, 2003b; Fischer 2003; Dalton 2004, Crouch 2004). There are recent publications on *regulative politics* (e.g. Majone 1996, 1997; Czada/Lütz/Mette 2003; Moran 2003), the *politics of delegation* (e.g. Thatcher/Stone Sweet 2002), on *depoliticisation* (e.g. Flinders 2004a, 2004b) and *political consumerism* (e.g. Micheletti/Stolle 2003). Yet, the specific question of the relationship between democracy and efficiency remains seriously under-researched, both empirically and conceptually. The exact meaning of *efficiency* is neither clear nor obvious. The compatibility with the objective of democratic renewal is widely assumed rather than properly analysed.

For the workshop directors, the proposed workshop builds on the experience and results of a recent research project on public resistance to agendas of societal modernisation in Britain and Germany (funded by the ANGLO-GERMAN FOUNDATION FOR THE STUDY OF INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY), the results of which are due to be published later this year (Blühdorn
and Jun 2005). This project highlighted the central significance of democracy and efficiency as key parameters in the process of societal modernisation. Widening the rather narrow geographical perspective of this earlier research, the proposed workshop now aims to provide for a much more inclusive discussion of the tensions between democracy and efficiency and of emerging syntheses between the two.

Participants:

It is anticipated that the workshop will attract the attention of academics from a fairly wide range of subject disciplines and research backgrounds. The tension between the demands for efficiency gains and for democratic participation surfaces in a variety of different contexts. Accordingly, it is expected (and intended) that the workshop will bring together researchers in politics, sociology, public administration, management and wherever else the conflict between efficiency gains and democratic gains becomes visible or relevant. Most certainly there is considerable interest in the topic among scholars dealing with democratic reform, political parties, institutional design, organisational theory, political communication, political campaigning and mobilisation by social movements and institutionalised political actors.

It is our intention to have a healthy mix between young and well established researchers. We will make a particular effort to recruit participants from the young democracies in CEE because it can be assumed that in these countries the tension between democracy and efficiency surfaces and is managed in ways that differ significantly from the experience of long-established western European democracies.

Type of paper:

The workshop invites empirical and theoretical papers. About one third of the contributions may be of a conceptual / theoretical nature, helping to explore the changing meaning and relationship of efficiency and democracy. Two thirds are expected to present empirical case studies demonstrating how the tensions between democracy and efficiency surface in, and how they are being dealt with by, specific political actors and structural arrangements.

Funding:

This workshop deals with issues which are highly policy relevant. It is anticipated that participants will be able to obtain support from national funding bodies.

Biographical details of workshop organisers:
Ingolfur Blühdorn, MA (Erlangen, Germany), PhD (Keele, UK), is Senior Lecturer in European Politics at the University of Bath, UK. His main research areas are political sociology, social theory and Green politics. He has also published widely on the transformation of late-modern societies. His current research focuses on the ways in which contemporary European societies adapt their modernist structures and ideals to the late-modern condition.

Uwe Jun, PhD (Goettingen, Germany), Habilitation (Potsdam, Germany), is Professor in Comparative Politics at the University of Wuerzburg, Germany. From Spring 2005 he will be Professor for Western Democracies at the University of Trier, Germany. His main research areas are political parties, political communication and parliamentarism. He has published widely on Social Democratic parties, parties and party systems in Western Europe, and on the change of parliamentary systems in comparative perspective. His current research focuses on the way in which political parties in Europe adapt to changing external circumstances.

References:

Offe, C. (2003b) Herausforderungen der Demokratie, Frankfurt: Campus