

*The Netherlands Institute for Academic Studies in Damascus (NIASD)
has the pleasure to invite you to the lecture:*

Democracy World Wide?
Reflections on the Questions
"What is Democracy?" and "What is it Good For?"



- Lecture by Evert van der Zweerde -

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Wednesday 22nd April 2009, 19:00h at the NIASD

"Democracy" is a buzz word in many discourses. Many people are favoring it and most states claim to have democratic institutions. In this connection, it often functions as an ideological notion. Therefore, it is appropriate to address the questions "What *is* democracy?" and "What is it good for?" Approaching these questions from the perspective of political philosophy, I shall defend the position that democracy is *not* an end in itself and not a primary value, but an important means for the transformation of forms of antagonism in a society into "agonistic" oppositions that can become the object of political struggle within the framework of mutually accepted "rules of the game".

The advantages of democracy, in addition to this capacity to transform antagonism into agonism, are the increased commitment of citizens and legitimacy of political power. I will elaborate a conception of democracy as consisting of three dimensions:

- 1) the institutional dimension of a "regime", i.e. a set of institutions, repertoires, and practices;
- 2) the dimension of democracy at the level of society at large; and
- 3) the dimension of a suitable ethos, consisting of principles and virtues.

These three dimensions do not imply each other, but they do tend to reinforce each other. Depending on the angle from which one looks at them, each of them can appear as the most important one. Democratic institutions, repertoires, and practices can be transferred from one place to another, and can be adopted in and adapted to other contexts than their context of origin. Still, this does not turn it into a cure for all ills or into a standard form for all circumstances. Also, "democracy", like all instruments, can only function if it is an object of maintenance and care. However, it remains crucially important to understand it as a means, not as an end in itself.

Language: *English – with Arabic translation*
Location: *NIASD, Farabi Sreet 85, East Mezzeh (near the Greek Embassy)*
Time: *19:00h*
Information: *Telephone: 6117622, Email: assistant@niasd.org*