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Citizen's Assembly
On Electoral Reform

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Our Thoughts about Electoral Reform.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen ,

After having attended your Public Forum on Electoral Reform on 31st. May 2004 in the Sheraton Ballroom in Surrey, we cannot help but give you our opinion on the topic by letter because we were under the impression that the meeting was more or less hijacked by people who wanted to impress a majority system on you and the attendees.

Although nine presenters were promised, we had to leave by the sixth, because every presenter was permitted more time than the allotted time. But the majority of the presenters .. and the catcalls were mostly directed to show the chaos that will come by having mostly minority governments with the proportional system in any shape or form. Already here we could not disagree more.

The gentleman who painted the Italian system as a scare crow seems to have conveniently forgotten that in Italy each and every party, even the smallest ones, can get into Parliament without a percentage limit (i.e. a 5% clause, permitting only parties into that Parliament with at least 5% of the popular vote) or a seat limit, where only parties can get into Parliament, who got at least three seats voted in. by the direct vote. However the Italian system is very good at getting rid of Governments, that the majority of the parliament does not support, if the reigning party refuses to compromise for the

sake of the majority of the parliament and of the people who elected it. Such an uncompromising standpoint our present government has let to the repeated boondoggles and misappropriations of our money over the last decade. If we had an instrument in our society similar to the Italian, we would have recalled such irresponsible Government by now !

The next scare came from another gentleman, painting the present German Coalition Government as being ineffective over already three governing periods. He seems to forget, that this is a real democracy in which, a majority of the populus is willing to give the same coalition the power to govern three times in a row. This coalition must have done something right in the eyes of the electorate. And because, as we understood, both parties in the coalition have ministers in the cabinet, wrongdoings by the cabinet can be discovered and made public right away. Not as it is in our system ! Here the cabinet makes decisions behind closed doors and their majority in Parliament does not, cannot and is not allowed to question things, under a threat of being excluded from caucus.

Because so many here live with the delusion, that “ their “ Representative in Parliament can bring through their own ideas or the ideas of the constituents, even against Party Policies. They still believe strongly in personal representation by “their” Member of Parliament. But they must have seen on so many occasions, that the party whip can and will introduce party discipline, even at almost unimportant issues, only to show unity and party discipline, against the wishes of the majority of their constituents. THAT IS NOT Democracy!!

So we thought, we should put our own thoughts to you all, and what we think our future electoral system should look like.

We both think after long consideration and weighing all your proposals of the thirteen fact sheets, that a Mixed Electoral System would fulfill both basics of a democratic election system: proportional representation and election of a local member of the area.

To make the new system simple and understandable also to the majority of people, for whom English is a second language – as in our case - and to avoid that the present government puts up more roadblocks – such as the double majority it has prescribed for you in the legislation for this change. The seventy nine electoral districts and the same number of representatives could stay in place. Only approximately 40 to 45 should be elected directly by pluralistic votes (as until now) and the rest, 34 to 39 in proportionality, meaning, they would be chosen from a party list by the percentage standings of the parties after the vote. Of course, the numbers of the already directly elected members would be deducted from that number.

Of course, the boundaries of the electoral districts would have to be changed, so that the rural areas are relatively smaller, to ensure more fair representation for rural areas. Urban constituencies with much greater numbers of electable candidates, should be made much larger than they are now.

If than a percentage hurdle would be in place – lets say five percent – then all direct elected candidates would go into the parliament, as long as the party gets at least three Members elected.

So, for example, if party A gets 35 percent of the votes, it would then fill 35 percent of the 80 seats to Victoria, i.e., 28 members. Had this party already gotten 15 Members by direct vote, thirteen additional Members would be chosen from the party list from number.1 to number 15.

One could even go to an Open Party List System, where voters could even make an “X” behind the name of their choice, and the candidate with the most votes collected would be elected, notwithstanding his place on that party list.

If a party B has only three percent of the popular vote, but got three direct Members elected, these three Members would go to Victoria. However, if the party gets three percent of the popular vote, but only two direct members, all these votes would be calculated and percentage wise distributed to the other winning parties. This would prevent parliament from becoming fractured by too many small parties – as in Italy – but will keep the number of representatives according to the percentage of the proportional vote for all the other parties. Under that system smaller but more populous parties could have seats in Parliament and bring forward their ideas to invigorate the political debate of the province as a whole..

That would be in our humble opinion the most democratic election process. But to keep it simpler at first, may be one vote for a party and the second for a direct elected member would be the easiest to understand by the majority of the voters.

That would diminish the high nosed attitudes of the big parties, who think they can do what they will, because the voters have no other choices.

Such a system was developed in Germany under the direct supervision of the four Victor Powers after World War II and proclaimed by them as the most modern and democratic system in the world, so that no dictatorship could ever develop again. It has served the Germans very well !!–

But why then have two of these superpowers – America and Great Britain– not changed their electoral laws, to reflect its own creation after the World War II for their own democracy’s sake, is beyond us !! It stands to reason that was right in times of buggies and horse couriers two hundred years ago , may not be adequate hundreds of years later in times of Internet and Rockets.

We really hope, that we have made ourselves clear and you will all be able to take the best out of it for yourselves. We both would be very happy, if our thoughts were to help you to arrive at a genuine Democratic electoral system in which the percentage of

votes for a party translates into a percentage of the seats for that party. It sure would help to get a Government elected, what has to be more accountable, more open and a more responsible as we have it NOW in our Province..

With kindest personal regards,

Yours

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Waltraud A. Ewald

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Manfred P. Ewald