

A photograph of a person walking on a path through a snowy forest. The path is covered in snow, and the trees are also covered in snow. The sky is overcast. The person is walking away from the camera, and the path leads into the distance. The overall scene is quiet and serene.

Kindness in politics.

An indicator of good governance.

Text by Matteo Quadranti
Photos by Paola Rezzonico

GentleBooklets

#15. Kindness in politics.

An indicator of good governance.

*Text by Matteo Quadranti
Photos by Paola Rezzonico*

GentleBooklets It is a series of long-form articles written by different authors. The booklets, designed for a quick read, feature texts and images. We have kindly asked to the authors to comment on the term “kindness.” Authors and photographers have donated their work. The motivations behind the project are the same as those of Gentletude, the desire to spread awareness about the need for “kindness” in our society, a society too focused on personal success to remember the basics of everyday living and respect for the environment that hosts us. Our decision to present these ideas in a series of publications is due to the awareness that, in order to stimulate people to think about these issues, it is necessary to present some concrete examples. In this case, the examples are provided in the texts written by the authors.

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Introduction

I have chosen to be involved in politics and I have made this decision during my studies at the University of Geneva: this town is indeed very inspiring, even in international, political terms. My degree thesis, on Public Law, dealt with the governmental Financial Plan and Agenda, used by the State as tools to act.

My main wish was using my skills to the benefit of politics, unselfishly focusing on the needs of the population and of the others in general, as I have done in several social and cultural charitable activities.

Of course, I also had some utopias and expectations. Even though I am now more disillusioned than I used to be while at university, these have remained almost unchanged and can be realized through some values and principles, such as social and distributive justice, focusing on people in need or having difficulties and the very same starting opportunities, regardless of their social condition, status or race.



The political system in Switzerland

In Switzerland, but not only, the way politics is dealt with has changed. It has changed especially in the last 30 years, due to laissez-faire, to the increasing power in the hands of mainly financial and economic lobbies, to the role played by the media and the coming of populist “parties”.

It has undoubtedly been a detrimental change, even though conflicts of parties and strong fights on issues and ideas have always occurred in our history. Today, there is no respect for people, no time to reflect, no transparency and correctness to avoid conflicts due to personal interests.

At a federal level, we have a bicameral Parliament including a National Council and a Council of States. The former is composed of 200 members who are proportionally elected by the population of each Canton. The latter is composed of 46 members (two per Canton) elected by the population of each Canton. These represent the government of each Canton.

The two chambers gather in the National Assembly for the elections of the Federal Council, that is the government, composed of seven members. Therefore, the Swiss government is elected by the two Chambers and not by the population. Each Federal Councilor has the same status and on an annual basis, a President is appointed, who mainly have representative functions. Conversely, each Canton has a unicameral parliament and a government (Council of State). Their composition and election differ from one Canton to another. In the Canton of Ticino, the population directly elect the five State Councilors and the 90 members of the Gran Consiglio based on the proportional system.

It is worth to highlight that the typically Swiss direct democratic system and the proximity of each politician with the population allow for widespread contacts, therefore, local issues, but not only, are quickly submitted to the parliament and to the government. Therefore, the federalist distribution of governmental tasks at a municipality, canton and federal level, which may however be optimized, is gen-



erally more successful than centralizing systems. Of course, due to these characteristics, it takes long to adopt the relevant solutions to issues, but this is the price to be paid to find the right political compromises.

The Role of Parliamentarians

In Switzerland, Parliamentarians conduct a militant activity, entering some commissions that gather once or twice a month to analyze in depth some issues and bills assigned by the parliament plenum.

The aforementioned commissions receive governmental messages, legislative initiatives taken by the Members of Parliament or by people, they discuss and examine them also relying upon some external experts and/or lobbies and eventually assess whether said initiatives comply with the Constitution and the higher federal law.

In turn or upon demand, parliamentarians volunteer as speakers for the report issued by the relevant commission to be submitted to the parliament plenary session.

In the parliament plenum, gathering approximately 10 times a year for 3 or 4 consecutive days, individual parliamentarians or groups may support or oppose the commission report. Eventually, speakers have the last word to persuade the majority to vote for their report. Also the Government has the right to intervene and may support or oppose the commission report. Each parliamentarian may at any time submit questions to the Government, on some specific issues more details are required of, to which the Government must reply.

Differences from the nearest Italy

The main difference undoubtedly lies in alliances. In Italy, the center-right and center-left wings exist, forming often temporary and changing alliances, based on opportunistic or economic interests. In Switzerland this does not exist yet, even though the proportional system has had some flaws, especially since the creation of new parties. Once only conservatism, liberalism and socialism existed, now also the Ticino League, the Democratic Union



of the Center, the Green Party and the Communist Party do. In the past parties managed to reach agreement on the agenda, but today they do not. Whenever they exist, majorities constantly change, therefore political activity becomes increasingly difficult. A proposal may take a long time and not be implemented because it is now fashionable to change one's opinion at the very last moment, depending on the mood of the population and the election period. Another difference undoubtedly lies in the federalist system I have mentioned earlier.

Kindness as an indicator of good governance

I think kindness is a way of thinking, partly innate and partly learn from one's parents and teachers. Kindness means respecting things, animals and people of any statuses, races and origins.

In politics, kindness translates in expressing oneself and making oneself understood correctly, honestly, without mis-

understandings or irrelevant issues. The ability consists in fostering reflection and analysis without imposing one's opinion. It takes respect of the citizens and of their ability to have their opinion. One of the principles I often pinpoint is free will.

The best choice should not be the best decision for oneself, but for the greater good.

Citizens are undoubtedly disgusted by aggressive and shouted politics neglecting their interests. Kind politicians present issues in simple and reassuring terms, because they are persuaded of their arguments and do not need to raise their voice. In the last few years, the degree of insecurity and fear has grown in the country. It is therefore necessary to bring back serenity also through the way we communicate.

Today politicians' fancy attitude is increasingly used to support their election. The fancy approach used by some politicians has been implemented following the arrival of some populist movements, wanting to have the exclusive proximity to people. Politicians must undoubtedly



reach consensus, but I believe that this should be done with kindness and intellectual honesty and not with this false and biased fancy attitude.

Those who want most people to like them, will promise something to everybody. It is hypocrisy revealing itself in something intangible. On the contrary, the need exists for people giving their vision in the political debate.

New needs and new opportunities

A kind way to deal with issues in politics is disseminating one's opinions clearly, concisely and honestly. One should not promise something that cannot be realized. One cannot promise miracles when reality goes the other way.

For example, in Switzerland and in the Canton of Ticino, we have experienced a closed-minded political propaganda. People – a word I do not like – are told that this approach will allow going back to Switzerland of the Eighties, to bank secrecy,

economic growth, no bilateral agreements with the European Union. This is an illusion, a populist utopia, because Switzerland lives thanks to relationships with the EU, its main commercial partner.

Bank secrecy actually was a real source of wellness and wealth for Switzerland, but after 2008 global financial crisis, the other countries have started to wage war to all countries having bank secrecy. Therefore, we can hardly think that we have strong bargaining power. The Swiss economy strongly depends upon the pharmaceutical industry, precision mechanics and trade: these sectors imply relationships with the rest of the world. We therefore need to find new compromises and to stop believing we can live outside the world.

Closed-mindedness can be also seen in the workplace, especially in bordering Cantons, like Ticino. Cross-border workers stealing jobs to Swiss people was the main argument used in the vote of February 2014, a vote against foreigners, be they cross-border workers, refugees or



migrants. After 20 years of fear of foreigners, instilled by populists, Switzerland has voted with its guts. The issue of cross-border workers cannot be solved easily, because our economy does need them in several fields, such as the social and health sector, the industrial manufacturing industry and hospitality, especially for low-salary jobs that people from the Canton of Ticino no longer want to do.

Education and training, in certain areas, such as the health sector, have not been able to make forecasts on the future of jobs and on the number of specialists to be trained.

After this vote, the economic sector, as well as university and research, have started to worry, fearing they would lose valuable professionals.

We cannot rely exclusively on the best talents educated in Switzerland. For researchers and students, we do need European and world exchange programs. This is why that has been an uninformed vote to raise more consensus, but also an

unkind way to communicate using a campaign against foreigners that was almost xenophobic.

The issue of cross-border workers is complex and must be dealt with kindly, starting from actual proposals, such as controls on wage dumping, allowing the State to introduce normal employment contracts, involving minimum wages and respectable and binding working hours.

Then we have collective employment contracts, established based on agreements made by employers' associations and trade unions. Similarly, they have become more complex, due to increasingly radical stances, stemming from the general situation.

Furthermore, training and education should be restructured. Young people need to know actual employment possibilities, future emerging jobs that do not require a degree. Basically, people from the Canton of Ticino need to be guided towards jobs that are done by cross-border workers.



What does good to politics

Politics based on vilification is an unkind way to do politics very differently from the past, when debates were not disrespectful. Nowadays, political rivals are mocked, attacked also based on their physical defects and personal affairs. Aimed at silencing rivals, gossip and public maliciousness are used systematically, in the press, also leading to libeling and insults.

When those who have different ideas are vilified and insulted on a daily basis, citizens are obviously likely to feel legitimated to do the same thing and this appears evident in social networks.

In the last 30 years, thanks to wealth, we have become more individualistic, as we have nurtured the idea that money can buy anything and that we do not need the others: so, why shall we respect them?

Such individualistic approach leads everybody to say whatever they want without any limit, which replaces solidarity that used to lay the foundations for mutual respect.

However, we are living a profound crisis and we should restore solidarity, a way of living together based on mutual help and political debate focused on issues and no longer on aggressiveness.

We must realize that something has changed and will change us, that the pillars of the past have disappeared and therefore we will have to be more resilient in the future and maybe start migrating again. We, as politicians, should start thinking about a common future vision, should find a way to build our country, reforming the system.



Conclusions

Rude politics, blaming rivals, blaming the others, regardless of who they are, with no self-criticism, distracts voters and reduces projects and the ability to react to the changing world. We stop being proactive. I hope that people will soon realize that the world is interconnected and that issues are increasingly complex. Solutions are not always easy, as typically suggested by populists, promising what they are aware they cannot actually do and being dishonest to those who believe them.

I think that we will have to draw from humanism, we will have to focus again on human beings, to try and ensure citizens the most peaceful possible future, caring more about the environment and fostering new technologies.

The last 60 years have been extraordinary in history, started by solidarity after the Second World War and involving shared objectives, which has led to a successful world. Then, the greed of a few has

started destroying this world, increasing the gap between the rich and the poor and creating difficulties for the middle class.



AUTHOR

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Owner of the Quadranti law firm, in Chiasso.

Commitments in the social and cultural fields (since 2010): Secretary of the Association “Incontro Democratico” - Board Secretary of the “Fondazione del Parco delle Gole della Breggia” - Former Chairman of the Friends Association “La Nuova Scuola di Musica”, Balerna - Former Vice-Chairman of the Foundation Don Bautista Gargantini for education and development aid - Former Vice-Chairman of the Association Friends of Argentina, since 2008 Chairman of the ACTG, “Associazione Cantonale Ticinese di Ginnastica”.

Political commitments between 1992 and 1996 as Secretary of the PLRT Section of Balerna. From 1996 to 2012 Municipal and from 2012 Vice Mayor of the Balerna Municipality - Education, Culture, Sport and Relations between Municipalities Department. Between 1996 and 2013 Cantonal Delegate at the Delegates Assembly of the Swiss Radical Party. Between 2005 and 2010 PLR Mendrisiotto District Chairman and member of the PLRT Presidential Office. Since 2011 Deputy at the Grand Council of Ticino.

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PHOTOGRAPHER

Paola Rezzonico

After the Cantonal School of Fine Arts in Sion, she attended the Art School of BES at the University of Bern. Later on, she started a vast path of expressive researches, with studies of serigraphy and typography. Pushed by her curiosity, in 2004 she started to be interested in photography. Encouraged by the results obtained, she exhibited her works during several manifestations and in galleries.

Her art works display many different expressive techniques and reveal her innate and learnt sense for design, graphic, colour and calligraphic art.

In 2007 she explored the calligraphic art as an expressive necessity. This experience fulfils the eclectic identikit of Paola who, in time, gains a growing confidence in switching from a language to another, with a consequent contamination between them.

Since 2011 she lives and works in Arosio (TI), where she opened her activity to the public, founding “Altro, Atelier D’Arte” and offering to her students courses that involve a multitude of disciplines, techniques and languages in the field of visual arts.

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GENTLETUDE

Gentletude is a neologism composed of the words “gentilezza” (gentleness/kindness) and “attitudine” (attitude). It pursues the aims for a better world without violence, arrogance and rudeness.

A world where caring and paying attention to others, common sense and balanced competitiveness are the most important things.

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