NICOLAS HAYOZ,

*Associate Professor of Political Science,
Director of the Interdisciplinary Institute of Central
and Eastern Europe at the University of Fribourg
(Switzerland)*

Political Friendship, Trust and Democracy: Some Lessons from Recent Theories on Political and Civic Friendship for the Analysis of Democracies and Autocracies

Abstract

A relational aspect of political friendship is basically the focus of studies on political friendship looking at informal politics, clientelism or friends in politics, which may be useful on the road to political power. This aspect must be distinguished from a more general, institutional aspect of political friendship, which political philosophy presents in terms of civic or republican friendship. The idea and the theory of civic friendship deals with aspects of collective action, as well as with those shared norms which are expressed and discussed in the public sphere, the core of the political. In relation to theories of trust, civic friendship is a civil society, civic and political culture of the practices and expectations in society regarding how to live and how to cooperate. The political theory of friendship is also a warning against the abuse of power and the reintroduction of unity and enemies in a society based on the differences and multiplicity of perspectives.

Keywords: *civic friendship, democracy, authoritarianism, civil society, political trust, political community*

The ongoing discussion about the return of friendship not only reveals a renewed interest in friendship as a social relationship based on specific values [Devere, 2011; Münchberg, Reidenbach, 2012; König, 2013; Nixon, 2015; Schobin et al., 2016]. From the angle of political theory, it reveals that friendship is more than a private matter — it is also political. In the literature on friendship, one can find many references to classical authors pointing to the multiple mean-

ings of political friendship, best understood as collective representations and practices of social relatedness and common values.

The paper examines and interprets the ideas of political friendship from the viewpoint of political sociology. The author tries to answer the following questions: what do we gain or lose by using the concept of friendship, which is first of all based on the idea of a more or less equal relationship, in the political sphere? Could the underlying ideas of political friendship help us better understand the concept of political as such and the political community with all its connotations of solidarity and civility? And more generally, to what extent could political or civic friendship be used to describe citizenship? In any case, political friendship is related to political trust. This paper will precisely elucidate the relationship between trust and political friendship. Moreover, it supports the idea that a modern understanding of a political, public-space-oriented notion of civil friendship needs to be linked to the concept of trust. It aims at describing the elements of a political theory of civic friendship from the perspective of a sociological theory of modern society.

At first glance, such a perspective does not seem to fit in well with the historical change of the relationship between friendship and the political, which occurred in modern society. Politics is now the field of a specific function system focusing on political communication and decisions. Politics, at least in a democratised context, is about strategies to access power and to influence political decisions by building up winning coalitions and negotiating acceptable solutions. If friendship as a personal relationship belongs to the private realm and politics to the public sphere, then the former does not seem to be compatible with politics [Schobin et al., 2016: pp. 157 ff.]. Indeed, is politics not the "battlefield" of enemies and antagonists rather than the field of friendship? Heather Devere takes into account this peculiarity by underlining that "friendship in politics is associated with nepotism and favouritism, allowing unjust and unequal access to decision-makers and resources" [Devere, 2011: p. 17]. Another researcher, Jürgen Gebhardt [Gebhardt, 2008: p. 315] argues for a more positive version of political friendship for established democracies. In his opinion, the power game of politics, at best, might allow for friendships of utility. Political friends do not love each other for themselves, but only in so far as some benefit accrues to them from each other as Aristotle had observed. In politics, it is useful to build friendships in order to gain access to power positions, to advance political projects, or to get support for these projects [Gurr, 2011a, 2011b; Leuschner, 2011a, 2011b]. Political friendship is part of informal politics, opening the door to professional politics. Such a utilitarian form of political friendship representing "politically motivated and politically used relationships of exchange" can be analysed, for example, in the case of parliaments [Leuschner, 2011a: p. 212; 2011b]. It can also be studied on the level of political friendship between political leaders [Gurr, 2011a]. Similar conceptions of friendship can, of course, exist in authoritarian regimes where key political leaders also control power through networks of friends, placing them in positions where they can and should be useful (e. g., "Putin's friends"). Furthermore, some analyses of networks of cooperation in the civil society sector can also be presented on this relational level of friendship [Devere, 2011: p. 19; König, 2013: pp. 899 ff.]. Consequently, personal networks in politics can be de-

scribed as political friendships [Leuschner, 2011a: p. 205]. The importance or "value" of informal networks and the corresponding practices of political friendship may vary from one political system to the other. Hence, one may ask to what extent they are functional in regard to formal structures, or to what extent they confirm or not confirm the objectives of formal rules [Helmke, Levitsky, 2004; International Handbook, 2012; Pannes, 2011: p. 40].

The meaning of political friendship as a utility-oriented relationship focuses on politics. Another nuance relates political friendship to the political order in itself, to the political as the core of political order. For instance, this is what Jürgen Gebhardt bears in mind stating that "Western discourse on trust and friendship is a theoretical and practical discourse on the human condition of political order and as such it is an inherent element of Western self-understanding from its origins in the Graeco-Roman world onward" [Gebhardt, 2008: p. 342]. In this extended conception of political or civic friendship, political philosophy points to the goodwill between citizens, which makes it possible for individuals to live together [Hartmann, 2011: p. 436]. If citizens share certain values, they should also be able to go beyond personal friendships based on trust, and express more general trust towards strangers and authorities.

The notion of civic friendship, which can also be regarded as an "extended notion of friendship" [Hartmann, 2011: p. 463], can be found in the ideas about political friendship expressed by classical authors such as Aristotle, Locke, Durkheim, Tocqueville, or Arendt. Their focus is on republican virtue of civil society, solidarity, or pluralism. These notions constitute elements of a political theory for the "politics of friendship" [Derrida, 1994], or politics as friendship, as Jon Nixon presents it in his study on Hannah Arendt's concept of friendship [Nixon, 2015]. They also point to the multiple meanings of political friendship, best understood as collective representations and practices of social relatedness and common values.

Political Friendship and the Public Realm

The political aspect of friendship in a civic sense must be put on a level different from that of political friends. Following Digeser, one could start asking what the word "civic" contributes to the friendship side: "In civic friendship, the friends' civic obligations to the ideals, principles, institutions, laws, or politics are built into the friendship" [Digeser, 2016: p. 120]. The "civic" in friendship introduces some aspects inherent in politics, which are not the same as in private friendships. Civic friendship in public life implies a different logic, practices in accordance with norms governing the institutions to which they belong. In this regard, Digeser points to a disciplined notion of civic friendship based not on proximity but on distance, on specific obligations and expectations of how to communicate with each other, for example, in parliament. Members of parliament are expected to respect each other, to consider their friends in terms of empathy, integrity and diligence [Digeser, 2016: pp. 121–122]. It is a kind of common sense orientation, the idea of "truthful dialogue" put forward by Hannah Arendt, which will be analysed later. Such friendship is directed towards producing politically acceptable compromises and solutions, involves cooperation with a political op-

ponent since it is oriented to the binding rules of the political system. This type of functional friendship may be also observed in other institutions and in other function systems such as the economy or science. In politics, particularly in a democratised context, the public role of a politician interacts with the above-mentioned informal network aspect of political friendship. Games of power may go together with public role, being focused on respectful cooperation and commitment. However, in no way the distance with regard to everyday life can be overcome in modern democracy based on the rule of law: private friendships and families are not allowed anymore to interfere in politics. They would open a path to corruption, which is precisely what the institutional arrangements in the public sphere with all its checks and balances, orientation to the rule of law and so on are supposed to avoid.

A similar aspect of civic friendship in its public-space-focused meaning can also be noticeable at the level of civil society. Asking why people cooperate, one can see that they — whether they are politicians, activists or those who concerned themselves with a specific public issue — do it not only for profits, but also because they share some common values and specific ideas, because they want to change things, or solve problems in different fields. Digeser also seems to agree on these points stating that "in civic friendships, the friendships themselves may alter one's interests. This may help increase the possibilities for cooperation or, when the friends disagree, to continue to work with one another. In performing these functions, civic friendship may contribute to the maintenance of political institutions" [Digeser, 2016: p. 123]. So, citizens may cooperate simply by publicly demanding more democracy, implementing common projects in the associational life, fighting for environmental protection or a more citizen-friendly city, etc. [König, 2013: p. 899]. Participating in these activities, they have to trust each other. They can produce and reproduce social capital which may generate a kind of social or civic friendship. In that sense, political friendship is also about civil society. Clearly, such a conception of political friendship that focuses on relational aspects does not have much in common with friends in political power networks. It is more likely the result of collective experience and a resource for collective action in the public space. Jon Nixon describes this in Hannah Arendt's terms: "Friendship sustains that world by acknowledging its plurality. Our friendships provide a private space within which to explore the plurality inherent in the friendship itself and from which to re-enter the public space of plurality. They connect us to the world while enabling us to cope with its complexity" [Nixon, 2015: p. 188].

Indeed, it is this passage from the private to the public sphere or conflation of the private and the public that can display the different meanings of political friendship. These meanings are either in the sense of power networks or corruption that avoids or marginalises the public space, or in the sense of collective action in the public space based on the mobilisation of private networks. This is particularly relevant when considering the fact that the private/public distinction, being a necessary condition for a modern liberal state based on the rule of law, points to the meaning of the political in society, i. e. to the distinction between the political sphere and other social spheres [Sales, 1991]. Political regimes based on the rule of law are supposed to protect and maintain the private/public dis-

tinction, whereas autocracies have abolished it or simulate a fake copy of the public space. When the political is disappearing or when even a distorted version of the public space is no longer visible, then the space for collective action and for civic or political friendship is also fading away. That is also what Hannah Arendt means when cautions against the disappearance of the plurality of the world and the free play of power represented by the public realm. Then, friendship would lose its access to the world and violence would become a substitute for power [Nixon, 2015: pp. 189–190]. We may add here that friendship would be reduced either to what is expressed in power networks or to private friendships disconnected from the public realm. A personalised power structure is consubstantial with the authoritarian regime. It would not be an exaggeration to assert that autocracies are aiming at personalising politics and other social spheres, as their obsession is control of plurality and any kind of deviation.

Therefore, we may underline once more that depersonalised relations and the public realm are ideally expected to coincide in modern society. Modernity can certainly not be located on the side of personalised or the proximate end of the distinction between personalised and depersonalised. However, this does not mean that modern society is only based on depersonalised contacts. On the contrary, modernity requires specific distinctions, particularly the possibility of drawing a distinction between private and public communications or spaces, as well as between personalised and depersonalised relations. In fact, society would not exist without personal relationships consisting of everyday contacts based on personal interaction. Nevertheless, these relationships must be reproduced in a sea of depersonalised relations. In modern society, personal relationships may even become a problem; for example, old-boy networks or clientelism in the political or economic system might be identified as corrupt behaviour. Established democracies and markets can serve as examples of how too many "good connections" undermine democratic and market rules when they try to bypass legal procedures in order to gain the upper hand.

On the other hand, the structures of a modern democratised political system perfectly represent the *depersonalised* background in the form of institutions, organisations and procedures, which not only enables the *personalised* political games of political actors (political parties and the corresponding networks of political friends) focused on gaining political power, but also provides room for collective action (civil society) and the mobilisation of *personal* networks in the sense of civic friendship.

Political Friendship and Trust

In fact, political friendship (as we have already described it in terms of civic friendship) suggests a depersonalised society in a modern sense. This can be specified through the concept of trust which is consubstantial with friendship in the relational sense, as well as (in a more general sense) with civic friendship oriented to the public space. Trust, depersonalisation and the arm's length principle go together, at least in democracies based on the rule of law. Furthermore, depersonalisation of society also includes depersonalisation of trust, a shift from interpersonal trust to general and systemic one. Trust towards relatives and friends may

still be important in everyday personal interactions, but society is no longer based on personal relationships held together by interpersonal trust. Generalised or extended trust among strangers is an adequate form of trust in a depersonalised society of strangers [Reiser, 1999; Uslaner, 2002; Rothstein, 2005]. Some authors characterise this form of trust as moralistic since it is not based primarily on personal experiences, but can be regarded as "the belief that others share your fundamental moral values and therefore should be treated as you would wish to be treated by them" [Uslaner, 2002: p. 18]. Generalised trust, then, is about sharing basic values with regard to reliable and honest behaviour. It is certainly about norms and expectations of reciprocity. This is, in fact, part of a definition of social capital, which refers to a set of specific values shared by the members of a community that allows them to cooperate. Obviously, these values have nothing in common with those of a criminal gang which also needs a great deal of social capital in order to be efficient. Rather, they point, again, to universal moral values in society, to certain virtues such as truth-telling, the meeting of obligations and reciprocity [Fukuyama, 2000: p. 99].

The "radius of trust" [Fukuyama, 2000: p. 99] in society depends on the degree to which people share certain values when it comes to solving collective problems by cooperating with each other. However, such values of reciprocity should not be mixed up with those shared by most families in the world. The latter is probably a case of interpersonal trust — not of that among strangers, which is influenced by conditions for trust outside the family systems (kinship) or personal networks between friends. General, systemic and institutional trust are aspects of modernity. The way specific countries in different regions of the world society have realised mixes of private and public relationships, personalism and depersonalised institutions, personal and general trust, etc. largely determines how these regions can cope with modernity. According to the "radius of trust" in a particular society, one could distinguish, using Fukuyama's definitions [Fukuyama, 1995: pp. 61 ff., 149 ff.] between "low trust societies", with familialism and personalism representing one pole, and "high trust" ones located at the opposite pole. This approximates what could be called Max Weber's ideal bureaucracy, trust in public life, in reference to such organisations as social security systems, political parties, interest groups, companies, etc. This distinction partly overlaps with that drawn between "warm" and "cold" societies. To be precise, it points to the importance of traditional values in modern or modernising societies. A country where personalism dominates and lack of general trust is common is very likely to fail in its fight against corruption. Conversely, in countries where political, economic and legal institutions have, due to their symbolic efficiency, created cultural settings which facilitate the development of generalised trust ("high trust societies"), the mutual reinforcement of institutional efficiency, shared values and trust should work against corrupt behaviour.

Moreover, we should keep in mind that the evolution from a culture of distrust to a culture of trust will be difficult in countries where society is mostly regarded as fundamentally unequal, populated by "hostile strangers", or dominated by "alien values". Why should you trust all institutions including political, the elites, or simply the world beyond your family and a wider "family" of your friends if this world is, if perceived in Hobbesian terms, full of discrimination and exclu-

sion, inequality, greed, crime, and corruption? On the other hand, things are different from a "top-down" perspective since interpersonal trust and trustworthiness are means of achieving and maintaining power for political elites and their networks of power.

Politics of Friendship in Hannah Arendt's Political Theory

At this point, we are returning to civic friendship to relate it to general trust. Mutual goodwill and sharing core values are also key aspects of personal and intimate friendships. However, in the political context or in modern society where individuals and citizens do not know each other, political friendship manifestly cannot mean personal friendship, as in the case of generalised trust with regard to personal trust. This is why Martin Hartmann speaks of an "extended notion of friendship" [Hartmann, 2011: p. 463], which he integrates into a theory of praxis of trust. The researcher mentions John M. Cooper's interpretation of what Aristotle presented as civic friendship, a special kind of friendship, "...as a recognised and accepted norm, a certain measure of mutual goodwill, and also mutual trust, among the people making up the population" [Cooper, 1999: pp. 370–371]. Citizens do not need to be personally acquainted with each other to know about the existence of mutual goodwill. In the political context, knowledge of the nature of the constitution and "of what's generally expected of people in that society is the normal way of knowing about these things, and it is sufficient, sometimes, to establish a reasonable presumption of goodwill on the part of one's fellow-citizens generally" [Cooper, 1999: p. 371, fn. 18; Hartmann, 2011: p. 436; Digeser, 2016: p. 133]. Similarly, John von Heyking notes that "political pluralism is embedded within like-mindedness expressed in terms of constitutionalism, which itself expresses social friendship and hence agreement concerning the highest things human ought to do. Ambition counteracting ambition is constrained by agreement on constitutional fundamentals, expressed as a social friendship that prevents such conflict from degenerating into fratricidal war" [Heyking, 2016: p. 11].

Indeed, citizens are supposed to share certain values or agree on what their country's constitution provides for; hence, they should be able and willing to express a kind of generalised trust towards strangers and the authorities. However, it is not clear nowadays what is understood by sharing certain values or, to put it another way, by establishing the "radius of trust" in a national society. Apparently, this kind of trust is only possible within certain boundaries which are also the boundaries of citizenship [Hartmann, 2011: p. 464]. Democracies run into difficulties when the radius of trust and orientation to the common good are no longer convincing criteria for explaining to the citizens of a political community what holds them together or why they ought to live together as a nation. In this connection, Danielle Allen's research study called "Talking to Strangers" underscores "that political friendship can help citizens to resist the disintegration of trust and achieve a community where trust is a renewable resource" [Allen, 2004: p. 156]. The author also points to the above-mentioned goodwill among citizens, which, if it becomes a guiding orientation, allows citizens to act as though they were friends and to show each other that they are trustworthy. Political friendship is described here as "trying to be like friends" [Allen, 2004: p. 156; Digeser,

2016: p. 135][1]. Such an original conclusion owes a lot to Aristotle's relational conception of political friendship assuming that citizens somehow interact with each other. Yet, it would be hardly realisable at local level (e. g., in cities). Therefore, it seems necessary to go back to the constitutional level or, more precisely, to the importance of third party enforcement by a legitimate state and its institutions needed not only to increase the social range of the legal system, but also to reproduce and raise generalised trust; for instance, between ethnic groups. The institutional aspect of trust is rather neglected by a theory of political friendship that places emphasis on "voluntarism", so to speak, on goodwill throughout the citizenry.

In any case, we can see that these different strands of the notion of civic friendship focusing on goodwill, shared norms, generalised trust, and the common good are parts of the classic legacy founded by Aristotle's typology of friendship. These parts are attempts to describe society and, moreover, the political as such, the political community, or the classical "polis", based on the notion of friendship which combines its private and public aspects. Friendship realises circles of a moral community encompassing primary personal friends, as well as the citizenry of the "polis" [Nixon, 2015: p. 51]. From this standpoint, the extension of friendship from the private to the public presupposes a set of moral conditions of civic and political order. If truthfulness is, according to Hannah Arendt, the promise inherent in friendship, it is also a necessary condition for the political, for a state of mutual understanding: "Politics is, as it were, ethically grounded in the 'truthful dialogue' that constitutes friendship" [Gebhardt, 2008: p. 336; Nixon, 2015: p. 52].

From that angle, political friendship is the public space of dialogue and understanding which accepts diversity, plurality and differences. In other words, it is a characteristic of a democratic civic culture. As Gebhardt notes, "republican friendship binds together the citizens of good judgement communicating their mutual judgements on the basis of truthfulness" [Gebhardt, 2008: p. 336]. This is similar to the previously mentioned like-mindedness of citizens forming a community since they are supposed to be mutually understanding partners. A community of like-minded citizens involves, along with a communal spirit, a democratic state guaranteeing friendship as an element that, as Nixon puts it, "both binds the citizenry and provides a context within which citizens can grow and develop" [Nixon, 2015: p. 194]. One can easily notice here, from the viewpoint of a political theory of democracy, that such a conception of republican friendship is traced back to Aristotle and focuses on civic self-government [Gebhardt, 2008: p. 336].

To be sure, modern society can no longer be described in terms of the classical political and moral community. Modern politics is not rooted in a normative premise that its objective should be the realisation of the normative good, although constitutions may outline such objectives. Nevertheless, political systems operate on a specific territory as nation-states. As such, political systems cannot avoid giving descriptions of what they are good for; for example, guaranteeing their citizens prosperity, or freedom, or defining who can or should be a citizen in accordance with certain criteria. In a democratised context, nations con-

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[1]   Critically in this regard see [Digeser, 2016: pp. 135 ff].

stantly reflect the question of whether or to what extent the established political order is adequate and corresponds to what citizens want. In other terms, they either produce political theories about the conditions of democracy or think of themselves as political communities based on shared values as expressed through civic friendship.

Political Friendship vs. Autocracies

For Hannah Arendt political friendship, understood as interconnectivity between human beings, consists in the public space of truthful and trustworthy dialogue and is also a condition for collective action [Nixon, 2015: p. 194]. Hence, non-democratic regimes must necessarily deny the political. Otherwise, they will have to accept a critical public space with citizens being allowed to raise their voice — as any political opponents usually do. Authoritarian regimes have no use for citizens: they need only subjects being loyal to the ruler. It is rather ironic that autocracies like Russia where personal networks and, with them, friendship have always played an important role in society *and* in politics, have abolished the public space, the room for friendly dialogue and collective action. Here, one could agree with Hannah Arendt's thesis that if friendship is a condition for democracy, then "all other forms of political regimes deny friendship or shape it to their own ends and purposes"; for instance, "autocracies distort friendship through their demand for unconditional loyalty to the autocrat" [Nixon, 2015: p. 194]. A similar conclusion had been drawn by Alexis de Tocqueville, who, as Peter Mallory noted, made "the bold argument that, given the inherent indeterminacy and insufficiency of the social, political friendship is necessary if democracies are to avoid becoming despotic" [Mallory, 2012].

Non-democracies that deny the public realm must try to build their imagined community differently; for example, as unity, as "us against them". This would be quite the opposite of what authors like Hannah Arendt have perceived as political friendship, as a public space of dialogue. Non-democracies share not only notions of unity ("people", "the nation") with so-called populists: both of them logically need enemies and an exclusive conception of friendship which implies enemies, being a kind of Schmittian[1] dialectics of friends and enemies.

Apparently, the political theory of civic friendship, whether it analyses civil society of collective action or a political community, is a critique of authoritarian and totalitarian conceptions of society, homogeneity and hierarchy, as well as conceptions of unity. All these conceptions negate the very idea of the political that needs the political space to express social autonomy and its conflicts. In fact, any description of politics or society that claims to be the only right one is totalitarian and inescapably provokes opposition. Unity necessarily produces differences, which in turn give rise to new identities. Social reality cannot be embodied (or represented) by a hierarchy, whether it is the state or a party organisation. This comes close to Hanna Arendt's idea about the "free play of power" and the

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[1] Carl Schmitt (1888–1985), a German political theorist, is best known for his work "The Concept of the Political" (1927) arguing that all true politics is based on the distinction between friend and enemy.

corresponding diverse perspectives that if restricted, would give access to violence [Nixon, 2015: p. 189]. Power is inevitably an empty place. As Niklas Luhmann looks at it from a sociological perspective, state power is an exchangeable, unstable, and divided position based on the distinction between government and opposition [Luhmann, 1990: pp. 167 ff., 231 ff.]. Under modern conditions, sovereign power is nothing more than the contingent possibility of remaining in power or being in the opposition. This is the very essence of democratised power. Such a double codification of the political system works against the moralisation of the power position, which would reintroduce the distinction between friends and enemies based on pretensions to being in a morally superior position.

Modern politics, however, needs and involves antagonists and opponents. This crucial difference between enemies and opponents [Edelman, 1991: p. 131], as well as between antagonism and agonism [Mouffe, 2005] highlights the core of the political in modern society and also the problem of morals in politics. As soon as opponents are conceived within the dichotomy "good/bad", or "friend/enemy", eliminating the *other* becomes the main aim of political action. In this case, friendship would also disappear because it cannot be defined with regard to enmity, as Helmut König [König, 2013: pp. 903–904] aptly points out; the brother and not the friend would be the correct term for the positioning "we against the others". On the other hand, the acceptance of the *other* as an agonist implies competition focused on political victory, but not on elimination. Political victory can be obtained only by observing the rules of the game and established procedures which are shared and respected by all players in the political game. The political as such and the public realm are definitely not the space for the Schmittian distinction between friends and enemies, but a structure institutionalising the idea of talk, dialogue and discussion. This is diversity, which is against unity. However, the actually observable "revival" or "return" of nationalist and populist parties and leaders is bringing back quite the contrary: unity instead of diversity, obsession with concepts implying exclusive homogeneity (nation, brotherhood, ethnicity, kinship, family, etc.). Populists need enemies as scapegoats, whereas civic friendship insists on plurality and diversity excluding enmity.

Moreover, many fashionable discourses on "post-truth politics" or "post-fact politics", particularly cherished in non-democracies but advanced by populists all over the world, may sound here, in the context of Hannah Arendt's idea that politics is about service to the truth, rather old-fashioned. As a matter of fact, protest movements directed against authoritarian regimes and their lies, as well as those opposing controversial policies in established democracies, are quite aware of the meaning of "truthful dialogue" in politics. In the chapter "The Republic of Friendship", Nixon describes the protest movement in Egypt in the spring of 2011 from the perspective of Hannah Arendt's idea of the public realm: "Friendship is what people brought to the Midan[1] through their existing affiliations and

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[1]   Tahrir Square in Cairo. *Midan* (maydān) means "square, public space, open area" in Arabic.

association and what developed through their sense of common purpose and collective action. It became an indispensable political resource" [Nixon, 2015: pp. 182 ff., 187–188].

Conclusion

Civic or republican friendship can denote several things. Firstly, it is a political discourse about the public space in democracy. Political philosophy starts reflecting on political friendship by pointing hypothetically to the consequences of a lack of friendship and its correlates, be it plurality, diversity, dialogue, public, or collective action in Hannah Arendt's interpretation [König, 2013: pp. 901 ff.; Nixon, 2015: p. 28, 189]. The political theory of civic friendship serves as a reminder of the destructive consequences of populist political discourses and ideologies for democratic politics. The risk of the abuse of power is continuously invoked in this theory, but it is not really integrated into a more general or classic conception of the countervailing powers in the political system.

The prevention of the abuse of trust and power is certainly among the most important functions of political institutions in a complex web of countervailing powers. Therefore, in a modern and multifaceted society, the common good along with the public realm is the somehow aggregated result of one sphere of action as much as it is the outcome of efficient activity of state institutions, markets (self-interest), or civil society (volunteering). From that angle, the idea of civic friendship would point to several aspects of civil society, as described by Michael Edwards [Edwards, 2014]. He writes that civil society is about the practices of assosiational life as well as about shared norms, the common good, and the public sphere which are the loci of dialogue in politics already invoked by Hannah Arendt. This matches up with the idea of civic friendship connected with the relational and organisational aspects of collective action *and* shared norms that need to be expressed and discussed in the public sphere.

Furthermore, civic friendship expresses many aspects of the notions of political culture and civic culture. The latter focuses particularly on the cultural conditions for citizens to cooperate [Lichtermann, 2012: p. 208]. Civic friendship is also a reflection of the possibilities of collective action, or of the underlying conditions and representations that enable or complicate cooperation, depending on the political context in which civic actions take place. Moreover, civic friendship is a political theory reflecting democracy in a time when democratic politics and culture are eroding and the "politics of truth" has entered a populist "post-truth" arena. Finally, it is a genuinely democratic political theory focusing on the conditions for a community of like-minded citizens. In this respect, Jürgen Gebhardt [Gebhardt, 2008: p. 342] concludes accurately that citizens live together by virtue of the binding force of trust. This is also the final destination of political friendship, the linking of friendship to the political order as a common order implying common meanings, purpose, and action. This could also be formulated with a Durkheimian approach in the sense that the "discourse of friendship is not personal" except when "it confirms the sacredness of the person and links the individual to the 'personality' of the collective" [Mallory, Carlson, 2014: p. 335]. According to this approach, friendship is a "collective representation" of beliefs

and ideals about living together, stipulated by institutions and exist in practices and thus can be analysed. This comes close to Digeser's statement that "while civic friendship may not be an appropriate general model of citizenship, friendship does offer an ideal of citizenship. In this ideal, our role as citizens pulls at our conception of friendship and vice versa" [Digeser, 2016: p. 142]. However, the political aspect of the political theory of friendship is not simply a normative programme "prescribing friendship as a normative ideal which strangers and citizens should adopt" [Mallory, Carlson, 2014: p. 340]. Civic friendship is not just something that is translated into constitutional norms. In relation to theories of trust, civil society, civic and political culture, it is much more about the practices and expectations in society of how to live, work together or communicate politically in order to influence politics, or change things. After all, protests against specific policies or political regimes, as well as other forms of collective action, *publicly* express opinions on how democracy should work. Taking a look at authoritarian politics, we will understand *e contrario* what society loses when the public space of the "truthful dialogue" is abolished. In a personalised informal power structure, political friends may be helpful when it comes to staying in power or reproducing networks of corruption. These "political friends" will definitely resist the democratisation of politics, for such a change entails the loss of their power. It will lead to the re-establishment of a public space where society and its citizens can again reflect on what holds them together and what they want to share. Even if the perspectives of political theory and political sociology are different, the reflection on civic friendship and the conditions of democracy may produce the same conclusions.

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