Preface

THE DEMOCRACY DILEMMA IN THE ERA OF GLOBALIZATION – CAN ICT ENHANCE DEMOCRACY, PARTICIPATION, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND POLITICAL AUTONOMY IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE?

Introduction: The Public Space of the Globalized Modern Democracies, Its Democratic Deficit, and the Need for its Renewed Democratic Legitimation

The book that follows focuses on problems that the modern representative democracies face in the era of globalization, namely corruption, political apathy, lack of transparency and legitimacy in the field of political decision making, as well as the need for more transparency and accountability in the public sphere. These problems form what we nowadays characterize as the “democratic deficit” of the modern representative democracies and are even more augmented due to the ongoing European and global financial crisis, and thus, they call for a re-evaluation and re-appreciation of the traditional democratic principles and institutions.

Traditionally, the democratic principle as any democratic regime’s grundnorm could be defined via four pillars, which consisted its core, its sine qua non minimum content. The first is undoubtedly citizenship and political autonomy. A democratic regime founded on the democratic principle is based on the people, a collective entity of free and equal subjects that enjoy political autonomy, thus the rights a) to participate in the public sphere, b) to fully express their political ideas and convictions, c) to be informed on matters of public interest, and d) to scrutinize and hold accountable the public officials. This collective entity, the people, presents the very basis of any democratic regime and functions as the subject of every political decision made in a democratic system and as the source of its legitimation. The second essential element of the democratic principle is political participation and the existence of a political, of a public sphere. Thus, the citizens of a polity, the people, should not only have the right to participate, but their actual and true participation should be guaranteed and realized via the construction of a public sphere, an agora, an actual (e.g. parliament) or metaphorical space which is transparent and open freely and equally to all and in which political ideas, political dialogue, and deliberation can be nurtured.

The third essential element of any democratic system is identified to the principles of transparency and accountability of political decisions, politicians, and public officials. Transparency is essential for the citizens to be fully and effectively informed on matters of public interest and common value in order to substantially participate and scrutinize political decisions, public policies, politicians, and public officials. In the same framework, accountability is a necessary perquisite in order for the people to function as a “watchdog,” as the ultimate guarantor of any democratic system, and protect democracy from
corruption and arbitrariness. Accountability enhances the trust of the citizen to the political institution and maximizes the responsibility of the public officials both in a moral and in a practical sense.

The fourth necessary element of the democratic principle is its *legitimacy* both as a formal and as a substantial parameter of democratic decision-making. Thus, in any democratic system the democratic decision-making should respect all the procedural rules that guarantee the citizens political participation (e.g. that parliamentary elections should be held every four years). This is the formal aspect of legitimacy, which is identified to the rules, either legislative or constitutional that regulate the democratic procedure. On the other hand, democratic legitimacy is also a matter of substance. The democratic decision-making should not only be based on democratic procedures (e.g. the majority principle) but also in open dialogue and in its fair and justified results. Thus, from its substantial aspect legitimacy means that the people, the public opinion, should be able to scrutinize in the public sphere any political decision that is not democratically formed (in terms of procedure) or is not democratic in its content and subsequently not fair (in terms of substance).

What we nowadays call “democratic deficit” is the malfunction of the four above core aspects of the democratic principle. More and more today, the citizens abstain from their active political participation in the public sphere and from the public deliberation and dialogue. A major symptom of what we call “political apathy” is the citizens’ unwillingness to participate in elective procedures as well as their reluctance in fulfilling their fiscal duties. These phenomena is known as “free riding,” because it results in burdening the citizens that actively participate with the obligations of the “free riders.” It is commonplace in the modern representative democracies. In a similar framework, the public space as a place that all citizens can freely and equally participate in the democratic decision-making has been eroded. Thus, nowadays the media and not the parliament represent the public space where the political dialogue and public deliberations takes place, though not in a sense that includes all the citizens but only the elites, the government bodies, and politicians. This evolution has slowly transformed the people from active citizens to a pathetic audience, from the *doers* of a given political system to its *watchers*.

In a similar level the fact that the vast majority of political decisions are taking place in a supranational level (e.g. the European Union) and thus in a distanced from the nation state’s citizens forum is rendering hard if not impossible the actual political participation of the people in the public affairs. In the same framework, the transparency of the public sphere seems an illusion since not only the majority of political decisions are taking place in a supranational level but they are also based on perplexing procedures that lack of democratic legitimacy or do not guarantee the actual information of the public opinion. In the end, the democratic legitimacy of the modern representative democracies of the era of globalization is doubted due to the augmenting phenomena of corruption.

There are many voices raised that call for renewed and modernized democratic mechanisms that can regenerate the classic values of democracy in the era of globalization. Thus, it is argued that the use of Interactive Communication Technologies (ICT) can facilitate the need for “more democracy,” especially in the fields of participation, transparency, and accountability. Therefore, cyberspace, blogosphere, and social networks can be used as a metaphorical *public space*, an *agora* where the exchange of political ideas and political dialogue can take place. In the same level, ICT can be employed in order to facilitate forms of direct democracy such as e-referenda, or to enable transparency of democratic decision-making through policies of electronic public deliberation and subsequently enhance public accountability. In this framework, the use of ICT as an alternative for the creation of a new public space in the era of cyberspace and globalization, its advantages and disadvantages, are researched in the chapters of this book that are briefly presented in this preface.
ICT, Democracy, Digital Participation, and Political Autonomy

In the first section of the book titled, *ICT Democracy, Digital Participation, and Political Autonomy* some of the main aspects of the influence of ICT, especially in the field of political participation and political autonomy, are presented. Nowadays, one of the remedies proposed for encouraging the citizen’s political participation and dealing with the “democratic deficit” faced by the modern representative democracies is the use of ICT in order to enhance public dialogue and direct political participation. It is true that in the traditional model of representative democracy the classic political institutions, parliament, political parties, the press, and the media have gradually isolated the public sphere from the democratic deliberation, thus forming democratic political systems governed by elites. For the last decades what seemed to be the only link between the representative democracy institutions and the people were the elective procedures and the enjoyment of private as well as group interests. The main principles on which the idea of a public democratic sphere ought to be constructed, namely the protection of *public interest* and *common good* were thus severely wounded leading to what we now call “democratic deficit” of the modern representative democracies.

This “democratic deficit” is nowadays reflected in the citizen’s political apathy, their practical absence from political participation and public dialogue, and in the augmenting influence of the media in the field of political decision-making. What is even more problematic is that in the modern globalized representative democracies the political decision making in a large part is taking place outside the traditional democratic *locus*, the parliament, namely in supranational organizations (e.g. the European Union), thus leaving the nation state’s citizens even more excluded from the political procedures taking place in a national and supranational level. In this framework, many voices raise the fair argument that ICT can really play a decisive role in enhancing the political dialogue by initiating new political procedures with the use of Internet that can function as a more substantive substitute for other forms of political participation such as the elective procedures. In this perspective, the Internet can be perceived as a metaphorical democratic public space, an *agora*, where the citizen’s can exchange their political opinions and propose ideas for aimed public policies, design them, or criticize the already existing ones even in a supranational or global framework. Thus, Internet can be used as a tool for the implementation of public governance policies in an *institutional* way (e.g. the government, the state bureaucracy, the EU institutions adopt initiatives regarding public deliberation on bills, directives, or even e-referendums on political subjects of great significance). Additionally, Internet and social media can be used as means of political participation in a non-institutional way by inspiring political movements such as the *indignados* in Spain (2011) and the *indignants* in Greece (2011) or as a medium for the design and adoption of forms of direct democracy as illustrated in the recent constitution making process in Iceland (2010).

In this framework, in the first chapter of the first section of the book, Gianluca Sgueo offers “Digital Participation: The Case of the Italian ‘Dialogue with Citizens’,” an excellent case study of how ICT can assist in the implementation of public policies of political dialogue with the citizens. Thus, the author focuses on the initiative known as “Dialogue with Citizens” that the Italian Government introduced in 2012. The Dialogue was an entirely Web-based experiment of participatory democracy aimed at, first, informing citizens through documents and in-depth analysis and, second, designed for answering to their questions and requests. During the year and a half of life of the initiative, roughly 90,000 people wrote. Additionally, almost 200,000 participated in a number of public online consultations that the government launched in concomitance with the adoption of crucial decisions (i.e. the spending review national program). From the analysis of this experiment of participatory democracy, 3 questions can
be raised according to the author: a) How can a public institution maximize the profits of participation and minimize its costs? b) How can public administrations manage the (growing) expectations of the citizens once they become accustomed to participation? and c) Is online participatory democracy going to develop further, and why?

These extremely interesting questions are partly answered in the second chapter of the book by Rawan T. Khasawneh, Rasha A. Abu Shamaa, and Wafa’a A. Rabayah in, “E-Participation: A Way for Creating Public Value.” According to the authors, e-participation is a major part of e-government initiatives; it is a window through which governments interact with their citizens and allow for a healthier democratic environment. In addition, e-participation is one of the main elements in the free democratic world that is receiving growing interest by governments, through implementing Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to involve citizens. This chapter sheds light on different aspects of e-participation; it views a three dimensional picture of e-participation theories and concepts, presents a number of real life examples for successful e-participation initiatives, and ends with an example of how to measure an e-participation initiative and evaluate its success, the hidden democratic “value” of e-participation.

In the third chapter of the book, Stavros Amanatidis and Olga-Eirini Palla in “ICT in Direct Democracy: E-Referendum, a Well-Structured Direct Democratic Participation Evolvement or a Democratic Illusion?” present and analyze the use of ICT in public participation and more specifically in e-referenda as an aspect of direct democratic participation. Their chapter aims to explain the correlation between ICT and e-referenda. Referendum, used as an instrument to accept or deny a proposed political decision, has a strong function of controlling political power and securing the openness of political power structures. It serves as an instrument of division of powers and opens roads to opposition outside parliament. In general, it provides the people with veto positions. By presenting the evolvement of the ICT and the technological developments that impact the way democracy is being exercised in the modern societies, the authors attempt to provide ideas and solutions on the use of e-referenda in modern democracies. The dangers, the advantages and the disadvantages of the use of ICT in democracy, are presented and analyzed as well. All these issues are being discussed, as this chapter tries to give a clear and objective perspective regarding the role of e-democracy and the problems that come along with its implementation.

In the fourth chapter of the book, Athanasios Tsakiris in collaboration with Costas Eleftheriou are analyzing the subject of “Digital Democracy and Trade Unionism: The Case of Precariously Employed Workers in Greece.” The chapter addresses the issue of digital democracy and trade unionism, particularly unions in the field of “precarious employment” mainly in the (to a great extent) globalized tertiary sector of the economy. These unions are considered “new” due to their network modes of horizontal organizing and their use of civil disobedience mobilizing compared to those of “older” and “traditional” unions that were characterized by bureaucratic structures and conventional repertoires of action (collective bargaining and strikes). Moreover, these “new” unions use the Internet and the Web 2.0 social media in order to communicate with their members, potential friends, and bystanders, as well as to receive feedback for their strategic and tactical goals or even to organize their general meetings and assemblies. The issue will be addressed by considering case studies of a number of unions in the financial, telecommunications, education, and publishing sectors, as well as courier and catering delivery services. In this chapter, the authors present the cases of four such unions from the banking and telecommunications sector and from the wide fields of publishing and translating. In order to evaluate the factors that determine their uses of the Internet and the social media, they analyze their digital strategies through the following axes: a) static or dynamic and interactive usage of digital media; b) technocratic or agitating rhetoric of uploaded texts and informative material. The authors’ objective is to examine the unions’ goals and organization in
connection with their usage of Internet. Namely, they argue that unions with a wider spatial orientation, a more fluid internal organization, and less recognizable status employ more interactive digital strategies and use Internet as a very basic tool of their political functioning. On the other hand, unions with a more limited spatial orientation, a strict internal organization, and a more recognizable political status prefer more static digital strategies. In both cases, the medium facilitates the development of a militant discourse, although in many cases certain technocratic elements seem to appear. The research for this chapter was conducted using semi-structured and in-depth interviews with leading unionists of these organizations as well with the unions’ Web administrators and by analyzing their respective Websites.

**ICT, Freedom of Speech, and the Public Interest**

In the second section of the book titled “ICT, Freedom of Speech, and the Public Interest” the individual’s political autonomy is examined both on a theoretical level as well as in its connection with the modern use of ICT. On a theoretical level, political autonomy is identified with freedom of speech, which as a prerequisite of free communication, expression, and dissemination of opinions and ideas is the most fundamental pillar of any truly democratic society. Indeed, the protection of free speech guarantees the conciliation between rights and democracy. Freedom of speech provides the framework for the fruitful and harmonic co-existence between individualism and individual liberty and the collective-political autonomy of each and all members of any democratic polity. This extremely valuable function derives from the very nature of speech as a right that expresses both the individual and the political autonomy and thus serves as a means for the expression of individualism and as a vehicle for the political participation and expression.

However, though of extreme importance, freedom of speech is not unlimited. The very limits of the freedom of speech are analyzed by Christina M. Akrivopoulou in the fifth chapter of the book titled “Dignity as the Ultimate Boundary to the Freedom of Speech: An Account of Jeremy Waldron’s ‘Harm in Hate Speech’ Argument.” In her chapter, the author underlines that though freedom of speech is internationally cherished as a fundamental pillar of democracy, in the vast majority of national legal orders—with the exception of that of the United States—the legislator as well as the jurisprudence impose limits on the freedom of speech when it reflects racism and hate against the ethnic, sexual, or religious identity of minority members of a given political community. These paradigms of negative speech are widely known in the international literature, as forms of “hate speech.” Nevertheless, in constitutional and human rights theory there is a strong dialogue against the imposition of any restrictions to freedom of the speech mainly due to its intrinsic nature for democracy value. The chapter offers an account of this dialogue while it analyzes, supports, and finally adopts a principal argument in favor of imposing limits in such cases of racist expressions: the harm that hate speech may cause to human dignity. This argument has been illustrated in the recent book of Jeremy Waldron, The Harm in Hate Speech (Harvard University Press, 2012), and its critically discussed by the author.

Shalin Hai-Jew in the sixth chapter of the book titled “Vengeance Culture Online: A Qualitative Meta-Analysis and Position Paper” deals with another negative form of expression, the vengeance culture, a form of negative expression adopted in cyberspace and social media. According to the author, if there is an ever-replicating and recurring Internet meme, it’s one of revenge. Intimate photos are shared online post-relationship and end up picked up by for-profit pornographic Websites. Privy information is leaked into private (narrow-cast) or semi-public or public spaces (broadcast), with massive amplifications of messages into the public sphere. Violent attacks and beat-downs are videotaped and shared on video
sharing sites. Flash or cyber mobs are brought together to clean-out stores and to exact vengeance on particular businesses. Information and Communication Technology (ICT), with its nexus of pseudo-anonymity, fast dissemination of information, long-term persistence of data, and mass reach, provides multiple affordances for the exacting of vengeance. The popular culture of anonymous hacktivism and cyber-vigilantism further contribute to the sense of the Internet as an ungoverned place. Finally, a general imprudence has meant the easy activation of Internet mobs and individuals to harm-causing rumor-sharing and behavior against others—sparked by rumors or loose storytelling. ICT has enabled the spillover of real-world antipathies and dark emotions into virtual spaces, which slosh back into the real world. This chapter examines the research in the area of vengeance and how such very human impetuses manifest online. Further, the author analyzes the design features of various ICT platforms and socio-technical spaces that may support vengeance-based communications and actions and proposes ways to mitigate some of these dark affordances.

In the seventh chapter of the book titled, “ICT4D and its Potential Role in the Detection, Surveillance, and Prevention of Novel Zoonotic Disease Outbreaks for Global, National, and Local Pandemic Prevention,” Shalin Hai-Jew examines how the ICT can be used in order to advance public interest goals and develop public policies. According to the author, Information and Communication Technology for Development (ICT4D) has been a strategy applied since the mid-1950s to support the work of advancing developing societies. There has been a range of technologies used for information collection, knowledge management, intercommunications, and information sharing. In recent years, ICT4D has evolved to include the uses of social media platforms and various analytical tools used for extracting information from such platforms to support disease prevention efforts. It involves the use of Geographical Information Systems (GIS) to help in epidemiology. Parsimonious simulations have been brought to bear to inform the policies to support pandemic prevention in countries where pharmaceutical-based interventions may be too expensive to deploy broadly. Work done in this area suggests that appropriate non-pharmaceutical interventions exist if government leaders and the broad public can be sufficiently aware of an occurring emergence of a novel pathogen (or re-emergence of a pandemic-potential pathogen) before this pathogen becomes endemic. This chapter asks, What is the relationship between Information and Communication Technology for Development (ICT4D) and global, national, and local prevention of zoonotic diseases with pandemic potential? This work provides some early thoughts on ways ICT4D may be deployed to this end, and it offers some insights about open-source (and some commercial) technologies that may be used for the work of pandemic prevention and protection of human health.

**ICT and Their Role for Public Transparency and Democracy**

The democratic deficit faced by the modern representative democracies brings forward more and more the need for transparency in the public sphere and the need for the disclosure of information related to public policies and public interest goals. In this framework, ICTs are proposed as a medium, tool for enforcing public policies that aim in fighting corruption or arbitrary exercise of political power and enhance transparency and accountability in the public sphere. These public policies are intent on increasing the democratic legitimacy of the political institutions with the introduction of modern and more efficient forms of accountability for the politicians and the state officials, and at the same time, they provide for the more active involvement of the citizens with politics and the public sphere. These public policies, which are taking the form of the legislative intervention in favor of transparency and against corruption are trying to restore the political credibility of the politicians and public officials and enhance the legitimacy of the representative democracy political institutions, namely the political parties, parliament, and government.
In this framework, Fereniki Panagopoulou-Koutnatzi in the eighth chapter of the book, titled “The Practice of Naming and Shaming through the Publicizing of ‘Culprit’ Lists” analyzes the problematic of “blame and shame” lists as a list of enhancing the accountability of politicians and public figures and the relevant problems regarding the protection of their privacy. In this perspective, as the author accounts, a long, seemingly endless list of names of men and women “worthy of shame,” aimed at publicly shaming them, has taken the mass media and public authorities by storm. Such public shaming practices can be traced back to the Byzantine era, when culprits were made to sit backwards on a donkey as a punishment, or the judge placed his hands in cinder and smeared their faces with black film, thus publically pillorying them, based on the conviction that a punishment’s most important aspect is social stigma and shame induced by public acts. This chapter examines various examples of “public shaming” lists and the general problematic of non-discrete publicizing of a full list of names.

A policy of public transparency is presented by Marco Bani and Gianluca Sgueo in the ninth chapter of the book titled “We-Transparency.” As the authors shrewdly point out, “transparency” is a term that many speculate about. According to scholars, transparency has three inter-related aims: first, to inform citizens in a simple and understandable way on the government’s decisions; second, to foster civil society participation and engagement; and, third, to monitor and to prevent corruption. Notwithstanding these shared thoughts, much has to be done in liberal democracies. The European Commission estimates that corruption costs the EU economy roughly 120 billion EUR per year. The lack of transparency is both an economic and political problem, since corruption and opaque policies may develop degenerative forms of governance, which, in turn, lessens citizens’ political participation and understanding on how the governmental machine functions. This “participative deficit” is common in many Western democracies. The notion of popular empowerment, the “core of democracy,” has been diluted to the point that most citizens exercise their putative sovereignty only through periodic elections of representatives and thus have extremely limited input into political processes. This deficit is further exacerbated by the fact that elected representatives in fact embody a range of competing “interests”—party, ideological, corporate—which may or may not coincide with those of the voter.

In a similar perspective, in the tenth chapter of the book, Arjun Neupane, Jeffrey Soar, Kishor Vaidya, and Sunil Aryal, “The Potential For ICT Tools to Promote Public Participation in Fighting Corruption,” present the ICT perspectives as a tool of implementing anti-corruption policies. As the authors point out, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have been seen as pioneering tools for the promotion of the better delivery of government programmes and services, enabling the empowerment of citizens through greater access to information, delivery of more efficient government management processes, better transparency and accountability, and the mitigation of corruption risks. Based on a literature survey of previous research conducted on ICT systems implemented in various countries, this chapter discusses the potential of different ICT tools that have the capacity to help to promote public participation for the purpose of reducing corruption. The chapter specifically reviews the different ICT tools and platforms and their roles as potential weapons in fighting corruption. This chapter also evaluates different ICT tools, including e-government and public e-procurement. Finally, the authors develop a theoretical research model that depicts the anti-corruption capabilities of ICT tools, which in turn, has implications for academics, policy makers, and politicians.

The eleventh chapter of the book authored, Marios Papandreou analyzes “ICTs, Public Access to Documents, and Transparency in the European Union: The Role of the European Ombudsman.” This chapter examines the relationship between Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and
transparency in the public sphere. The link between the two is rather easy to conceive: ICTs facilitate flow and management of information, which is crucial to achieve openness and accountability and advance public debate. In this chapter, the issue is examined in the context of the European Union (EU), from the point of view of public access to documents and the role of the European Ombudsman (EO). The author presents the applicable legislative framework and discusses the role of the EO in facilitating and promoting public access to documents, with emphasis on the EO’s mandate, the procedure followed, and its possible outcomes. The last part of the chapter examines the decision of the EO on a recent case concerning public access to documents of interest to a wide public, whereby it is illustrated that ICTs, by facilitating access to documents and information, advance openness, transparency, good governance, and accountability.

**ICT, Privacy, and Accountability of Public Figures**

The issues of accountability and the privacy of public figures are analyzed in the twelfth chapter of the book by Despina A. Tziola, “Privacy and Accountability of Public Figures” and in the thirteenth chapter of the book by Despina Kiltidou, who explores the subject in the field of jurisprudence with her paper, “Privacy and Accountability of Public Figures: International Jurisprudence – The Cases of N. Campbell, M. Mosley, Caroline of Monaco, and F. Mitterrand.” In the end, the extremely interesting subject of political accountability in the USA is examined by Alexandros Passiatas, in the fourteenth chapter of the book titled “Accountability and Responsibility in the Public Sphere: Impeachment in the Political System of the United States of America.” The author in this chapter analyzes the impeachment process in the USA political system, a legislative, constitutionally based procedure that serves as a mechanism for investigating possible illegal acts of the President, the Vice-President, and other US public officials.

**ICT, Inclusion, and Cultural Differences**

The fifth section of the book is also devoted to the subject area of ICT and public policies, namely the subjects of “ICT, Inclusion, and Cultural Differences.” In the fifteenth chapter of the book, Vehbi Turel and Eylem Kılıç analyze the subject of “The Inclusion and Design of Cultural Differences in Interactive Multimedia Environments.” As the authors analyze, a concern for social justice and the inclusion of cultural differences as a requirement of social justice in all learning materials, whether they are in the form of conventional materials or Interactive Multimedia Environments (IMEs), is the moral responsibility of all educators who want to contribute to humanity, social inclusion, and justice. Such a responsibility requires a wide range of philosophical, political, and sociological discourses, informing multiple debates and their implications in the field of education. The subject is examined in depth also in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth chapters of the book authored by Vehbi Turel, titled “The Use and Design of Supplementary Visuals for the Enhancement of Listening Skills in Hypermedia,” “Priority of Listening Materials for Autonomous Intermediate Language Learners,” and “Factors Affecting Listening.”

**CONCLUSION**

Accountability is one of those golden principles, which are inherently positive in their meaning and identified as one of the core values of democracy. The concept of accountability is closely connected to the principles and practices of transparency, democratic participation, political legitimacy, democratic
deliberation, and public dialogue. The principle of accountability is extremely important as a guarantee for the democratic legitimation of any given democratic system and a necessary against the corruption and arbitrariness of the political institutions. The concept of accountability is broad and is examined not only in the field of constitutional law but also from the point of view of political science and public administration. Indeed, accountability may be understood as one of the main objectives of a democratic civil society but also can serve as a tool, as a medium and method for achieving a more efficient and justified democratic governance and public administration.

The rising levels of corruption, the lack of transparency, and the legitimacy deficits of the modern representative democracies more and more have given rise to the claims demanding higher levels of accountability in the democratic political systems. This trend has led to what today is criticized as the “virtual” and in some cases purely “rhetorical” use of the term in the current political dialogue, which uses the accountability as a normative or merely political argument without actually realizing in the political practice and discourse. At this point, it should be noted that in principle political accountability is inextricably linked to the political legitimacy of the decisions of public officials. Moreover, it is closely linked to the principle of transparency, since the information of the people on matters of public interest is a necessary perquisite for the public officials to be held accountable. In the core of the notion of accountability lies its relational character since it is based on a vis-à-vis relationship between the public official (e.g. the prime minister – individual accountability) or a group of public officials (e.g. the government – collective accountability) and an institution (e.g. the judicial) and the forum in front of which they are held accountable (e.g. the people, the parliament, the courts, public opinion) and which may impose legal, moral, or even criminal penalties. Summing up, political accountability is a political practical discourse that does not occur in a vacuum but in the context of a political debate or a legislative framework. This process requires that certain political actors, either individual, groups, or institutions should justify and explain the basis of political decision, policy, behavior, action, a judgment, a bill, or law in front of a forum and suffer the penalties imposed.

To the extent that transparency is a necessary perquisite of political accountability, questions can be raised regarding the limits of intrusion in the public officials’ privacy, family life, and personal data. In this framework, extremely significant is the legal framework that the ECtHR has set with its jurisprudence in a series of cases regarding the privacy of public figures and public officials, such as Plon, von Hannover I, II, and III, Radio Twist, Mosley, etc. In particular, in its relevant jurisprudence, the ECtHR has underlined that although public figures and public officials do not lack a core right to privacy, their private life can be limited due to the need of the public opinion to be informed of their actions. Thus, the ECtHR has stated that public officials are entitled to a private space regarding their intimate family life and health issues, but otherwise, they should be open to the public opinion’s scrutiny on all issues regarding their actions related to their public role or office or connected to the public interest.

Christina M. Akrivopoulou  
Hellenic Open University, Greece

N. Garipidis  
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece