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GLOBAL FORUM
ON MODERN DIRECT DEMOCRACY

SPQR : Senatus PopulusQue Romanus

« The Senate and the Roman People »

Direct democracy has developed simultaneously in Athens and in ancient republican Rome.

The political system of the Republican Rome, of which several aspects had already been developed during the period known as the Monarchy (where the “king“ was an elective post for life time and not hereditary), provided that a Senate made up of elderly magistrates, that means people who had held elective positions in executive roles (consuls, magistrates, responsables for roads and buildings , quaestors, tribunes, etc.).

The Senate therefore, being made up of persons who previously occupied positions (the "magistrates") was indirectly elected by the citizens themselves.

The democratic system of republican Rome, was in constant evolution during the 5 centuries of its life (510 BC - 30 BC).

In the span of history and especially in the first centuries of the republican period we can identify the tendency to distribute the power among the different categories of citizens, and thereby reducing the patrician supremacy (present in the early years of the republic).

There were not only Consoli, but also "Dictator" plebeians (In 356 C.Marcus Rutilius have been appointed to the office of "Dictator" by the plebeian consul M. Popilius Laenas).

The Roman citizen was engaged for a great part of his time in political activity through city assemblies called "Comizi".

About half the days of the year were qualified by the Roman calendar as "dies comitiales": days in which it was possible to hold public assemblies.

The citizen participated in the assemblies to:

- directly elect the responsible for the public administration: such as the presidents of the council (at least 2), ministers, prefects, quaestors, judges, prosecutors, etc.;
- approve laws;
- judge some cases of considerable importance.

Adult males (aged over 16) could participate in assemblies.

Foreigners, even if they were residents, slaves and women were excluded.

There existed three kind of assemblies, according to the type of law to be approved:

- the "comitia curiata", where the citizens participated divided into 30 curiae, groups of different "gentes", in turn groupings of families;
- the "comitia tributa", where the citizens participated divided into 35 tribes, groupings on a territorial basis;
- the "comitia centuriata", where citizens participated divided into 193 centuriae, groupings based on census and age.

The one-vote principle was in force within the groupings (a kind of electoral districts).

The groupings were not numerically homogeneous . For example, half of the centuriae were young (aged 17 to 46) and half older (over 46). The different "weight" of the citizens' vote may be in contrast with today's democratic sensibility, but we must consider the fact that in this way the greater experience of the elderly was taken into account.

The results of the votes were determined by the majority calculated on a circumscription basis (one constituency one vote).

The secrecy of the vote was assured to avoid electoral fraud.

During much of the republican period the Senate was constituted of 300 members nominated for life. The senators were former public administrators who were included by right in the senatorial lists. Since the administrators were elected by the people, only those who had been elected by the people could enter the Senate.

The Senate could not legislate by itself, but it could only prepare the laws that the assemblies would then approve or reject.

The democratic rules changed throughout the Republican period, but very soon was defined the drawing of the first of the assemblies that had to meet to vote. This assembly (Comizio) was defined as "prerogative".

On the basis of this fundamentally multi-chamber system the laws were virtually voted by the totality of citizens (defined as: adult and free-standing males).

Through the "comitia tributa" of the magistrate "tribunes of the people" the citizens also had the right of legislative initiative: in addition to approving or rejecting laws proposed by the Senate, they could propose and approve laws without the intervention of the Senate.

The term **SPQR** (Senatus PopulusQue Romanus) has a very concrete content and describes a system of direct democracy similar to the instrument known today as the "**Mandatory Referendum**" when the law was a senatorial initiative, or the "**laws of popular initiative**" when they were the result of the initiative of the "tribute committees".

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The intentions of "Più Democrazia Italia"

www.piudemocraziaitalia.org



The **Organizing Committee of "Più Democrazia Italia"** was created to encourage cooperation between citizens and associations which are working with the same intent through the implementation of a **national association**.

The **"Più Democrazia Italia"** Association proposed is:

nonpartisan, nonsectarian, autonomous, independent and inspired by the values of democracy, freedom, participation and solidarity of its founding members, with the aim of achieving any kind of promotion of cultural and social utility appropriate to pursue the following purposes:

- 1. Promoting** the knowledge, the introduction and dissemination, at the local, national and international level, of Modern Direct Democracy, **understood as the right of citizens to participate directly in the formulation and approval of the laws.**
- 2. Spreading** the culture of popular sovereignty exercised by active participation and with full use of Direct Democracy practices.
- 3. Encouraging** awareness that popular sovereignty must be practiced:
 - a)** with a constant staff involvement in the management of public issues;
 - b)** with the responsible use of Direct Democracy practices ranging, for this purpose, introduced, supplemented and strengthened;
 - c)** requiring opened, free, direct and plural access to information;
 - d)** demanding popular control of the instruments of democracy that must be completed, improved and balanced to a complete Democracy;
 - e)** with the continuous control over the use of the delegation granted to the political representatives in the institutions and demanding a revocation system of elected.
- 4. Collaborate** with other associations, committees and organizations, national and transnational, offering preparatory practices to the creation of Direct Democracy instruments: transparency in political activities, democracy within the parties and open primary education to the fundamental basics of democracy as from schools.
- 5. Study and experiment** with new methods of Direct Democracy also linked to the use of new information technologies.new methods and tools of Direct Democracy also linked to the use of new information technologies.
- 6. Spread the experiences** for the benefit of civil society.