

Chantal Mouffe's Theory of Agonistic Pluralism and its Possible Application within the Analysis of Democracy in Latvia (Jewish Property Restitution as a Case)

Jekaterina Ivanova

Rīga Stradiņš University, Doctoral Studies, Latvia

Abstract. The given thesis is devoted to the main aspects of Chantal Mouffe's theory on agonistic pluralism, which is considered to be the main opponent of such ideas supported by deliberative democracy, as elimination of power and its isolation from the process of deliberation. Lack of democratic tolerance deriving from the current antagonism is one of the central features typical for modern democracies; moreover, it is actively deplored by Chantal Mouffe since the idea of agonistic pluralism proposes political powers to transform the current model of "us" and "them" so that it is no longer perceived as enemy, but existing power and legal adversary. Consequently, the model introduced by C. Mouffe is worth to be applied for the analysis of Latvian democracy, which is a representation of antagonistic model due to many factors, taking as a case study questions connected with restitution of Jewish property.

Introduction. The main idea of deliberative democracy to isolate question of power by its elimination from the process of public deliberation has resulted in antagonistic model of democracy, which is prevailing in Latvia. The processes of Jewish property restitution could be considered as a good example of such transformation. Since deliberative democracy is not able to satisfy needs of liberal democracy due to its contradictive nature and drawbacks, a model of agonistic pluralism introduced by Belgian political theorist Chantal Mouffe could be analysed from the perspective of a good alternative for the existing model.

The aim. The aim of the respective study is to define the main aspects of the theory of agonistic pluralism, in order to find out its possible application within the case of Jewish property restitution in Latvia.

Materials and methods. In order to conduct the study the following research methods were employed: conceptual analysis and comparative investigation.

Results. The nature of the existing conflicts differs depending on the level it is taking place – institutional and social ones, both forming so called "risky public space", but still, there is always one common root – absence of political will, inability and lack of willingness of the existing powers to work constructively on the problem in a rational way. Thus, the root is the so-called antagonistic politics, which does not allow searching for rational solutions in order to find a way out from the conflict at the beginning of its emergence.

One of the main arguments against deliberative democracy is that individual rights will always contradict democratic self-government, and all the limits existing in the public space should be acknowledged as being of political nature not as requirements of morality or rationality. Furthermore, the core issue of Chantal Mouffe's theory is to separate "politics" from "political", which means to treat separately institutional and social, create unity in the context of conflict, and develop into creation of "us" by the determination of "them". So, this may fulfil the main idea of any democracy – to transform antagonism into agonism by transformation of the term "enemy" into "legal adversary".

Conclusions. The question of Jewish property restitution for many years, being actualized, has provoked burst of hostility and lack of tolerance in the Latvian society. Thus, being a problem of purely political nature, taking its roots from the distorted form of liberal democracy, the issue of Jewish property restitution is worth to be analysed through the prism of Chantal Mouffe's theory of agonistic pluralism, which means modelling the situation on the basis of its main indicators, where political powers should threat demanders for Jewish property as legal adversaries, but not as enemies.