

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind

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Effects of Technology on Business

The rise of the Internet combined with modern technological advances has reshaped the way businesses operate. The 21st century utilizes numerous electronic gadgets and devices that have created efficient systems offering multiple benefits. From a business's organizational structure, to advertising, marketing, and communication methods, modern industries, companies, corporations, and entrepreneurs have discovered the benefits of using technology in the work place. The Internet has transformed businesses allowing communication to take place instantaneously as opposed to older, outdated methods. There is no question that technology has propelled businesses to new heights and has been a boost to productivity rather than a drain.

Technology has radically changed the way a business organizes its data and paper information. Filing cabinets, which used to be the norm in all businesses, are being replaced by computer storage systems that save time, money, paper, and trees. When it comes to comparing the benefits of storing a company's important business documents, customer or employee information there is no doubt that saving files on hard drives or disks is the preferred route. Paper deteriorates, fades, takes up space, can be destroyed in fire and can become cumbersome to a company's ease of operations. Saving pertinent information, including customer billing information, enables companies to create digital storehouses that may be backed up on additional drives, either physically or maintained online. These disks of information save space, are more efficient, are easy to access, and provide businesses with freedom to operate in a convenient and organized manner. Many companies have decided to go completely paper-free in favor of the digital benefits offered to them.

There may be no better example of how the Internet has transformed the nature of businesses than to look at the advantages of marketing online compared to offline. Computer users that frequently use the World Wide Web easily recognize the abundance of ads located on individual and company websites. Whereas a television ad may cost hundreds of thousands of dollars, and reaches its target audience during specified times (when the commercial airs); and magazine ads are only viewed by a selected few, ads on the Internet have the ability to broadcast your service or product 24/7 at an extremely cost effective rate. Technology has overhauled the way businesses advertise and market a product. The 21st century has welcomed numerous entrepreneurs and business owners that advertise solely online. These businesses would have practically no advertisement if they were limited to traditional marketing methods. Advertising on the Internet offers a company the ability to reach target customers 24/7, year round, and worldwide.

One of the greatest examples of how technology has reshaped businesses in the 21st century is in the field of communication. Cell phones, email, instant messaging, video conferencing with the use of webcams and chat, online conferencing applications, and fax machines have enabled businesses to communicate instantaneously and on a global scale. Online and technologically based communication systems have liberated offices, removed telephone and cable wires, replaced physical call centers with virtual connections, and are a cost effective way to reach more employees and customers. Technology has vastly improved business communications with many positive advantages enjoyed by business owners, employees, and customers.



Comprehensive Reforms needed in Electoral Commissions

By: Mohammad Zahir Akbari

Following the concerns raised by the political parties and presidential candidates regarding draft electoral law, major consultative meetings were held in the presidential palace. In the beginning of the meeting, President M. Ashraf Ghani welcomed the participants, saying that there was a general consensus about the need to modify the election law. "The draft for amendment has been prepared. After taking the opinions of all the concerned people, the law will be amended based on the draft," said Ghani. Subsequently, the advisory session was continued by the second Vice President M. Sarwar Danesh and the participants expressed their comments, views, and suggestions on adjusting the electoral law. "The draft law to amend the electoral law is not a government plan, as more than 20 meetings have been held in this regard, and the plan has been the subject of suggestions and consultations," he added. Nevertheless, a technical committee consisting of representatives of the candidates, political parties and civil society organizations related to elections has been tasked to discuss and finalize the draft within three days.

According to FIFA, some good changes have been made in the draft law but it still needs to be improved so as to ensure the transparency of the upcoming elections. Referring to the concerns expressed about the independency of electoral commissions, Mr. Rashid Said, "there is no serious problem as long as all electoral stakeholders are having role in finalizing the draft law." Thus, few others also expressed optimism saying if new election law is not violated again, the next elections will be held without any serious problems.

By the way, the government's actions show that reforms in electoral commissions are a serious need, and so the government has decided to respond to public opinion demands and make consensus on electoral reform. The reason for this inevitability and the formation of public consensus was the poor performance of electoral commissions in the parliamentary election this year. The last parliamentary elections which were full of deficiencies unfortunately followed the 2014 controversial second-round election. There were countless problems with the parliamentary elections throughout the country, which brought Kabul elections up to cancellation steps. For this reason, the majority of the political parties sought reform of the election commissions.

Given the fact that the three major elections such as presidential, provincial councils and district councils, plus parliamentary elections in Ghazni are ahead, reforms are a necessity and serious demand of the people. If the necessary reforms are not made in the electoral commissions, the upcoming elections will face more serious problems. According to some experts, reforms are not enough in the rules and procedures; rather, these reforms should be inclusive in all sections of the electoral commissions. Reforms and adjustments to the rules are rou-

tine and somewhat easy but what matters is to reform the structures and management of electoral commissions. Problems have always emanated from the structure and management of electoral commissions. We have never had a lot of problems in the rules segment. The main problem with this has been in the structure sector as well as the poor management of commissions in complying with the rules. The top members of electoral commissions could not prove their impartiality and ability in last two elections, but before 2014 elections commissioners, who had held several elections, were more successful than these ones. Recently, the head of election commissions said, "it is not professional to repeatedly dismiss the experienced members instead hire the ones who do not know the Alphabet of election." It is true but truer to choose those who have good experience and also good fame among the nation. If we look at list of ex-commissions members (since 2003 - 2014) there are many professional and neutral personalities who showed great competencies and impartiality in the Karzai's era.

The legal or structural dependence of electoral commissions was another serious issue which was frequently raised by electoral stakeholders. Often times, the president is one of candidates but he is also the one who appoint the top members of electoral commissions. Given the experiences and lessons learned from several past elections, it is high time to make serious reforms to all sections of the electoral commissions and to lead these commissions by independent and solely professional individuals. So far, the usual tradition has been to consider the view of individuals, political parties and lastly the president's in recruitment process of commissions' members. While, a big part of the problems have originated from this factors, each commissioner had to represent a particular tribe or political faction; they always disagreed over the smallest issues due to ethnic, linguistic, party and factional factors.

After the controversial presidential elections of 2104 and the problematic parliamentary elections of this year, the public opinion has been badly damaged and people have extremely been disappointed from impartiality and transparency of Electoral Commissions. The government must eliminate the ground for any form of misuses. Therefore, electoral reform is one of the most important preconditions for elections in the future. As long as this precondition does not materialize, holding elections will be faced by public distrust.

Given the important lessons learnt from the past and the issues in terms of peace and the propagation behind-the-scenes agreement about suspension or cancellation of elections, it is imperative that the government run elections at any cost. Any procrastination to delay elections is a great betrayal to the history and people of Afghanistan.

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Europe, Please Wake Up

By: George Soros

Europe is sleepwalking into oblivion, and the people of Europe need to wake up before it is too late. If they don't, the European Union will go the way of the Soviet Union in 1991. Neither our leaders nor ordinary citizens seem to understand that we are experiencing a revolutionary moment, that the range of possibilities is very broad, and that the eventual outcome is thus highly uncertain. Most of us assume that the future will more or less resemble the present, but this is not necessarily so. In a long and eventful life, I have witnessed many periods of what I call radical disequilibrium. We are living in such a period today.

The next inflection point will be the elections for the European Parliament in May 2019. Unfortunately, anti-European forces will enjoy a competitive advantage in the balloting. There are several reasons for this, including the outdated party system that prevails in most European countries, the practical impossibility of treaty change, and the lack of legal tools for disciplining member states that violate the principles on which the European Union was founded. The EU can impose the *acquis communautaire* (the body of European Union law) on applicant countries, but lacks sufficient capacity to enforce member states' compliance. The antiquated party system hampers those who want to preserve the values on which the EU was founded, but helps those who want to replace those values with something radically different. This is true in individual countries and even more so in trans-European alliances.

The party system of individual states reflects the divisions that mattered in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, such as the conflict between capital and labor. But the cleavage that matters most today is between pro- and anti-European forces.

The EU's dominant country is Germany, and the dominant political alliance in Germany - between the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Bavaria-based Christian Social Union (CSU) - has become unsustainable. The alliance worked as long as there was no significant party in Bavaria to the right of the CSU. That changed with the rise of the extremist *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD). In last September's *länder* elections, the CSU's result was its worst in over six decades, and the AfD entered the Bavarian Parliament for the first time.

The AfD's rise removed the *raison d'être* of the CDU-CSU alliance. But that alliance cannot be broken up without triggering new elections that neither Germany nor Europe can afford. As it is, the current ruling coalition cannot be as robustly pro-European as it would be without the AfD threatening its right flank.

The situation is far from hopeless. The German Greens have emerged as the only consistently pro-European party in the country, and they continue rising in opinion polls, whereas the AfD seems to have reached its highpoint (except in the former East Germany). But now CDU/CSU voters are represented by a party whose commitment to European values is ambivalent.

In the United Kingdom, too, an antiquated party structure prevents the popular will from finding proper expression. Both Labour and the Conservatives are internally divided, but their leaders, Jeremy Corbyn and

Theresa May, respectively, are so determined to deliver Brexit that they have agreed to cooperate to attain it. The situation is so complicated that most Britons just want to get it over with, although it will be the defining event for the country for decades to come.

But the collusion between Corbyn and May has aroused opposition in both parties, which in the case of Labour is bordering on rebellion. The day after Corbyn and May met, May announced a program to aid impoverished pro-Brexit Labour constituencies in the north of England. Corbyn is now accused of betraying the pledge he made at Labour's September 2018 party conference to back a second Brexit referendum if holding an election is not possible.

The public is also becoming aware of the dire consequences of Brexit. The chances that May's deal will be rejected on February 14 are growing by the day. That could set in motion a groundswell of support for a referendum or, even better, for revoking Britain's Article 50 notification. Italy finds itself in a similar predicament. The EU made a fatal mistake in 2017 by strictly enforcing the Dublin Agreement, which unfairly burdens countries like Italy where migrants first enter the EU. This drove Italy's predominantly pro-European and pro-immigration electorate into the arms of the anti-European League party and Five Star Movement in 2018. The previously dominant Democratic Party is in disarray. As a result, the significant portion of the electorate that remains pro-European has no party to vote for. There is, however, an attempt underway to organize a united pro-European list. A similar reordering of party systems is happening in France, Poland, Sweden, and probably elsewhere.

When it comes to trans-European alliances, the situation is even worse. National parties at least have some roots in the past, but the trans-European alliances are entirely dictated by party leaders' self-interest. The European People's Party (EPP) is the worst offender. The EPP is almost entirely devoid of principles, as demonstrated by its willingness to permit the continued membership of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's *Fidesz* in order to preserve its majority and control the allocation of top jobs in the EU. Anti-European forces may look good in comparison: at least they have some principles, even if they are odious. It is difficult to see how the pro-European parties can emerge victorious from the election in May unless they put Europe's interests ahead of their own. One can still make a case for preserving the EU in order radically to reinvent it. But that would require a change of heart in the EU. The current leadership is reminiscent of the *politburo* when the Soviet Union collapsed - continuing to issue *ukazes* as if they were still relevant.

The first step to defending Europe from its enemies, both internal and external, is to recognize the magnitude of the threat they present. The second is to awaken the sleeping pro-European majority and mobilize it to defend the values on which the EU was founded. Otherwise, the dream of a united Europe could become the nightmare of the twenty-first century.

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