

Presentation of the Book

The Crisis of Politics by Stefanos Dimitriou

Presented by Maria Repousi

I would like to begin with a personal, somewhat self-referential remark. While reading this important book, I encountered many of the ideas that I had first come across in the early years of the post-dictatorship period, within the circles of the **renewal-oriented Left**. At that time, organisations such as the *KKE Interior* and the *Renewal Left* represented currents that attempted to rethink the relationship between democracy, socialism and political pluralism, before later being absorbed into broader formations and losing part of their theoretical and political autonomy.

In the book we present today, **Stefanos Dimitriou renews and reinterprets this tradition**, enriching it with his own theoretical perspective and situating it within contemporary debates in political theory on democracy and politics. At the same time, he brings this tradition into dialogue with the pressing issues of our time: the rise of the far right, the growing distance between citizens and the public sphere, the disenchantment with the Left, the emergence of “Trumpism” in international relations, and the return of war to the global political landscape.

This is not a book that merely describes the difficulties faced by contemporary political systems. Rather, it poses questions that cut across multiple fields—democratic governance, politics, the economy, the media, political parties and ideological formations.

The Crisis of Politics

The central argument of the book is that the crisis we are experiencing today is **not simply a crisis of political parties, governments or institutions**, but a crisis of **politics itself**. Politics, according to Dimitriou, has lost its autonomy vis-à-vis the markets and, consequently, much of its meaning.

Under these conditions, politics is increasingly reduced to **administrative management and communication strategy**, depriving democracy of its substantive content. This process leads to the depoliticisation of public life and raises serious questions about democratic representation.

Across many European societies, a growing distance can be observed between citizens and the political system. Civic participation declines, trust in political parties diminishes, and citizens often feel that political institutions no longer genuinely represent social needs. Democracy continues to function institutionally—elections take place, parliaments operate, governments change—but its **political vitality appears weakened**.

Political Thought and Democratic Theory

Engaging in dialogue with major thinkers of our time—among them **Hannah Arendt and Cornelius Castoriadis**, whose work significantly enriched our understanding of democracy, political institutions and power—Dimitriou constructs a chain of analysis linking the **crisis of representative democracy** to the **loss of meaning in politics**.

This development is understood as the result of the transition from the post-war model of the **regulated market economy** to a **post-industrial society shaped by the consolidation of the neoliberal paradigm**.

Dimitriou describes this transformation as a form of **market fundamentalism**—an ideological and economic totalising logic that imposes its rules in such a way that ideas such as **social justice, rights and the rule of law** are increasingly portrayed as outdated or unrealistic.

Even democracy itself—and the political pluralism that is fundamental to it—can be portrayed within this framework as costly or inefficient, precisely because democratic debate may place limits on unrestrained economic competition and profit maximisation.

In this context, politics itself becomes an obstacle to the functioning of markets, since pluralistic political debate allows the articulation of alternatives to the neoliberal orthodoxy often presented as the only realistic economic and social model.

Historical Transformations

Dimitriou traces the trajectory from the **post-war social contract**, which characterised the “golden age” of social democracy and the consolidation of the welfare state, to the critical transformations of the **1970s**.

With globalisation, the weakening of trade unions and the diminishing regulatory power of nation-states, the balance of power shifted:

- **between capital and labour**, in favour of capital
- **between politics and markets**, in favour of markets.

Within this framework, Dimitriou also analyses the transformation of political parties.

Political parties in the post-war period were not merely electoral machines. They were organisations that shaped political identities, represented social groups and articulated collective visions for society.

Today, however, parties increasingly operate as **mechanisms for managing power**, often revolving around political leadership and communication strategies. This transformation is one of the factors contributing to the weakening of the political dimension of democracy.

Social Democracy and Europe

The author also raises a critical question regarding **governing social democracy**, which once held what he describes as the “political navigation of the European ship.”

How did it respond to the dismantling of the welfare state?

Dimitriou notes that the emergence of large fiscal deficits and high unemployment placed social democracy in a position of uncertainty. One might even add, he suggests, a form of political silence, as it struggled to articulate a convincing alternative programme.

For Dimitriou, a potential response lies in a **supranational framework**, particularly within the process of **European integration**, which he examines extensively from a deeply pro-European perspective.

Questions for Contemporary Politics

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,

Stefanos Dimitriou's book engages with many of the fundamental questions facing progressive and left-leaning citizens across the Western world today:

Why do citizens increasingly feel that representative democracy no longer represents them, even though democratic institutions continue to function?

Why is the rule of law weakening?

Why has the welfare state—the historic compromise between capital and labour—been eroded?

Why has politics lost its credibility?

Why are inequalities expanding?

Why are citizens turning towards the new right?

What role does Europe play in this context?

Does the distinction between Left and Right still matter?

And why does the Left often seem unable to offer convincing answers today?

Dimitriou's book attempts to respond to these questions—or at least to open a meaningful dialogue with them.

Rethinking the Left

Allow me, in closing, to briefly refer to the proposals Dimitriou advances regarding the future of the Left.

The Left today faces a difficult challenge. On the one hand, it must remain committed to **social transformation and social justice**. On the other hand, it must defend **democracy, pluralism and democratic institutions**.

Historically, the tradition of the **democratic renewal-oriented Left** sought to combine these elements. Under present conditions—where political democracy is increasingly challenged by the rise of the far right—the **defence and re-foundation of democracy** must become a central priority for the Left.

This agenda also opens possibilities for cooperation with broader democratic forces, including those located in the democratic centre and centre-right.

Populism and Democratic Politics

In periods of crisis of representation, political narratives often emerge that portray society as a confrontation between “the people” and “the elites”.

Dimitriou argues that **populism is a symptom of the crisis of politics, not its solution**. It tends to oversimplify complex problems and can further distance democratic politics from the realities of contemporary societies.

Populism may also appear as an easy path for the Left itself. Dimitriou instead proposes the concept of “**popular democratic politics**”—a democratic reconnection between politics and society.

Reform and Radicalism

According to Dimitriou, the Left must rethink the relationship between **reformism and radicalism**.

Reforms without radical objectives risk becoming mere management of the existing system.

Radicalism without reforms risks political dead ends.

The challenge, therefore, is **not to choose between reform and radicalism**, but to combine **radical goals of social transformation with democratic political action and institutional reform**.

Reclaiming the Autonomy of Politics

The Left needs a renewed political programme aimed at restoring the **autonomy of politics**, revitalising democratic participation and strengthening social movements, democratic institutions and public debate.

Such a programme should form part of a **new reformist Left** that is democratic, rejects populism, promotes social justice and defends inclusion.

The crisis of politics cannot be addressed solely through technical reforms or improved governance. What is required is a deeper **re-foundation of politics as a collective activity**.

Democracy cannot exist without active citizens, public debate and political projects that give meaning to collective action.

A Call for Reflection

In this sense, Dimitriou's book also functions as an invitation to broader reflection.

It invites us to reconsider what politics means today and how a **vibrant democratic politics** can be rebuilt in a period of profound social and economic transformations.

It reminds us that politics is not merely the management of power. It is the space in which societies deliberate, confront one another democratically and attempt to shape their common future.

For those of us concerned with these issues, this question is not merely theoretical. It is deeply political: it concerns how we can reconnect democracy with society and reopen the horizon of collective transformation.