Session 2A: The Redefinition of Sovereignty

Substantiating the Right to Democratic Governance: Internal Self-Determination as a Means of Empowerment

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Abstract

The ‘right’ to democratic governance is a composition of various principles and rights, which are explicitly protected by all prime international and regional legal instruments. Democracy by definition means the people’s direct and indirect equal participation in the political, economic and cultural processes of their governance. The elements of democracy are linked with the protection of human rights and the maintenance domestic peace and security.

Internal self-determination in practice is linked with every citizen’s right to take part in the conduct of public affairs and government, to participate in elections, and have equal access to public service. Similarly, democracy etymologically, describes the political system in which the power of governance belongs and depends on the peoples’ consent and will. It is the right to participate in the political processes of the state by practice of the civil and political rights, such as the freedom of speech, press, religion, assembly and vote. Internal self-determination accordingly, may be considered that is coterminous to democracy, when focusing to their common normative elements.

Self-determination placed as article 1 in both International Human Rights Covenants, suggests that its application is an effective guarantee and observance of all individual rights. Moreover, it is provided that state-parties should describe their constitutional and political processes and take positive measures for the respect and protection of the right. Entitlement to self-determination could mean guarantee of internal stability and protection of all citizens regardless the multi-ethnic character of a state or historical complexity. Self-determination affiliated with the principles of democracy may accommodate in preventing or assisting to decay internal diversities, which otherwise would lead in violence and possibly conflict. Self-determination, in its internal aspect, is the right to regulate, protect and affirm an active participation by the guarantee of a liberal, transparent and accessible government that has as a priority the safety and prosperity of all its peoples.
Introduction

The ‘right’ to democratic governance and the right of self-determination are basic principles of international law and international human rights law. Both are multi-component concepts, of immense importance that gained a diachronic and international character. Democratic governance, in a normative context, is comprised of certain characteristics and values. Most of which, are already established in international human rights law. Furthermore, many thinkers with strong legal arguments advocate that democratic governance is perhaps the only system able to attain peace and security, offering true human rights protection. Therefore, it should be, if it is not already, an entitlement. This paper will present briefly the theoretical and legal evolution of the concept, in order to understand its establishment as a right. The most developed component of democratic governance in international law is the right of self-determination and it is where the main focus of this study lies.

The right of self-determination while, begun as a merely political principle of collective character, it thereafter evolved to become an established right within the international legal framework. Due to its complex nature, coupled with the general political and historical circumstances, self-determination has developed a ‘dual’ character. On the one hand, as external self-determination that is primarily associated with the decolonisation process and on the other as internal self-determination that directly relates with the spirit and application of international human rights law. This evolution will be explored, by providing a concise presentation of the historical and political background followed by an introduction and assessment of the right’s position within today’s legal framework. The main focus of this research is the internal aspect of self-determination, which is the application that relates with the right to democratic governance. This paper aims to provide the highlights of the theoretical thesis suggesting that self-determination in its internal aspect can apply as the empowerment mechanism for substantial and long lasting democratic governance, offering a peaceful, secure and equal accessible environment for all peoples within a state’s boundaries.

Democracy and Human Rights

The ideals of democracy as well as its application as a system, from the very beginning and throughout the centuries became the theme of extended literature analysis and critique.\(^1\) Democracy, an ancient concept, survived in time due to the writings of the

political thinkers of its time and re-entered in the European political thought through the Italian Renaissance in the Italian city-states between the tenth and fifteenth centuries. Then on, through the general quest and re-examination of the concept of ‘governance’ and ‘state’, democracy found itself once again in the centre of philosophical attention. The evolution of political philosophy coupled with significant events reflecting that philosophy, as the English Revolution (1640-88), the American Declaration of Independence (1776) and the French Revolution (1789) marked the emergence and establishment of democracy as a predominant political ideology in Western Europe and the United States.

Deriving from the Greek words δήµος-people and κρατώ-hold/carry, democracy etymologically means that the power of governance is in the hands of the people. Accordingly, as a word it describes the type of governance where all individuals are equal and free, able to access the wealth and services of a state and most importantly make the decisions on their affairs. Democracy, in the last few decades has become one of the most discussed and established ideas. While, as an administration system it applies in different ways, as a concept it encompasses specific elements. The right to vote and participate in the political affairs and decision-making processes, the freedom of expression, thought and conscience, the principle on non-discrimination and the freedom of assembly. Since the end of the Second World War, the principles of democracy and human rights became highly associated and a ‘right’ to democratic governance has started gaining momentum. Arguably, democracy nowadays is perceived to be the only ‘acceptable’ type of governance and as Anthony Langlois concludes ‘human rights without democracy are standards or norms, but not rights as such.

The conceptual context of Democracy, as part of the international legal system, was first ‘appeared’ in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) but the word Democracy as such, is not included in the United Nations Charter either. However, as Boutros Boutros-Ghali argues, ‘the notion of democracy derives from the people, is

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7 implied throughout the spirit of the Declaration and more specifically in [Article 21], also see Cerna, M. Christina, *Universal Democracy: An International Legal Right or the Pipe dreams of the West?* HeinOnline, 27 N.Y.U J. Int'l L. & Pol. 289 (1994-1995)
therefore central to the foundational document of the United Nations’. Accordingly, many of the components that constitute democratic governance are indeed, protected by numerous human rights legal instruments, for example the freedom of expression, thought, conscience and religion, the right of assembly and the right to vote.

The collapse of authoritarian regimes, the failings of the socialist/communist political theory and the end of the Cold War, led to an increasing demand for governments of a parliamentary, multiparty, democratic style and accumulated the requests for electorate assistance. Accordingly, there is a general recognition, that democracy is maybe the best process to resolve or prevent conflicts and its promotion lies on the United Nations responsibility, since ‘democracy is one of the pillars on which a more peaceful, more equitable, and more secure world can be built’. In the same spirit the European Court of Human Rights is a series of rulings confirms that the maintenance and further realization of human rights are best ensured by an effective political democracy and a democratic government can resolve internal problems via dialogue, avoiding in that way violence.

Democracy is affiliated with human rights in all major international human rights instruments, the two International Human Rights Covenants, the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the American Convention on Human Rights and the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights. The existence of a democratic form of governance is perceived to be essential for the enjoyment of human rights. Furthermore, it has become of great importance for a

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11 Boutros-Ghali, Boutros, Agenda for Democratisation, Supplement to Reports A/50/332 AND A/51/512 on Democratisation (17 December 1996)
12 Ibid.
14 Wheatley, op. cit., supra n. 11
15 'explicitly written into the preambles of the European and American instruments and implicit in the United Nations instruments’, Cerna, M Christina, op. cit., supra n.8
country, in order to enter either economic or political partnerships, to be considered of ‘good governance’, meaning to demonstrate respect for human rights and to hold periodic free and fair elections. Accordingly, organizations like, the Council of Europe, the Organisation of American States and the European Union have developed mechanisms for the member’s admission with strict criteria on the issues of democracy and human rights. It is necessary to emphasize that the regional nature of the expressed protection and promotion of democracy does not mean to undermine the universality of the principle. One of the main reasons that the United Nations instruments refer to democracy's component rather than the word is, so to avoid granting affirmative obligation to states to interfere in cases of non-democratic administrations. Nevertheless, it is clear from the Agenda of the former United Nations General-Secretary, Kofi Annan, that democratic governance and the realization of human rights are essential and directly linked with international and domestic peace.\(^\text{16}\)

Thomas M. Franck argues that the oldest and most developed subset of democratic norms has emerged under the heading of self-determination and thus the right of self-determination is the root from which the democratic entitlement grew. ‘Self-determination postulates the right of a people organized in an established territory to determine its collective political destiny in a democratic fashion and is therefore at the core of the democratic entitlement’.\(^\text{17}\) This paper focuses in presenting the emergence and development of the right of self-determination, in order to support Franck’s argument.

**The Right of Self-determination**

Robert McCorquodale refers to self-determination as a right claimed by a ‘people’ to control its own destiny\(^\text{18}\). According to this definition, self-determination is meant to be the right for groups of people with distinct identity, entitled to determine their own political and legal status. Despite the clarity that this may present in reality, self-determination is of a compound nature and its concept was evolving for a long time before becoming an established right of international law and thereafter part of international human rights law. Its notion emerged and shaped along the general historical, ideological and political tendencies\(^\text{19}\). Self-determination was partly born with the principles of Enlightenment in the Western Europe and the United States on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and partly appeared and grew to be a prime aspect


\(^{17}\) Franck, op. cit. supra n.6, p. 46


of nationalism in Central and Eastern Europe mainly in the nineteenth century. Due its
dual ideological roots, self-determination shaped a ‘twin’ character alongside its general
historical evolution, shaping a rather controversial standard within the general
international law.

The right has traditionally been divided in two categories, reflecting its different
characteristics: the external self-determination and the internal self-determination. The
right to external self-determination is the collective aim of people to decide their own
governance and future status without foreign interference and reflects primarily to the
desire for the creation of independent nation-states that could mean a threat to the
existing territorial stability and often lead to conflict. On the other hand, the right of
internal self-determination implies, to an extent, individuality over collectiveness shaped
by the elements of liberalism and democracy and entitles the people to participate in the
decision-making process, which concerns the political, economic, social and cultural
conditions under which they live, reflecting to a non-violent practice of the right. Self-
determination, accordingly, can be simultaneously an individual and a collective right
and due to its complex nature the international legal system has been always very
cautious when dealing with its claims. This presentation will focus on a brief examination
of the internal component of the right by referring to the emergence of self-determination
and development in order to explain its significance and further potential.

The Historical Emergence

The American and French Revolutions, which marked the end of religious, monarchical
and aristocracy governments giving birth to popular rule, were the first indirect
expression of the concept of internal self-determination. This very fact was of immense
importance, since it meant a breakthrough for the political and legal standards, by
modifying the place of individuals from ‘subjects’ under the absolute power of a
monarch, to ‘citizens’ of a government that needed to be accountable to them.

In the nineteenth and the twentieth century, however, the increasing claim for national
self-determination challenged the stability and peace and led to the eruption of

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20 for more see, study prepared by Gros Espiell, Hector (Special Rapporteur of the Sub Commission on
Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities), The Right to Self-determination: Implementation
21 "whenever any form of government becomes destructive…it is the right of the people to alter or to
abolish it and to institute new government" “governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just
powers from the consent of the governed”, Declaration of Independence of the Thirteen Colonies (1776),
In France, self-determination was implied in the French Revolution, 1789 and a few years later, on Nov
17, 1792 the French National Assembly declared that “will give help and support to all peoples wanting to
recall their freedom”, Cassese, op. cit. supra n. 20
22 Ibid, p.11, also “The French Revolution must be considered…not as the initiative of the a new age, but
as the last formula of an expiring age.” Mazzini – The Duties of Man, Introduction by Jones, Thomas, J. M.
Dent & Sons Ltd (1966), p. 251
numerous conflicts. Self-determination revealed a mainly political oriented character, forcing for changes and as a result it became a rather important norm for the international community to respect and take under serious consideration. The first significant advocate for a right to self-determination was without doubt President Woodrow Wilson, who revealed his ideas at the end of the First World War. His famous *Fourteen Points Address* to the US Congress on January 8, 1918, dealt with the conventional liberal demands for open democracy, the difficult colonial question and the broad lines of territorial rearrangement, meaning that the application of the principle of self-determination would be necessary\(^\text{23}\). Within the framework of Wilson’s ideas, it was suggested that self-determination is the right of each people to choose the form of government under which they wish to live, asserting both the national desires but ensuring that it will take place in a ‘proper’ non-violent manner. Only under a democratic political system could a people choose their own government, control the actions of that government and ensure that it did not infringe their rights\(^\text{24}\). The American President envisaged a domestic and internal character of the right of self-determination that would give rise to the principle without the radical revolutionary character that nationalism represented.

Internal self-determination did not play, though, a major role in the post-war settlement. According to Article 1 of the League of Nations Covenant, ‘full self-government’ was a precondition for becoming a member of the League, interpreted as ‘full control of its internal affairs and …foreign relations’, rather than ‘full control of the government by the people of the country’\(^\text{25}\). However, Article 22\(^\text{26}\) of the Covenant established the Mandate system, which entailed control and administration, but not sovereignty, over former colonial possessions of Germany and Turkey\(^\text{27}\). The principle of self-determination was partly expressed, ‘stand by themselves’, meaning that the administrator state would have the authority until the concerning territory became sufficient enough to self-rule itself and consequently gain its full independence. The mandate system, however, did not deliver the right to peoples to self-determine themselves but it was a major step forward and it greatly contributed to the downfall of the colonial system. Although the post war settlements treated self-determination in its external form involving mainly territorial changes, there was an effort for regulating such claims via a non-violent transitional process. The Case of the Aaland Islands was the first extended legal discussion on the right of self-determination, demonstrating the international community’s position on the matter at the time. The League, while considering the

\(^{24}\) Musgrave, op. cit., supra n. 20, p. 22  
\(^{25}\) Ibid, p. 107  
\(^{26}\) “To those colonies and territories which as a consequence of the late war have ceased to be under the sovereignty of the States which formally governed them…not yet able to stand by themselves…the tutelage of such peoples should be entrusted to advanced nations…and that this tutelage should be exercised by them as Mandatories on behalf of the League”, Article 22, League of Nations Covenant  
principle a political and not a legal issue, in an effort to avoid any disruption of order, resolved the issue so as to satisfy both the Aalanders’ claim to self-determination and at the same time avoiding interference in a sovereign states’ jurisdiction. Accordingly, Aalanders were denied their right of self-determination, but they were granted with a special autonomy statute in a treaty, under the guarantee of the League of Nations.\footnote{Finland, resolved to assure and to guarantee to the population of the Aaland Islands the preservation of their language, of their culture, and of their local Swedish traditions, \textit{The Aaland Agreement in the Council of the League of Nations 1921} (September 1921) Minutes of the 17\textsuperscript{th} Meeting of the Council, June 27\textsuperscript{th}, League of Nations Official Journal 701. also see Alston (eds), op. cit. supra n. 20, pp. 13-14} The international community for the first time resolved a claim of self-determination by asserting its internal aspect, and associated autonomy as a type of application.

\textbf{The United Nations}

General international law entered a new era after the end of the Second World War and the establishment of the United Nations Organisation. The UN was built on principles for protection of the fundamental human rights, dignity, equal rights, respect of justice and practise of tolerance between one another, in order to maintain international peace and security\footnote{see, Preamble, Charter of the United Nations (1945)}\footnote{Musgrave, op. cit. supra n. 20, p. 32}. Taking under consideration the preceding experience of the League of Nation, its failures and weaknesses, it drafted its Charter focusing on the idea of human rights for \textit{all}, instead of the ‘minorities treaties regime’\footnote{Chapter XI, Article 73, Charter of the United Nations (1945)} that the League of Nations had established. The underlying idea was that the guarantee of general human rights could prove to be the solution to the disturbances that national (external) self-determination had caused.

The UN Charter refers to the principle of self-determination both in article 1 (2) and article 55 in relation with the United Nations’ aim for developing friendly relations among states. Self-determination is not established as a legal right within these articles, but it is mentioned as an essential principle to be respected and as appropriate measure to strengthen universal peace. Article 73 of the Charter refers the non-self-government territories and although it does not use the exact phrase of self-determination, it does imply it to its context, ‘obligation to promote to the outmost…the well being of the inhabitants of these territories, and to this end (b) to develop self-government, to take due account of the political aspirations of the peoples…’\footnote{Chapter XI, Article 73, Charter of the United Nations (1945)}. This clause demonstrates the international community’s effort to link self-determination with the de-colonisation process in order to restrict it only within the context of these certain territories.

Accordingly, the GA Resolutions that were adopted during the 50s and 60s, although partly insisting on the principle of universal application for the right of self-determination, still were mainly focused to the obligations of the States Members to develop the criteria
for determining which Territories fall under Article 73 of the Charter, so to deal only with them. The international community in an effort to regulate the decolonisation process in a peaceful manner, linked the right of self-determination with democratic procedures, revealing the internal aspect of the principle, e.g. in resolution 637 (VII), 1952. Furthermore, the GA Resolution 1514 (XV), one of the clearest statements of self-determination within international law, proclaimed self-determination as a universally accepted right, embodying it as a fundamental right, within the scope of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948, by linking it to issues of non-discrimination. In the same year, Resolution 1541 (XV) further added a list of ways that a Non-Self-Governing Territory can achieve full self-government. The spirit of these three categories, indicate another attempt of the international community to regulate the process of de-colonisation in a non-violent way, by respecting both the peoples will but also the sovereignty of the administering State. Accordingly, if the respected peoples decide to found their own independent state, it has to take place into the context of democratic procedures in order to avoid any possible confrontation and disruption of peace and security. If they wish to associate with another sovereign state, they should have the right to form their own constitution without any alien interference. And lastly, if they choose to integrate with the administering state, they should be treated as equal with the rest of the population.

During the period from 1960 through 1971 there was a decisive tendency of treating self-determination as a part of international law. Accordingly, the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples was given a prominent place in the Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation among States, Resolution 2625 (XXV), which further reinforced the view that self-determination was an established legal principle. It dealt with self-determination in eight paragraphs and unlike most of the General Assembly Resolutions it made no reference to Resolution 1514 (XV) in an effort not to limit the right within the colonial context, despite the fact that it did make clear in its provisions that de-colonization was a very important aspect of self-determination. GA Resolution 3314 (XXIX) of 1974

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32 GA Assembly 637 (VII), The Right of peoples and nations to self-determination, 403rd plenary meeting (16 December 1952)
33 GA Resolution 1514 (XV), Declaration on the granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples, 947th plenary meeting (14 December 1960)
34 Musgrave, op. cit. supra n. 20, pp. 22-23
35 GA Resolution 1541 (XV), Principles which should guide Members in determining whether or not an obligation exists to transmit the information called for under Article 73e of the Charter, 948th plenary meeting (15 December, 1960)
36 GA Resolution 2625 (XXV), Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation among States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, 1883rd plenary meeting (24 October 1970)
37 “Convinced that the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples constitutes a significant contribution to contemporary international law, and that its effective application is of paramount importance for the promotion of friendly relations among States...”, GA Resolution 2625 (XXV)
38 Musgrave, op. cit. supra n. 20, p. 75
concerning the Definition of Aggression, refers to the 2625 (XXV) Resolution, and stresses that any act against the status of states is an act of aggression, but that peoples are legitimate to struggle for their right of self-determination, always though in conformity with the principles of the UN Charter, highlighting once again the necessity for a non-violent application of self-determination.

The International Court of Justice certified the evolution of the right of self-determination in the international legal context with the Namibia advisory opinion 1971\(^{39}\), and again in the Western Sahara opinion in 1975\(^{40}\). The Court helped to ensure, that Namibia would become independent, despite the power of South Africa at the time and with the 1975 Western Sahara case, it explicitly recognized the principle of self-determination as part of international law, by ’reaffirming the right of the population of the Spanish Sahara to self-determination’\(^{41}\).

While the Court dealt with the issue of self-determination in several occasions\(^ {42}\) as Philip Alston argues, it has never directly confronted with the right outside the colonial context.\(^{43}\) For example, in the Frontier Dispute Case (Burkina Faso v. Republic of Mali)\(^ {44}\) although there is a small reference to self-determination regarding the principle of respect for colonial boundaries the maintenance of the territorial status quo, it was noted to be ‘wisest’ as a decision and there was no mention or suggestion for any possible redrawn of borders even in the case that the will of people decided so, by plebiscites.

**International Human Rights Law**

The right of self-determination occupies ‘a place of honour’\(^ {45}\) as article 1 in both of 1966 United Nations Human Rights Covenants\(^ {46}\). This fact proves its importance as an individual right and could be interpreted that its guarantee and promotion can strengthen all individual rights listed in the two Covenants.\(^ {47}\) “It is for that reason that States set it

\(^{39}\) ICJ Advisory Opinion (21 June 1971)
\(^{40}\) ICJ Advisory Opinion (16 October 1975)
\(^{41}\) Western Sahara, Advisory Opinion (16 October 1975), Cour Internationale de Justice, Requeil Des Arrets, Avis Consultatifs et Ordonnances, (1975), International Court of Justice, Reports of the Judgments, Advisory Opinions and Orders, p. 13
\(^{42}\) e.g. Case Concerning East Timor, Portugal v. Australia, International Court of Justice (30 June, 1995) General List, No. 84 and Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (Request for Advisory Opinion), Summary for advisory opinion (9 July 2004)
\(^{43}\) Alston, op. cit. supra n. 20, p. 36
\(^{44}\) Case Concerning the Frontier Dispute (Burkina Faso/Republic of Mali), International Court of Justice, Judgment (22 December 1986)
\(^{45}\) see Makkonen, Timo, Identity, Difference and Otherness-The Concepts of ‘People’, ‘Indigenous People’ and ‘Minority’ in International Law, Publications of the Faculty of Law University of Helsinki (2000) p. 59
\(^{46}\) International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966)
\(^{47}\) *the right of self-determination is of particular importance because its realization is an essential condition for the effective guarantee and observance of individual human rights and for the promotion and
forth in a provision of positive law in both Covenants and placed this provision as article 1 apart and before all of the other rights”.\(^{48}\) Furthermore, the fact that the exact same article is included in both Human Rights Covenants, recommends that the right of self-determination is both a civil and political as well as economic, social and cultural right\(^{49}\).

It is the only right that is not categorised by been separated under a certain Covenant but is identically included in both, stressing its spherical significance. The right of self-determination, included in the two Human Rights Treaties, is not bound to apply only in the cases of colonised or oppressed peoples but it obtains a general character for a universal practice, a right for all.\(^{50}\) Accordingly, although the GA Resolutions, in an effort to regulate the de-colonisation process, dealt with the principle of self-determination mainly in the context of specific territories, the Covenants overcome this restriction and give a universal character for its application.

The Human Rights Committee refers specifically to the right to self-determination of peoples in its General Comment 12, 1984.\(^{51}\) The Committee acknowledges the importance of the right, been part of positive international law, as its application is an “effective guarantee and observance of individual rights”\(^{52}\). Furthermore, it affirms the duty of all States parties to their corresponding obligations for the implementation of the right to self-determination, since from the practice it is observed, that most of the State reports have been providing inadequate information regarding article 1, mainly in reference to election laws. The Committee in the first paragraphs of its Comment implies the internal aspect of the right, especially in paragraph 4, where the States “should describe the constitutional and political processes which in practice allow the exercise of this right.” However, it does not specify which these constitutional and political processes would be, preferring not to express a clear opinion.

As Cassese argues, the internal dimension of the right was neglected by the Committee and States, due to the principle of non-interference, could not examine whether internal self-determination was practice by other States.\(^{53}\) Furthermore, the Committee supported a vague interpretation of the ICCPR provisions concerning the democratic process, mainly Articles 22\(^{54}\) and 25.\(^{55}\) Accordingly, the Committee did not really examine whether internal self-determination was truly practiced by the Member States.\(^{56}\)


\(^{49}\) Alston, op. cit. supra n. 20, p. 27

\(^{50}\) see Castellino and Hannum, op. cit., supra n. 20

\(^{51}\) General Comment No. 12, HRC

\(^{52}\) Ibid, para 1

\(^{53}\) Cassese, op. cit. supra n. 20, p. 63

\(^{54}\) “Everyone shall have the right to freedom of association…” Article 22, ICCPR

\(^{55}\) “Every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity…to take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives…” Article 25 ICCPR

\(^{56}\) Cassese, op. cit. supra n. 20, p. 63
Nevertheless, the Committee has gradually changed its attitude, by considering and examining internal elements of the right of self-determination and by taking into account the international legal recognised realities. Such ‘shift’, or else broader examination of the right, took place in parallel with the view that pluralism is in fact a basic component of democracy, emphasizing the “importance of self-determination as a truly democratic decision-making process.” However, the Committee still opts to examine individual complains, which deal with violations strictly under article 1, revealing a rather hesitant attitude due to the political nature of the right.

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) deals with the right of self-determination in its General Recommendation 21. CERD takes a step further and when discussing the right to self-determination of peoples it distinguishes between two aspects of the right: the internal self-determination (ISD) and the external self-determination (ESD). As far as the internal self-determination is concerned, all peoples have the right to ‘pursue freely their economic, social and cultural development without outside interference’. In respect of such principles, the Committee points out that every citizen has a right ‘to take part in the conduct of public affairs at any level, as referred to in article 5 (c) of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination’. CERD directly links the right of self-determination with the principles of democracy by stressing the internal component of the right. Such a reference gives a broad application to self-determination by not constraining it only, within the context of colonial or oppressed people. State governments, which are to represent the whole population ‘without distinction as to race, colour, descent, national,

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57 For example see, Information Concerning Articles 1-27 of the Covenant, Third periodic Report of Peru: Peru. 21/03/95. CCPR/C/83/Add. (State Party Report), Human Rights Committee-Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties under article 40 of the Covenant
59 For example see, C. Positive aspects, Concluding comments of the Human Rights Committee: Romania: 05/11/93., CCPR/C/79/Add.30. (Concluding Observations/Comments) and B. Positive aspects, Concluding Observations of the Human Rights Committee: Burundi: 28/12/92, CCPR/C/79/Add.9. (Concluding Observations/Comments) - Consideration of reports submitted by states parties under article 40 of the Covenant, also see, Summary Records of the 1681st meeting: Algeria. 24/07/98.,CCPR/C/SR.1681. (Summary Record), Human Rights Committee
60 Cassese, op. cit. supra n. 20, pp. 64-65
62 Also see, Joseph, Schultz, op. cit. supra n. 49, p. 101
63 Para 4, General Recommendation 21, CERD
64 “States Parties undertake to prohibit and to eliminate racial discrimination in all its forms and to guarantee the right of everyone… to… Political rights, in particular the right to participate in elections-to vote and to stand for election-on the basis of universal and equal suffrage, to take part in the Government as well as in the conduct of public affairs at any level and to have equal access to public service”, International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1969)
65 Para 4, General Recommendation 21 CERD, forty-eight session (1996)
or ethnic origins’, are obliged to provide and respect the democratic procedures for their citizens and therefore concurrently safeguard all peoples right to self-determination.

**Regional Legal Instruments**

A great contribution to the right of self-determination has been made by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in its Final Act (Helsinki Accord) 1975, which refers specifically to the equal rights and self-determination of peoples (Principle VIII). The Final Act provides that it is the right of peoples “in full freedom, to determine, when and as they wish their internal and external political status, without external interference, and to pursue as they wish their political, economic, social and cultural rights.” Additionally, it links self-determination with the UN Charter and the two Human Rights Covenants, aims for friendly relations and cooperation among the states, tackles issues of internal political status and examines the rights outside the colonial context. The OSCE’s Charter of Paris for a New Europe, adopted in 1990, emphasizes the necessity for the existence of Democratic governments, based on the will of the people, expressed regularly through free and fair elections, stressing the importance of political pluralism and freedom as necessary elements for economic growth, prosperity and social justice.

A further step is taken with the Vienna Declaration, 1994, where one of the resolutions adopted was on self-determination, adding that ‘a fully democratic political system’ is ‘an essential integral aspect of the right to self-determination and its effective exercise.’ The High Commissioner on National Minorities, Max van der Stoel, in his speech in 1994, expressed “the emphasis has to be on internal self-determination” regardless the increasing emphasis on national identity and on ethnic self-determination.

Finally, the *African [Banjul] Charter on Human and People’s Rights,* is the only among other major regional human rights treaties that refers directly to self-determination. The distinctive political reality of the region, most of its land was under colonial rule, along with the multi-national and multi-ethnic character of the continent were the reasons for that. In the case of the African Charter, due to the region’s particular history, the right of self-determination merely concerns the de-colonization process. However, the wording

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66 Joseph, Schultz, op. cit. supra n. 49, p. 103
70 High Commissioner on National Minorities, Speech by Max van der Stoel (undefined occasion), (13 May 1994)
and the reading of the Charter points out the internal aspect of the right, and aims to
give a broader interpretation to self-determination in the aftermath of colonialism.72 In
this light, the people’s right to self-determination is ‘interpreted as a principle of
democratic legitimacy’.73 According to article 13, every citizen has the right to participate
in the government of his country, either directly or through freely chosen representatives. The enjoyment of internal self-determination is therefore, the enjoyment
of civil and political rights. As Fatsah Ouguergouz, argues the ‘right of peoples to
internal self-determination by the African Charter has much more potential than would
appear at first sight.’74

Who are the ‘People’?

The right of self-determination appears to be highly problematic when one attempts to
define and explain who it relates to. While, there is a great legal discourse in an effort to
clarify it, there is not yet a common understanding or agreement on which are the
precise criteria that frame the context of the term ‘people’. Timo Makkonen, argues that
it is due to the division within the doctrine of the self-determination, the inconsistency of
the state practice and the often anthropological and sociological understanding of
international lawyers, that the concept of ‘peoples’ has remained as vague as it has. He
further argues that the concept of the ‘people’ is situational and not permanent.75

Thomas Musgrave in his work presents some of the various theories attempting to
define the context of the term ‘people’. The first is based on the interpretation of article 2
of the UN Charter. Accordingly, ‘people’ are a ‘state’. That theory, however is easily
rejected since the drafting committee of the UN Charter made clear that the term
‘people’ is a separate and distinct concept from that of ‘state’ and that article 2 was
intended to proclaim the equal rights of the people as such.76 The second approach links
the term ‘people’ with the process of de-colonization, as mere consequence of self-
determination’s relevance with the colonial territories. In the UN Charter in Chapters XI,
XII and XIII, as well as in the GA Resolution 1514 (XV) ‘people’ are solely associated
with non-self-governing, trust territories and generally the concept of colonialism.
However, identifying ‘people’ only within the context of colonies can be very problematic.
Hence, both the GA Resolution 2625 (XXV) and article 1 of the two Human Rights
Covenants overcome such limited application of the right.

72 see, Blay, Nyameke, Kwaw, S., Changing African Perspectives on the Right of Self-determination in the
(Autumn, 1985), pp. 147-159
73 Ouguergouz, Fatsah, The African Charter on Human and People’s Rights – A Comprehensive Agenda
74 Ibid.
75 for more see, Makkonen, op. cit. supra n. 46
76 Musgrave, op. cit., supra n. 20, pp. 148-149, see also GA Resolution 2625 (XXV)
Another interpretation of the term comes from the representative government theory. According to this theory, ‘people’ is defined as the entire population of a territorial unit, which includes both non-self-governing territories and independent states. The representative government hypothesis identifies ‘people’ in terms of the prior to colonisation territorial boundaries. While this theory is based on promoting the popular sovereignty, it ignores the actual composition of the population within the given territory, as well as the cultural, linguistic and religious, evolution of the respected people. However, ethnicity appears to be one of the most important characteristics that a group can be identified as one unit. The terms ‘nation’ and ‘people’ were both included in the final draft of the UN Charter. Also, the principal General Assembly resolutions dealing with self-determination associate ‘people’ with language, therefore indirectly referring to ethnic groups. Both Resolutions 1514 (XV) and 2625 (XXV) declare that ‘people’ have the right not only to determine their political status but also to ‘pursue their economic, social and cultural development’. Defining ‘people’ as ethnic groups raises serious difficulties, as well as the previous efforts for the term’s definition. The ethnic group or ‘nation’ is a concept that itself lacks a precise and general accepted definition. Furthermore, to define a ‘people’ as an ethnic group has the risk of excluding those who do not belong to that particular group, in direct contrast with the two Human Rights Covenants and the ideals of democratic governance.

Musgrave further examines the cases of minorities and indigenous populations, whether they could collectively be entitled to the right of self-determination. The scope of article 1 of the two Human Rights Covenants as well as its interpretation by the UN Human Rights Committee makes it clear that minorities can not assert such a claim. Furthermore the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (1992), highlights that minority groups consist of ‘persons’, avoiding any association with the term ‘people’, in order to avoid any collective claims. The entitlement to the right of self-determination belongs to all, equally and not in groups. Since minorities cannot legally considered as ‘people’ asserting claims of self-determination as groups, indigenous populations began to consider themselves as being a separate category, wishing to be treated in a different manner. Nonetheless, the case of the indigenous ‘people’ is peculiar and varies case by case. Indigenous population have gained recognition as ‘people’ by some instruments, however, none of which is legally binding. Although the issue of minorities and indigenous is far more complex than this brief presentation, it is not in the scope of this

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77 Ibid., p. 151
78 Ibid., p. 152
79 Ibid
80 Ibid, p. 162
81 see comments on article 1 and 27 in Joseph, Sarah, Schultz, Jenny and Castan, Melissa, op. cit. supra n. 10
82 Musgrave, op. cit. supra n 20, p. 162
83 For example see, International Labour Organization in the Convention No 169 and the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (1999)
paper to further examine it. What is important to highlight is that international human rights law in principle, has separated any groups from identified as ‘people’ so to avoid external application of the right to self-determination outside the de-colonisation process. Collective claims often are associated with disruption of stability and in many cases with secession. Therefore there is an apparent emphasis on the individuals than the group as a whole.

**Self-determination and the ‘fear’ of Secession**

Secession is in direct contrast with the principles of territorial integrity and state sovereignty. Therefore, when self-determination is examined in these regards it needs to be considered in conjunction with those principles under both the spectrum of international law and its actual application. One of the fundamental characteristics of statehood is that a state exercises exclusive control over its own territory. The principle of territorial integrity has been stressed in Article 10 of the Covenant of the League of Nations, and has been mentioned again in Chapter Article 2 (4) of the Charter of the United Nations. Since secession, occurs when part of an independent state or a non-self-governing territory separates itself from the whole and becomes an independent state, it contrasts with the territorial integrity of a state. Resolution 1514 (XV) explicitly prohibits secession, therefore any claim from a group for self-determination that implies the possibility of secession in order to define its own political status, is incompatible with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

Similarly, the principle of state sovereignty is highly protected under international law provisions. As a doctrine, it implies both, the state’s autonomy in foreign policy and the exclusive competence in internal affairs. According to the Charter of the United Nations, in Article 2 (7) ‘nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state or shall require the Members to submit such matters to settlement under the present Charter…’. Furthermore, both GA Resolutions 1541 (XV) and 2625 (XV) clarify the relation between self-determination and territorial integrity, by referring to the relations among states and not to the possible right of a group or part of the population to separate and create their own autonomous entity.

James Crawford divides the concept of unilateral secession and self-determination in the practice of colonial territories and of non-colonial territories. The UN Charter in

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84 see Report by Crawford, James, *State Practice and International Law in Relations to Unilateral Secession*, University of Cambridge (19 Feb. 1997)
85 Musgrave, op. cit, supra n. 20, p. 181
86 Article 6, GA Resolution 1514 (XV)
87 Evans, op. cit. supra n. 28, p. 504
88 UN Charter
Chapters XI and XII makes specific provision for territories of colonial type, without actually using the phrase ‘right to self-determination’, but with a concern to the progress to the self-government of the peoples of dependent territories. The ‘emergence as a sovereign state’ from a colonial territory was the most common outcome of this process, amongst the different outcomes recognized by Resolution 1541, namely ‘free association with an independent State’ and ‘integration with an independent state’.\(^89\) Since 1945 the international community has been extremely reluctant to accept unilateral secession of parts of independent states in situations where such an act is in contrast with the government of that state.\(^90\) Accordingly outside the colonial context, the principle of self-determination is not recognized in practice as giving rise to unilateral rights of secession by parts of independent states, but as a constitutional process by which the people determine their future within the state, without external involvement.

The United Nations World Conference on human rights, held in Vienna in 1993 reaffirmed the predominant position on the matter and further added that the principle of self-determination should be ‘possessed of a Government representing the whole people belonging to the territory ‘without of distinction of any kind’. In that way all people can exercise their right of self-determination by participating as equals in the decision making processes of the state. The recognition of cultural identity and internal self-government for different groups or peoples is treated by international law as an issue under domestic jurisdiction and translates as application of internal self-determination, which is the ‘desirable’ application of the right.

Claims of self-determination by secessionist movements, or ‘liberation’ movements as they might be called, constitute a further threat to existing order, peace and security within a state. By the use of violence and in many cases by acts of terrorism, such groups seek to break away from a state and often aspire to statehood themselves. This shows the immense importance of framing and constraining the concept of self-determination under international law. According to Rosalyn Higgins ‘wars of national liberation’ are said to occur when ‘people entitled to self-determination take up arms against the governments ruling the territory where they seek to exercise that right’.\(^91\)

Self-determination is a concept that should be in conformity with the other fundamental principles and human rights and not a right, which would bring about instability and violations. Self-determination is a right that only if seen within the context of democracy and democratic procedures can guarantee peace and security.\(^92\) Accordingly, self-determination for peoples or groups within a state is to be achieved by participation in its

\(^{89}\) Principle VI, GA Resolution 1541 (XV)
\(^{90}\) In this point it should be clarified the distinction between *secession* and *dissolution*. In the 1978, Vienna Convention on State Succession it is stressed that the main difference is that in cases of dissolution, no one party is allowed to veto the process. By contrast in the case of secession the agreement of the government of the predecessor state is necessary.
\(^{91}\) as cited in Castellino, op. cit. supra n. 20, p. 102
constitutional system, based on democratic procedures and on the basis of respect for its territorial integrity.

‘A State whose government represents the whole people on the basis of equality complies with the principle of self-determination in respect of all of its people and is entitled to the protection of its territorial integrity. The people of such a state exercise the right of self-determination through their equal participation in its system of government.’ GA Resolution 2625 (XXV)

**Autonomy**

The principle of autonomy derives from the Greek words εαυτός (self) and νόμος (custom, law) and translates as the capacity for individual decisions, *self-government*. Thereupon, autonomy means the ability of all individuals to judge, choose and act in both private and public life. Autonomy can be described in a territorial political form as ‘an arrangement aimed at granting to a group that differs from the majority of the population in the state, but that constitutes the majority in a specific region, a means by which it can express its distinct identity.’

Autonomy is an expression of internal self-determination, since it is an ‘indoors’ ‘territorial arrangement’ that its political status does not prevail the state’s constitutional law but gives a certain amount of authority to the internal affairs of a distinct group that cover specific territory within the states boundaries. The status of autonomy entitles this certain area to either enjoy the control over most of the policies concerned or the control over particular aspects, for example policies on issues of education, culture etc. This type of application of the right to self-determination is to be provided by the constitutional provisions of a State. Thereby, the quest of an independent statehood is not the only option for a group’s claim for self-determination. The group can achieve a territorial and political ‘separation’ within the state, avoiding the potential for disruption, violence and conflict that a claim for independence would likely bring.

Hans-Joachim Heintze, in his analysis defines two types of autonomy; the territorial and the non-territorial. The first application is perhaps the one mostly associated with the term and involves a certain area that is given special political and administration status. It falls under the principle of sovereignty and equates with territorial self-government. Such method is often used to resolve ‘issues’ between a minority that is territorially concentrated and the respected state. It that way the minority becomes majority within

94 Ibid.
95 for example the system in Switzerland, see McCorquodale, op. cit. supra n. 19
97 For example in the case of the Aaland Islands, Alston, op. cit supra n 20
the defined territorial area and even, in some instances, the group gets authorised to establish elected representatives and functions institutionalising its own democratic processes.\textsuperscript{98} That said it is not feasible to grand all minorities with territorial self-governance, therefore it only applies in very few cases. In view of that, the application of territorial autonomy as a solution for self-determination claims takes also the form of non-territorial arrangement.

The non-territorial autonomy translates in different ways. It could mean cultural, personal or functional autonomy. Cultural autonomy means that a certain group can govern over its cultural affairs and make decisions over matters related with language and education.\textsuperscript{99} Such autonomy raises the risk of a group not integrated with the rest of the population in a state. In case of a group not been concentrated in an area or the state not willing to provide collective rights, then autonomy can fall under the principle of personality. This type, according to Heintze is called personal autonomy and it prevents disputes over territories, since it does not divide land and population at any level. The general democratic institutions of the state deal with majority and minority/ies in the same way. The subjects of autonomy are individuals and not groups. Finally functional autonomy means that certain state functions and entitlements are transferred to private minority groups organisations. Such private corporations are responsible for the promotion and administration of culture, education, media and religion for a minority. Functional autonomy can promote assimilation of the minority with the rest of population and relief ethnic tensions.

The application of autonomy, since it is regulated by the constitution of a state (constitutional autonomy) it becomes relevant with the ideals of democratic governance and internal self-determination. The right of self-determination applies in a non-violent way, with the consent of both the group concerned and the state. As Hurst Hannum argues, conflict and tension are inherent in society; so are the differences in individuals and cultures. Therefore, fundamental state obligation in respect of international human rights norms is to eliminate discrimination and not to destroy all differences. Recognition of the right to personal autonomy and group identity is essential to ensure that the principles of self-determination, participation and tolerance are allowed to flourish.\textsuperscript{100} Autonomy aims to be the solution to provide respect of human rights and most importantly satisfaction of self-determination claims without disruptions, conflict and secession. Autonomy, unlike secession, does not interfere with territorial integrity and offer political unity in a state.

\textsuperscript{98} For example the case of the Palestinian Territories and their administration, Oslo Accords (1992)
\textsuperscript{99} For example the case of Saami in Finland, see, Myntti, Kristian in Suksi, Markky (eds), op. cit., supra 101, pp. 286-294
Participation

The concept of participation is principally linked with the values of democratic governance. Robert Dahl argues that there are seven institutional conditions for a democracy to be genuine.\textsuperscript{101} These are: (i) elected officials, (ii) free and fair elections, (iii) inclusive suffrage, (iv) right to run for office, (v) freedom of expression, (vi) alternative information and (vii) associational autonomy. Furthermore, votes need to be of equal status and able to determine the outcome of the elections. All individuals must have adequate and equal opportunities before an effective participation in the process of making collective decisions, in order the preferences to be genuine. And finally the control of the decisions ought to be in the hands of \textit{demos} who make the decisions as regards their governance.\textsuperscript{102}

Political participation, according to Anthony Birch, similarly concerns peoples’ capability to vote either in local or national elections and referendums, to participate during the campaigning in elections and be active either been part of a political party or pressure group keeps all individuals involved in the decision making processes of the state.\textsuperscript{103} That said it is important to keep in mind that real participation is possible only when true equality and access exists among individuals in governance. Therefore, application of the rule of law is essential in order the basic human rights standards are applied. Without protection against discrimination and accountability there are no real democratic standards. Furthermore, adjacent in action is reaction. Participation also means ways of changing or responding to detrimental and discriminatory measures or laws. Access in policy-making procedures is a continuous democratic right, granting involvement in all stages of governance. Taking part in political demonstrations and strikes or other activities targeting to complain or change policies are some of the most common ways testifying true participation. When people are taking part in the selection of the public officials, express their views on public issues and exercise pressure on decision makers, ‘they are more likely to accept that governmental decisions are legitimate’.\textsuperscript{104} Therefore, participation is an integral part of democratic governance and can potentially provide peace and stability in a state, regardless the composition of the population.

Accordingly, it can be argued that democratic governance consists of four general principles; popular sovereignty, political equality, popular consultation and majority rule.\textsuperscript{105} All of which are highly linked with principles composing the ‘right’ to internal self-determination. All people freely determine their political status in conformity with human rights standards supplement with the principle of non-discrimination, participating in the decision-making process and making decisions by the method of free and fair elections.

\textsuperscript{101} as cited in Held, David, op. cit, supra n. 1, p. 278
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., p. 291
\textsuperscript{103} Birch, op. cit. supra n. 3, pp. 56-81
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid, p. 82
Hence, the internal application of the right to self-determination, associated with democratic governance can assist in the realisation of human rights for all and balance the internal affairs of a state.

**Closing Remarks**

Democracy by its very definition involves the unremitting authority of all people, to be able to choose for their political status and type of governance. The principles of democratic governance and democratization of states has gained great momentum in the last few decades and is highly linked with the observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms. It is further seen as the system that strengthens peace and security both in domestic and international level. Accordingly, an entitlement of a right to democratic governance is widely, if not universally accepted. Its component elements are already established within international human rights framework with most developed subset the right of self-determination. The right of self-determination similarly, means the entitlement of all peoples, ‘to freely determine their political status and freely pursue their, economic, social and cultural development.’

While, in principle the right of self-determination reads almost identically with the right to democratic governance, in practice it is rather more complicated.

After presenting in a brief manner the main developments which led to the legal establishment of the self-determination, it can be said that although the political character of the principle forced the international community to deal with its external character, mainly in the colonial context, there has been a parallel intense effort for regulating its application in a non-violent way. The threat of territorial changes and disruption of the existing order and status led to the necessity for the emergence of internal self-determination. The international community in order to achieve and sustain universal peace, security and stability along with satisfying people’s claims for self-determination, revealed and emphasized the internal aspect of the right. Internal self-determination was the way of ‘controlling’ the extreme ‘external’ political character of the right. Accordingly, the people, by choosing their own governance, political status and participating in the decision-making process along with preserving their cultural, ethnic, historical and territorial identity, assert their undeniable right of self-determination without need to change the existing boundaries. As Hector Gros Espiell argues, the self-determination of citizens, individually, on the basis of the recognition of their political rights, is a prerequisite of the effective realization of self-determination as the people’s collective right.

Internal self-determination is directly linked with the principles of democracy (pluralistic democracy) that is accepted to be the political system compatible with the principles of

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106 Article 1, ICCPR
the international human rights legal system. Therefore, in order to achieve respect and protection of the human rights of people, internal self-determination needs to be applied. The international community ought to observe and defend its application within all States, as well as the territories that are in a transitional period, either due to a domestic conflict or severe discriminations to certain peoples. Internal self-determination can perhaps be used as a mechanism for resolving or preventing disputes, outside the colonial context, since its application presupposes democratic procedures, meaning the respect for both the individual rights, and the collective distinct character of the group in question. It can help as been the guideline frame for the respect of all rights within a territory, allowing free and equal access in the decision making processes of a state.

The categorization of self-determination as ‘external’ and ‘internal’ is not meant to conceptually divide the meaning of the right or to imply that one aspect prevails or eliminates the other, but is an effort to reflect, explain and interpret its complex context by creating two artificial categories as implementation options. Self-determination is the right of all peoples to be governed based on their consent, free from any external interference. It is the right to regulate, protect and affirm an active participation to the political decision-making procedures in a state, by the guarantee of a liberal, transparent and accessible government that has as a priority the safety and prosperity of all its peoples.

The international community in its practice thus far, prefers to deal with self-determination as a mainly political issue and address the claim only to the extent of a possible threat to the stability or territorial integrity of a state arising. There appears to be general consensus on this need within the international legal framework. However, international human right law, in its various documents along with other contemporary legal sources, seeks to provide the ground for further and broader interpretation and treatment of self-determination by emphasizing the internal aspect of the right. As Steven Wheatley argues, the right of self-determination ‘applies at all points in time; it is not exercised (and thus exhausted) at a single moment’.

The right of self-determination is currently almost in stagnation, trapped within the colonial, external and political context with some residual though contested meaning in terms of indigenous peoples. Self-determination’s relevance and direct association with secession and conflict led the international community to be reluctant in quantifying its entitlement and application and consequently, there is an apparent lack of a dynamic interpretation of the right and consequently no concrete measures for its protection and realization. There is a need to remove self-determination from this loop by exploring its internal aspect, a conceptual context that is already given and acknowledged by the

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international forum. Internal self-determination seems to be the future for the application of the right, since it reflect a continuous entitlement to it, avoiding any boundary disturbance or domestic turbulence, regardless of the demographic composition of the population residing in a specific territory. The promotion and protection of internal self-determination can mean the promotion and protection of democratic governance that can mean international and domestic peace.

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