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***Introduction***

In the past two editions of the Politeia Forum we have analyzed the evolutions of the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and of the role of multinational corporations (MCNs). With the Seventh Politeia Forum - *The Corporation as a Political Actor: A New Role of Business in a Global Society* (May 2011) – we have shed light on how private actors, namely MCNs, increasingly assume direct political responsibilities, that conventionally belong to governments, as providers of citizenship rights and public goods. Through the Eight Politeia Forum - *Business and Human Rights: In Search of Accountability* (December 2011) – we have further developed the theme of the new role of business in the globalization process by analyzing the impact of MCNs’ activities on human rights, in the light of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, which have provided a better definition of the respective roles and responsibilities of governments and corporate actors.

The Ninth Politeia Forum on *Corporations and Global Justice: Should Multinational Corporations be Agents of Justice?* will seek to contribute to the international debate on the grounds and scope of the duties of MNCs. Global justice demands traditionally concern the duties of states and of their citizens; however, today there is a debate on whether such demands concern MCNs too. While it is widely recognised that the latter have the negative duty not to engage in harmful activities, it is less clear whether, and to what extent, they have the positive duty to remedy global injustices, by translating the respect of the UN Global Compact principles into an action aimed at fulfilling the Millennium Development Goals. Development will depend on the degree of cooperation between public actors — governments and international organizations — and private actors — civil society and business. Aim of this edition is to frame the role of MCNs in the quest for global justice. At present, international *CSR standards* constitute a global “institutional infrastructure” designed to help MNCs put into practice principles of global justice in their worldwide operations; however, a critical analysis of such standards is needed in order to assess the benefits and limits of their adoption. Arguably, the very concept of CSR, however important, appears to be insufficient to address the issues of global justice, as it generates only little impact on the structural root causes of injustice. An alternative *perspective based on justice* could account better for the increasingly prominent political dimension of corporate responsibility: in this alternative view, responsibility is *shared* among all relevant actors according to their different power, influence and capabilities. However, the 2011 UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights seem to require a weak commitment to corporations, as they provide for the fulfilment of just the most *basic expectations* of society in MCNs’ respect. In fact, international human rights law — as a legitimate marker of a global standard — require more than just avoiding the infringement of human rights, as it compels both states and the private sector to actively contribute to the fulfilment of socio-economic rights. Thus, a better consideration of MNCs’ positive obligations is needed, in order to alleviate poverty and inequality on a global scale. As a consequence, when linking global justice to corporate responsibility, it seems all the more necessary to better specify the fundamental *purpose* of MCNs and in general of for-profit corporations. One of the Forum’s main aims will be to show how a perspective based on global justice entails a new reflection on the purpose of for-profit corporations. The Forum is organized by the Research Centre Politeia in partnership with the University of Milano – Department of Social and Political Sciences, Dublin City University — Institute of Ethics, and the Global Compact Network Italia, and is supported by a Promoting Committee of several well-known Italian companies and organizations. Aim of Politeia is to organize a Forum in which managers of national and international companies and experts in business ethics and CSR from the most prestigious national and international research centres will have the opportunity to discuss the emerging ethical issues in the global economic system. This way, it aims at increasing the awareness and knowledge of the ethical and social responsibilities of economic organizations, and at filling the gap between ‘practitioners’ and ‘experts’.