

Evolutions of the European Social Democracy under the Impact of Globalization

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Classic values of social democracy are discussed today from two perspectives: **i. Loss of uniqueness** as a result of their adoption by other doctrines, as well as of their association with elements from different doctrines; **ii. Loss of the capacity to apply into practice** (of the specific political efficiency) as a result of the market substituting the state (politics) – a substitution which was, at the same time, objective and subjective/ ideological).

a. Social Democracy, Neo-conservatism and Neo-liberalism

Equality and solidarity are the traditional messages of the left. The left has wanted change for obtaining or bringing more equality. In this battle it needed solidarity as an instrument.

The right has mainly promoted the idea of liberty. As liberty included free competition, and this led to inequality, the right integrated into its system of thought **equality under the form of equality of chances.**

At the same time, the left – especially after the failure of the egalitarian experience that led to stagnation – renounced solidarity as an **instrument of change**, adopting it then as an **instrument of keeping the rights already won.**

The right has enriched its ideological patrimony, bringing the **principle of subsidiarity** into the sphere of liberty, beside the equality of chances in a free contest. Multiplying, thus, the decisional levels and centers, the right claimed that it makes people freer, because each would be less dependent of others in the decisional act and more “dependent” of oneself. Free competition amplified also by subsidiarity generated, though, **social exclusion.**

In response, **the left tried to improve the role of solidarity by comprising as one of its objectives social inclusion.** Solidarity was practiced, though, mostly as a **redistribution policy** meant to preserve previous social balances and structures, no matter their dynamism and merits. The right then took over the idea of solidarity, too, but it considered it as a **strategy of gathering resources** in order to obtain a larger profit for all those freely participating to the economic life.

In principle, both the American philosophy concerning **the social role of corporations** and the European philosophy regarding **social market economy**, reflect a certain conception of solidarity and are both the creation of the rightist thought. From these positions the right has accused the social democratic left that it only knows how to consume what the neo-liberals produce.

Naturally, the left has tried to defend itself, by showing that it is the single generator of ideas apt to stimulate production. To this end the left accepted to introduce in its ideology the respect for rules of market economy and **to replace the “welfare state” thesis with the social security as a corrective meant not to deny**

the market, but to humanize it, that is to civilize it. The innovation was immediately “accepted” by the ideologies of the right, which have always had among their values, beside **liberty, law and order subsumed to the concept of security.** **Extending the meaning of the term *security* to other social problems, the right managed to ideologically combine two contradicting notions – liberty and security. Liberty was confined to the economic sphere; the security to the social sphere.** As a consequence, social liberty was limited for the reason of thus promoting security. The inequality resulting from such an approach was used both as a system of government (as a political regime) and as a motor of economic progress. From an economic perspective, **growth was insured by releasing** (of course, relatively, but increasingly) **the rich from any control and any regulation,** the global welfare increasing proportionally with the increase in the number of those excluded. Where we are dealing with a rightist government (neo-liberal and neo-conservative), the better the synthetic indicators are, the more social polarization they hide. Political measures to reduce this polarization are reflected in the reduction of the economic growth. At least this seems to be the evolution of things concerning the rightist policies on the long term, while a long-term thinking is lacking. Such a long-term thinking would certainly lead to another approach, which will enhance sustainable development, in the economic field, through the association with the sustainability of the social and political balances. However, the promoters of the right think today that on the long-term they will be dead anyway.

b. Social democracy – market – globalization

What is the ideology with which social democrats respond to such a state of facts? Their old concepts don't belong to them any more (at least not exclusively). The market-economy once (and righteously) accepted seems to drastically limit the capacity of ideological maneuver of the left.

The problems that social democracy rises are not, though, a mere offspring of the ideological fashion or confrontation. **The market imposes itself to social democracy with its inner force, as an objective reality** (which, therefore, cannot be ignored) **governed, as a consequence, by objective laws** (that cannot, thus, be submitted to political control, at least in their essential aspects). When the socialist revolutionary (radical) left tried to “correct” the economic laws and replace market-economy with command-economy, the result was stagnation. **It was proved that production cannot determine the consumer needs and that compulsory state planning cannot replace motivation through competition.** But stagnation, once it appears in a world where the fundamental rule is circulation, only reduced to incapacity the societies that decided to defy the reality of the market. An economic incapacity whose compensation was tried by political mobilization or a mobilization policy inevitably leading to limitation of civil rights through centralization, bureaucratization, militarization, super-legislation and nationalization, that is destroying democracy. The absolute nationalization of the production means led to the nationalization of thought and, therefore, to blocking of free initiative (Exceptions only confirmed the general rule). Under the overwhelming impact of such a failure, the left was forced to reconsider its position regarding market-economy, accepting the fact that its laws can neither be ignored nor modified.

The decisive element that imposed such reconsideration was globalization. I am talking about the globalization of the markets, but also of information, which was equivalent with globalizing human contacts. **“Ideologization of economic action” was possible** – in spite of limits and threats previously mentioned – **at most, into an isolated and controlled society**. The technologic progress, though, made impossible a complete isolation of the socialist national societies. The sentiment of trans-border communion made people find the moral force in order to oppose state control. On the other hand, the state’s dependence on external resources forced the national society to open up. Once it opened, it was forced to abide by some transnational forces that it couldn’t control anymore. The most important of these were **the force of free competition and the circulation of capitals**. The circulation of goods and services, thus, evolved following rules out of a specific state’s control, as the global market imposed supra-stately customs and standards. Money circulation followed, in its turn, the same tendency, the capitals running from one side to the other, according to how they were satisfied by the national political decision. This became, therefore, the object of blackmail from some forces that didn’t depend on it and ended by being their hostage. Any ideology that didn’t want to recognize the role of such forces was doomed to failure. Any government that tried to lead a policy against transnational capital was either thrown down from power or obliged to change its options to prevent capital from fleeing abroad (often forced by its rivals). The problem is that the forces of the market, in general, and the forces of the global market, in particular, **created difficulties not only to the ideology of revolutionary socialism, but also to social democracy which had previously managed to civilize the national capitalism**. The global market or the globalization of the market made that an ideology that proved efficient within the nation-state and while the nation-state was the main actor of international relations reach its limits. At the same time, social democracy – democracy in general – went into a crisis.

c. Issues of the social democratic agenda

Political developments from European countries and the impact that globalization has over social-political, economic and cultural realities, strive for a review and modernization in the ideology of European social democratic parties (as well as of the social democratic ideology, in general).

In this context, European social democratic reflection emphasizes **three issues: nation; democracy; cohesion/social integration**. I will briefly approach each of them.

1. The issue concerning nation is made up of several sub-themes. First, it deals with the necessity of **distinguishing between the civic nation (linked with the territory – territorial) and the cultural nation (spiritual)**. On the basis of this distinction there can be drawn up a theory of civic multiculturalism, of cultural security through intercultural dialogue and of the multicultural civic state as a building block for the “common European home”.

A second sub-theme deals with the **cosmopolite nations** as a form of integrating the European and the global family, based on principles such as the respect for diversity, supporting common values, subsidiarity and spiritual cohesion. In this

context, a sensitive problem is that of the **migration and recognizing the rights of the immigrants**.

A third sub-theme regards the **role of the nation-state in the context of globalization** and, in connection to this, the new meaning and the **new form of exercising sovereignty**. It is worth underlining that the national state does not mean ethnic state and that a unitary state does not mean centralized state anymore. Also, it is worth mentioning that sovereignty cannot preserve its absolute character and cannot be considered as an alibi for abuses of the state against its own citizens. As a consequence, if usually a powerful state was the one having the capacity to resist pressures from abroad or impose its model and priorities outside its borders, today in the conditions of globalization, a powerful state is the one secure enough on itself, ready to exercise its sovereignty in common with others. In the same context of ideas, sovereignty ceases to exclude the right to intervene of the international community when, through its policy, a state harms its own citizens (violating human rights) or acts internally in a manner susceptible of endangering regional or global security. **The right to intervene concerns protection and prevention, crisis management and post-crisis rehabilitation**. It must be legitimated internationally, exercised by multilateral means and submitted to the universal judiciary censorship. Finally, it must be upheld that, in the conditions of globalization, regional integration does not imply a limitation, abdication or abandonment of sovereignty, but only its functioning in a different way, that is together with others or closer to the citizen. This also implies a **redistribution of sovereignty's prerogatives** – upwards, from the nation-state towards European, regional or global institutions, and downwards, to local communities.

A fourth sub-theme regards **re-evaluating the tradition and preserving cultural identity in the conditions of globalization**. Such a specialized approach would include reflections around relativization of tradition as a consequence of communication and comparison facilitated by globalization, around the need to select what is essential from what is ritual in tradition, as well as around the importance of the process of elaborating spiritual/moral guides that would, at the same time, be legitimate in the eyes of those assuming them and compatible with the habits of other communities with which they coexist.

2. The issues concerning democracy should **provide content to the concept of “democratizing democracy”**. These should include defining of the instruments linked to: insuring the open and free character of the society; transparency and accountability of the political factors; democratization of the family; partnership between the political elite/state, civil society and the economic environment/businessmen; personal solidarity; social involvement and participative democracy. In the same framework, there should be an approach to the issue of balancing the free access to information, the freedom of opinion and the right to correct information. Fighting against “politics as a show”, supporting a free and loyal political competition, both within and between parties, fighting corruption in politics and financing of political parties are other issues that must be explored.

3. Social cohesion or, to be more specific, **rebuilding social cohesion** constitutes another major challenge on the agenda of social democratic ideological reform. Social democracy has already renounced equalitarianism, that is providing for

the equality between people, promoting instead the **equality of chances principle**, that is meritocracy. Meritocracy is, though, a principle that divides more than unites. Therefore, **equality of chances must be balanced by the chance of equality as inclusion of each individual**. This implies, in its turn, the achievement of another balance between **integration into the democratic family and integration of the family within the structure of open** collectivities. Such collectivities are to aggregate, in their turn, into the multicultural civic nation and into the cosmopolite one. The policy of integration chances and of equality as integration should be defined as concretely as possible, so that it identifies the path towards **increase in the individual freedom and security through an increase of adaptability as well as through a fair correlation between freedom of opinion and responsibility, between the risk taken and the gain obtained**. Organization of the civil society, explaining the role of the middle class, social restructuring and partnership between society and the political elite must be integral parts of the present social democratic ideology. From such a perspective, **economic and environmental policies must insure not only sustainable economic development – and, consequently, poverty alleviation – but also sustainable social development**.

From the short presentation of the recent evolutions within the European democracy it results that a re-evaluation and a re-elaboration of the social democratic ideological and political platform are needed because **the leap from “national” to “global”** places the entire society face to face with new problems. A new ideological vision, created in response to globalization but also in the light of a global thought, will allow European social democrats to unite in a coherent effort meant to lead to **the achievement of three aims, which are: i. Civilizing global capitalism; ii. Defining a common project for the edification of a United Europe; iii. Acting against economic and social disparities (fighting poverty) at world level**.

Will social democracy be able to respond to such challenges? To the extent that it does, social democracy has a perspective. For the moment, although there is a conscience of the need to redefine itself, the political left, absorbed by the fight for power, limits itself to explorations. Some progress is visible, though. It answers an obvious social need. All these combined constitute a reason for optimism but also for mobilization.