

MODERN LEFT-WING EUROPEAN POLITICS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Abstract

This paper is about the importance of modern left-wing European politics in the process of construction of European Union. In my paper, I have tried to discern the main ideological issues of the contemporary European left-wing, focusing on that which may currently be considered the essence of the offer of the left-wing political parties: the European societal model. Lately, there has been a real “right-wing fashion” throughout the European space, fashion manifested both in the intellectual circles, in those of the great entrepreneurs, in those of the middle class, and even among a large part of the working class. They all have right-wing sympathies; they all vote for the right-wing parties at the local, national, or European elections. In the recent electoral years, few EU countries have witnessed victories of the left-wing, the right-wing succeeding in imposing itself paradoxically in times of economic crisis, that is just when the electorate was expected to vibrate to the leftist political promises! Against this background, the question arises whether the left-wing is experiencing a conjectural decline or whether precisely its fundamental values (political, economic, and moral) are going through a crisis, in a world increasingly individualistic.

Keywords: modern left-wing European politics, European Union, Anthony Giddens

INTRODUCTION

The European Socialists (Social-Democrats) claim the avant-garde of the construction and modernization of the European societal model. This model constitutes an important political and even ideological bet – in a global context – for the European left-wing. Political, as the left-wing desires to prove the superiority of their pan-European views in relation to the Neo-liberals and the non-Conservatives who either oppose integration or promote incoherent projects. Ideological, in a global context, as the European left-wing desires to prove the superiority of the European societal model/European model of life over the North American one, symbol of the neo-liberal mundialization.

The European societal model lies at the heart of most European, but also Transatlantic, intellectual debates. It is an ongoing process, which is still quite far from the final agreement stage. There is a point of view with a very high agreement potential concerning the fact that the European societal model must be a Rhenish-

type one as defined in the theses of Michel Albert (Albert 1996, 12-46). There are, however, many different points of view between the left-wing and the right-wing, between North and South, East and West, politicians and the European public opinion. A growing polemic arises, between those who believe and those who do not (any longer) believe in the viability of an integrating European project. Within the European left-wing there are also different ideological stands concerning the European project as a whole, or some of its aspects.

The Social-Democrats, whose creed is reflected in the values disseminated by the Third Path, imagine a European model which would harmoniously integrate the values of the economic liberalism. Market competition and open trade are essential to boosting productivity and growth. From this perspective, they suggest the creation of a framework allowing market forces to work for the economic success. The European Union should thus act as a force for the liberalization of world trade.

The proponents of this point of view, founded on the works of Anthony Giddens (*The "Third Path"*) and of Bodo Hombach (*A new impetus – the new center*), propose new guidelines for the social mentalities and attitudes at the national and European levels. They believe that the ideals of competitiveness and of the ability to create wealth, the sense of progress and risk must replace, at this level as well, the old values of social security and redistribution and the old feelings of social solidarity focused on the individual assisted by the providence-state. They assert the primacy of the reform of the European institutions as a reinvention of their efficiency and transparency against all losses and fraud.

The key to success of a European institutional model is, according to them, those steps of integration – made possible only through economic growth – which will produce real added value to the lives of the Europeans, recognized as such by the people. As for the common foreign affairs and security policies, the proponents of this model believe that the foundation of the European security resides in: a sustainable transatlantic partnership, in Russia's association to the European security structures, and in NATO's rise as a political-institutional binder of the Euro-Atlantic community.

The Socialists, reformer Communists, and civic Radicals, who see their creed embedded in the values of the new left-wing, circumscribed to the "alterglobalist" project, consider that the European model of society must provide an alternative to liberal globalization and the American model now dominating the whole planet. Stating that the political and social Europes are inextricably linked, they consider that the European social issue must be at the heart of the European left-wing's action, which has no other means of getting popular support for the European project. The proponents of this model suggest building a "Social Europe" to provide sustainable solutions to the current European challenges: the transnational capitalism governed by financial globalization, the rising unemployment, the inequalities between North and South, between East and West, the incoherence of environmental protection under the rule of the model focused on economic growth.

The beginning of the third millennium is marked by the Highway of Ideas, a concept introduced by the Chairman for Global Progress, Felipe Gonzales. Under the pressure of the philosophical enthusiasm characterizing every beginning, new ideas, themes, and dilemmas emerge, less explored axiological theories are being “recovered”, while, on the other hand, several concepts and ideas that have dominated the public debate disappear. Some ideas are running faster, others more slowly, sometimes collisions occur with strong effects on the useful content of the debate, some other times, the “ideological traffic” is accompanied by what we call the ethics of dialogue, of the confrontation of ideas (Crick 1998, 45-54).

My paper does not propose a complete investigation of this “highway of ideas”. It aims to identify the main trends/themes/ideas running down the left side of the highway, to capture the “development stage” of the European market of the left-wing debates in the context of an analysis of the global market of ideas at the beginning of the millennium.

CURRENT DEBATE TOPICS OF THE EUROPEAN LEFT

a) Equality of opportunities

This has long been a favourite topic of the Left, even overvalued by the Social Democrats. In public practice, the equality of opportunities revealed some undesirable results as well. For example, the talented ones, progressing at another pace due to the equal conditions of deployment and evolution, rather create broad inequalities in terms of results.

Moreover, the equality of opportunities tends to produce high levels of social and cultural diversity as the individuals and groups have the chance to live their lives as they see fit.

A common argument is that the ethical basis of the existence of community and cooperation should determine the state not to focus on absolute paternalism (to feed, provide food, provide accommodation) but to ensure that its citizens can earn by their personal efforts everything they need for a full civic efficiency. Education, broadly and less vocationally understood, should be the primary instrument employed in the cultivation of initiative and responsibility.

The equality of opportunities is and should be based on the social model. The essential argument is that it requires the redistribution of wealth and income in view of at least two less “classic” reasons. One resides in the fact that the equality of opportunities often produces an inequality of achievements, redistribution thus being necessary as our chances in life should be reassigned across generations. Without such redistribution, the inequality of achievements of a generation will determine the next generation’s inequality of opportunities. The second reason is that there will always be people whose opportunities will be limited or who will be ignored when others are more efficient. Neither these should be denied the chance to attain fulfilment (Verdery 2003, 67).

b) Issue of inequalities

The causes of income inequalities are economic, social, and cultural. These recent years have seen a dynamics of the degree of inequality, generally based on objective reasons.

The economic reasons, such as migrant workers, with a higher share of income inequalities, tend to decrease, while paradoxically, the grounds related to social egalitarianism determined by a raise of the equality degree of women to men stressed the income inequalities, as the “women’s emancipation”, their desire to build a career, thus their autonomy placed them in the situation of rearing their children by themselves, knowing that single parent families receive lower income.

Poverty due to insufficient income should not be long-lasting or chronic because of the social model, therefore, getting out of poverty by the joint effects of the social policies and the personal efforts of individuals is the solution to this kind of poverty.

The poverty owing to the lack of income may have, in Europe, other causes, related to the global free trade pushed to the Eastern countries – emerging markets but which do not bring high wages to the exporting countries, to the industrial production and its trends, to the technological developments, and to the spread of the information technology, leading to the decline of the demand for unskilled workers whose jobs and wages decrease accordingly. In addition to these causes we can mention those related to the demographic trends and to the changes in the distribution of family labour and in the growing inequalities related to other sources of income, especially real estate (Giddens 2001, 34-67).

c) Taxing and redistribution

This component is considered important when constructing the social model, since accepting the idea of redistribution as a necessity in order to lessen inequalities involves addressing the taxation form so that on the one hand it should bring a maximum of budget revenues and on the other hand it should not introduce new inequalities into the personal income.

Between the Swedish taxation model, which has a system of taxes and transfers which reduces inequality by 50% of the gross income, turning it into available net income, and the US model which reduces inequality by only 20%, there certainly is a middle situation that proposes a phased taxation and that ensures an optimum of transfers and a minimum of personal income inequalities.

This middle situation must ensure on the one hand, a maximum possible economic equality, and on the other hand, a reasonable level of government spending needed for social welfare. The model must take into account that increasing the costs of the current social security systems will not necessarily help alleviate inequalities. The moderate Left argues that progressive taxation is a mandatory feature of the European social model. However, it is necessary to take into account the more recent research showing that the level of taxation, together with the social transfers, are more important sources of redistribution than the progressivism degree of the income tax. The progressive income tax should play an

important role in reducing inequalities, but returning to the excessively progressive systems of the past is neither logical nor necessary (Florian 1996, 34-45).

d) Social security system

Since the existing social security systems are overcome by the economic and social changes taking place in the world and the dynamics of inequality is different from the past, new risks occurring in society, the reform of the social security systems is inherent. Mainly it has to take into account the following: women are present on the labor market to a greater extent than before; the relations between job and family have changed, there are many more single-parent homes; the educational needs and opportunities have changed; longevity and the proliferation of medical treatments have forced the retirement and health social insurance system to ensure a long-term financial sustainability, raising many new issues. On the other hand, the welfare state has become impossible to support. Instead of creating greater social solidarity, the social security institutions may undermine it. The Western European countries have already realized that the state's obligations to the public pension funds are impossible to meet.

Assuming a high level of debt with paying pensions will direct a large portion of the taxes and fees to paying the interests, instead of using financial resources to pay for social services. This can lead to social unrest, riots of taxpayers, rupture between generations, etc. Consequently, the reform of the social security systems in the European countries should initially be targeted at preventing social exclusion and maintaining a satisfying level of social cohesion. Social exclusion must not be regarded as a hypocritical replacement of the notion of poverty and deprivation, but must be considered as a totality of some social mechanisms that produce or support deprivation.

The most important manifestation of social exclusion in the upper strata of society is the elite's choice not to assume its social and economic responsibilities, including its tax obligations. Social exclusion in the lower strata can be identified with poverty. It is not about the degree of differentiation compared to those with higher incomes, but about the lack of opportunities they experience in connection with "the failure of capabilities". Most often, the failure of acquired capabilities refers to the lack of the normal access to employment opportunities.

Countering social exclusion mechanisms is mainly associated with the idea of personal responsibility. The new European social contract that binds rights to responsibilities must operate in a reformed system of social security.

A criticism coming from the rightist but also from within the leftist movement, says that: the Social Democrats and Socialists have identified the achievement of social justice with the equality of income, ignoring individual effort and responsibility. The various societies coming across alternate methods belonging to the Liberals or Leftists disrupted the social security systems and the individuals, requesting from them, at various stages, various adaptations of mentality (Giddens 2001, 78-92).

e) Issue of immigration

An increased immigration cannot meet the European manpower and pension needs on the long-term all by itself. Even if the employment degree were to be maintained constant during 2010-2040, an annual rate of immigration of 2.2 million is required. Even so, the economic growth should rely on productivity growth alone.

From this perspective, the need to focus the European efforts on employment policies and reforms of the pension systems is obvious. The immigration policy should be treated as a contributing element in a coherent package that includes a variety of political measures. Immigration, which also depends on the different level of tolerance towards immigration of the various countries, as well as on the manner of integration of the policies needed to counter the demographic effects, should take into account the different social environments and periodically develop appropriate responses. The current immigration rate is not satisfactory. The relation between education and employment is quite clear. The more educated immigrants are, the more easily they get integrated into the social and economic life. The credibility of a legal framework for the economic immigration will depend in the future on the ability to combat undeclared work and illegal immigration. The migration of the EU Member States' citizens within the European space may give rise to some issues in the destination countries, as these migrant workers will receive, upon their retirement, the recognition of their worked periods in whatever country they would have settled.

For example, countries such as Great Britain avoid receiving workers from other Member States, preferring to host, temporarily or permanently, non-EU citizens to whom it will not give pension unless they have met the requirements of the UK law for the period of contribution. These immigrants, even if they are less qualified than the Romanian or Bulgarian ones, for example, may be preferred, in their capacity as taxpayers and not as social security pension beneficiaries. This behavior is merely pragmatic. In this case, solidarity and European spirit do not apply (Bobbio 1999, 93-110).

f) Social responsibility of corporations

It is a favourite topic of the Left, assumed both by the moderate movements and the most radical of them. We can say that the moderate movements took and passed the issue more effectively from and under the pressure of the more radical movements, especially the altermundialist ones. In Central and Eastern Europe, the leftist governments, especially those in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland, have passed legislative measures meant to implement the criteria of the corporate social responsibility.

CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) is a concept about the contribution that a company must make to the development of modern society, by including policies to motivate and support their employees and by a manifestation of a socially responsible conduct in relation to the community and the environment. Under the pressure of the European Left, the European Council and European Commission adopted a Resolution and a Directive, respectively, which stipulate

that the EU Member States should initiate their own CSR projects taking into account the specific policy priorities, depending on culture and national context. All CSR policies, however, have a core of common objectives: promoting social dialogue (employee – employer), supporting the public – private partnership, enhancing CSR practices and tools, ensuring strong links between the public policies and the sustainable development objectives (Martin and Schumann 1999, 181-208)

g) Globalization

The globalization of economy, capitals, information, and more recently, the globalization of terror turn this phenomenon into the main topic of the current intellectual debates and the epicenter of the Left's debates. In this debate there are three different viewpoints, although their underlying analyses contain a number of common elements.

The promoters of the Third Path concept (politically shared by a part of the social democratic representatives/modernizing Social-Democrats, in the Party of European Socialists) believe that globalization is a given fact, an inevitable phenomenon, with a whole deal of opportunities for progress, but also with risks to be assumed. It will gradually impose a new world order based on global governance – a governance that takes on the impact of globalization, “both under and beyond the level of the nation state.” “Globalization is social and political and cultural [...] Related to the rapid scientific innovation as well, globalization directly contributes to creating new risks; it rewards the efficient management of both sides, dynamic and threatening, of taking risks [...] it dissolves tradition and customs, enabling a more active and more open approach to life.” (Giddens 2001, 65-68).

They estimate that adapting to this phenomenon, the only realistic option, means reforming the state and government, the economy assisted by the state, “changes in everyday life and the emergence of an active and thoughtful civic spirit” (Giddens 2001, 65). Developing a new economy based on information means that the state's interventions into the economy should be different from the ones before. The philosophy of those supporting the Third Path, concerning the new role of the state, both at its national sublevel and at its global supralevel, aims to be an ideo-economic convergence: “A more assertive regulation of economic life in certain contexts is necessary. But deregulation may be just as important in those areas where restrictions inhibit innovation, the creation of jobs, or other key economic objectives. The government does not exist only to constrain the market and technological development. It plays an important part in helping them work for the social good as well.”

Globalization generates risks and opportunities for everyone. It does not assign the risks and opportunities based on gender, race, or class. An effective risk management and education for action (growing social capital), for managing risks and uncertainties seems to be the key to understanding and adapting to globalization, according to the proponents of the Third Path.

“The new forms of uncertainty are not created only by global economy – they are intrinsic to achieving economic success. Most key development sources are sources of uncertainty as well. Anyone wishing to contribute to them (and take advantage of them) must assume them [...] Along with uncertainties, the chances for innovation and profit are multiplied as well.” (Giddens 2001, 67). The theorists of the modernization of social democracy believe in the virtues of the “new individualism”, in the self-adjustment effect of investment in social capital, which are, in their option, one of the main sources of adaptation to globalization.

“The new individualism that accompanies globalization is not reluctant to cooperation and collaboration. Cooperation is positively stimulated by it.” (Giddens 2001, 76). A second conceptual viewpoint on globalization of the European Left is expressed by the Alterglobalists and it is politically supported by some representatives of the European Left in the PES, in the International Socialist, by some reformer Communists, Environmentalists, civic Radicals in the networks of the European civil society (see the European Social Forum but not only). A harsh critique of some altermundialist leaders from an altermundialist stand is made by Serge Halimi. He appreciates that some anti-globalization activists on behalf of the pressing need to be heard and publicized, “blinded by their own reputation” sacrifice the rough essence of their analysis on articulating the components of domination. “So they will not cause too much clutter amid the ideological and commercial belongings of those inviting them, courting them, co-interesting or even buying them, turning them into agents convinced to promote their interests.” They believe that humanity, by the will of its citizens and representatives, can and should rewrite another scenario of globalization, which is a product of human creation and, therefore, under human control.

The promoters of altermundialism launch an applied criticism upon the current course of globalization, which, in their view, does not serve human progress. “Mundialization represents another type of totalitarianism based on a single thought”, Ignacio Ramonet says. The main aspect of this criticism is that globalization produces few winners and many losers, that inequalities grow worldwide in direct proportion to the development of the exclusion of most citizens from the market of opportunities. “Mundialization has destroyed the domestic market which was one of the foundations of the nation-state’s power. Because of it, more and more countries which have massively sold their public enterprises to the private sector have become the property of large multinational groups.” (Ramonet 2004, 23-25).

They warn against the violence of these “globalitarian regimes” that dominate world destiny, inspired, politically, economically, culturally, and socially from the American neo-liberal model of capitalism. “Globalization is an essentially American process!” – Bernard Cassen, leader of the altermundialist network ATTAC, (Cassen 2003, 50) states. In this context, the Alterglobalists believe, “Uprising, the right to rebellion, are rebecoming civic imperatives. We must simply create a fifth power which should enable us to oppose a civic force to the new coalition of the dominant ones, a bunch of planetary economic groups and of global

companies whose share in the world economy is sometimes higher than that of governments and states.” (Ramonet 2003, 21-23).

This model offers numerous pitfalls for the future of mankind: the spectrum of a single-fifth society, the disappearance of democracy, the *peripheralization* of the state and the supremacy of corporations, successive financial crises, the degradation of security and global balances, etc.

The German researchers Harald Schumann and Hans-Peter Martin point to the ‘end of labour’ in a study published in 1996 in Hamburg: “One-fifth of those seeking work would be enough to produce all the goods and provide those high quality services which the world’s society can afford. These 20% will actively participate in life, gain, and consumption, irrespective of the country they are in.” The other 80% will compete in a fierce competition for the access among the 20%. Those who fail will face huge difficulties. The two analysts of globalization, quoting one of the heads of a Western corporation, state: “The issue of the future is to have lunch or be lunch.” (Martin and Schumann 1999, 13-15).

Regarding the repeated failures of the state to compete with the “world market anarchy” the Alterglobalists consider that “economy devours politics ... The governments worldwide are slowly losing their ability to intervene in the development of their nations.” (Martin and Schumann 1996, 346).

The Alterglobalists do not trust the solutions proposed by ideologies and the political activists supporting the Third Path. They consider that the ATC accepts the fundamental vision of neo-liberalism/the globalist vision of the winners in favour of the global market virtues, abandoning the principle of reallocating, the major perennial ideal of the authentic Left. They criticize the ATC for wanting the limitation of the government’s role before the blind forces of the market/the lack of an economic policy distinct from that of the free market arch-domination. They accuse the ATC that, supporting the technological development in the light of the prevailing interests of the big businesses, they place the idea of profit above the idea of environment, the principle of the risk taken on above the principle of precaution.

In an article published in the summer of 2001, in the Spanish magazine *El Pais*, the American researcher Jeremy Rifkin, one of the main theorists of altermundialism together with Ignacio Ramonet, from *Le Monde diplomatique*, defends the idea of general interest to the detriment of the particular limited one, the idea of diversity before the one of uniqueness: “The policy of the Third Path is a materialism displaying a much too narrow orientation to be able to encompass a wide variety of interests, which represent the civil society movement. When the commercial sphere begins to devour the cultural sphere, there is the risk of destroying the social foundations underlying social relations. The diversity of the civil society, of culture, the de-monopolization of economies, eliminate the risk of escalation of fundamentalism.”¹

¹ Jeremy Rifkin is the president of the *Foundation on economic trends* based in Washington, author of the famous study “*The end of labor*.” In this study, Rifkin warns

The globalization project of the Alterglobalists is not, qualitatively speaking, at the height of its criticisms. There are a variety of ideas, proposals, solutions, but which have not yet been set in an alternative integrated platform. This is actually the fundamental accusation brought to all anti-mundialization movements. “The anti-globalization advocates score victories in the street but are still unable to find the key to the problem. We need a new commercial and industrial vision which should denounce world inequalities. The workforce should be organized to compel the managers to change the policy to the benefit of all. Reglobalization in politics and economics, this is the way.” (Rifkin 2002, 34-39).

Starting with 1999, the Socialist International has been trying to recover the altermundialist movements, to outline, in dialogue and in partnership with these movements, such a platform. If the resolution of the 21st Congress of the Socialist International in 1999 remained in a critical-analytical area of the globalizing phenomenon, but explicitly stating the political need for the manifestation of a critical relationship with the global capitalist system, (main requirement of the altermundialist movement) the *São Paulo* Declaration and the report titled “Governance in a global society: the social-democratic approach” (Documents adopted during the 22nd Congress of the Socialist International, São Paulo, 2004.) state the landmarks of an alternative project to the current mundialization. This document testifies to the rise of the altermundialist view competing with the theses of the Third Path. These documents speak of the “introduction of social, democratic, and ecological values in the globalization agenda”, the democratization of the World Trade Organization, World Bank, International Monetary Fund, the cancellation of the debts of poor countries, the taxation of financial speculations and corporate net profits, the “taking on of the social and environmental responsibilities of transnational corporations by imposing international regulations on competition, consumer rights, and capital taxation”, giving up the forced imposition of cultural models, including in terms of human rights, the recovery of democratic values at a global, regional, sub-regional, and local level, combating the dissolution of state authority, “the establishment of a multilateral and multipolar global order and the elimination of the unipolar unilateralist ones”.

Moreover, the Socialist International has set on this occasion an Action Plan for a Global Democracy: “the Socialist International will submit its approach to global governance and democracy to debates with organizations of the civil society, academic and research media, ... with other democratic associations of international parties.” Very important steps were taken immediately after the Congress by the participation of many IS representatives in the Global Progressive Forum in Brussels in November 2003 and especially through their participation in the Social Forum in Mumbai in January 2004.

Besides these two axiological and political attitudes to globalization, the ideological family of the Left has another voice, the anti-globalists. Their theses,

against the disappearing trend of the middle class in the developed countries, which is the basis of democracy.

fuelled by various theories, inspire the political action of several representatives of the dogmatic communism, of a minority among the civic Radicals and the Social-Democrats/conservative Socialists. Products of the theorists around the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, the left wing of the French Communist Party, other revolutionary communist parties in the world.

They appreciate both globalization and European integration – a product of globalization, as being failed or pending failure neo-liberal projects, politically and morally illegitimate. They plead for the recovery of the authority of national states, the only frameworks in which the social problems can be solved and which can ensure balance, peace, and security in the international arena. See the texts of Jaime Ballesteros, Patrick Theuret, Boris Kagarlitsky, Ken Coates, Jeremy Corbyn, Victor Trouchov, Nelson Roque Valdes, of the researchers from *Correspondances internationales*. Their main thesis is that the decline of the national states is the direct effect of the enlargement of the new supranational powers, which ignore the relationships between the states and their national authority.

This extension is coordinated by the authoritative action of the American unilateralism and imperialism. The perception of globalization as a purely American phenomenon – the mundialization of American capitalism – is the source of the anti-globalist philosophy and action. “The conceptual framework that nourishes the neo-liberal globalization becomes the new ideal of the bourgeois internationalism, with the complicity of the various components of the great transnational capital” (Isa Conde 1999, 291-295).

This conceptual framework has – in the anti-globalists’ analysis – three basic dimensions: a) hegemonic domination by the financial manipulation/debt policies of the nation-states as a means of penetrating/dissolving national borders; b) universalization of the capitalism domination as a global system based on a new form of militarism of American origin; c) the neo-liberal world government and the financial and trade liberalization with the help of the mass-communication means and the information revolution are converging stakes of the globocrats.

In the anti-globalist view, this conceptual framework mimics/manipulates the democratic appearances, eroding democracy: “The nation-states that wished institutions based on democracy have increasingly less influence on the working conditions, the redistribution of goods, and the quality of life. This democratic deficit appears as a marginal issue for the neo-liberal capitalism which is considered the end point of mankind’s development. The best means to overcome this chaos of the democratically-coated mundialized economy is to start by understanding what is going on.” (Ikonowicz 2000, 37-38).

h) The state

The role and functions of the state have been the hard core of the philosophical and political debate throughout the history of the Left, of the world in general. The limits of the state’s intervention in the lives of its citizens or the measure of the state’s utility are commonly found on the international agendas for debate. Paradoxically, the classic Marxists – who spread the idea of the extinction of the state (instrument of oppression of the poor), by class struggle – rejoin in their

ideal the neo-liberal thinkers/libertarians who no longer believe in the usefulness of the state (instrument of oppression of the rich, enterprising, courageous, etc.) in terms of the victory of the markets, self-regulating and providing economic and human progress.

Although the former stated it explicitly and the latter have never stated it, winning the class struggle was/is the main stake of the promotion of their own project of stateless society.

Between these two points of view, which are found on the current stage of debate and which mark the ideological viability of the Left-Right political axis, there is a range of viewpoints/theories nuanced. We will address in this paper the ones on the market of the intellectual and political Left.

The leftist “Conservatives” are divided in relation to the classic Marxist theses. Some share the idea of a classless and stateless society – the global socialist utopia. Others believe that the nation-state affirmed as a democratic instrument of protection of the weak and the underprivileged. In their vision, their number is increasing, so it is necessary to regain the authority of the social welfare state. They plead more and more intensely for the revitalization of state institutions against the chaotic assault of the markets. Oskar Lafontaine, one of the most ardent defenders of the social state, warned in 1999 against the “urgency of strengthening the democratic control over the global casino of the world’s financial markets and ending the compromise between social democracy and the global power centers.” After a whole history of internationalism, this type of Left becomes ever more isolationist, leaving the internationalist vocation to a localist Right in its entire history.

The “leftist Progressives”/followers of the Third Path current, with the founding spirit which animates them – the Popperian one, of the refusal of the “standing still in the project”, believe in the need for a reinvention of the state, of the attributes of sovereignty, for the government’s adaptation to the new risky situations generated by the demands of globalization. “Rebuilding public institutions and the trust in their functioning constitutes a primary priority of contemporary societies.” (Giddens 2001, 59). They express a radical critique of the statist visions of the conservative Left, of the old style social democracy.” (Giddens 2001, 57-61). “The government and the state are at the root of social problems just as much as the market ... States have become inadequate for the provision of public goods, social security, and civic order.” Their main observation concerns the fact that excessive statism, both in the communist state’s version and in that of the social democratic welfare state, often created inactivity, addiction, bureaucracy, clientelism, authoritarianism, hostility to innovation, loan, cynicism, fiscal irresponsibility, etc. They believe that the power and authority of a state do not reside in the size of its attributions, but in the efficiency and legitimacy of its action: “States can be both oversized and inefficient and consequently face a deficit of legitimacy [...] The state should not paddle, but stand at the helm, not control but meet the challenges.” (Giddens 2001, 59).

The lines of force concerning the construction of the new democratic state – the new identity of the nation-state – proposed by the Third Path are:

- 1) The decentralization and devolution of the state – return of power to regions, cities, districts
- 2) Double democratization - “top-down and bottom-up”
- 3) The renewal of the public sphere
- 4) Administrative efficiency
- 5) Mechanisms of direct democracy – attracting citizens into the shaping of the public decision through the transparency of the governmental act
- 6) The government – risk manager, the source of the state without enemies; social investor in the education for risk taking. The state teaches people how to paddle, it does not paddle for them (Giddens 2001, 90)

These lines of force are built on the fundamental idea (slightly pessimistic) that if the third path turns out not to be the one reforming the state, this one will be dismantled/destroyed by the Right.

New Left supporters believe in the idea of global democratic governance. They want to rebalance the market and the state, economics and politics, and to achieve the democratization of the global state project, currently dominated by the interests of the American state. The most radical of them consider that before reinventing the global democratic state project, restoring the authority of states and democracy within these ones is required. They criticize the theories of the Third Path/the neo-social-democratic theories, accusing them of complicity in the effort of the neo-Liberals and neo-Conservatives to deprive the state of its instrument of monetary and military sovereignty, of its ability to adjust the economy, to control and regulate the informational and communicational space: “By a global encirclement manoeuvre, whole countries and their social order so far are completely destabilized by the new International of capital [...] The supreme task of the democratic politicians is the reinstatement in service of the state and the restoration of the primacy of politics over economy.” (Martin and Schumann 1999, 19-25).

The new Left re-joins the “old social democracy” in the ideal of restoring the primacy of politics over economy and of preserving the values and practices of the welfare state, promoting the idea of extending them globally: “The protection of social achievements, of the workers in Western Europe during the welfare state is clearly a reference and support for the peoples across the world, because they contribute to promoting a sense of identity and of global solidarity on the labor market.” (Corbin 2000, 30).

The major crisis of the state is identified by the “new Left” in the transformation and transfer process of the political decision. Globalization tends to take over all the levers of state power, without taking any of the social responsibilities of the state. Democratic decentralization, nearing the decision to the citizens, the “politics of life” are advertising formulas actually accompanying the tendency to concentrate worldwide the decision in a single decision-making centre. In these conditions the nation-state becomes a formal state. It can no longer

participate directly in the governance of the territory over which sovereignty is exerted, because this one becomes formal, decorative at its turn.

i) Democracy

The crises and challenges, the intellectual and political victories and failures of the Left have always been related to the idea of democracy and democratic practice. The content and meanings of democracy at the beginning of the 21st century are going through a process of profound analysis and debate. The democratic consensus is, politically and intellectually, in a rather precarious balance.

The crisis of democracy, both conceptual and as institutional reality, is a resolution increasingly encountered in the political and scientific speech. The Left and Right are in a fierce competition for the re-accreditation of their own vision of democracy. Such a competition is also reflected within the Left. The modernizing Social-Democrats/the Third Path adepts consider that we are dealing with a “crisis of democracy derived from the fact that it is not democratic enough” (Giddens 2001, 85). Based on the results of several huge polls, they believe that additional ways for the development of democracy should be sought.

The “democratization of democracy” central concept along with “radical center”, “state without enemies”, “new mixed economy”, “cosmopolitan nation” in Giddens’ theories, would further enhance people’s confidence in the democratic system of government. This concept translates, under the pressures of globalization, primarily by decentralization as the recovery lever of state authority. Decentralization is seen as a two-way process, of devolution of the state based on logic both ascending and descending. Along with decentralization, the concept launched by Giddens involves the activation of some forms of direct democracy (electronic referendums, bodies of citizen juries) to supplement the normal democratic voting mechanisms at a local and central level. The fundamental objective is the promotion of the transnational forms of democracy and thus the creation of a global cosmopolitan democracy, within which the global governance and global civil society, nascent, will be able to avoid the “global chaos” in full affirmation. “Democratization can no longer be restricted to the nation-state. Seeking to build democratic institutions above the nation is no longer a utopian goal.” (Giddens 2001, 147).

The Alterglobalists/New Left consider that overcoming the current crisis of democracy requires a full review of the manifestations of representative democracy that became – in their opinion – a formal-manipulative democracy, a sham democracy which no longer serves its authentic, original contents and values. They also believe in the need for global democracy, but which should be the true expression of the interests of the majority, not the domination, disguised as free choices (limited responsibility dictatorship/dictablanda) of an exclusive and oppressive minority².

² See the theories of the new democratic socialism of *Flechtheim*, O. K., from the Otto Suhr Institute, which talk about: the democratization of economy through another type of

“Globalization is a trap for democracy” – consider the followers of the New Left, warning that maintaining the current course of globalization would generate fear of poverty, which could be misused by the nationalist, xenophobic, exclusive, and isolationist political forces. “An incalculable explosive political force arises precisely out of the fear of downgrading. It is not poverty but the fear of it which jeopardizes democracy.” (Martin and Schumann 1999, 24). The New Left believes that the current democracy marginalizes 80% of the world’s population. “If we were to introduce all human beings into the democratic mechanism worldwide, the 20% privileged ones would lose the elections.” (Ikonowicz 2000, 38).

The conservative Social-Democrats believe that democracy, as it was affirmed by the Rhenish and the Nordic models, is the achieved ideal of contemporary democracy and that any criticism brought in the name of modernization and/or globalization to this successful model is an attack against the solid authentic democracy. This view is challenged from all sides. Radu Florian talks about the increasingly widespread feeling of “exhaustion of the draft of the social-democratic society” and the urgent need for a new type of social reformism (Florian 1996, 198-215).

The conservative Communists argue that in the contemporary capitalist societies there is no democracy. Democracy is incompatible with exploitation, inequality, and the free market. In their view, what is required is the radical transformation of class society into a classless society based on democracy and civic self-determination. The draft of a popular, workers’, socialist democracy, inspired by the Marxist-Leninist theses, a new way of governance that goes beyond the exhibitionist democracy is the true democratic ideal, which remains an objective to achieve by the “true Left”.

j) Equality

Equality is the pivotal idea of all leftist movements. It knows, however, various intellectual and political approaches, even divergent, within the Left, despite the constant and unanimous affirmation of the need for greater equality.

For the Third Path, equality must be reconsidered dynamically in order to promote diversity and the idea of redistribution of opportunities/possibilities. In the view of this trend, recognizing the conflict between liberty and equality by the modern Left is the first step towards a new realistic vision of equality. The new equality model should go beyond the neo-liberal model of meritocracy and be based on the principle of inclusion and of equal opportunities.

In Giddens’ view (Giddens 2001, 83-92), inclusion means, on the one hand, access to opportunities through access to employment and education, and on the other hand, it means social mechanisms to prevent the social isolation of social groups, either at the bottom or the top of society. Giddens relies, in the construction

partnership relations between employers and workers, the transition from Sunday democracy to everyday democracy, the conquest by the citizens of the decisional centres and means of democratic control.

of the new concept of equality, on the social capacity theory of Amartya Sen. Thus, equality is related to the notion of self-accomplishment. It is a direct result of the success of the achieved abilities, and not the effect of a government regulation concerning the availability of material or social goods. The Third Path, however, does not risk defining equal opportunities outside the redistribution of income and welfare.

“The equality of opportunities produces an inequality of achievements, thus necessitating redistribution, because the chances in life have to be reallocated across generations. In the absence of such a redistribution, the inequality of the achievements of a generation will determine the inequality of chances of the next generation.” (Giddens 2001, 86).

For the conservative Communists equality is a concept of class. It cannot occur in the presence of the capitalist state or in the presence of social classes. Equality may be reconciled with freedom in the socialist society.

For the conservative Social-Democrats, equality is embodied by the practical model of the social welfare state – equality through the state. The social state is the guarantor of the equality of opportunities and of planning equality as large as possible, economically and socially. The disadvantaged social groups have access to equality and wealth through the redistribution and protection policies of the social welfare state. “Socialism cannot exist without freedom, and socialism without equality becomes meaningless. The tension between equality and liberty is the foundation of our political struggle.” (Jospin 1999, 30). Wolfgang Thierse, Vice-President of the SPD, believed that the Left should cultivate what Hannah Arendt said: “We are not born equal. We become equal by our mutual courtesy and acceptance of freely granting each other equal rights.” (Thierse 1998, 20-21).

For the Alterglobalists, equality is seen through the ratio of losers (“people surplus”) and “profiteers” of mundialization. They see the escalation of global inequalities as the source of the new class struggle. They deny the equality of opportunities provided by the “cognitive capitalism” in which 20% of the working population produce 80% of the wealth of a nation, with benefits to match, and the remaining 80% survive at the periphery of the new economy with benefits lowered accordingly.

In the view of the New Left, a scoring society should not be a society that primarily honors the one who “guesses better and faster the fluctuations on the screen of the video game called stock exchange at the expense of the one working more, who is more productive, or more inventive.” Global redistribution of income and opportunities is, in their view, the only way to get the new global equality which should avoid the “polarization between those who know how to exploit the capital and those who do not.” (Gheorghe 2000, 95-109).

k) Human progress

The debate concerning the purchase of progress in terms of mankind is a constant one of the leftist doctrine. There are several issues of contention between the various intellectual lines of the area: to what extent is the progress of civilization claimed/found in the cultural progress? Who are the beneficiaries of

human progress? Are there truly human progresses or setbacks in terms of mankind in the package of progress? Is there a content crisis of human progress?

The Third Path supports the thesis of modernization of the idea of progress, of the manner to think, the development of a new project of human emancipation, starting from the synthetic integration of all political ideas which have proven their applicability and openness to reform. Appealing to Popper's gnoseology, the Third Path argues that social progress must no longer be conceived in the spirit of historical lawfulness or logical fatality.

They believe that human progress must be interpreted based on the knowledge grid of critical rationalism, the only way to a correct projection of the future and a better assessment of progress. Progress is imagined in terms of permanent change, civilizing, opportunity, and responsibility (civilizing capitalism, civilizing globalization, civilizing the human condition, civilizing labor, etc.). Human progress is related to the release of each individual's potential, who must learn to survive and not be helped to survive.

The New Left sees in changing the course of mundialization the key for this process to be in the benefit of human progress. In their view there can be no progress without rebalancing the relationship between the political and economic, between the economic and social benefits.

The most radical New Left theorists warn of the imminent death of the idea of progress/the decomposition of the idea of progress, given the crisis of the human condition and the dilution of the idea of future. Man is the process of dehumanization as a result of his almost exclusive concern for biology and present (Sloterdijk 1999, 15-19). A new "natural" inequality will dominate mankind, set on the idea of a single-fifth society: between those who hold on, the planetary elites, the supermen (selected on such criteria as adaptability, mobility, non-ideology) and the social waste, the Untermenschen (misfits to the unidirectionality of technical progress, to post-humanism and who will serve the supermen). For the Alterglobalists, the idea that 80% of the population will be an obstacle to progress is totally unacceptable.

Pierre-André Taguieff speaks of *mouvementisme* as the last stage of the decomposition of the religion of human progress (Taguieff 2000, 67-75). The technical and scientific progress accelerates this process. "Paradoxically, the more technology develops, the more communication networks expand, the more social relations attenuate. Man is becoming ever more alone, more divided, fallen to the status of peripheral and, soon enough, virtual." (Taguieff 2000, 75).

The New Left proposes the establishment of a new humanism which should rethink the dynamic impact between the individual and society, between critical action and the search for meaning, between the transformation of nature and respecting it, between the scientific and technical progress and the vigilance of its potential destructive effects.

The new humanism has three fundamental tasks: a) Recovering the idea of local and global solidarity, creating resistance movements and revolutions that generated human progress (turning Man away from an empty unit of

individualities); b) Recovering the spiritual dimension of the shaping of the human condition under the totalitarian pressures of absolute competition, material freedom, and transnational decision (made as far from the citizens as possible, the political decision becomes the main source of *mouvementisme*, of the degradation of the human condition); c) Promoting “concrete utopias” – ideas turnable into projects, into realities.

The conservative Communists relate human progress to the disappearance of human exploitation and to the building of a society based on full equality, in which man is the center of the political, economic, and social action. They advocate reinventing the idea of progress, by highlighting a new credible utopia which should mobilize human energies. In their vision, this utopia is essential as long as there is no economic equality and political freedom.

The conservative Social-Democrats believe in the idea of social progress gained on previous bases that must be defended. They promote the idea of the rule of politics over economy. “Being a socialist means stating that there is a primacy of politics over economy.” (Jospin 1999, 33). According to them, the social state is the main source of human progress. It was born and developed into a permanent critical relationship with capitalism. This allowed for the redistribution of assets and opportunities as a basis for tangible social progress. Human progress is visible only if “those things that people value are treasured, beyond and outside the rules for optimizing benefits, profit, and the market” (Jospin 1999, 39).

1) Conclusions concerning the European social model

- 1) The European social model, under the pressure of such arguments as Blair’s/the Third Path, must find an answer to the constant failure of personal attitudes and induce a permanent care of individuals over their own responsibilities in return to the state’s efforts to equalize incomes. The result of this model is a successful combination of social solidarity with a dynamic market economy.
- 2) The European social model cannot however ignore poverty on the long term as a fundamental restriction in life for those exposed. The reform of the social security system in the case of the sustainable social security will be primarily based on a solid public-private partnership, manifested especially at the community level.
- 3) The purpose of the European social model is to provide the Member States with societies based on social cohesion. Achieving this desideratum means addressing such concepts as equality and pluralism, focusing on the dynamic model of egalitarianism, equal opportunities, and economic redistribution. The state must not only react to inequality and poverty; it enters the living conditions of the individuals and groups involved.
- 4) Social exclusion must be treated, reacting to it both at the upper and lower levels of society. Redefining inequality in relation to exclusion at both levels is consubstantial with a dynamic vision of deprivation and privileges.
- 5) Inequality should not only be addressed at national level. Topics such as global economic governance and control over the corporate power imply global approaches.

6) The Social European Model is an eminently democratic model. The Eastern societies are in the process of consolidating democracy after a journey of 50 years of totalitarianism. Mentalities are still not widely modified and some European concepts are not perfectly and naturally adjusted. Time and the new generations will naturalize such concepts as volunteering, human solidarity, mistrust of individuals, responsibility for the prosperity of the individual and their family, the attitude towards the taxpayer, obeisance of the law.

7) There are some features that confer advantages upon the Eastern European Model. These ones are: a large informal education, combined with comprehensive specializations in well-defined branches, a number of women with a higher training degree than men, able to engage in the most difficult of jobs, including management, an average remuneration of women's work closer to that of men, with differences decreasing, a number of single-parent families lower than that in the West, based on the total number of families, trust in the virtues of the family, the prevailing mentality that having children and their number are a result of the economic conditions and not of a prejudgment, the registration as such of a natural increase of the population in favorable economic conditions. The fact that the facilities brought to the family by the social security policies have tangible results and a quick response create the prerequisites for influencing the demographic factor.

CONCLUSIONS

The Romanian researchers (but especially the educated public interested in politics) show a psychological reluctance to focusing their intellectual attention and scientific effort on a world where there are symbols and ideas which remind them of a past that most of them hate even as a subject matter. After 1989, very few Romanian intellectuals have tried to deal with the issues of the Left and those who did it treated this ideology in a rather anti-communist partisan manner, which altered the meaning and scientific validity of their approaches. In the West, however, the debates concerning the values of the Left reached considerable maturity, revealing that the rightist political project is neither the only one nor the best possible.

The concept of Left in the East still does not hold the same value as in Western Europe. It is a cumbersome process, involving transition, the maturation of concepts, an integral part of the overall process of democratization and modernization of the countries in this region.

There are several factors that favour and maintain the confusion about the concept of Left. First, it was seized and placed under the totalitarian communist ideology. For this reason, the "left" is still equated to: repression, lack of freedom, prohibition of fundamental human rights, delay of reform, nostalgia for the past, and stagnation. Secondly, the concept of Left is also suffering because of the economic option of the leftist political formations (we are referring to competitive parties, not to the anarchic-leftist corpuscles or nuclei talking of collectivization and class struggle). With a few variations, all these political formations support de-

etatization, the market economy, reform, the well-structured capitalism. These parties are leftist based on the criterion of the need for change and the need for action in this regard. But if we introduce the criterion of the “criticism of capitalism” (existing with almost all the Western leftist formulas), they seem not to belong to the Left anymore. Thirdly, nationalism is another variable affecting the distortion of the concept of Left. Traditionally and in the Western acceptance, nationalism is identified as “right”. In Eastern Europe, it found a hospitable hosting to the “left” (the greatest number of leftist groups are made up of nationalists – see the Movement for Democratic Reform in Slovakia, the Serbian Socialist Party, even the Bulgarian Socialist Party, the Democratic Labor Party in Lithuania).

An important contribution to the poor reception of the concept of “Left” is made by the political culture tributary to its character in the totalitarian period. The poor reception of the concept is also visible in the contradictory relationship between the self-identification (self-placement) of individuals and their vote. Thus the supporters of the “leftist” parties (their voters) declare themselves as “Rightists”, while the voters and supporters of the “Right” claim to be “Leftists”. The language of the Left and the manipulation of the concept also alter a correct perception of it. Starting with the term itself, which, in the absence of clear meanings related to political doctrines, is equated with words belonging to the same family (left = leftist, clumsiness), the destruction of this language is reflected in the “tainting” of marker words with “socialism” (social protection, social justice, solidarity, equity). The noblest concepts were associated with the most repulsive features of real socialism. A manner of affective and emotional receiving of the term “left”, rather than rational, was thus induced (in the first period especially in terms of leveling communism). Against this affective and emotional background, spurring psychological diversion, the concept was used as a manipulative tool. Labeling someone as being leftist – a socialist or a communist – meant the “halt” of careers in many countries.

The specific socioeconomic structure prevents the maturation of the concept of Left. The classical conflict capital-labor underpinning the modern “Left-Right” cleavage, immature itself, is less significant (for the time being) in the East. Post-communist countries still seem to be a form of classless society. The new property relations have not finalized, a strong capital market has not been created, and privatization has not been completed. Market rhetoric (as an expression of the concept of Right) hides (paradoxically) an egalitarian mentality (expression of the Left). Many individuals talk of market economy, consider themselves Rightists, but, when asked about the role of the state, they grant to it a predominant one, directly affecting protection and social justice. They believe in the purpose and efficiency of the market economy, but tend to regret the communist-type social security system.

All these variables affect the quality of the reception of the concept of Left in Central and Eastern Europe today. But as election cycles multiply, as interests distinguish in society, and as the social groups that will have to present specific policies mature, the issues generally approached by the Left (controlled

privatization, economic and social rights, trade union rights, dynamic role for the state) will move from doctrinal coverage to concrete policies.

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