

All over the political landscape in the European Union right extremists are to be seen as coming to the fore. In the Netherlands their negative narrative of social exclusion and their positive narrative – as they are maintaining – of racial homogeneity found again last week support by local populace in the Provincial elections. Nationalism as a twisted cultural strategy to purify values and to establish an artificially produced imagination of ‘togetherness’ against a targeted ‘otherness’ - this phenomenon one will observe if one would be ready to take a look into the political theatre which the fighting parties in Albania are now playing before the local election on May 8.

Take the societal atmosphere of Germany in 2010 as a telling example. Thilo Sarrazin wrote a book covered with dirty prejudices insinuating Germany is on the way to abolish itself - a blunt offense against Islamic immigrants. The former Minister of Finance of Berlin took them into his focus as a target which he could easily use for bashing. Several months he hopped like a honky-tonk from one talk show to the other from one magazine to the next and sold his cynicism as an alarm signal proclaiming the downfall of Germany. This travelling entertainer gained roughly one million Euros out of this charade. Germany again these days – the former Minister of Defense, Karl-Theodor von und zu Guttenberg has forced himself out of office because of notorious lying about his dissertation and the populist leading newspaper lost an invented pop idol. Populism has been the glue between cynical journalists and a young politician pretending originality. Robert Musil's “Mann ohne Eigenschaften”, man without (moral) characteristics – has found a political player in the age of Post-Democracy an ironic turn of Colin Crouchs theoretical notion.

So – the “Berlusconization” of the political arena is on its way all over Europe and the central-european countries are not alone in this disease. Populism is to be observed from Belgium to Austria and more of this same. Although mostly bizarre in its forms Populism is far from being ridiculous. It is the anticipation and a strong catalyst for heating up the climate in which the extremist right can grow. Populism is an instrument of cheating voters, stirring up apathies, constructing targets of hate and in so doing paving the ways for cleansing the political mindsets towards digital thinking. And the winner is the extreme right.

One of the essential criteria of what makes the extremist right dangerous especially in times in which we are living when economies and cultures are involved in and are acting as accelerators of change is the ethnical closing. Herewith the extremist right needs populisms from different angles of the political spectra to enlarge the support for what it is striving for via windfall profits generated by the feelings of the losers of enhanced globalization processes. That is the ground in which 'flowers of evil' can rash. Go to several regions of East-Germany where the de-industrialization has been rapid and brutal and you will find a polarized picture between neo-Nazi skinheads on the one hand and the radical left on the other and in-between are the moderate parties hardly saving the pluralistic substance of democracy some time surprisingly silent. I can imagine the fear in some Hungarian regions where neo-Nazis are producing strongholds for Jobbik and where one can smell the violence in the air. 'Ethnical closing' is the illusionary aim built into the Nazi Ideology and 'ethnic cleansing' its violent tool following suite. This ideology often is the companion strolling along with the national myth of decorating its own role as a secular victim pushed around by foreign enemies or even worse by traitors inside the own nation.

Cultural pessimism as Magdalena Marsovsy pointed out "stems from the feeling of fear for losing old traditions and traditional social bonds deriving from the process of modernization and reform." Fearing the 'death of the nation' lost in the European integration and in western liberalism – a déjà vu of what the communists between 1945 and 1990 have been trying. In what the communists failed, the liberals are now trying. So it goes the actual ideological narrative of the right. In conspiracy thinking there is a missing link between both the Communists and the Liberals - the cosmopolitan Jew.

Niklas Luhmann made the analytical observation that in modernizing societies because of rapidly growing intrinsic differentiation of functions there is in parallel a need of reduction of complexity if from an external point of view a certain scale of systemic confusing has been reached. The global financial crisis from 2008 had its starting point originally in one of the most specified national market sectors of homeland securities in the United States. Nevertheless this peculiar factor unleashed in the aftermath the crisis of the economies, the humanitarian crisis and the fiscal crisis on the scale of nations, regions and the globe. And the whole world jumped in an era of turbulences.

Neither the G 20, neither the G 8 nor the EU nor the UN created new settings of adequate tools in order to reduce the complexity of inflicting globalization processes. The first attempt was to use the last resort that has been systematically weakened since the newest era of deregulated globalized financial industries begun some 30 years ago when Ronald Reagan opened the fight against statehood in announcing that the state is the problem and not the solution. The Keynesian approach was in late 2008 the only key to open up the door into taming the dangers stemming from an unguarded radicalized capitalism – Helmut Schmidt called it predator capitalism. What if a badly needed new framing of how to shape politically the processes of globalization from a human perspective comes too late to prevent than the then historical peak of a coming crisis? Is not there waiting around the corner a foreseeable next danger – the outfall of the fiscal turbulence? And what if the overburdened states are then running out of fiscal tools?

All this reflects like a mirror the surroundings in which the heat of the political climate is climbing and the extremist right finds fertile grounds. The Hungarian ‘conservative revolution’ which has happened in spring 2010 was a result of the mental bombardment invented by ideological tacticians. The Hungarian nation that is at the core of this tactic is imagined as being under the attack from two sides – at first from the socialists and their internationalism as the incorporated enemy of any nationhood and secondly from the liberals who as cosmopolitans are portraying all believers in Magyar-hood as sheer narrow minded provincials.

In comparing the political landscapes of different European Member countries one will find similarities: populisms are on the rise, extremist rights are gaining parts of the electorate, Nazi-parties are leaving marginalized corners. What is disturbing to me is the analytical observation that the pattern of narratives accepted by sectors of the various publics is shifting from the societal center to the right. To put it bluntly the other way round: the taboo barrier which over a period of time managed efficiently to withhold the politics of obscene obscurities has been lowered down. The waves of crises have been sweeping into the societies of the Member States of the European Union as well.

The Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation published last year the findings of Leipzig University sociologists Elmar Brähler and Oliver Decker. Right extremist attitudes are creeping gradually from the margins into the center. Chauvinism, Xenophobia, anti-Semitism, Social Darwinism, playing down Nazism, advocating for Dictatorship – the six dimensions of right extremism have been found the support of a valid representative panel of 2411 interviewed citizens. Number 9 of the “Deutsche Zustände”, German States, edited by Wilhelm Heitmeyer of Bielefeld University, published in the end of 2010 also came in the case of Germany to similar results. What was striking in their data is the fact that the German elite dramatically changed its mindset and is narrowing the gap between the other societal sectors especially in prejudicial xenophobic attitudes. “We only can hope”, this is the summary of their study, “that the uncertainty of human beings facing the crisis as well as the devaluation and discrimination of weak groups will not worsening further. In any case elites are standing for responsibilities – elites, nobody really knows whether they are now part of the problem.”

These Bielefeld social scientists enlarged their methods of ‘Group-Focused Enmity’ and included besides Germany Great Britain, France, Italy, The Netherlands, Portugal, Poland and Hungary in their analyses.

Although any given country is unique, and all of them are showing different stages of quality in media, churches, trade unions, political cultures and civil societies at large, they do share at least in common general xenophobic attitudes towards immigrants and especially towards the most vulnerable group of the asylum seekers. Outspoken wide spread are hostile attitudes in view of emigrants and believers of Islam. Big parts of the peoples of these eight countries seem to have an understanding of homogeneous communities based on cultural oriented or descent oriented pictures of their given nationality. Immigrants are viewed as second class people even if the EU accepts the emigration and even if the EU confesses plurality. The distinction between western European countries and central and eastern European countries is a gradual one and marks the stage of learning in processes of modernization. The results of learning in the West are more comprehensive than in the Center and in the East due to the heritage of colonialism and the closer exchange of codes of cultures.

The western conceptualization of diversity contributed to a better mutual understanding of differences between cultures. And it opened up a path to a polity of recognition.

East and south of Vienna are spaces to be seen full of ancient conflicts deriving from experiences in which a single cultural concept tried to gain supremacy over a different single cultural concept. Patchworks of ethnicities were produced sometimes overlapping sometimes partitioning from one local place to the next local place within a direct neighborhood. The Ottoman Empire and the Austrian Empire eventually tried to use force to subjugate minorities but failed over time. They left behind an aggressive potential of violence which could explode any time even if and when rivalries only on cultural grounds occurred. The endangered fate of the Sinti and Roma minority over centuries is the telling example. In the West the concept of the nation state had on the contrary a lot more opportunities centuries long to be developed further than in the East. The conceptual invention of the civil society gave the West a decisive comparative advantage. As Hannah Arendt put it, free individuals formed as an act of political willingness and liberty their own associations as an expression of personal and interpersonal self-determination. That is the autonomous moment of the autochthon created 'constitutio libertatis'. Herein the self constructed Concept of the nation state finds its incorporation, the indispensable column of the Modernity.

Convincing because of its rich empirical findings, its understanding of the problems and its recommendations is the handbook "Racist Extremism in Central and Eastern Europe", edited by Cas Mudde and funded by the Open Society Institute. The survey of the ten incoming new Members of the European Union before their accession is an excellent piece of social science. Six years later there is a growing need to write a new handbook and to compare the state of affairs with the older Member states of the European Union. The summary that the editor has given is still quite impressive. In concluding Mudde pointed out that the differences of the Central and Eastern European Countries compared with the Western European Countries "seem less striking than is often assumed", it is "neither a hotbed of racist extremism nor a safe haven for racist extremism." And both regions "are not as homogeneous as it often assumed. The quality of democracy in Western Europe varies quite significantly."

Different political cultures could be identified. And so Mudde continues that “it is debatable whether in terms of ‘democratic thinking’ Estonia or Slovenia have more in common with Bulgaria or Romania than with Finland or Austria.”

Because of the above mentioned observations I am sure that the closing findings of Cas Mudde will stand today. Six years ago he could made the following point: “Main stream parties in Central and Eastern Europe are less willing to speak out against extremism than in the West. They are also more reluctant to distance themselves clearly from racist extremist actors.” In this regard there is unfortunately to be seen a process of Europeanization leading into the wrong direction. The cases of the Netherlands and of Italy are alarming. Pro multi-cultural activities are in decline, the ethos of active tolerance is eroding and so solidarity is fading away. The project of the European Union its fascinating attraction is at risk. The EU has to be invented anew. The United States of Europe can be the new conceptual framing for what we should strive for.

The German Socialdemocracy drew as one of the radical consequences out of the catastrophic downturn that the globe has been struck in the aftermath of the ‘black Friday’ to lay out the aim to overcome the fragmented European political landscape which should lead to the concept of establishing the United States of Europe. That would have been a constructive answer to the shortfalls of the globalization processes at the beginning of the last century after the end of the World War I. We know how these efforts found its horrible end. This time maybe we are a bit wiser. If we fail again – what will come next? The writings on the wall are threatening.

But at the same time - signs of hope are to be seen. Wake up calls are ringing. Activists are keen to fight against the neo-Nazi ideology and their appearance. Democratic movements when they are organizing peaceful events they from the outset are stronger than right extremists. To defend Democracy means to prevent extremism from winning ground. But defense is no end in itself. Groups of civil societies are successfully working all over the Member States of the European Union and they are fostering solid networks of re-shaping and strengthening democratic institutions on the local, national and European scale. The new tools of the Lisbon Treaty can be and should be set in place creatively.

Intellectuals should again be ready to take over their responsibilities in an enduring long term great effort for a modern Hungary in a new Europe. Kertész Imre, Konrad György and Heller Agnes are outstanding personalities, representing alongside other authors, journalists, artists, musicians, filmmakers through their creative potentials the human future of Hungary and of a Europe united in diversity.

Do not fear the fight for humanity. Real Democracy is stronger. And every one of us is called to be engaged day by day. History has shown how fragile democracy is. And it is hard to keep democracy open as a project for societal progress, as a project for social equality, as a project for ecological responsibility and human dignity. But where is the alternative? To all of us Europeans: we should be ready to throw this question into the debate of our respective publics. In free and fair deliberations we may reach a new quality – in these processes we can constitute from the local to the European entities a political culture based on our rich varieties. From controversial debates to consensual sets of values we can build on an agora, a real European Public as a basket of different publics, a recognition of our multifold creativity.

From this moment on, when we are offering a new picture of how human we could live together most people will open their eyes and will see that the state of our political presence is under our possibilities. Then the apathy will go away. Anomy is just another word of the fact that people are suffering from lost chances to be active. David Brooks made a brilliant comment on what one can learn from the revolutions in the Arab World March 3 in the New York Times. “All people”, so he confined his article, “share certain aspirations and ... history is wide open. The tumult of events can transform the traits and qualities that seemed, even to great experts, etched in stone.” They are many more and they will join you in working for a just case. Never forget: light is brighter than darkness.

Istvan Gyarmati stated in 2002, that the extreme right is on its way to re-emerge. Were within nearly a decade these aggressive groups really capable to change the European political landscape? Although they tried to be successful and in part they gained (too much) legal tools to implement their ideologies – parties of the extremist right were not able to conquer the core of the legitimate power of any state inside the European Union.

In some European Countries latest developments are hinting to new dangers. The tactics of containment is eroding. Some leaders of the moderate conservative center are in Europe acting in the direction to remove this tactical pattern. Fearing the loss of voter's majority they might use an option that is misleading from containment to contagion. To stabilize influence via flirting with extremist ideologies is only a sign of despair. Riding a tiger may have deathly consequences. The politics of 'distant embrace' could trigger out the danger that the democratic center can be infected by the poison of hatred. In The Netherlands or in Hungary or in Austria one can analyze these tactics in details with different outcomes.

History shows yet convincingly that in general clear cut actions against the enemy of freedom and openness will marginalize the extremists.

To prevent the danger from coming into being, new alliances should be developed. Democratic institutions, state-bound authorities, social movements, trade unions, churches and civil societies should strengthen the sources of political culture inside European Countries and between them. Encouraging individual and collective attitudes of empathy, tolerance and cooperation is the best answer to overcome an era of uncertainties in which we were thrown in. Practices of post-democratic arrangements are leading into apathies and anomalies. Therefore active groups of both local and national, European and international civil societies should start the democratization of the European democracy, supported by the European Union. These secular efforts will pave the way into a human European future.

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