

Europe between Nationalism Affirmation and Union Integration. 2014 and the Euro Discourse of Scepticism

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Abstract:

The present study deals with the issues of rising populism and nationalism in Europe, phenomenon that brought the extremist parties in the European Parliament after the 2014 elections.

Even before the election, recent studies showed, in a lot of European countries, the persistence and expansion of extreme manifestations and the European election was an opportunity to bring in front of stage the Eurosceptic leaders. Their declared goal is the welfare of the people, promotion of democracy but under their own vision and ideology.

Therefore, we will describe, briefly, the wave of democratization highlight the major dimensions in the Europe and explore the factors that led to a representative democracy having the core in the elections for European Parliament. The method I selected is a comparative analysis from a historic and political perspective of the EU recent elections. Today, when we mark 100 years from the beginning of the First World War, the result of these election has to be an alarm sign for the European establishment in consolidating the solidarity and unity of the continent.

Key words: integration; populism; nationalism; far-right; European Parliament; citizenship.

1. Europe and Peace Seeking

Peace is conditional on building democratic institutions. The question that arises is whether European peace can really be credited to European integration, the extent to which integration has been a main source of democratization, and whether, in any case, peace and democracy would in fact be among Europe's central goals.

After the painful experience caused by the two world wars, the greatest challenge for democracy in Europe was at the national level, and it is not just about institutions but also about ideas and discourse.

A lot of authors, like Alain Badiou, making a parallelism between United States of America and European Union, considers Europe as a fragile construction following, "in blind", the American decadence. Democracy aims to empower the people so that their will shall be the basis of the authority of the government. One of the debates, still ongoing, is about Europe of elite vs Europe of citizens. Even lot of opinions regards EU as a system of political elites leading people and delivering jobs and welfare, the EU's self designation is as '*a Community of values*'¹

Vivien Schmidt shows that a problem arising is about how to remedy a situation in which "the EU level is characterized by *policy without politics*, given that the EU's politics is mainly about interests – whether national interests in the Council, public interests in the European Parliament or organized interests in the Commission – and the national level by *politics without policy*, as more and more policy areas are removed from the national to the EU level, leaving an impoverished national political arena?² She also claims that the question is: how does one maintain the effectiveness of the EU's

¹ More details on www.SchumanDeclaration.int

² Vivien A. Schmidt, *Explaining democracy in Europe*, Review Article in *Comparative European Politics* (2009) 7, p.399.

‘output’ democracy for the people if one increases ‘input’ democracy by and of the people at the EU level, because this would politicize decisions that were efficiently dealt with as technocratic in the past.”³

II. Building Democracy in Europe

The European Union offers an attractive social, economic and political model. It is more stable, safe, green and culturally diverse than most parts of the world, which is why neighbours want to join and many migrants aim for Europe. Europe offers a model of multilateral co-operation that looks attractive to other regions, being know that at various times the African Union, ASEAN and Mercosur have tried to emulate aspects of what the EU does.⁴ This trend was summarized in *The Economist*: “Brussels is becoming the world’s regulatory capital...usurping America’s role as a source of global standards.”⁵

According to some authors, the EU needs a geostrategic vision for where it wants the region to be in the next ten or twenty years, which problems need to be overcome and where Europe should be able to work with new regimes on broader global questions. It should work back from this vision to decide which policy changes are appropriate in the short-term.⁶

At present, the direction of deliberation is almost the reverse: policy-makers look at what is bureaucratically feasible now, and then see what this can achieve in strategic terms. EU economic interests will require a fine balance between markets and the state. Youngs (2001) says the EU must recognise that

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Apud* Charles Grant, *Is Europe doomed to fail as a power?*, Centre for European Reform (CER), CER JULY 2009, 14 Great College Street, London, p.3.

⁵ More details on www.theeconomist.en

⁶ Richard Youngs, *The EU and the Arab spring: from munificence to geo-strategy*, POL I C Y B R I E F, N° 100 - OCTOBER 2011, p.3. on www.frider.org

the way in which economic liberalisation was prompted during the last decade nourished much social discontent but it should be wary of over-shooting in the other direction.⁷

One influential conceptualisation uses the simile of 'waves' for the global spread of democracy. In 'operationalising' democracy, Huntington emphasizes the accountability of government to parliament and universal suffrage as two key institutional aspects of representative democratic government. He aims to identify the moment at which these two institutions have been established in the countries under investigation. This approach leads to the construction of time sequences, or 'waves' of democratization.

A first 'wave' of democratisation could be seen as 'coming in' around the time of the First World War in northern and western Europe with the parliamentarisation of constitutional monarchies, the formation of republics, and the extension of the franchise. In central and eastern Europe, the newly independent states following the collapse of the multinational empires (Austro-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire, and Russia) start experiencing democracy at a somewhat later time. The second 'wave' after 1945 saw the defeated states, such as Germany and Japan, be given democratic constitutions, while others, such as Italy and France, instituted new democratic regimes.

The third 'wave' affects the countries in southern Europe and in Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s, with military dictatorships being replaced by elected civilian governments. This wave also brings the decline of authoritarian regimes in parts of east and south Asia starting in the mid-1980s, and sees the collapse of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe after 1989 as well as the break-up of the Soviet Union together with the formation of fifteen post-Soviet republics in 1991. The 'wave' reaches South Africa and brings about the decline of one-party regimes in several parts of sub-Saharan Africa in the

⁷ *Idem.*

first half of the 1990s, too. Even in the Middle East there are signs of liberalisation in the 1990s.⁸ Thus, democracy is spreading around the world from its European heartland.

The question arises as to whether there are any 'prerequisites' of democracy or, more broadly, what 'causes' democratisation as well as what accounts for the consolidation of newly established democratic regimes. Samuel Huntington's (1991) analysis of 'waves' of democratisation provides a prominent example of such an analytical research programme.

To account for the 'third wave', for example, Huntington (2003) lists *five key factors*: the legitimacy problems of authoritarian regimes as a result of poor economic performance or defeat in war; rising expectations regarding material consumption and education on the part of the middle class; the liberalisation of the Catholic Church following the Second Vatican Council of 1963–1965 and its turning into a proponent for change; policy changes of international actors in support of democratisation and human rights; and, finally, the demonstration effect, facilitated by the global growth of communication networks.⁹

Huntington's is one way in which the simile of the 'wave' with reference to 'democracy' and its 'global' spread can be used. There is, however, another way of using the notion of the democratic 'wave' to pinpoint concern with the 'globalisation of democracy'.¹⁰

Globalization and increased migration have brought both new opportunities and new tensions but the European citizens have to learn how to bridge the gap between locality

⁸ Samuel P. Huntington, (1991), *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, pp.14-15.

⁹ Samuel P. Huntington, "Democracy's Third Wave", in Robert Dahl, Ian Shapiro, Jose Antonio Cheibub (eds), *The Democracy Sourcebook*, Massachusettes Insututue of Tehnology, 2003, pp.105-106.

¹⁰Samuel Huntington in Roland Axtmann, *Democracy. Problems and perspectives. The Globalisation of Democracy: The Right to Democratic Governance*, Edinburgh University Press, 2007, pp.108-109.

and universality, between nationality and europeanity. Together with the leaders they all have to examine how ethnic majorities and minorities can achieve individual rights, exert civic responsibility, and explain how to construct a deliberative framework to make sustainable democracy possible.

III. What Message Did the European Citizens Send?

The messages and speeches of the nationalist and populist leaders such as Le LePen in France or Neil Farage in Great Britain and the destructive antagonism relation “we” vs “they” brought to the idea that euroscepticism won.

Thus, they might campaign more effectively together, but are also likely to make things even more chaotic: some populist parties will want nothing to do with the racism associated with them. On one level this incoherence is a good thing, as is the fact that even within the far right, alliances have regularly broken down. So unless they truly want a dysfunctional EU, European citizens should think twice before they vote for such parties. They will not get different policies, but paralysis. There are real alternatives – even to austerity – and there is a genuine left-right spectrum of options in the parliament, more so than in many national parliaments. It is democratically legitimate to want to protest – but it is also important to take oneself and one's vote seriously.

The European Union went to vote on Friday through Sunday (23th-25th of May 2014) with a heavy archive of economic dissatisfaction (especially about the EU's inability to prevent the sovereign debt crisis, austerity measures, unemployment reaching 25% in countries such as Spain), social dissatisfaction (abandoning multiculturalism in France, Great Britain and Germany and unleashing the anti-immigrant rhetoric, right and left wing, reduced legitimacy of European political institutions), political dissatisfaction (EU citizens' and even member-states government inability to influence the

decision-making process in Brussels - what is the Troika's democratic statute, an unofficial organ, arbitrary designated and formed without a single word from the European electorate?).

The European citizens are still waiting for answers or explanations to those complicated matters both from their national and European representatives.

Conclusions in Brief

Public indifference or hostility towards the EU limits the scope of national governments to strengthen the Brussels institutions and sign up to more co-operation at EU level. Given that the EU is a complicated, hard-to-understand organisation that deals mainly with issues that matter very little to most people – business regulation, trade policy, milk quotas, emissions trading and so on – most people are indifferent rather than strongly pro or anti. However, euroscepticism appears to be a trend that is growing rather than diminishing in several parts of Europe, partly because of the economic crisis. The growth of euroscepticism in the EU should not be exaggerated. In the European elections most people voted for moderate parties that are broadly sympathetic to the EU. However, euroscepticism appears to be a trend that is growing rather than diminishing in several parts of Europe, partly because of the economic crisis.

¹¹In some countries the EU annoys people by stopping governments from applying interventionist or protectionist policies. Thus the Commission recently forced the Polish government to close down and break up two shipyards that had received illegal state aid. The May 2014 vote was less about an “euro-sceptical” option about the future of the EU and more of an “euro-skeptical” option regarding UE's ability (in its institutional and political forms) of offering solutions to local (firstly) and continental problems. The EU must be more

¹¹ Charles Grant, *Is Europe doomed to fail as a power?*, p.4.

geostrategic but not in an old style realpolitik fashion. Europe should be unapologetically pro-reform.

As *The Economist* has noted, “Brussels is becoming the world’s regulatory capital...usurping America’s role as a source of global standards”.¹²

Finally, we believe that the world does not need another great power in the 21st century. The EU represents the aspiration for a world governed by law and this reflects the nature of the Union that is, itself, a community of law.

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¹² Charlemagne column, *The Economist*, September 22nd 2007 *apud* Charles Grant, *Is Europe doomed to fail as a power?*, p.3

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