

EUROPEAN FOUNDATION ON SOCIAL QUALITY

Symposium

"The Europe of Citizens, towards social quality"



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Democracy was referred to in the Preamble of the Treaty of Rome. Many countries (including my own) were then outside the scope of the Treaty. And yet, throughout the whole continent the dream and the desire for full citizenship made its way to a true democratic life. The European Communities and then the European Union became the symbolic promised land of such dreams and desires. Did they hold their promises?

Two difficulties had to be faced:

- one, the limited concept of citizenship which is alienating the attachment of Europeans to a common ideal;
- the other, the concentration of the building up of the Common Market, of the Single Market, of the European Monetary System, and finally of the Economic and Monetary Union.

Let me refer to the first, to citizenship. Indeed, plunged in the Cold War and in the wake of the battle conducted at UN about the translation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights into a Convention binding for all States, the Western countries remained attached mostly to civic and political rights in their elementary components.

The Maastricht Treaty seemed at first to improve the situations giving shape to citizenship to Europeans, but its steps were timid and limited:

- the right of freedom of movement;
- the right to elect the European Parliament;
- the right to vote in local elections of the country of residence;
- the right to be protected by the representatives of another Member of the European Union in a Third Country.

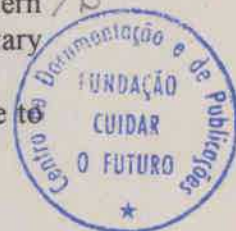
At the same time, the tremendous transformations that took place in Central and Eastern Europe led the Western countries to formulate strict conditionality on the civic and political front, forgetting that the other Europe had a universal culture of social rights (whatever may be the misgivings about their quality). The Berlin Wall fell on one side while the other side remained standing in the self-righteousness of its democratic life. And yet, in the United Nations, all Western countries from Europe had ratified the two International Covenants on civic and political rights on one side, and on social, economic and cultural rights on the other side, whose preambles were identical. They said:

“the civic, political, social, economic and cultural rights are interdependent and indivisible”.

How to give shape, among the 15, to what we agreed long ago among the community of all nations?

The Amsterdam declaration comes at the right moment.

It produces concepts that overcome the fallacy of mere “quantity” that characterised policies of past decades. It shows that, if it is true that a critical mass is necessary for those who are deprived of the most essential rights and that than the quantity is needed in order to reach quality, it shows also that there is in human values a precedence of quality over quantity. It raises the social from a mere correction of or



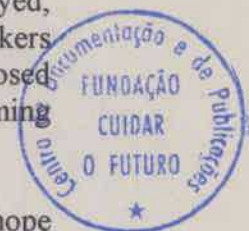
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adjustment to the hazards of economics to where it should stand: a category of thought bound to life and to the right for everyone to lead a life worth living.

In the last 5 months I had the chance to participate in National Conferences of Non-governmental Organisations in 10 Member-states of the European Union. Everywhere the concern for a Europe of civic and social rights was affirmed and suggestions proposed for the IGC. If those thousands of activities were here today I would feel, as I do, that the Amsterdam Declaration added momentum and brilliance to a process that can not be stopped.

Indeed, there are many reasons to support the Amsterdam Declaration.

I am not referring only to the many who are utterly destitute, unemployed, homeless - I am thinking also of the unmet needs of the overstressed manual workers and of their executives, of the young without horizon, of the old being easily disposed of, of the impossible dual task of the generation of women between 30 and 45, coming out of the care for their children just to face a life of care for their elder relatives.



Citizen's rights are needed for millions of Europeans to face with dignity, hope and joy their lives. But the old concept of rights was an abstract one, which presumed as its subject: men, of course white, in good health and able to defend himself in all situations

In last years, our societies in Europe are discovering that their composition is diversified and that every individual human being is at the same time a subject of rights and of vulnerabilities.

The more vulnerable we are the more our rights have to be safeguarded. It is the role of the State to ensure that. Protection, promotion, and safeguard are there, whatever the agents may be in different societies with different cultural traditions.

In this regard, citizenship in the Europe Union can not lag behind.

The Amsterdam Declaration enumerates the most important elements of that citizenship enhanced and strengthened by the social quality in all its territory and geared towards all those who live in this territory.

One of the greatest difficulties for politicians, rather for governance.

There is a short-term and a long-term task. In the short-term, governments and non-governmental organisations have the responsibility to make that social quality a reality. But in the long-time a great deal of research is needed to find answers to the many difficult questions at stake. This is why NGO's and research and academic institutes have to become social partners both at national and at European level.

The good thing of being on political office is to discover what we don't know and what others around you don't know. Advisors are often Cardinal Richelieu.

It is in these different interfaces of different actors, working within different timeframes that we can find the solutions for equity and fairness to all.

Let me just briefly underline some of those tasks which appear of paramount importance to the Comité des Sages.

First of all, we need a redefinition of work. Unemployment can not be addressed adequately within the boundaries of the Nation-State. Neither can it remain to be seen as in the beginning of industrialisation. In a time of globalisation, terciarisation, always new technologies and in need of renewable fuels, production's schemes of goods and

services have to be revisited. "Transnational labour markets" will enrich the mobility, if social quality is the guiding factor.

Tasks now fulfilled within the home have to be acknowledged and made part of the wide gamut of work in an active society

To this redefinition of work we have to add the demographic change in the continent which made obsolete the old sequence of learning /employment/retirement.

Hence, it is the second long-term task: to review the goals of education through the learning of what a representative of a NGO in Birmingham called a few weeks ago "transferable talent and skills", enabling individual to target specifically their talents at diversified activities in different periods of their lives.

A third and fundamental task is needed: the one that internalises environmental costs and obliges economy to follow new and unknown paths.

By giving rights a dynamic dimension and being sustained by diverse social partners, social quality indicates clearly that participation and empowerment of every European are fundamental ingredients of a political entity. It is there that citizenship and democracy cross-fertilise each other.

This can not be, however, a mere result of good will. It requires a translation of the political identity of the European Union into a Bill of Rights. We need to move hand in hand in civic and social rights as a common basis, without making our cultures and traditions uniform. The more political our unity will be, the freer each one of us will be to express and to enhance our own social and cultural traditions.

We don't know to which form of political entity such a Bill of Rights would lead us. But such is the excitement of this adventure to go into a new Europe of unity and solidarity while remaining ourselves. It is a challenge to our imagination as it is to our skills.

Moreover, a Bill of Rights by strengthening our unity, will give us the moral power to defend in the international arena the universal rights of the 1,5 billions of people who live in destitution and in infra-human conditions.

We can not sacrifice our farmers with a so-called Common Agricultural Policy and at the same time go on playing each one our own trade battle in the international scene, giving the paradoxical image of a non-united European Union.

A political unity of Europe will contribute decisively to a multipolar world.

Such is the understanding I have among the members of the Comité des Sages. So much so that, having failed to be heard by the IGC as we had expected when, more than a year ago, I handed our report to President Santer, we are going to present a plan of what we called in our report a II phase of consultation.

However blurred may be the long-term vision of those who have to decide in the short-term, we think that the European citizens are ready to work together in their national parliaments, trade unions, NGO's, Universities. They will be the civil society to which belongs the duty to define together at what level and with what contents it wants to see social quality to be put into practice and what will be the form of our common Bill of Rights.

