

## REDIRECTING INTERNATIONAL PRIORITIES

1. Acceleration of history is at stake in many more instances than in the hopes and disenchantment of Central and Eastern Europe. From the most diversified places and institutions come the gropings for new concepts, the enunciation of new rules of the game, even of until now rather absent ethical concerns. My question is :  
- is it enough to make declarations and to build blocks for new theories?

2. If we accept the unexpected character of history's changing face shouldn't we draw the necessary conclusions?

and there we are:

- it is not enough to draw up a map of still uncharted landscapes. All that is said - if it is to be implemented - must be taken up in a real political action.
- this means more State, more intervention, more regulation, more initiative - how to make this compatible to the total deregulation pruned by the current myth of free market?

3. (PS) There is an obvious dilution of long-standing sets of values upheld until recently by coherent and cohesive religious beliefs. With a secularisation that tends to create new "gods" out of dominant economic and psychologic trends the religious based set of values are taken into derision. Society becomes then the prey both of those who see in themselves the starting point of all criteria and of those who react to this attitude by holding to religious fundamentalisms. *Figaro*

4. Economics itself has as its foundation a utilitarian outlook on life and priorities. The search for individual affirmation, pleasure and total satisfaction is led to such an extreme that the system risks to undermine all the ties of solidarity.

5. In this context there is a breakdown of social order, as no norms or practices are valued to embody other-centered concerns and responsibilities.

6. At the same time, though the principle of control of politics over economics still appears as a basic element of democracy, even politics is highly dependent on economic interests and arrangements. Inside the different national States there are new phenomena revealing themselves with great intensity. Forces of social desintegration flow directly from the unjust distribution of resources in societies from which solidarity has vanished. Ethnic conflicts erode the necessary social cohesion. Processes of regional and supranational integration shake the basic cultural ingredients capable of sustaining national integrity and sense of direction. In all negotiations and decisions values seem the same



but they don't correspond anymore to a strongly embedded national consensus.

7. Among many other factors, demographic growth exercises also pressure over the national political structures, through the consequences of its social impact. Namely:

- weight of more people on employment, on under-employment, on marginal informal activities, on landless peasants;
- growth of people needing education when present structures don't cope with present numbers already;
- more of homeless people and overcrowded cities;
- accentuated difficulties in food availability.

8. In order to come to grips with the situation and to translate the new ideas into feasible policies and operational measures it is impossible to count on the market as a starter and regulator. A new role of the State is asked here. The market is blind, its instincts are not enough to address the need for more wealth, for a direct fight against poverty, for stopping the degradation of the environment, for developing fundamental infra-structures of health and education.

9. However, often the State is unable to fulfil these roles. First of all because of its dependence on foreign aid and institutions. But also because management of a country does require experience of other levels of management - and very often the leaders are not equipped with such an experience. Moreover the remnants of old and strong ties in rural societies leave political leaders and civil servants at the mercy of all loyalties, when it is not of their own greed. This phenomenon is becoming also evident in societies which for centuries had developed a sense of the public service.

10. Several aspects of international life are also threatening to the role of the State, namely:

- the growing regional integration and the consequent harmonization of norms and targets;
- the ever growing weight of international principles, norms, regulations and interventions;
- the globalisation of financial markets;
- the new modes across boundaries of production and consumption.

11. Just in the opposite direction of what seems to be the need, there is the lack of a guiding vision for political action and ethical norms. Governance - what to decide and how - is indeed problematic. There are no adequate answers not only for the problems of today but most of all for the decennies to come.

Demographers are pretty rigorous in establishing scenarios for tomorrow: how many young people to expect in every country and for whom education facilities have to be devised and later on jobs provided, as well as how many people will need old age protection from the community. And it is not only numbers the political leaders are invited to see - they are telling also the modification of populational structures, the speed of the urbanization processes, the need for adequate infra-structures, and the big

migratory movements. How is it possible to go on "governing" when there are no answers (no concerns?) for these huge questions? (conditions getting worse, erosion of the soil, destruction of forests, scarcity of arable lands, of fisheries, general pollution of important zones of the planet, impossibility to go on using fossile fuels.)

12. It is obvious that these shortcomings cannot be attributed only to the lack of competency or to other complexe social causes. They point out to the need for a concerted international action that can only be displayed by multilateral institutions. But what then of the huge array of international organizations who would seem, from their respective mandates, the adequate fora for the elaboration of such policies? Part of the answer to this question may be in the fact that the existing international institutions have come into being through successive adjustments of the same pattern created immediately after the II WW. And is there any need to describe again the radical changes that have taken place in these 50 years?

13. Undoubtedly from such a huge institutional apparatus (around 85 institutions funded autonomously) a very important array of ideas and norms have been developed. But two questions have to be asked: first, about the coherence of problematics addressed, the strategies defined, the measures undertaken; second, about the interest of national leaders to comply with internationally defined norms that they themselves approved in the constitutional decision-making assemblies of the international systems. Why is it that it is possible to come to universal norms and to have them applied everywhere in what concerns, for instance, postal questions, civil aviation, meteorology, and it seems so far impossible to do the same in what concerns the development path of nations?

14. The fragmentation of the international institutions is not only a question of good and bad management but also of totally divergent points of view. The recent creation of the WCO is a sharp example of conceptual inconsistency. In a time when we already know the shortcomings of the prevailing liberal ideology - so clearly challenged by the incapacity to face the economic situation of Russia (among others) - the steps taken at GATT are alarming. If the new institution is going to implement the decisions taken there we can clearly say to the world that there is no hope for the poor.

15. Moreover if action is going to be taken and international cooperation redirected, financement is needed in huge amounts. This requires not only good management at the national level but also new forms of political control at the international level. Indeed the national representations at the international level are composed by diplomats who often struggle with the total lack of instructions and by civil servants who may have the technical expertise but are, by definition, neutral. A new type of democratic control needs to be devised so that the action taken at the international level may represent the will of the people. In listening to people who are organized in many different forms at the grass-roots we are aware of the tremendous revolt that is

boiling in the minds of people. New actions, funds and institutions are of no avail if the people perceive them as autocratic however good and generous the ideas behind them may be.

16. What is at stake is not a mere reshuffle of international institutions. Two conceptual breakthroughs are necessary: the redefinition of economy for our time; the understanding of the pivot role of the fight against poverty.

17. As to the economy we are still under the regime of the Cold War. During the last 50 years - the period during which several attempts were made to face development at a global scale. Then the confrontation between communism (as the historical form of socialism) and capitalism has also imposed on capitalism a monolithical behaviour. When alternatives were attempted they situated themselves as a third path. In the post Cold War period economics didn't liberate itself from that approach. On the contrary: liberalism has become ever more dogmatic and unable to adjust itself to different sociological and historical situations. The philosophy of the market has tried to harmonize situations which could never be amalgamated. It is becoming increasingly clear that in some cases the market means a reality of vicinity, both geographic and cultural, conducted by an immediate sense of utility while regional and international markets are conducted mostly by competition. So why are we referring to the market as if to a mythical reality?

19. As to the poverty eradication, we have to pursue the policy lines indicated in the most important reports of the last years. They point out towards a priority of the fight against poverty that is unquestionable. And once this is agreed we have to ask ourselves what is the economic theory, experimentation and instruments that can help putting those ideas into practice. In a very important report from The Netherlands it is stated:

- "THE POOR HAVE DEVELOPED SURVIVAL STRATEGIES IN THEIR RELATIONS WITH THE ELITE AND WITH REGARD TO MODERNIZATION. (...) A GROWING NUMBER OF PEOPLE ARE TAKING MATTERS INTO THEIR OWN HANDS. (...) A DEVELOPMENT POLICY AIMED AT FIGHTING POVERTY SHOULD LINK WITH THESE STRATEGIES. (...)"<sup>1</sup>

Likewise a few months ago The Swedish Minister of Development and Cooperation indicated clearly:

- "THE ABSOLUTE PRIORITY OF THE SWEDISH GOVERNMENT IS THE FIGHT AGAINST POVERTY."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "A world of difference - A new framework for development cooperation in the 1990s", Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Hague, 1991, pg 154

<sup>2</sup> "Population policy reconsidered", SAREC Seminar, Harare, December 1993



If we accept the new concept of human security we have to give equal value to "freedom to fear" and to "freedom from want". The three main components of human security in terms of want are indicated as "economic security" (the capacity to earn a sustainable livelihood), "food security" (encompassing food availability through adequate food distribution and purchasing power), "health security" (access to primary health care, particularly in relation to endemic diseases and in relation to mother and child care). The fight against poverty emerges here as the envelope of all these aspects.

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