

## **The rise of an extreme and populist Right wing — a challenge to the Left.**

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The rise of populist and xenophobic Right-wing movements is a challenge to Left parties as a whole as well as all social movement organisations. This rise expresses a crisis in European culture and politics — the answer involves affirming a Left alternative that is able to face up to the issues at stake. It is essential to analyse the problem and to understand the issues of the times, namely the early 2010s and to stress the essential factors for hitting back.

### **The populist and xenophobic Rights are a continent-wide reality that calls for global responses.**

Five ideas support this conclusion.

1. The populist and xenophobic Right is a continent-wide reality. It exists in almost all the European countries, from Great Britain to Russia, from Scandinavia to Greece or Italy, and including France, Switzerland and Austria. Countries where this is not, like Portugal or Ireland, so are rare. These movements have enjoyed a global increase in power since the beginning of the 80s, but the political groups that vehicle this trend are, themselves, unstable and tend to appear and disappear.

2. We can describe certain essential points they have in common:

- They all fear the decline of their nation/people/ethnic group. Even in Germany, the prime economic power of the European Union, the populist and xenophobic *best seller* is called *Deutschland schafft sich ab*. European societies are declining and are in danger of disappearing, culturally and/or biologically.
- They draw attention to an internal or external threat — immigrants or national minorities and the internal dangers, Islam the external one.
- They express distrust of European oligarchies. International finance capitalism wants the destruction of the peoples and European institutions are the instruments of this project on European soil.

3. The strengthening of this political demand feeds on pan-European phenomena:

- The crisis is bringing Europe to a halt. The European continent as a whole has been experiencing stop in growth since 2008 and will for several years more (the time taken to repay the debts). At the same time, the centre of world growth is moving to Asia.
- European institutions are working outside democracy. The absence of policy (to the extent that policies allow a choice between different orientations), the permanent “grand coalition” in the European Parliament suspends and wipes out any potentially possible democracy. European citizens are aware that they do not have control over the decisions taken by European institutions.
- These fears take the form of “moral panics” directed at immigrants and minorities. Discourses are flourishing in most of the continent’s countries asserting that both of them and the descendent of immigrants are “imposing” another way of life on the peoples — an “inverse colonisation”.
- Fear is developing about the power of “Islam”, described as a permanent enemy. All societies. All societies in which Islam is the dominant religion, all the existing “Islams”, all the political trends that make any reference to this religion, great or small, are described as a single agent, as a civilisation and organisation hostile to Europe.

4. These organisations politically catalyse a pre-existing “political demand”

- We are in a crisis of European (self)consciousness. The Europeans (and not only the xenophobes) find themselves without any long-term project, without perspectives: the continent’s development is becoming incomprehensible and is moving in the wrong direction.
- The crisis of European societies, which shows itself through these moral panics, is fuelling a xenophobic populist policy. Neither Thilo Sarrazin nor Oriana Fellacci is a member of extreme Right political parties. The “social demand” can be expressed in opinion polls without appearing through specific political organisations. In such cases, an unoccupied political area comes into existence. This is the case in Germany. This (populist and xenophobic) political area is filled by parties that intend to take advantage of it. Groups with politically different profiles may be tempted to occupy the same area: thus, in Greece Laos (clerical Orthodox) and

Golden Dawn (neo-Nazi and pagan) have successively captured the same electorate. In Germany, several groups are quarrelling over this area: the extreme Right, neo-Nationalists (NPD), local populist lists (pro-Koln lists, etc).

5. For the European Left, there are, therefore, some common factors for of analysis and answers:

If the four preceding factors are true, and since we are acting in a relatively homogenous European area (developed economies, Parliamentary democracies, shared cultural references) then the conclusion (that there are common factors for riposting) is necessarily true

### **B. The three domains of the demand are both national and European.**

Over and above the profusion of discourses, the demand covers the need to resolve three issues:

- First, the crisis and the economic and social involution, the national decline
- Second, the dangers to the identity communities/peoples, the cultural religious evolution.
- Thirdly the lack of political will to tackle the problems

These are important questions, some radical challenges: the difficulty of answering them shows that this is a crisis of civilisation

The crisis is the first factor — it is the depth of the crisis that provides the opportunity for certain types of response.

Each aspect has both a national and a European dimension.

1. Crisis and harmful mutations in the economic and social sphere, the national decline shows itself country by country, but the European continent as a whole is being overtaken by the economies of other continents.
2. The threat to the identity of communities/peoples, the religious cultural evolution is rejected line linked to the self identifying themes of each nation but also echoes the fear of Turkey's joining the Union at continental level (the fear that Europe might renounce its Christian roots).
3. Lack of political will: the EU institutions work without any real democratic control, Parliament works on the basis of a permanent "great coalition" of social-democrats and liberal-conservatives.

### **C. The populist and xenophobic Right offers answers to all three lines of this demand.**

1. A return to more self-centred economies (but some want less liberalism while others want less State or "less socialism").
2. A social model that favours national membership, the "real people": gives privileges or priority to "the real ones", discrimination against the others in the following fields:
  - The right to work
  - The right of organisation and association
  - Freedom of expression and political rights
  - Religious freedom.
3. Defence of a body of traditional culture (linked to the eternal people) but integrating the upheavals of recent decades (defence or adoption of cultural liberalism).
  - The Geert Wilders Movement in Holland is not related to the extreme Right but born of the new themes of cultural liberalism.
  - The French National Front has worked for over a decade to modernise itself.
  - In Greece, first Laos and then The Golden Dawn have not been "modernised" and are probably a counter-example
4. Lack of will: the people must express itself directly and delegate the task of creating a restrictive legislation to a leader of group.

Behind each response we can find the Them/Us opposition. The basis of these responses is the opposition of "Us", the real citizens to "Them" who come to destroy (deliberately) what we are. This structure is very deep and touches things that the citizens (and human beings) are most sensitive about: knowing who we are, knowing how we define ourselves, having a stable point of reference, at least in this world.

#### **D. The issues at stake, today and tomorrow.**

##### **What is happening today?**

1. The weight of the populist and xenophobic political parties is increasing, putting pressure on those in office or likely to take it.
2. An ideological block is being set up including the populist and xenophobic trends (whether or not coming from the extreme Right) and the radicalised trends of the conservative or liberal Right, using the writings of essayists, journalists and controversial intellectuals who have a mass audience.
3. The moral and identity panic is spreading and becoming generalised, because the modernisation of the discourse of the extreme Right groups enables them to encroach into circles that are culturally, socially and politically new for the radical Right.
4. The electoral rise of populist and xenophobic Right wing movements gives them fresh capacities:
  - For having legitimate positions of representation
  - For being associated in structures of power, of local government.
  - For weighing directly or indirectly on measures that have real consequences for everyone.
  - For orienting discussion round issues that concern them.

##### **What are the dangers for tomorrow?**

1. That the ideological block could become a dominant ideology. For example liberalism is, today, the dominant ideology in Europe, It is hard to say: "the debt is unjustified, the interest on this debt must not be repaid".
- 2. That the political block that includes the populists and xenophobes becomes a legitimate and essential actor of power.**
3. That these trends could remodel society (towards a form of apartheid society). If a hegemonic ideology is approved by a political coalition with a majority, then the political forces could assume power and carry out a programme for transforming society (and not just taking part in the government).

#### **E. What responses are effective?**

##### **Neither discourse nor moral**

The analysis presented so far includes several ideas to be taken into account in reply.

- The panic and the perception of the situation are based on very deep undercurrents (the Them/Us opposition).
- The populist Right groups are seen by their supporters as political actors putting forward credible solutions. What kinds of responses are effective?
- If the panic were linked to some deep more or less conscious undercurrents, then no discourse by itself would be effective.
- If the populists are supported because they seem to put forward political responses, then no moral argument would be effective.

##### **How can the Left act?**

If we do not analyse these factors the way the supporters of the populists and xenophobes, we know that we must offer them a potential social base, some political perspectives that are both convincing and mobilising (and not limit ourselves solely to polemics and arguments) for the three dimensions: decline, identity and political will.

1. It must understand and include the perception of the problems by those who support the populists and xenophobes:
  - It must understand and cover the linking of ideas and discourse
  - It must understand the climate before studying the discourse of the parties.
  - Analyse the pamphlets, the Internet comments on the press sites
  - It must understand what generates the panic: the rapid and brutal social phenomena that create the economic, social and cultural insecurity and not just insecurity linked to delinquency
  - What is the basis for the idea of the decline of the country or of Europe?

2. It must provide radically Left principled answers based on a foundation of different ideas. For example:

- We are in favour of generalising the political rights of all the world's citizens whatever the country in which they live.
- The People is all those who live in a country and work (or are unemployed) there, whatever the colour of their passport.

Any compromise on the principles is counter-productive because it affects the structure of contradictory and potentially dominant ideologies.

3. It must provide Left wing political answers. These answers are different from those of the social democrats. They cover:

- Austerity
- Unemployment
- Globalisation

These answers also enable showing that the populists, even when they have a "social" and anti-liberal discourse (the German NPD or the French FN) never challenge capitalist social relations or the employers.

4. It must back its answers with action and not just words.

The Them/Us opposition is present in all the policies of the populist and xenophobic Right groups. Any discourse that is solely moral, ethical or internationalist will thus be completely ineffective. The Left must build an "US" that is inclusive at social, trade union, voluntary association and political levels. An "US" that is built to defend common interests. Thus in a Trade Union or in Parent –teachers association, in a party, the "Us" is strong but not an ethnic "Us".

### **What can the Left parties and the social movement organisations do?**

1. We reject the economic recession, social regression and the decline. We interconnect the local, continental and global levels, while the orientations of withdrawal do not enable us to have any political hold on the situation in Europe. Paradoxically, the "nationalists" and those primarily concerned with "identity" have less faith in the capacities of the various European societies than the radical Left.

We know that the decline, that is the crisis resulting from the fact of giving priority to profits over the well-being of the populations can be reversed: we also know what needs to be done to reverse the cause of events even if we are not, today, politically able to carry them out. We do not think that Europe is in danger of disappearing — on the contrary we know that the contribution of Europeans of Moslem culture can strengthen the social, cultural and geopolitical dynamism of the continent.

This implies putting forward the alternative to decline at the heart of the social and trade union struggles. The alternative is the dictatorship of the market mechanisms is not economic nationalism but in the rejection of social dumping, in the rejection of de-localisations that only serve financial criteria.

This implies to wage a campaign for the rejection of policies of segregation in all the areas of social activity. In the towns, the schools, the work places and associations, on every opportunity for civic or political activity.

Regarding the issue of identity, there are two paths: either an identity of withdrawal, as chosen by the xenophobes or else a democratic and inclusive identity. The Left has no qualms about saying "Us", far from it — the organs of social action are the fruit of conscious and voluntary social activists. Thus the Left is (or should be) engaged in building up "Us" in citizenship along with the minority and immigrant populations against which the xenophobes want to discriminate.

Building a European "Us" with Turkey.

**On the political level:** a radical Left orientation implies a very strong political will — a political will expressed at local, national and European level. The political will of the Left parties and social movements is embodied in democratic participation, self-government and self-management, not on the delegation of powers.

Tackling the European question head on.

The European political will of Left parties is against the EU as a bureaucratic territorial administration that lacks a democratic political dimension.

Is expressed by building political, social ideological continental level actors.

Is expressed by confronting the EU policy as an obstacle to any recovery or development of the continent.

The political will of Left parties is expressed on the geopolitical issue of the future of the continent:

- A continent simply as a free trade zone?
- A continent with a social identity?
- A continent that has a policy regarding Russia? Regarding the United States?
- A continent that can include Turkey in a number of mainspring factors?

Tackling the question if Islamophobia head on.

This issue is essential for three reasons:

- Cultural and differential Islamophobia have replaced inegalitarian and ethnic racism as a principal basis for discrimination or xenophobia. The modernisation of xenophobic discourse has transformed it to an Islamophobia discourse based on cultural and not ethnic factors, the defence on the rights of individuals.
- This issue is an essential vector for the generalisation of the xenophobic view of the world to political circles (born of the Left), to cultural tendencies (that are part of the cultural liberalism, sometimes derived from the feminist and/or homosexual movements) social strata (middle classes with considerable cultural capital) hitherto unreceptive to it.
- ± In every country, many immigrants (often the most numerous) and citizens are Moslems. In the majority of European countries, the largest immigrant groups and their descendents come from Moslem countries.
- Turkey's membership gives a geopolitical dimension to this fear of Islam. Turkey, a secular republic, is a major Moslem power of 75 million inhabitants. Its membership of the EU cannot be treated as a simple administrative problem. This is a very important development for Turkey and for Europe as a whole.

The fight against Islamophobia involves:

- The visibility of Moslems within the "Us". This is not a matter of a coalition between "Us" and "Them" or of promoting "Islamophily" or "xenophily" but of making clear that the political, trade union, voluntary societies and social movements that we bring together round common objectives do so without any ethnic or religious distinctions.
- Establishing relations of confidence with the Moslem organisation. Since every struggle or movement is based on the self-organisation of those exploited or discriminated against, the Left parties and organisations must work more effectively with the existing organisations and avoid replacing them.
- A revitalisation of certain values carried by the Left in the context of a deep ideological suspicions
  - Political and intellectual independence regarding religions, without rejecting believers.
  - Individual freedom regarding behaviour and morals
  - Can the idea of what is emancipation and who acts on its behalf be imposed?

Working with Moslem feminist trends is strategically important. In fact, some activist trends are active against a millennial patriarchal interpretation of religious texts and in favour of women's rights. They are developing throughout the world, including in Europe. This commitment is developing a strategy of confrontation/influence regarding the Moslem religious authorities and, by making a critique of the orientations of European and American feminism that is seen as being white/imperialist, colonialist and open to commercial values. This is important in practice and to mobilise Moslem women, but also for the perception of Moslem men and women by culturally liberal perceive, feminist and/or homosexual circles.

Integrating the populist xenophobic danger is at the heart of the Left's approach. Taking into account the danger of these Right wing populists and xenophobes is not a "separate" area of Left activity. Faced with the ideological crisis of European societies, of which these movements are a symptom, we do not need specific discourses separate from the other political issues but orientation rooted in the political, social and cultural fields.