"Criminalisation of solidarity and the rise of xenophobia – Where stands the left?"

By Elengo Manoussakis

Let's start by reflecting to the bigger picture in order to understand where we stand at this historical moment and think about our role as European left.

Europe

Our continent is a paradox

- Democracy, renaissance, enlightenment , were building stones of the European cultures
- The major revolutions happened in Europe
- The area were the best social programs were created in favour of the working people

However,

- Europeans are responsible for the 2 major world wars an lately 2 peripheral Balkan war and Ukraine

Movements

European states are mainly constructed according to the principle one state one nation…

But

- The borders after the 1st world war changed but border population in many cases, stayed at the wrong border…
- 1922 Greek people from Asia Minor were forced to move to mainland Greece as refugees some of them although Christian

orthodox in religion could not speak Greek, at the same time Muslim Greeks were obliged to move to Turkey. For example we call them Turkish-Cretan population. They were Cretans who changed their religion to Musulmanism, (one of the reasons was the peasants who needed to keep their land).

- 1939 after the defeat of democratic army by Fascist Franco, Spanish people had to move mainly towards France,
- Movements of populations as result of the 2nd WW
- Greek people left as refugees after the defeat of the Democratic army towards Balkan countries and ex Soviet Union. Some of these people came back after the dissolution of SU as immigrants….

and many

Europeans left as **economic immigrants** to Canada, USA, Australia and towards Germany and Belgium after the 2nd WW but not only then for example Greece received thousands Albanians…

So Europeans move and take different titles according to political situations or international laws, but they are always the same persons who wish and fight for a better life for them and their families.

We should not forget the most recent story a very negative consequence of the **BREXIT** that UK people vote for, that many of our young people live at the moment in UK are European citizens with all the rights that Eur. Citizens have, and in 1-2 years the same citizens will become immigrants, if May's project proceeds as she proposed.

Not to mention that in some European countries the border populations live in particular situation since they are minorities of other countries.

The second European Paradox

Some European politicians, namely Schuman, Monet, Spinelli, reflecting on the catastrophic consequences of the 2nd WW, to people to land to

infrastructures, started since 1957 little by little to cooperate at national and on economic level and the growing process arrived to a cohesion and enlargement level that had to build a second identity to the national identity, the European identity was essential. However, the last 20 years or so, we observe people in different countries alienating from this process, turning towards nationalisms, so from one hand we have the unification process and on the other hand we observe nationalisms growing and the process to develop the European identity fading …a paradox…

European authorities instead of developing the super integration and start building a European federation, developed economical instruments of power over the people, who felt that the direction that the European authorities have taken is even against their interests.

The European authorities especially E. Commission is secretly and with no transparent and democratic methods negotiating and eventually signing in a non democratic way the big agreements like TTIP and CETA and lately a few more, without and consultation even not informing the populations if they wish to join, but also as far as I am informed by forcing governments to accept those international agreements, against the will of the majority of the people

There are two types of answers to this process the answer of the left and the answer of the radical right.

A crucial question is: has the left questioned in an ideological, political but also at grass root level the European constitution in an effective way?

Radical right however is very active.

It would be naïve to explain the rise of radical right and extreme nationalism simply with one reason. We have different histories, different relationships with our states and our neighbours**. However, it is interesting to observe that nationalistic movements at the beginning were developing conflicts <u>within</u> the nation state. As result politicians and governments started talking about national interests and how to defend those interests, so that the unification process was limited to**

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intergovernmental decisions. So, the result is antagonism between states still exists and prejudices between people are multiplied.

The growing nationalistic movement affected almost all countries.

It is interesting that nationalistic movements are appearing not only to the countries were economical crisis has because of the austerity programs, with severe consequences to the poorest civilians.

Even in **Germany** which is the most powerful country in Europe who has benefited the most and theoretically has not gone through the austerity programs that could cause to nationalistic uprising and also it is interesting to think that Germany especially had their nationalistic feelings were kept to very low level, since the known reasons of the second WW responsibilities. However in ex Eastern Germany the nationalistic movement became more violent against foreign workers and refugees.

On the other hand the **winning countries** of the 2nd WW, had to deal with the growing German economic superiority since they were not powerful as Germany so nationalistic movements, started there too, with better appearances than Germany at this level. UK stared an independent road to European integration trying to save their national way of practicing politics. Nevertheless two big nationalistic movements started UKIP and SNP completely different but nationalistic and on the contrary. In France they tried to continue up to a point the initial cooperation plan of MONET and SCHUMAN, but the National front was created .So different roads, the same result growing extreme nationalism.

In my view, a turning point was the implementation of Maastricht treaty, which supposed to deepen the European cooperation, but instead a hard neo liberal program started by using **social Darwinism as ideology** that the stronger will survive, only strong economies will receive the euro later the idea with the circles started to be discussed. The stronger, the medium strong second circle and the weak the external circle. An unacceptable approach in my opinion, for the people of our continent and for European Union cohesion process.

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But the most worrying element is that those who have power to influence people the **Mass Media** Television, journalists, politicians are addressing their nationalistic message not in a ethologic manner but mainly to the instincts and feelings of the people. (Christos Hatdjiiosif)

- Since nationalism is rising, it is self evident that in some countries will rise to dangerous for democracy levels towards Nazism like Golden dawn in Greece.
- From historical experience we know that nationalism defends the nation state and **forgets the class societies**. Democracy and equality are not of part their objectives.

In Greece Golden dawn who is currently on trial started first by attacking local workers and later refugees/immigrants until they murdered a antifascist rap singer. So n extreme nationalism is starting to fight their own people with different views but if this is not stopped they expand their attacks towards the other, with no limits to their methods.

The problem is not that the neo liberalism, who is now established with a stamp , the stamp of our European constitution which has as sequence a very strong class separation, rich people become richer and poor people become poorer, not to say that middle class often disappears (like in Greece) that class division is growing stronger. Instead of tackling the class division, the nationalistic movement is trying to find as escape goat the **other**…The lazy Greeks, the ruthless Italian etc, **so the enemy becomes another nation.**

A turning point to the rising nationalisms is when big refugee movements arrived in our continent.

The problem becomes the other, other. Not the Greeks anymore but xenophobia becomes an important factor of our societies even the most democratic like Denmark, Fear (fovos) of the other, is playing an important role.

The wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria created refugee movements.

The war in Syria continues, some of the European countries played again a role the same in Libya the same in Mali and the story continues…

But the nationalistic movement forgets, who is responsible of the wars and attacks the refugees who run away to save themselves so our enemy becomes the other who does not belong to our national state.

I am wondering are the foreigners" the other" is our enemy? I wander did the left mobilize for peace and against the wars and their consequences to their people who suffer from the wars in an adequate and effective way?

The rich Arabs, the energy and petrol owners who live in Europe are the danger to our way of life?

I do not believe so,

If we see a wailed with burke woman in the east side of London we may react she cannot be like that she should respect our values, but if we see her at the big shops of west end of London we may try to see what is she buying gold, precious stones expensive shoes? I am certain that in most cases the attitude towards the 2 women would be different.

So, **the class element should be important** before we judge or object to the other.

Refugees, immigrants' migrants, the other and the human rights

After the 2nd WW, movements of populations existed in a massive form. We all have seen Italian or Greek films were Italians from poor south Italy left for Germany or Belgium, the same with Greeks and other populations. They were difficult times and the different languages, different eating habits, even different religious habits existed, there were tensions but nationalism was oppressed and the other populations, they were called immigrants at that time, were accepted to contribute in the new development of new western Germany Belgium etc. After this period over 40 years have passed what does it remain as memory?

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Many Italian restaurants, some Greek restaurants many common marriages between Germans and Greeks etc. and most important their children were incorporated to the societies they lived.

However these people along side with Kurds, Turks, Portuguese are part of the German working class that often is mentioned as xenophobic. Is that so?

The role of the mass media

The **photograph** of the drowned Syrian child **Alan Kurdi** woke the world on the **refugee crisis**.

The **photograph** of the **3 grand mothers in Lesvos** feeding milk a refugee baby made the world understand the **solidarity movement** that grew in Greece and

The photographs at Idomeni with desperate people trying to cross the **closed borders** made us understand that we live in an unjust world. That **the decisions to close the border was unjust to those people,** to Greece and to the rest of European Union countries, because I am certain that at the end they would benefit from opening their countries to these people.

But what is behind those pictures?

Between 2015 and 2016 Over 1 million people crossed the sea between Turkey and Greece seeking protection from armed conflict persecution and their leaving conditions. After, the wall which was built in 2012 at Evros between Turkey and Greece the only possibility for them remained to cross the seas by boat. Most of them arriving in unprepared islands and mainland. So because our financial and social situation as consequence of the austerity program imposed to us, we had organized ourselves in solidarity movements** , for food, clothing, medical care in order to support citizens who lived in Greece and were *struck* more since 2012 -13 So the grass root movement was ready to take action. The solidarity movement was growing and had 2- 3 important consequences.

**Eduardo Galeano on solidarity

"I don't believe in charity. I believe in solidarity. Charity is so vertical. It goes from the top to the bottom. Solidarity is horizontal. It respects the other person. I have a lot to learn from other people."

The **first** being that we helped and supported the people arriving in Greece as much as we could at least on their basics. Food, sleep eat, clothing, medical service

The **second** was that a big international solidarity movement was created and since 2015-16 we had the experience as solidarity movement so immediately we started supporting them at all places detention centers, camps or IDOMENI, Pireas, Ellinikon all over the mainland, and the islands and huge solidarity convoy was crated and we still receive material support.

Third and most important **huge human wall** was created and Golden dawn stayed away and almost silent.

At this point I wish to emphasize that a society in crisis instead of closing herself to her problems opened to the other with no fear and enforced solidarity movements.

The arrival of the EC and the funds

Until the EU Solidarity fund was put in place, these flows where assisted mainly members of civil society, charged with organizing rescue missions, the provision of medical aid, nutrition and accommodation, often in cooperation with local authorities. These forms of 'unofficial' aid were criminalized after the EU Fund became operative, seeing people lodging migrants and lifeguards assisting those drowning threatened with trafficking charges, (Spanish) followed by the eviction of several migrant housing initiatives revealing an antagonistic relationship between the Supra-State, INGO's, also understood as 'flexible state' and the migrant/refugee solidarity movement.

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The president of the International Federation of Human Rights' argument is that whilst Greece has the potential for integrating new arrivals ''any attempt to improve migrants' conditions or comply with integration policies **signals** to other member states that the decision to turn their backs on Greece is acceptable'' (**Christopoulos**, 2016).

So there was a turning point on the way we received refugees.

The signing of EU-Turkey deal (March 18, 2016) **upgrading the latter** to a Safe Third Country for the return of refugees despite of its damming/condemning Human Rights record and the recent illegal relocation of Syrian asylum seekers to Turkey by FRONTEX that appears unaccountable on refugee rights, placing legal responsibility back to the Greek state, showcase that the discourse of **'Human Rights' has become a trope in legitimizing processes of exclusion and their unaccountable violation at a national and transnational level, used strategically for political and material gains.**

Crises make contradictions in societies more visible and that this tension lies to a great extent, in different understandings on Human Rights. Whilst the **former attribute rights through processes of separation and categorization based on ethnicity** as oppose HR are the protection of biological life, self-managed living spaces for refugees/migrants and border crossing support networks proposed a different set of rights reflecting adopting inclusive terms to refer to these populations that relate to their embodied experience instead of a legal framework, such as 'people on the move'.

From a theoretical viewpoint, this **tension reflects the distinction between 'institutional' and 'subjective' human rights as described by Douzinas (** a Professor and member of the Greek parliament, SYRIZA party), the first producing 'just results' but ultimately serving the self-interest of sovereign territories rather than the claimants of rights, whilst the later act as a standard of right outside of institutions supporting ''the political experience of freedom'' that allows individual self-realization (Douzinas).

The right to freedom, is according to Arendt ''the very essence of human rights'' since to **''be human and to be free are one and the same''** where 'humaneness' is experienced through action, for 'to be free and to act are the same". **By regarding the rights of the 'other' as equivalent to those of the 'self' but through participation, also produce and exercise their own rights.**

Let us remember what Hanna Arendt has written and said about the Nazis who committed so many crimes they were ordinary persons executing orders. The same 20 years later during the Greek dictatorship people were tortured not by monsters but by ordinary people of the neighbouring door. Violence still exists in our social conscience let us work and together to change this. Let us work together to accept all any human as equal.

It might appear as utopia to fight, but is the only pragmatic way to liberate our societies from past history fears and capitalism.

Let me finish with Aeschylus an ancient Greek writer and philosopher who wrote in his Promethous trilogy: Prometheas stole the fire (knowledge) from the gods and gave it to the people. Prometheus had to be punished and Zeus the God gave the order to two of his children the state (Kratos) and violence, children of the night, to punish him for his act and chain him with chains until he dies. Thousands of years have been passed but state violence still exists.

My presentation was inspired by

- Christos Hadjiiosif: European unification, Germany and the return of Nationalisms (my unofficial interpretation)
- Hanna Arendt, Giorgio Agamben, Enzo Traverso: We the refugees
- Ioanna Manoussaki Admopoulou :PhD proposal on Human rights