

THE IDEA OF EUROPE, AN IDEA OF FREEDOM: A “MERIDIONALISTA” POINT OF VIEW

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In the same years, when the European institution building, through the Maastricht Treaty, was endorsed of truly concrete outcomes, which were completely different vis-à-vis to those really labile policies of the difficult seventies, the rich Denmark was expressing, through a very debated referendum, its own hostility to those agreements, initiating an intense and tortuous debate targeting the destiny of the very idea of Europe. I still remember with disappointment, the egoistic and at the same time short-sighted reasoning of those, and they were not a few, who were frightened of the establishment of a mechanism the effects of which were unpredictable in a long term perspective and were interpreted, tout-court, as a brake to the current development of the strongest north-European economies.

In that context, it goes without any doubt, that if France and Germany had opted for a more cautious europeanness and had agreed to be led by Danish and British euro-intolerants, today we wouldn't have had either the EMU, or the embryo of a future political integration. It was not that “Europe Schumann was dreaming of”, acutely written by Jean Daniel, however, the irreversibility of the process of the European cohesion has prevailed determining the conditions of convergence, that all we know, without underestimating economic hardships and nationalist intolerance. The above mentioned conditions are the enlargements and the new quests for accession, which, better than any adjective, express the concrete success and the very strength of the idea of Europe.

To speak about short-sighted egoism, can undoubtedly appear an almost imposed choice for those who observe European economic policies from the less developed periphery of the EU – the Italian *Mezzogiorno*. Those policies are deeply fitting into mercantilistic criteria of financial supremacy and exasperated competition, the common criterion of which is centered on parameters intimately connected with concrete capabilities of local systems in absorbing the imposed acceleration of the technological evolution of means of production.

On the other hand, it is clear the according to the intentions of the EEC the project of the economic integration had to be accomplished trough a stable convergence of the economies which all together were participating to the development of a unique huge economic area. This approach has determined, at least from he beginning of the seventies, the use of progressively incisive financial tools devoted to the re-composition of the main distances between central areas and the periphery.

The process of realignment has neither always, nor equally led to positive outcomes. However, it has highlighted an aspect of extraordinary value from the geographical point of view: the necessity to leave behind sector-based policies and adopt a generalized and diversified regional policy.

In that sense, the division among goals to achieve into “differentiated regional areas”, which has led to a unification of the EU periphery territories represents the logical consequence of the application of an intervention criterion for the realization of the “convergence” of the European regions towards a model. The descriptive parameters of this model are represented by an explicit consequence of the comparative confrontation determined by a direct reference to the EU medium standards.

So, the possibility to analyze the “distances of convergence” in geopolitical terms acquires an exceptional strength. At the same time, the very concept of “differentials” imposes to highlight the limits and opportunities of the realignment according to considerations of “milieu” and effects inducted by the actuation of a process of integration built up on the local-global relation.

At the same time, the consequent process of enlargement which extends the EU to 25 countries, essentially enlarging its borders towards North and North-East, and to a lesser degree – towards South, builds up an innovative scenario to necessarily refer to both for the changes that this process imposes over the values of the parameters determining the “new

differentials”, and over new directions of European regional policies, that are imposed by a further process of convergence.

However, differently from those who were locating and are still locating the challenges to the integration in an econometric dimension of the process of convergence of single regional economies, I think that the true and the most relevant issue, which lays at the very basis of the European construction has to be found among the huge issues of civil and political development of the European democracies.

A few years before leaving us Francesco Compagna was writing on the pages of his “North and South”:

“... I would say that this Europe is better than nothing. However, I would add that it is an unsatisfactory Europe: also and may be because it’s a Europe which shows the path...”

“... This problem imposes to run and make the Europe less unsatisfactory, than it is today... I would say that in order to overcome this problem it is necessary to introduce more elements of democracy, and of supra-nationality, before all, in the process of the European construction”.

In the last two decades a different climate has emerged and much of the dissatisfaction of those days has vanished. However, if on the one hand it is commonly accepted that the realignment of the less developed economies constitutes a key issue for the most developed countries, on the other hand in a dimension of the culture of integration and the will to accept the logic of the *multi-ethnicism*, not easily resolvable problems persist.

I wouldn’t want to be boring with figures, but if I rapidly scroll demographic figures and forecasts provided by specialized accredited observatories, I have to point out that the intolerance for “our labor infantry” (the “cafoni” of the old Mezzogiorno of the fifties), in the phase of European high labor intensity development has led to the enrichment of our European partners undergoing accelerated development processes. That intolerance is no more tolerable, nor applicable towards those, who are coming from the South of the World (no more from Italy) and are seeking for hospitality, that this time Europe has all the convenience to offer.

Tab. n. 1. Forecast of demographic dynamics for 2005 in some european countries

Country	TOTAL		MALES		FEMALES	
	1990-2000	2000-2015	1990-2000	2000-2015	1990-2000	2000-2015
Belgium	-0,14	-0,41	-0,16	-0,43	-0,13	-0,28
Danmark	-0,14	-0,40	-0,16	-0,44	-0,12	-0,36
France	+0,21	-0,04	+0,19	-0,07	+0,23	0,00
Germany	-0,28	-0,75	-0,22	-0,77	-0,34	-0,73
Greece	-0,04	-0,31	-0,04	-0,29	-0,05	-0,33
Irland	+0,49	+0,55	+0,48	+0,54	+0,51	+0,57
Italy	-0,07	-0,41	-0,09	-0,43	-0,06	-0,39
Luxemb.	-0,22	-0,61	-0,22	-0,66	-0,21	-0,56
Netherl	+0,26	-0,14	+0,23	-0,19	+0,28	-0,09
Portugal	+0,01	-0,22	0,00	-0,21	+0,01	-0,23
U.K.	+0,10	-0,09	+0,14	-0,08	+0,06	-0,11
Spain	+0,19	-0,06	+0,18	-0,07	+0,19	-0,05

In fact, significant demographic increases are registered in the peripheral areas. It is also true that in these same regions the demographic basis constitutes only 15% of the total European population.

To sum up, a simple estimation unveils the fact that, if the mainly “fertile” population corresponds to less than 1/8 of the total, the future trends will not bring a considerable increase of the EU population. This fact can also be proven by the circumstance that the demographic models characterized by a low birth rate will spread also in the regions of the EU periphery. In

these regions, in a current and short-term perspective the demographic behaviors are interpreted in terms of a higher degree of fecundity.

This consideration leads to the fact that also in “our” southern regions, only in one generation, an initial brake of the natural positive balance, then a generalized demographic decrease has to be registered.

Finally, what we want to uphold is that the Marxian conceptual scheme of *relative overpopulation*, that currently and in the near future, will keep characterizing our *Mezzogiorno*, together with other peripheral regions, with its population exceeding the global productive resources installed in the given area, would not last for a long time, given, at least, the foreseeable demographic dynamics.

I am fully aware that it's the case of a not-precisely-measurable approximation and that transition is neither simple, nor a short term phenomenon: complex phenomena like the progressive *female-ization*, the elevation of the pension age, the qualitative transformations of occupational components, and more or less legal extra-EU migration fluxes will complicate the European labor market and the relative regionalization.

However, what I wanted to highlight is that even if we tried to neglect the issue of “liberties” and the emphasis of “democratic” vocation of the European construction, the dynamics of development of the area more and more clearly demonstrate that economic convergence will no more be exclusively a problem of peripheral areas, but paradoxically, it would become a problem for the strongest areas, if new elements will not be introduced.

In other words, in front of a deficiency of either highly qualified, or “infantry” category work force, the balancing of developmental standards of the European regions could happen through a *decrease* of the upper levels, that is, through a advance of peripheral regions allowed by a substantial *arrest* of the economic development of the most developed regions.

Naturally, no government, entrepreneurial group, or European citizen can afford such a regression.

The conclusion that I feel to project is that the “free circulation” of human resources, capitals, technologies, or any “economic good” is senseless and without any perspective, if it is not based on a “free circulation “ of ideas and on the autonomy and confrontation between cultures: finally, if it is not uphold by a full affirmation of democratic liberties.

