

Thesis: The European reality – East-West – The role of the Left

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- The numerous cases witness that practically every common concept actually consists of several various ideas. Ignoring this diversity may lead to a failure to reach a common goal. This is also true for the common pan-European leftist policies that are striving to overcome the neoliberal conceptual base of the contemporary European "*real-politik*".
- If we talk about the impact of this policy in CEE we need to take into consideration the process of this region's transition from "socialism to capitalism". But – attention! – to the neo-liberal type of capitalism. The type of capitalism that had been anticipated by the significant part of the CEE population (probably by the majority of it) at the time of social transition in the late 80's and 90's was very different from what it actually turned out to be. My judgement primarily relates to Czech, partly Slovak realities due to my detailed knowledge of the local situation and the availability of relevant data. But it is evident that many aspects of my analysis are rather common and can be observed in the other countries of the former socialist block - at least in the "Visegrad 4 countries" (V4) (naturally in different extent and intensity of symptoms) . A known Czech philosopher has described the situation the following way :
"In the year 1990 we have been a poor country with hope, currently we are relatively rich country without hope"
- The facts and the feelings of the people rising from their everyday lives do actually show that paths of the East and the West, despite the loud statements of politicians, never came close starting the early 90's. At certain moments they actually diverged or went in parallel failing to affect each other in a significant way. The West drifted from the model of welfare state to the neo-liberal project. The East, on its turn, was a place where a "Washington consensus" ⁱ was implemented in the full scale and with all relevant consequences.
Ironically, the aspiration of the majority of the people there was actually related to the welfare state. The successful PR campaign of new elites has managed to convince the citizens of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) countries to accept the solution that was never actually desired by them. In Czechia the first signs of doubts have arisen in the first half of 90's. The emerging new neoliberal elite had from the very beginning eliminated every single reminiscence of political and economic solutions that have been based on the concept of so-called "Prague Spring" (The idea of the third way, the socialism with a human face). This "Third Way" was unacceptable for them - hence any type of discussion on this topic, even among experts, not talking about citizens was not tolerated. The skeptical position was primarily taken by those unsuccessful, the ones that have not managed their perspective and "benefits" in transition from socialism to capitalism.
- The Washington consensus was an important factor even from a political aspect. It was an indicator of the "progressivity" of one's positions. Whoever hovered doubts or disagreed with this concept was graded as a person who does not understand the dominance of such requirements of modernity as the "invisible hand of the market" and the neo-liberal, individualistic philosophy. Some of those people were labeled as "supporters of the old (communist) rules". This was possible due to the absence of mechanisms, not speaking

about the brakes that would have prevented the certain limits to be exceeded and borders crossed. In the West the dismantling of the welfare state took the form of a process where the different social and political forces collided and certain pressures from trade unions, civil structures, the traditional political parties including Left have been applied thus influencing the entire process in terms of content and dynamics. In the East the entire transformation was based on a totally different performance of social forces. In essence, no "slow-down" of the transformation process, let alone its possible modifications had been allowed (a concept of "TINA" – politically and economically). Criticism and modification requirement had been kept in the framework of the chosen concept whose key parameters remained untouchable. The some democratic processes seemed to be needless complication. All political processes in the Czech republic were subordinated to the neoliberal economic transformation. The citizens of the former Eastern post-socialism bloc got used to the certain standards of the social security provided by their countries and tended to consider them to be "automatic". Even many supporters of the defeated "communism" had not been able to imagine that this defeat would bring an end to an automatic validity of social guarantees (of course, their content, quality and scope is a subject to a discussion). Subsequently, many of those were astonished by the easiness and speed of these guarantees' disposal and by the fact that this process went practically beyond the possibility of being influenced by citizens. Alongside this dismantling process the new measures of social security had been introduced in accordance with the concept of neo-liberal capitalism - very different in many ways from the former ones in terms of content and forms. However, their average level was lower than the level of similar "guarantees" being in force at the same time in countries of the West.

- Contrary to the expectations of theorists of the post-industrial society since 80's the proportions of produced wealth distribution in favor of a "higher" strata of the society kept growing. This fact has also determined the trajectory of development in post-communist/socialist countries. Here, however, this process went without disguised and masking usually employed for preventing an increase in social tension. A process of a blunt grab of the accumulated property took place on a dramatic scale. The emerging elites were aware that any resistance will be small and easily surmountable. Any process differences between the individual CEE countries did not affect the extent of the content. However the V4 states fared in this process much lighter comparing the excesses that took place in Ukraine, Russia as well as in the Balkans.
- The offensive against the fundamentals of the employment policies begun rather disguised on the West and hard and indiscriminately in the East. If in the West an argument for the need of a greater efficiency and competitiveness in a global world was employed, emphasizing individual freedom as the basis of the increase in wealth and further liberalization of the market as the only viable way forward. In the East, very often the only deployed argument was the need to combat the so-called "remnants of communism" in people's mentality, with the idea that only the complete departure from the past practices would ensure a transition to the bright (capitalist and neoliberal) future. Given the fact that in the East the middle class (in the Western sense) was virtually nonexistent there was no need for the traditional approaches to be taken into account.
- For many Western experts it is very hard to comprehend how differently the East experts and the general public understand several phenomena, terms and theoretical postulates.

The main issue that was tackled by the Western Left essentially for the whole period of coexistence of two opposing systems was how to make the social transformation related to the overcoming of capitalism. They relied on many theoretical postulates that were almost unknown in the East - the works of Gramsci, the concept of the "historic compromise", the concept of euro-communism as such, dialectics of revolution and evolution within the societies respecting the principles of democracy etc. The East at the same time firmly relied on the traditional concept of Marxism-Leninism. Although within it there had been studies of processes used by the theorists of the West, the center of gravity rested on the issue of ensuring the possible changes in the West. However, the East lacked knowledge of "real capitalism". The West, on its turn, experienced the lack of information about the "real socialism". After the transformations that took place in the CEE region the Left have not been able to agree between themselves, each side talking about something somewhat different and using a slightly different language. And unfortunately, even after more than a quarter of a century both parts of Europe the radical Left had failed to integrate and let their synergies contribute to the promotion of leftist solutions.

-The attitude toward the European integration in the countries of CEE - V4 and specifically in CZ reflected in a certain way the transformation process and the evolution of the citizens' expectations. In the beginning, immediately after the changes, the interest in European integration significantly prevailed – with "Back to Europe" motto being very popular. Many people could not understand the lukewarm character of the West's response. They assumed that if the condition of the "the communism overthrow" has been fulfilled there would be nothing to prevent their path to the Western community. In the Czech Republic even some sort of feeling of superiority that "we are better prepared" prevailed for some time among other things. This also played a role in a fact that part of the Czech population was willing to easily part with Slovakia. In the 2nd half of the last decade there has been some weakening of the pro-European tendencies. Especially supporters of the radical left took an increasingly critical approach against the fact that accession to NATO was given a clear priority. This priority was fiercely supported by the ruling Czech circles (in close collaboration with the dominant elites of the USA) as part of a new geopolitical structure being built in the context of a unipolar world. The process of association with NATO was taken out of democratic mechanisms where a highlighted civic opinion could have been applied and thus remained fully in the hands of the elites.

- A significant evolution of views on the EU actually took place: In the Czech Republic the level of highest confidence in the UE has culminated in the year of 1999 with 62 % of support and stayed practically unchanged for the next following years. A significant decrease has occurred with the onset of the crisis (2008) bringing the support level slight below 40 %. Further descent occurred in 2016 to the level of 29 %. There are several reasons for this decline; however it has certainly shown that that citizen's expectations regarding the positive benefits of the EU accession failed to materialize. The vision of some EU leaders that the threat of withdrawal of financial transfers would change the civic opinion only testified to their ignorance of CEE (Czech Republic) reality. This tool can have an impact on those who enjoy the real benefits from these transfers, but if the majority of citizens does not feel that this financial stream is reaching them in one way or another and on the contrary benefits only the few (with all stories of alleged and proven corruption, suspicious financial transactions etc.) then they are willing to forego these transfers.

- There is a growing indication that the long-term misunderstanding of the significant substantive differences in the political development of the East and West, as well within the content and direction has not received a reflection in the formulation of the European radical left-wing politics and in their implementations. This currently results in the tragic weakness of the Left in the East and the inability of their Western colleagues to effectively assist in overcoming this weakness (in contrast to the other political forces - the right-wing, liberal, etc., who enjoy strong and stable positions in the East and which have had long lasting support from the West). The existing all-European leftist concept with small exceptions do not take these deepening rift effects into consideration, not speaking about the strive to overcome it.

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ⁱ The consensus (as originally stated by J. Williamson -1989, as a "standard" reform package promoted for crisis-wracked developing countries) included ten broad sets of relatively specific policy recommendations:

1. Fiscal policy discipline, with avoidance of large fiscal deficits relative to GDP;
2. Redirection of public spending from subsidies ("especially indiscriminate subsidies") toward broad-based provision of key pro-growth, pro-poor services like primary education, primary health care and infrastructure investment;
3. Tax reform, broadening the tax base and adopting moderate marginal tax rates;
4. Interest rates that are market determined and positive (but moderate) in real terms;
5. Competitive exchange rates;
6. Trade liberalization: liberalization of imports, with particular emphasis on elimination of quantitative restrictions (licensing, etc.); any trade protection to be provided by low and relatively uniform tariffs;
7. Liberalization of inward foreign direct investment;
8. Privatization of state enterprises;
9. Deregulation: abolition of regulations that impede market entry or restrict competition, except for those justified on safety, environmental and consumer protection grounds, and prudential oversight of financial institutions;
10. Legal security for property rights.