

Democracy and Diversity

The subject of democracy and diversity has been discussed repeatedly. Some see it primarily in terms of the treatment of migrants faced with xenophobia and racism. Others examine the coexistence within the population of different groups with different customs and religions, the integration of foreigners, nationality issues, as well as the problem of terrorism and how to control it. It is commonly held that Europe, especially social Europe, must accept diversity.

'European Democracy and Diversity', the European Socialist Party's discussion paper for the European elections in 2009, emphasizes the diversity of Europe's peoples, their cultural and linguistic diversity, and national and regional diversity, and it deems that the provisions of the treaties that establish the Union's democratic institutions do safeguard that diversity. Political discussion must aim at strengthening democracy in order to reflect better Europe's diversity and fight discrimination.

The European Socialist party asks, among other things, whether the European Parliament should have the power to elect the Commission President and to dismiss individual European Commissioners, and also whether there should be one electoral system for European parliamentary elections rather than different ones in each country. I shall not address those issues here.

I will address another issue that also concerns democracy and diversity. It is the question of what form the relation between the

supranational and the national should take within the Union in order to preserve diversity while also pursuing the common objectives of the peoples of Europe. How can a balance be struck between the necessary common framework of the Union's objectives and actions and the preservation and protection of diversity?

The texts of the Union's earlier treaties and of the New Constitutional Treaty are based on the premise that unity within the Union guarantees diversity. The peoples of Europe are united though different. Articles 2 and 3 of the New Treaty lay down the conditions for unity. These are adherence to shared values, the promotion of peace and the well-being of the Union's peoples. Also actions in the areas of common policies, freedom, security and justice, the internal market, sustainable development based on balanced economic growth, and peace and security. Articles 4 and 3 refer to diversity – the obligation to respect cultural and linguistic diversity, and the equality of member states and national identities. Article 5 contains general rules for achieving a balance between unity and diversity: "The limits of Union competences are governed by the principle of conferral. The use of the Union competences is governed by the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality". And Article 8 makes it clear that "Citizenship of Union shall be additional to national citizenship and shall not replace it". This shows that the EU is a political structure with a multinational dimension. Collective interests, however, are defined with the approval of the member-states; hence the interests of the nation states remain predominant. It is they that determine the boundary line that the Union must not cross if diversity is to be

safeguarded. That line is guaranteed by the community model, intergovernmental co-operation, and the development of the Union through successive transfers of national sovereignty arrived at by mutual agreement.

Nevertheless, the dividing line between the supranational and the national, between unity and diversity, is not clear. This is evident from the history of the new treaty. It is also evident from the rejection of the Draft Constitutional Treaty and the change of its name to the New Treaty, from discussion as to whether and how to mention the objective of a social Europe and from the unprecedented number of amendments, derogations and opt-outs, a result of numerous objections, national ambitions and fears concerning the co-existence of 27 states. None of that would have happened if there had not been doubts, conflicting views and disputes over how to aim for unity and defend diversity. The view that the community model permits transnational integration and the transcendence of cultural differences without denying them is not confirmed in practice. Experience has shown that inter-governmental co-operation is an inflexible framework.

This situation harbors dangers. New social and economic problems such as the energy crisis, as well as global developments such as the rise of the Asian economies, lead to greater tensions due to the specificities of member-states, conflicting interests and different cultural approaches. This increases the likelihood of clashes that may have the effect of paralysing the Union. These differences must be overcome. Diversity makes it imperative that unity be continually renewed and

expanded within the Union. This unity cannot be achieved solely by further developments in electoral procedures, such as the election of the Commission President by the European Parliament, a change with which I agree. Other approaches are also required.

The rules that were formulated to make democracy function in the national state cannot be applied in the same way to a supranational Union of states where there are for greater differences between citizens and the extent of the union is by much greater than the territory of each individual state. The change in scale is such that it alters the conditions for workable solutions. The simple transfer of a solution from the level of the nation state to the level of transnational co-operation without the creation of support and implementation mechanisms adapted to transnational reality will not bring about the desired results. Besides, many contemporary issues, such as globalisation, demand wider actions than those that can be taken at the national level.

The transfer of responsibilities from the national state to a supranational body, with the change in the territorial scale of power and the obligatory quest for new ways of exercising policy and governance, entail an indefinite period of institutional realignment and social and political tensions. It also means that, while co-operation among European states keeps acquiring new forms with their own constantly changing rules, since established constitutional and political formulae do not suit current events, the outcome will be something new.

Consequently, attempts to create democracy by a top-down process will not succeed. Likewise, it is exceedingly doubtful whether it is possible to create a European identity solely by means of formulating an ideology and promoting it through advertising.

Experience has shown that the future evolution of the Union will be marked by the retreat of individual states and the emergence of centralised power in Brussels. The lever for this process will continue to be the Union's central bureaucracy, the mechanism that foregrounds and formulates the common interests of the member states. Its field of action will be determined by loose inter-governmental collaboration agreements that are made periodically. This new centre will generate its own autonomy. The more responsibilities it acquires, the more independent it will become.

EU bureaucracy and inter-governmental collaboration see technocratic issues as the responsibility of administrative mechanisms and the territory of experts. The prime concern for EU employees is to find compromises to meet the wishes of the member states, and of often divergent and contradictory national preferences. De-politicisation is seen to be advisable because it allows for the easy achievement of balances. This stance, however, does not favour public dialogue.

Bolstering democracy requires emphasising the political dimension, free public debate, the discussion of problems in a forum for political dialogue that is open to all. National forums must make it their concern to discuss common issues and make them

their own. That will ensure information for all, transparency, control and accountability. A European public forum is the way to reduce the democratic deficit. Such a forum has not yet been created, even though the Union increasingly supplies more information and its actions impinge on far more issues that affect the public. It could not be created because the preconditions do not exist for broad public participation in political procedures.

The creation of this forum is the task of forces that want a strong, democratic Europe. They must pursue it systematically and discuss the Union's issues in all countries at the same time so as to formulate common policies. Proposals for such joint action have been made, such as introducing a common electoral system for European parliamentary elections and for the election of the President of the European Commission by the European Parliament.

These proposals have met the strenuous opposition of member states that do not want to go beyond the framework of inter-governmental co-operation and fear any constraints on their own autonomy. But the consolidation of democracy at a supranational level necessitates searching for and exercising new forms of co-operation that respond to the new conditions of post-national reality.

Democratic governance arose in nation states when a political community was formed on their territory through public debate. This made people aware of their common interests and how to defend them. Thus, in the Union too, public mobilisation for

common projects can help build acceptable institutions and democratic processes at the supranational level. It will ensure new forms of democratic governance in the post-national world.

The view that opposes the creation of a European forum overlooks the fact that the Union is at a crucial stage in its history, as are the nation states. It is already facing issues on a scale that cannot be dealt with by existing co-ordination and agreement mechanisms. The problems go beyond the sum of national abilities and demand a different dynamic.

Besides, political affiliation is no longer determined exclusively by nationality. The emergence of common values, the shared path within the Union of people and states with different histories, experiences, references and symbols have given the Union a supranational content that is common to citizens of all the member states. A shared political affiliation entails a common forum, an ongoing common quest. That is the only way we can exist in accordance with what we want our identity to be, without coming into conflict with whatever constitutes the identity of others.

Instituting public debate on European policy throughout the Union will also help clarify the aims of the unification project and determine the institutional shape of Europe. Public debate makes the problems and issues that are at stake comprehensible. It can contribute significantly to clarifying which aspects of diversity need protection and in what ways that can be achieved. Public debate is a motivating force for uniting expectations and perceptions at the European level, for making common interests apparent and

shaping a collective identity beyond the borders of the member states – a European political community, a European demos.

The new treaty is an important step towards reducing the democratic deficit through the provisions in the chapter on democratic principles. Those principles are formulated and applied to a series of special provisions that relate to the Union's institutions and procedural functions and lay the way for the formation of a system that is more open to public debate on Union policies.

The solutions that arise from the new treaty will sometimes prove viable and sometimes evolve, like those of former treaties. Under pressure from socio-economic change, the Union will continue to seek new forms of organization, combining the inter-governmental and federal approaches. There is little time left for new quests and balances as the dimensions of the problems grow and their management requires solid and durable forms of co-operation. The need to adapt the operation of the European Central Bank to a policy of development for Europe as laid out by the Ecofin Council is already apparent. The Union will thus gradually acquire its definitive shape on the basis of the ongoing problems it has to handle. EMU is evidence of that.

Economic and Monetary Union is an example of how settling an important problem, that of the common currency, entails a broader awareness of issues related to the currency, of public discussion and debate about them. The question of whether the euro contributes to inflation, whether its high value puts European

exports at risk, and whether interest rates set by the European Central Bank have facilitated house purchases, are issues familiar to the European public and have an effect on its stance. This goes to show that a forum for public debate automatically emerges when specific issues of concern to the public become topical and urgent.

That example also shows that progress towards a more democratic, more united Europe, whose people are aware of the issues it must face, will not derive from grand, unrealistic plans for the future, but from specific solutions for broader common issues. Already EMU and the Schengen Agreement, and now the common foreign policy and defence policy that are being mapped out, have shaped the European structure and defined ways in which to respect and transcend particular identities. They ensure union in diversity, gradually reducing the number of intra-state agreements while also creating a focus of interest and discussion for citizens in more countries. Joint actions lead to broader means of cooperation and experience of the balance that must be struck between efforts for diversity and for unity, a balance that will not be the same in every sector. Such joint actions, consciously fostered by the Union, will gradually weave a unifying web that carries the integration project even further towards completion. Seen in that light, enhanced cooperation can be a step forward and a means of exerting pressure on the Union to expand common endeavours into new sectors.

The picture that emerges will be more complex than the structure of a nation state. The more complex it is, the harder it will be for

people to understand, and it will not provide the direct connection to power that exists in smaller state entities. But that also applies to other contemporary socioeconomic problems. Their complexity makes them seem obscure to the public, as power relations today become more complex, less direct and visible. The new forms of supranational organization will not resemble their predecessors. And, provided that their complexity promotes the fullest and most effective democracy, it will also ensure a greater degree of diversity.

To sum up: the preservation and protection of diversity is connected with the progress of the unification process and the deepening of democracy. The relation of the supranational to the national can be shaped creatively as long as it is linked to a joint effort to tackle the problems of the peoples of Europe.
