

Constantinos Simitis

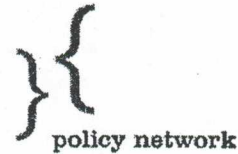
Από: "George Papaconstantinou" <gpapak@otenet.gr>
Προς: "ISTAME-A.APAPANDREOU" <info@istame-apapandreou.gr>;
<koppa@politicalforum.gr>; <gmaniatitis@hol.gr>; <i.maniatis@parliament.gr>;
<tinab@politicalforum.gr>; <ktheos@otenet.gr>; <csimitis@otenet.gr>;
<gpap@pasok.gr>; <antiglib@otenet.gr>; <pamb@ath.forthnet.gr>;
<achilleas.mitsos@cec.eu.int>; <panaretos@gmail.com>
Κοιν.: "costas cartalis" <ckartali@cc.uoa.gr>
Αποστολή: Πέμπτη, 17 Μαρτίου 2005 8:48 μμ
Επισύναψη: policy network - Speech by Wouter Bos - new dilemmas on solidarity.pdf
Θέμα: Speech by W. Bos

Αφαπητοί

Επισυνάπτω μία εξαιρετικά ενδιαφέρουσα ομιλία του Wouter Bos, ηγέτη των Ολλανδών Εργατικών. Έγινε στο Policy Network Spring Retreat, στο οποίο πήγαμε με τον Κώστα Καρτάλη.

Φιλικά

Γιώργος Παπακωνσταντίνου



New dilemma's on solidarity

Speech by Wouter Bos

**3rd Policy Network Annual Spring Retreat
12th March 2005**

Check against delivery

Social democrats from all over the world have a few things in common. One of them is that they all have ideals. And actually, they may even have some of those ideals in common!

Like for example solidarity, the classic progressive principle that I want to talk to you about this morning. Solidarity, in my view, is the readiness, recognizing a basic mutual dependence, to take a certain responsibility not just for one's own life chances but also for those of others.

But social democrats tend to have something else in common too. And that is that they are good in proclaiming ideals but a lot less good in maintaining those ideals, in ensuring that enough people share these ideals and continue to support them.

I sometimes wonder why that is and I think that part of the answer is fear. We are good at defending social security but we are not so good at tackling social security fraud. Why? Because it may give others the opportunity not just to launch an attack on fraud but on the whole system of social security.

Another example. We are good at defending the welfare state but we are not so good at handling problems of its costs and financing. Why? Because it may give others the opportunity not just to launch an attack on the financibility of the welfare state but also on the welfare state itself.

My point here today is that fear is a bad advisor.

I think that if progressives want to be seen as the main defenders of a generous and civilised system of social security, then that is all the more a reason to be - at the same time - at the heart of the fight against social security fraud. If we want to be seen as the main defenders of the modern welfare state, then that is all the more a

reason why it should be us and nobody else who are going to be seen as the ones concerned about its costs and financing.

If we leave these discussions to our political opponents, then they will not just solve the problems but also kill the ideals. To save our ideals, it should be us to address the problems, first and best.

It is from this perspective that I am worried about the state of solidarity. I think many social democratic parties in Europe are afraid to address problems that come with our ambition to organise solidarity because they fear that opponents may use that opportunity to challenge the ideal of solidarity itself. I am convinced that this attitude of fear will not be rewarded and that the only way to save solidarity is to be the first and the best in addressing the areas where it runs into problems.

Now then, let me be specific and give you three areas where I think solidarity is under threat and where we should come up with progressive answers, no matter how uncomfortable they are, in order to save solidarity from destruction by our political opponents. **Solidarity is facing three threats:**

One. I believe solidarity is under threat from migration and our failure to integrate newcomers into our society.

Two. I believe solidarity is under threat from policies that favour insiders over outsiders and baby-boomers over youngsters.

Three. I believe solidarity is under threat from attempts to create a Europe that is large, fully integrated, effective and efficient all at the same time.

First, migration, why is it that if we don't do the right thing, migration could become a threat to solidarity?

The story begins with the conclusion that solidarity is not a matter of, or at least not exclusively, a matter of altruism. Many sociologists have argued that the welfare state is not based on altruism, but on enlightened self interest: we all run the same risks so we might as well collectively insure ourselves against those risks. We do not like to live in neighbourhoods with a high chance of running into beggars and homeless people all the time. We do not want to live in houses that may be broken into by bored youngsters, so let us educate them and improve their life chances.

Looking at the history of our welfare state it is not merely speculative to conclude that solidarity is easiest organised and supported in societies where citizens have common interests and run similar risks. And looking at various studies one can also safely conclude that people can easier be motivated to share risks if they understand each other, identify easily with each other and indeed have common values.

Solidarity thrives on common interests and common values.

The tragedy in some of our Western European societies, and certainly in the Netherlands, is that these foundations for solidarity are now being challenged by migration and by failing integration of newcomers into our societies.

An increasingly diverse society makes it more difficult to sustain support for solidarity. Part of the problem is a perceived loss of common values. Tax paying citizens may then very well argue: Why should I make an effort for people I don't know, don't understand, or who don't do things the way I would?

And the other thing happening in a society like the Netherlands is this: migration may not only cause a loss of common values but it also seems to come with a loss of common interest.

In Dutch society the facts speak for themselves. It is no longer true that we all run the same risks. For example migrants and people of migrant background in the Netherlands run a much greater risk than others of being poorly educated, unemployed, sick or having a criminal record. Here again the result - if we do nothing about it - will be that white middle class tax paying citizens wonder: am I paying taxes for myself or am I paying for them?

It is for this reason that I am convinced that unlimited migration and failing integration are a serious threat to solidarity and to the degree of welfare sharing we are proud of as social democrats.

A traditional social democratic answer to this problem would be to make a moral point about why there is nothing wrong with paying taxes to the benefit of others. And yes, that moral point will always remain important.

But it has never been enough. Solidarity always needed that foundation of common values and common interests. If that is under threat, we need to rebuild it.

Social democrats all over Europe have not been too good at tackling these problems. Maybe because they were afraid to be accused of racism. Maybe because they were afraid of the right taking over the discussion and challenging the very idea of combining diversity and solidarity in modern society.

This is why I say fear is a bad advisor. Leaving this discussion to conservatives may save us from some uncomfortable choices but will certainly not help the people who count on us, whether they are migrants or not. So a progressive answer is needed and I think it consists out of three elements.

One: we need to address the absence of common cultural values that may endanger the willingness of the middle classes to pay for solidarity. It will therefore be necessary to work on greater mutual trust and understanding between the various groups in our society. But probably more important than that, those who favour more economic migration into western societies and even those who simply consider it inevitable, will only be politically credible if they are also credible on the core contract our society requires all citizens to accept: civil liberties, including freedom of expression; the equal treatment of men and women, hetero-and homosexuals; the separation of church and state; the principle of democratic government, and the rule of law.

These core principles are of course not fixed for all time, but we will only be believable defenders of migration if we are believable defenders of this contract.

Two: we need to address the absence of a common interest. If we feel we all run the same risks in life, it will be so much easier to find support for collective welfare sharing arrangements. That requires working towards the classic progressive goal of emancipating and developing those who lag behind and fighting the racism and discrimination that makes it so hard for them to catch up with others. We are, of course, aiming at a society where, whether you are black or white, Christian or Muslim, everyone is an equal citizen with a decent chance in life. Only then will collective arrangements be seen as arrangements that are paid for by all of us, regardless of origin, and benefit all of us, regardless of origin.

Three: we need to realise how difficult this is going to be. Integration requires an effort from all of us, those who were born here and those who have just arrived, those with a Western and those with a non-Western background. It requires an effort from employers, school boards, politicians, spiritual leaders, journalists, building corporations and many more. Every society has limits to its capacity to absorb newcomers. Successful integration therefore above all requires a restrictive migration policy because our capacity to integrate and emancipate is not limitless. And it will require toughness, toughness both on those who arrive new into our society and on the society that adopts them.

This is my first example of a new dilemma on solidarity and how uncomfortable it will be. .

My second example is one that I am sure the Young Progressives present here today will find this one interesting: **solidarity is under threat from policies that favour insiders over outsiders and baby-boomers over youngsters.**
What do I mean with that?

There are various systems, policies, processes in our societies that structurally favour outsiders over insiders and baby-boomers over youngsters.

Governments building up public debt pass tax obligations on from this generation to the next. There is, by the way, much more solidarity in high taxes than in high debts!

Employees retiring early at the cost of the taxpayer pass the tax burden from older to younger generations.

Trade unions protecting the rights of employees by sticking to the 'last in, first out' principle protect insiders at the cost of outsiders and favour baby boomers at the expense of youngsters.

Governments financing pension schemes and health care arrangements through the budget rather than through saving or insurance schemes, pass burdens on to younger generations.

Governments protecting employee rights of male breadwinners at the expense of opportunities for youngsters, migrants and women, pass a tax burden to the future.

Now one could of course be indifferent and argue that that is just the way it is, but the fundamental change in our society that does make it problematic is the greying of our societies: the great change in the number of older people that have to be supported by ever smaller numbers of young people. We need outsiders, women, youngsters, migrants to pay for the next generation's welfare state. The more we keep them out, the more difficult it will be to maintain that welfare state. And the more distorted we structure our solidarity today at the disadvantage of those who will have to pay for it tomorrow, the more we run the risk of them telling us tomorrow that they no longer want to pay for us!

Is that a problem that specifically relates to us social democrats?

In a way not of course, because all politicians are afraid of making these choices. But yes, social democrats too. I am worried when I hear the German social democrats argue for more relaxed spending limits in the Growth and Stability Pact. I am worried when I hear the French socialists fight against pension reform. I myself am having a hard time with my constituency trying to convince them that the days of ever-earlier retirements should really be over.

The reason I think these choices are harder for us than for others though, is to do with that same fear that I talked about earlier. The fear is that if we start reforming workers' rights and pension schemes, others may take over and the whole discussion may get dynamics we can no longer control. But again here I would say again: fear is a bad advisor.

We can only save solidarity by taking the initiative in reforming it. We need to reform early retirement schemes and other labour market practices. We need to build new alliances with modernising trade unions. We need to provide fair opportunities to women, youngsters and migrants to keep them motivated to make their contribution, preferably right through the period that we are all old and grey and depending on their solidarity with us.

That was my second example of new dilemmas on solidarity. Here comes my third: Europe!

The history of the European Union shows us a classic example of solidarity, of politicians and whole societies making their futures interdependent, both because they believed they have a common interest in doing so and because they believed it was a morally right thing to do. I believe that still is the power of the European idea. But it is under threat. And we ourselves are the greatest threat. **Our pursuit of the parallel aims of widening and deepening the Union has put a great strain on Europe and on Europeans.** Europe is slowing down its performance and citizens are becoming more and more sceptical.

And here again we see a parallel with the two other examples I gave. I see many social democrats who are afraid to address scepticism about Europe, who are afraid to tackle the slowness in European decision making, the inefficiencies in the European parliament and the inconsistencies in European policies. But yet again my answer is: fear is not a good advisor.

It should be those who love Europe most, who should be the first to take action where Europe fails. Because that will prove the only way to preserve public support for the European Union.

And yes, again the choices are uncomfortable. For example, we Dutch social democrats have chosen to take the initiative for a referendum on the European Constitution. We love Europe so much that we think the risk of the Dutch people rejecting the Constitution is worth the benefit of their greater involvement with the future of Europe.

Another of those uncomfortable choices was that we concluded that we can no longer pursue the goals of widening, deepening, democratising and enhancing the efficiency of the Union all at the same time. The lack of clarity about where we are leading, combined with the lack of performance by today's European structures, is eroding public support for the EU. Only if Europeans feel represented at a European level and if Europe provides solutions for problems that can no longer be tackled at a national level, will Europe regain the legitimacy it needs to confront its challenges.

My point is that if we continue to strive for further expansion, which I think we should, and at the same time try to get all our ideals on integration implemented for all member-states at the same time, we run the risk of a Europe which mainly negotiates with itself rather than performs for its citizens. That would not be in our common interest and it seems to be the quickest road to victory for the Euro-sceptics.

If we believe a performing Europe is the best way to guarantee support for Europe, we will have to recognise that in some areas in order to do better, Europe should do less rather than more. If we believe a performing Europe is the best way to guarantee support for Europe, we will also have to recognise that we should leave room for a Europe which creates different speeds towards different subjects, in different combinations of countries.

I gave these three examples for two reasons.

First because I think they all three tell us how difficult the choices are that we have to make to maintain support for our ideals. Maintaining support for solidarity in an increasingly diverse society requires tough choices on migration and integration. Maintaining support for solidarity in the welfare state twenty years from now requires tough choices on workers' rights and our relationship with the trade unions. And maintaining support for solidarity within Europe requires tough choices on how to involve citizens and how to scale down some of our ambitions.

But there was another reason for me to give exactly these examples. I believe one of the greatest electoral threats to progressives in Europe these days, is the conservative populist movement that chooses a different position on exactly these issues. Who choose against diversity and against migration. Who defend the vested interests in our welfare state. And who are straight out anti-Europe. That anti-migration, anti-Europe, pro-vested-interests movement can be very powerful if given the chance.

I don't think we should give them that chance. I therefore think it is us who should address the dilemmas that I talked to you about today. If we leave these tough discussions to others, it is not hard to predict what will happen. We saw a glimpse of it in the Netherlands in May 2002 when the Dutch social democrats suffered their greatest election defeat ever and the conservative populists under Pim Fortuyn made a glorious entry into the Dutch parliament.

That type of defeat is something I would never want you to experience. May this little early morning warning help you to be prepared, to remain progressive and to become winners.

Thank you.