PROGRESSIVE POLITICS IN FRAGMENTED TIMES

10 Core Guidelines

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This Policy Brief was drafted as a reflection after a seminar held by FEPS, Policy Network and Renner Institut in Oxford in July 2015. It is organized alongside 10 Core Guidelines, which were inspired by different points made respectively during the debate. Each of them is deliberated in details and closed with a reflection of what standpoints social democrats could consider consequently in order to ensure primacy of progressive politics in these fragmented times.

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Background

Since the first event held in Nuffield College in 2012, the so-called "Oxford seminar" has become an annual flagship activity organized by FEPS – Foundation for European Progressive Studies, Policy Network and Renner Institute.

The herewith-established "series" envisages high-level symposiums, which arranged in round-table format engage for a length of two days a group of 50 distinguished academics, think tank's spokespersons and politicians. The surroundings of Oxford University and in particular the hospitable premises of St. Catherine's College ensure a unique atmosphere. In this exceptional ambiance, there is an overwhelming sense of an obligation to place things in a broader context and consequently seize a further horizon, even if at the same time there is no doubt regarding the pressing political necessities.

The past two sessions (organized in 2012 and 2014) were focused respectively on the future of trans-Atlantic progressivism and on the social investment paradigm. The outcomes were incorporated in two published volumes – later of which is currently awaiting its launch. They created a fundament, on the bases of which this year's theme was partially identified. "Partially" comes from the fact that a couple of months ago there had been a hope that the seminar could serve as the reflection on what the Labour governance could look like in the new legislative period. But regrettably the general elections in May vanquished those expectations. Instead, the attention had to be re-focused on of state of social democracy. This involved completing an assessment of the position of social democratic family across the EU (also after the elections in Finland, Denmark, Poland etc.) and placing it in the perspective of the state in which both politics and democracy find themselves nowadays. Hence the objective changed and the goal of the seminar has become to find the way out of what, amongst the others, late Peter Mair labeled as 'the crisis of traditional parties'.

Initial reflection

The coordinates of the progressive debates regarding the future of the movement have changed profoundly since the first "Oxford event" 4 years ago. The discussions shifted from being focused on a renewal to being consumed by an anxiety on how to stop the decline of the movement. The appeals to be "more radical, bolder" are no longer that eminent, whilst also the characteristic of "radical" has become attached to competing, "challenger" parties growing to the left of social democracy. And finally, the ambition to propose an alternative and to win in order to transform has been replaced by a more disenchanted, exhaustingly pragmatic talk on how not to loose too much and survive on the side of the currently contested system.

These depressing observations should however by no means lead to a conclusion that one should submerge into the spirit of negativity. In fact, a reflection to make is that this time perhaps the movement would do better by not only talking yet again about a need for a profound renewal (and

simultaneously drowning in self-criticism and potentially in self-pity). The starting point for social democrats nowadays should be about having a different approach towards its renewal process(es).

It goes without saying that the concept as such is as old as social democracy itself. It has always served proving that the movement is adaptable and is remaining forever in the "avant-garde of modernity". But also it has grown to be a sort of a "business as usual" – with the same key sentences repeated after every electoral loss: criticizing the message, blaming communication, implying that the voters did not understand… Some quasi-obligatory statements follow them: that from now on things would be different and a new chapter in which the centre-left would be a true left would herewith be opened. Since they are conducted always in the same manner, they became a sort of a ritual. As such it no longer carries a powerful, credible hope for a change neither for members nor for potential voters.

That can be changed. Especially that those days the progressive family can count on perhaps the largest, and the most impressive network of thinkers ever. This is a great potential, greater than ever in the past. And it could become in fact a new power plant, bringing energy into the quite apathetic movement. The reason for optimism is therefore the fact that engagement and passion of great minds put together at least always result in an intellectual fermentation. Their criticism is not meant as a down-grader, but rather is an expression of a belief that in their assessment there is still a potential to do better. Their proposals, even if sometimes sounding as "impossible" at first – invite for a search beyond the limitations of the contemporary political set up. And the fact that there are so many of them available is a clear proof of what Gerassimos Moschonas words: the political crisis at hand in case of the centre left is definitely not a crisis of ideas.

If to accept this statement, one could wonder why that is that they do not get translated into an actual political agenda. Possible answer from the political operatives would be that the problem lies within their nature. The proposals encapsulated in research papers, books, articles etc. are often seen as "too long, too complex, too idealistic". This complaint may be even fair, however it would actually suggest that the issue at hand is of a quite different nature. It would indicate that the more academic debate is led rather on the fringes of the movement. And that it is not being translated into what is happening at the core. In that sense it may be a sort of a "make-ourselves-feel-good" exercise. Politicians may even refer it to with pride in terms of "assets" ("oh, we have a debate") – but, if to continue with this despicably financialised metaphor, they rather stand for passives and not for actives. The appeal that this provokes would therefore perhaps be that both sides would need to find a new connection. It would require from both academics and politicians to drop the veil of disempowering political correctness vis-à-vis one another, but instead challenge each others according the criteria of both creativity and pragmatism.

The conversations in Oxford have always been designed to enable precisely such an honest exchange. Their format ensures that everyone involved takes part in a transformative experience, to which all may arrive with different points of reference, but from which everyone departs with a handful of reflections. They may not all inspire, but at least they provoke and disturb. They oblige to be given a further thought and this is also what guides this particular essay. Its' aim is not to include all the points made – as also because of richness and intensity of the exchange that would hardly be feasible. It hopes to offer a teaser and here through an indication of what was discussed.

The paper is organized alongside 10 Core Guidelines that emerged in the debate. Each of them is deliberated in details and closed with a reflection of what standpoints social democrats could consider consequently. These later have also been extracted below:

Guideline 1: Consolidate in the era of contradictions

The progressive parties have to find a way to consolidate politically in order to consolidate further organizationally and electorally. They must ensure that it is possible for each and everyone, supporter or opponent, to be able to define in one comprehensive sentence what their prior mission is about. In order to achieve that, they must stop hiding behind the excuse that modernity is complex. Instead they must embrace it, acquiring real competence on the field they find determining and hence they want to lead on. (Page 7)

Guideline 2: Construct a sound, compelling argument

It is impossible to renew or revitalize social democracy, while upholding to the same understanding of politics and political scene. Not only the nature of politics changed, but also the rules of the game. They now seem to be defined rather by outside than of the inside of the "old" political system. In that sense social democracy must break out of defensive position. The society moved forward and there can be no return to old ways, categories or terms. Progressives have to be smart in embracing the fact that politics nowadays is the politics of identity and not of ideology. The key is to find out how to address the matters people hold relevant with and explain the proposal alongside ideological conviction. That is the way to make the core values yet again tangible, compellable and emotionally loaded. This is a path to bring back ethical dimension to politics. (Page 7)

Guideline 3: Embrace a new socio-economic paradigm

It is the age of complexity and contradictions, hence a simple, quick fix answers won't do. Consequently, the progressive must aim at a new socio-economic paradigm, which would embody a new model of production, consumption and (wealth) distribution. It must be a brand people can relate to – rationally and emotionally. It must check on the modernity criteria (connected with digitalization, environment etc.), while offering a vision of a fairer and more egalitarian society. Hence it must focus on social progress, quality jobs' creation and equality of both opportunities and outcomes. As such it must be proposal old-, new- and modern-risks proofed, dedicated to activation and empowerment. It must be crosscutting, simultaneously answering dilemma of youth impoverishment and social uncertainty of older generations. (Page 8)

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Guideline 4: Reestablishing as the main fighter against inequality

The question on how to battle inequality is a defining matter, which will set terms for the upcoming decades – if not for the entire century. The method chosen will pave the trajectory of social development, while settling who and how will benefit from all the civilizational achievements that modernity brings along. Social democracy will not be able to win this argument, if it continues to simply argue that inequality is destructive. There are others, who have taken over this narrative as well – financial sector included, for whom inequality start harming business. What it needs is to translate a pledge to fight against inequality into a proposal of a new socio-economic paradigm, which however will be presented as something that people can also culturally identify themselves with. It is a matter of overcoming divide between politics and economy, while making an argument that is sound in parallel in terms of calculations in both economic and societal (moral) terms. (Page 10)

Guideline 5: The progressive alternative as an agent of transformation

The progressive family has lost political battle in the midst of crisis on a number of levels. It will not be able to get a new opening in this debate if it is not settled about its own past and herewith renewal should not translate into a denial towards the legacy, which it actually should build upon. It will also not manage to acquire the competence of better managers – as this one seem already claimed by the centre right. It stands a chance only if it learns to see itself in a perspective different than the narrow path within the contemporary political world characterized by the limitations. For that perhaps it should deemphasize its role as "alternative" and rather explore its potential as an agent of profound transformation. (Page 11)

Guideline 6: New members and new memberships

Progressives have to change the focus from "how to attract new members" (which in that case would be a secondary query) towards "what role, hence rights and responsibilities members should have in a modern party". The new connecting points must be found in order to ensure that the partisan organization abides by the principles of participatory, representative democracy. In that sense there must be a new way to empower the members, as also the parties should make sure that the agenda that they put forward derive precisely from what these members value, are passionate about and ready to mobilize for. Social democracy must be the party that speaks for, on behalf and through its

members. It has to stop pursuing sentimentally driven idea of what they think the others would like them to be instead of letting itself be what it actually is and could aspire to become. (Page 12)

Guideline 7: Reclaiming leadership

The progressive family has to approach the question of its leadership. First of all, in itself it has to realize what sort of leaders it needs nowadays to really make a difference. Is that transitional leadership which has advantages in terms of not alienating majority, not pursuing any radical lines and being capable of forming coalitions on issues with others) or transformative leadership that it finds appropriate? Secondly, it needs to look at the inner process and the dynamic of the partisan life. The emergence of the leader(ship) group should be seen as part of continuous development on the bases of which new generational agenda can be proposed. And thirdly, there comes the issue of mandate, representation criteria and empowerment of the party members in making the selection – which issue has already been touched upon before. (Page 13)

Guideline 8: Facing challengers head on

The progressive parties must understand that the protest, populist and radical parties present itself as a diverse group of "challenger parties". The main defy is not their communication, but the fact that they pursue a different understanding of "doing politics", based on aiming to gain "influence" rather than to "acquire the office". Furthermore, a prejudice-free effort needs to be made to understand the electorate that they attract. Helpful to that would be serious consideration of how to reclaim the issues that these challenge parties grasped. The motivation to change may however not derive from seeing the "challenger parties" as the main enemy, but from acknowledging that without convincing answers on the key issues (Europe, inner-migration etc.), progressives will not obtain the strong mandate needed to be a political force in charge of shaping the next decades. (Page 15)

Guideline 9: Reinterpreting the meaning of representative democracy

The progressives have to embrace the understanding that the voters decide following the conviction who is going to raise their issues rather than who is going to represent them in broad terms. Hence the key to win back votes lies predominantly in identifying the core issues and proposing sound solutions. In that they have to become bolder, sorting internally of what they consider radical (which they now hold in contempt in reference to the radical parties) and what for them is radical enough (in reference to themselves). (Page 16)

Guideline 10: Define a "fairer deal" for Europe

Therefore the tenth and final reflection is a following one. The progressive family has to stand firmly on a principle that "fairer" deal for any Member State is only possible, should European Union find its way out of the crisis and with joint efforts would start to prosper again for the benefit of all. Therefore a new concept is needed, which would re-vitalize the value-based ambitions of Social Europe and operationalize them within an agenda that would replace the reminiscences of the

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Lisbon Strategy and the EU2020. The difficult topics must be dealt in honesty. Progressives must use their European cooperation mechanisms to jointly develop sound, convincing and European answers to the conflicts arising between Western and the incoming Eastern workers, between the societies of the net-payers and loan-takers. And to that end they should fight Grexit, Brexit or any other exit to gain grounds both as realistic choice or as an idea defining the perception of the European electorate. (Page 17)

Guideline 1: Consolidate in the era of contradictions

Transformation of politics has led to an understanding that in order to "catch" diverse groups of the electorate, parties have to compete to become agents of a broad spectrum of different issues. It resulted on one hand in blurring of clear distinctions between what used to be considered as 'left' or 'right' on one hand, and on the other it overshadowed a commitment to acquire political competence on a specific field.

Additionally, the interest of political actors to create a holistic, politically distinctive vision is weakened by the conviction that politics itself has become relatively powerless. Politicians themselves have been arguing at least twice in a row that "not much can be done" to alter the course of affairs. The first time was in the 1990s vis-à-vis emerging globalization. And the second time was after 2008 and was caused by the overwhelming blast that crisis had. Therefore the ambition expressed through the respective electoral offers of traditional parties varies in between maintain and mitigate, being distance from a pledge of ensuring a profound transformation.

To that end, running after issues and being subjected to self-assumed limitations meant that the traditional parties became entrapped in a very narrow operational space. Politicians (and parties) find it hard, if not impossible, to firmly claim an issue and win an argument, ensuring that it is their (and not others') proposal that paves the way forward. Example of that is the question how to go out of the crisis – where austerity versus alternative model of growth could have been the sole divergent point. Instead, after the initial disagreement – all the traditional parties resigned, to a certain extent, becoming either hard or light austerity parties. That brings especially progressives into a contradiction – in the context of their tradition, the values they claim to uphold and the electorate they predominantly would like to aspire to represent.

Therefore the first reflection is that the progressive parties have to find a way to consolidate politically in order to consolidate further organizationally and electorally. They must ensure that it is possible for each and everyone, supporter or opponent, to be able to define in one comprehensive sentence what their prior mission is about. In order to achieve that, they must stop hiding behind the excuse that modernity is complex. Instead they must embrace it, acquiring real competence on the field they find determining and hence they want to lead on.

Guideline 2: Construct a sound, compelling argument

Though the results of the recent elections across the European Union may vary in specifics, they share certain common features. The first of them is that in the majority of cases they seem to indicate the weakening of the "established" partisan system. The traditional, or if one wishes to say

otherwise: "historical" parties seem to generally fade. In that sense, the line alongside the groups of voters split lies not in between what is right or left, but alongside what is constant and what is new.

The second commonality is that the results often seem inconclusive. That term entails a number of phenomena. It is not unusual for the parties to win in terms of obtaining the largest amount of votes, while not being able to benefit from that gain by acquiring a prerogative of forming a government (see: Czech Republic, Belgium, Denmark). It is not infrequent that even if the voters wish to "punish" the government – one (or more) of the currently governing party will reoccur in the next executive anyway, as otherwise it would be impossible to form a cabinet (see: consecutive elections in Poland). And finally, it is also more common for the victorious party to "win" upon the promise to offer further consultation – such as referendum – rather than upon a decisive standpoint regarding specific controversial idea (see: the recent elections in the UK, or in Poland).

The third common feature is that the recent votes resulted in the emergence of different political movements. Some of them are brand new indeed, fostering the voices of protest against the current establishment and ongoing developments. Some of them are however already well established, growing in strength by claiming certain controversial issues. They are on the raise and hence have "all to win and not much to lose". That makes them free from any elaborated pre-occupations "how many votes out of those still left this is to cost us". That fear paralyses on the other hand the traditional parties. These developments enhance the above-mentioned divide between "old and new" by adding to that the quality "outside, independent versus established and limited".

Therefore the second reflection is a following one. It is impossible to renew or revitalize social democracy, while upholding to the same understanding of politics and political scene. Not only the nature of politics changed, but also the rules of the game. They now seem to be defined rather by outside than of the inside of the "old" political system. In that sense social democracy must break out of defensive position. The society moved forward and there can be no return to old ways, categories or terms. Progressive have to be smart in embracing the fact that politics nowadays is the politics of identity and not of ideology. This is of course not only hard to admit, but also resentful conclusion for the progressives. The key is to find out how to address the matters people hold relevant with and explain the proposal alongside ideological conviction. That is the way to make the core values yet again tangible, compellable and emotionally loaded. This is a path to bring back ethical dimension to politics.

Guideline 3: Embracing a new socio-economic paradigm

Majority of the debates regarding a need for a renewal of social democracy in Europe seem to transcend a matrix of key words, which are repeated in different configurations. On one hand, there is a concern regarding three core challenges: (fight against) inequality, complexity (of issues) and (facing) modernity. On the other, there is an issue of how to shape the direction of the three phenomena: civilizational revolution (as emergence of the digital era is referred to), societal evolution (connected with growing inequalities, fragmentation and alienation), and finally transformation (of ways and means of making things happen, which particularly speeded up after the crisis of 2008).

For the traditional parties this matrix resembles slightly a struggle with a Rubik Cube, where it is hard to get all the sides and elements right at the same time. Especially that, as it was already pointed out before, they all share an anxiety that while the reality remains complex, a complex answer may appear too complicated to be effectively sold as a political argument. Herewith they themselves give in to the impression that these are "hard times" within which modernity is seen as a curse rather than a reason for hope or excitement. This all falls short in showing a capacity to shape the course of events in the age, which as Andrew Gamble named it, is an age of contradictions. That means that partial proposals won't do anymore. In order to get hands on the development instead of being carried by them a change of paradigm is desperately needed.

For social democracy it presents itself as an extraordinary challenge. The European model based on ensuring sustainable economic growth that would go hand in hand with the development of welfare provisions has been dramatically undermined. While the post-2008 recovery seems slow and hasn't yet offered any grounds for truly optimistic forecasts, the other world economies seem to by-pass the EU one – and strikingly so, not only quantitatively, but also qualitatively. A more concrete example of that is China, which has been so frequently denounced by the European progressives for its' lack of respect of human, labour and social rights. At this point it is a country that is about to spend more on science and research than the EU member states altogether, investing, among others, in development of new technologies and in "green" policies. The jobs that are currently created there are the high skilled one, which remains in a contradiction to the ones that Europe is currently offering to its citizens. Even though China has not altered its essential approach to the matters connected with social insurance or with the labour law, nevertheless its overall growing prosperity carries a chance that reforms will be made. The clear sign of it is the recent withdrawing from the "one-child" limitation.

This observation should not be misinterpreted as an indication to follow, but rather should be seen as a warning that the conception of the European model (and its' assumed superiority over others) is no longer defendable in the same manner as it used to be a couple years ago. A profound change of thinking and subsequently a new, modern socio-economic paradigm is a key ingredient in the change of the approach. It must take into account both external developments, as also the internal ones. In that sense a critical assessment of the "re-industrialization" project must be made, especially that in the light of the current proposals it remains quite unclear what model of production-consumption it would encapsulate. Alongside of it, the complex and coherent agenda must be developed to deal with the three core challenges and the three phenomena simultaneously. An example of it is that it is not really possible to speak about digitalization and IT-Europe on its own, without placing it in reality of ageing society and its needs. That is especially that should that be one of the core drives of the new strategy, it must indeed address this growing in numbers group – which constitutes, importantly for the political parties, what Liam Byrne called "silver electorate".

Therefore the third reflection is a following one. Historically speaking, social democracy emerged as an avant-garde because it offered a vision on how to shape the course of industrial revolution so that its' benefits could serve creating a fairer society with improved living and working conditions for all. In the end of the 1990s it tried to develop a new model under the motto of "the most competitive world knowledge based economy", which with the promise of equality of opportunities and full quality employment for all attracted majority of electorate. Consequently, what the progressive must aim at nowadays is a new socio-economic paradigm, which would embody a new model of

production and consumption. It must be a brand people can relate to – rationally and emotionally. It must check on the modernity criteria (connected with digitalization, environment etc.), while offering a vision of a fairer and more egalitarian society. Hence it must focus on social progress, quality jobs' creation and equality of both opportunities and outcomes. As such it must be proposal old-, new- and modern-risks proofed, dedicated to activation and empowerment. It must be cross-cutting, simultaneously answering dilemma of youth impoverishment and social uncertainty of older generations.

Guideline 4: Reestablishing as the main fighter against inequality

It would seem that no other subject has gained as much attention in the recent years as the growing inequality. It has been dividing societies and regions, alongside with causing disequilibrium within the European Union and torpedoing the ambitious agendas of sustainable development on the global level. There are numerous diagnoses regarding the causes and the speed within which the situation worsens, among which there are volumes by Josephn Stiglitz, Thomas Piketty and Antony Atkinson. They are named here as even if they disagree on certain aspects among one another, their work belong to the sort of a must-read, which is being called upon at any debate held by both progressive intellectuals and politicians nowadays.

The awareness that inequality is not only one of the most important challenges, but in fact the core issue to tackle while trying to shape modern times in alternative manner, is undoubtedly there. The evidence that it derives from the damaging rule of unregulated global financial capitalism alongside has been provided. The arguments why breaking out of the neoliberal pax would benefit all has been delivered and academically proven – for example within the work of Amartya Sen or Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett. Why then, social democracy, which has been the movement rising historically in the name of equality and empowerment isn't seen this days as the main fighter against inequality? That is even, when as in the case of the UK, they place "equality" at the heart of their struggle?

There are a couple of instinctive answers here. First of all, the contemporary times are the ones of very slow (if any) growth – should growth be still understood in the classical economic terms. There is therefore not much to anchor in, should one wish to defend the traditional redistributive version of the welfare state. To that end, following what late Tony Judt wrote over a decade ago, progressives lost their credibility torn in between unconvincingly defending old ways and conflicting with one another around the modernization agenda of the Third Way. Secondly, they failed to link the question of equality with principle matters (such as social justice) and pragmatic political proposals (such as increasing efficiency, while improving opportunities alongside with living and working conditions).

Therefore the third reflection is a following one. The question on how to battle inequality is a defining matter, which will set terms for the upcoming decades – if not for the entire century. The method chosen will pave the trajectory of social development, while settling who and how will benefit from all the civilizational achievements that modernity brings along. Social democracy will not be able to win this argument, if it continues to simply argue that inequality is destructive. There are others, who have taken over this narrative as well – financial sector included, for whom inequality start harming business. What it needs is to translate a pledge to fight against inequality

into a proposal of a new socio-economic model, which however will be presented as something that people can also culturally identify themselves with. It is a matter of overcoming divide between politics and economy, while making an argument that is sound in parallel in terms of calculations in both economic and societal (moral) terms.

Guideline 5: The progressive alternative as an agent of transformation

When the crisis hit in 2008, the social democrats cherished an elusive thought that it would discredit the existing order and that it would make the electoral pendulum automatically swing in favor of them. The logic of that diagnosis is at best questionable, as it does not find any supportive evidence that it would have ever been the case in the past. It would also presume a dubious and repulsive argument that when the situation worsens for people overall, it improves for social democracy. That is of course neither true nor kind to consider. But, in order to explain and excuse social democratic approach of those days, it was in a search for hope for itself after so many electoral losses. Additionally, at this point nobody knew what scope the events would take, what scale of transformation would follow and what options there would be left in the aftermath of the crash.

Contradictorily to these above quoted hopes, the prevailing, mainstreaming neoliberal order not only did not collapse, but also actually strengthened. The assessment of that is made by a number of academics, including Colin Crouch – who labeled the phenomena as a "Strange Non-Death of Neoliberalism". Within the same process, social democrats effectively lost the battle in terms of busting those, whose doings caused the crash. Hence the opportunity to "name the enemy", pursue a political charge and win the battle passed by, leaving them with more of a managerial debate on the ways out. To make things worse, the rights seem to have been faster to claim those grounds and portray themselves as the ones, who "led through the crisis". They admitted that the measures taken after were tough, but they hid behind overall necessity. Herewith the centre right succeeded in convincing moderate voters that it is the truth and the only truth that "things will get worse, before they get better".

The centre left found it difficult to contradict. First of all, they were unsure how to counterbalance the argument that "their welfare state and public spending" was the cause for the budgetary problems. Denying that would place them in a defense of their preceding governments, which they considered as having been dismissed in the course of the previous elections. Hence the progressives saw it rather as a burdening legacy than a reason to be proud of. Even if the previous progressive governments put in place mechanisms that cushioned some aspects of the crisis, still the current leadership felt most uncomfortable about the earlier reforms. An example was the last Labour Campaign in which the achievements of Gordon Brown or Tony Blair were defended only once. The mistake here was to assume that what the opponents were saying was what people felt – which was not the case, as many would have connected with the previous Labour times under which their lives were more prosperous as such.

Secondly, the subsequent matter was how to claim competence. They were attacked as a "party of spending" and they never managed to turn it around to become "the party of investment". Hence they would be very careful, too careful perhaps, in terms of proposing bold alternatives. To that end

also, the electoral systems would place them post-2008 at the level of 25 – 30% of support, which meant that they would need to enter coalition governments. And there they would find it impossible to break out from the path of austerity (in light or hard version). Herewith they would become a party of system – fostering together with the other traditional parties the situation in which electorate would no longer see the difference between "left and right" but rather between "right and wrong". To that end, the demand towards the society to agree on decline of the standards and hopes was of course seen as wrong.

Therefore the fifth reflection is a following one. The progressive family has lost political battle in the midst of crisis on a number of levels. It will not be able to get a new opening in this debate if it is not settled about its own past and herewith renewal should not translate into a denial towards the legacy, which it actually should build upon. It will also not manage to acquire the competence of better managers – as this one seem already claimed by the centre right. It stands a chance only if it learns to see itself in a perspective different than the narrow path within the contemporary political world characterized by the limitations. For that perhaps it should deemphasize its role as "alternative" and rather explore its potential as an agent of profound transformation.

Guideline 6: New members and new memberships

Different analyses are pointing out that social democracy is both shrinking and declining in terms of membership. The explanations of this trend vary and can be generally classified into three categories. The first focuses on general questions and suggest that it is a result of citizens' disappointment in contemporary politics and hence their unwillingness to engage directly. Complimentary to that are the studies regarding electoral abstention. The second group emphasizes the declining trust in the political institutions and is seconded by the debate on why there is a rise in power of the groups that present themselves in opposition to it (radical, populist etc.) Finally the attention is also given to the question of parties as organisations, where there is a suggestion that the way the traditional formations operate is quite archaic. Following that, they fail to find ways to attract members – who live in a different social reality than their predecessors, who used to be members in the past.

It would seem that these three categories are complementary towards one another and jointly offer at least a partial explanation of why the (traditional) parties shrink in terms of members. What in that sense appears perhaps slightly astonishing is that most of these organisations have spent much of resources trying to think how to change the trend, how to improve in terms of reaching out (especially here benefiting from the digital era overall, and from the social media in particular) – but have not asked themselves the key question: what is the role that the members should play nowadays?

The argument here would be that the traditional parties, social democracy included, grow from an institutionalized framework within which they are members-based organisations. These activists would join to participate in partisan life, influence the decisions and in exchange for voluntary work would have a guarantee that their core issues would be raised and defended. Party was a place to socialize, to acquire better understanding of the world's development and to jointly mobilize in the name of a cause.

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Nowadays the character of partisan life changed. The logic of these organisations reminds the one of a professional enterprise, which takes liberty to outsource much of its former duties. The content work is transferred to different selective committees and not infrequently also to the satellite think tanks. The communication is in hands of PR agencies, while the final decision of what package to choose for the campaign (message, image, communication channels) is strongly influenced by the polling's that parties can afford to order. The finances rather than from membership fees come from the state funding. These are the points that appear harder to admit than formulating the general statements that the society has changed, people are individualistic etc.

Therefore the sixth reflection is a following one. Progressives have to change the focus from "how to attract new members" (which in that case would be a secondary query) towards "what role, hence rights and responsibilities members should have in a modern party". This new approach should take into account that the societal transformation translates into different approaches of individuals towards relationships overall and memberships in particular. The new connecting points must be found in order to ensure that the partisan organization abides by the principles of participatory, representative democracy. In that sense there must be a new way to empower the members, as also the parties should make sure that the agenda that they put forward derive precisely from what these members value, are passionate about and ready to mobilize for. Social democracy must be the party that speaks for, on behalf and through its members. It has to stop pursuing sentimentally driven idea of what they think the others would like them to be instead of letting itself be what it actually is and could aspire to become.

Guideline 7: Reclaiming leadership

Since the beginnings of days, certain époques are named after the people, who then shaped the major developments. With the course of the history, the amount of names that would be assigned to the certain times would grow – indicating on the one hand a greater political pluralism, on the other also (at least in the international context) more of a tendency for groups to claim leadership. It symbolized also a shift between different generations – with the new ones coming with modern, revised agendas. Either ways, it has been possible to name a few of those in charge. For social democracy the last time that this was the case would perhaps be the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the century. Interestingly so, thinking in the categories of "leaders" would then promptly provoke associations with the last grand modernization attempt (Third Way/Neue Mitte) and the inner-movement conflict around it.

While there are countless studies, which point at personalization of politics, this trend is at this point used to the full extent predominantly by the populist and radical movements. Of course, for them it derives from the specific operational modus, which concentrates major activities within the epicenter constituted by a strong, outspoken leader. Even more than within the national context, it has been visible in relation to the developments on the EU level. While the news would report on the traditional parties holding their "summitries of leaders" in Brussels, the debates among the populists or radical groupings would always be called upon with mentioning of the present leaders' names: Le Pen, Wilders etc.

One could ask the question why that is the case that when it comes to the traditional parties (both in government and in opposition), the leaders do not seem to appear as embodiments of good old

charisma. There are certain exceptions – such as Matteo Renzi – but they are rather exemptions from the rule. That seems even paradoxical, if to put it in a broader context of contemporary politics within which the parties are so frequently scored along the lines of their leaders' performance. That is to say that these days polling often focuses on specific features of the leader (is s/he trustworthy, strong, potential presidential/prime ministerial candidate etc.).

The academic discussions on the matter offer a number of explanations. The first one is connected with the transformation of politics. The personalization came along with professionalization of politics. The later one has been especially intense in the last two decades resulting in a fact that the contemporary leaders are to large extent recruited from a new generation of apparatchiks. The word in itself may be considered most pejorative, but in fact objectively it refers to a specific career paths that those people have followed. It has involved a very little (if any) extra-party activities. More typically, it rather led from participation in students' club/youth organization, through political assistant's and adviser's positions, up to the leadership. This makes it all appear as an individual exercise of persons, aspiring to get promoted rather than the battle among candidates to obtain a mandate to execute a real change. They themselves do not "create a momentum" to grab power, but rather "are there" when the position is available after a lost election.

The second is the question of an ambition of the political class and the traditional parties at the moment. Again with some relevant exceptions, it would seem that already mentioned assumed limitations make them aim mostly at perseverance. Their motivation appears often not to be about winning, but actually about "not loosing" the next elections. To that end, taking into account that pool of voters for traditional parties is shrinking and that after the vote they will need to potentially enter a coalition with other actors, they instinctively try to avoid appointing controversial or by any way unaccommodating leaders. As André Krouwel put it "Within the party cartel (…) there is more need for capable, rather invisible technocrats than for overly popular leaders who may shift too many votes and upset the cartel agreement".

Therefore the seventh reflection is a following one. The progressive family has to approach the question of its leadership. It requires a number of answers, which have to be offered on diverse levels. First of all, in itself it has to realize what sort of leaders it needs nowadays to really make a difference. Is that transitional leadership which has advantages in terms of not alienating majority, not pursuing any radical lines and being capable of forming coalitions on issues with others) or transformative leadership that it finds appropriate? This refers to already mentioned question: is the ambition to sustain and reform the movement slowly or to bring about profound changes? Secondly, it needs to look at the inner process and the dynamic of the partisan life. The emergence of the leader(ship) group should be seen as part of continuous development on the bases of which new generational agenda can be proposed. It should enable entry of people with diverse backgrounds and experiences. And hence it should not be limited only to procedures leading to a quick replacement after unsuccessful election, based on finding out from "who is available to cover". And thirdly, there comes the issue of mandate, representation criteria and empowerment of the party members in making the selection – which issue has already been touched upon before.

The term "challenger parties" as proposed by Sara Hobolt refers to the organisations, movements and groupings that rose in force in recent decade, following their outspoken opposition to both the established political/partisan system and the developments within it. As such they present a political and an electoral challenge to the traditional parties, their agendas (frequently framed by assumed limitations) and their behavioral patterns.

There is an awareness that the gains of those movements are in fact more significant than ever before in the post-war period. But until quite recently the debate would predominantly focus on the fragment of the challenge, namely on "populist" parties. The definition would be relatively broad, accommodating quite different groupings. Usual assessment would refer to their socially alluring statements, which in the analyses would be consider 'unrealistic and irresponsible' at best. Hence the attention was consumed by the question of "appeal" – making that mostly the matter of communication. That led for example progressives to look at "how to communicate better".

This is of course only a small fragment of an eventual strategy that should be adopted. The question is not as much how to communicate more convincingly, hence in another word how to be more appealing – but rather how to approach the real battleground connected with the facts that these parties have a different approach to politics in general.

First of all, this means that there needs to be a distinction made in between left and right radicals, in between populists, nationalists etc. Though there are certain common features of those organisations (such as earlier mentioned overwhelming dominance of a leader), their agendas and methods differ. This is also one of the explanations why it was so hard for those of them on the right to set one common group in the European Parliament – even if strategically benefits of having a group versus not having a group are quite obvious.

Secondly, what relates to that is the fact that these organizations enter the political stage frequently on the wave of protests. The rejectionist agenda that they advocate for makes them clearly distinguish in between "running for an office" and "running for an influence in politics". Of course, the distinction may appear purely academic – looking at the fact that some of them decided to break the trend and enter into the government (such as PVV in the Netherlands or Syriza in Greece). But it is also clear that when they do, almost immediately they find themselves in trouble and weakened considerably.

Thirdly, it is by far too easy to look at the success that these parties have with an attitude of a shock, disgust or dismiss. This requires honest analyses of the electorate that these parties attracted versus the policies that put those voters in the socio-economic reality that they find themselves in. The traditional parties, and here especially social democracy, cannot afford to project an image that those supporting "protest" or "populist" parties are simply disenchanted or even worse "simply crazy". Such an approach anyhow would be a show of lack of respect for respective individuals' electoral choices. Instead, it is better to review the impact of earlier governance (including the pan-European strategies such as the Lisbon Agenda) vis-à-vis what can be done in the future instead to create enough of safety net and avoid, for example, the massive youth unemployment to repeat itself as an phenomenon ever again. That lesson should be vital – especially that the dominant electorate in favor of the protest parties is young and less educated, hence the one that missed out on the promise of social progress for all within a knowledge based society. To that end, frequently

also the reason for which they opt for the protest movement is these parties' argument in favor of keeping the welfare state safeguarded. That is, honestly speaking, something that the progressives would sign in – especially prior to the austerity era.

Therefore the eight reflection is a following one. The progressive parties must understand that the protest, populist and radical parties present itself as a diverse group of "challenger parties". The main defy is not their communication, but the fact that they pursue a different understanding of "doing politics", based on aiming to gain "influence" rather than to "acquire the office". Furthermore, a prejudice-free effort needs to be made to understand the electorate that they attract. Helpful to that would be serious consideration of how to reclaim the issues that these challenge parties grasped. Perhaps it is indeed an era of identity politics and not ideology politics, but the topics that they claim are the ones on which traditional parties in fact are not having the strongest programmatic strategy. Examples of that are: Europe (where progressives are trapped between defending idea and criticizing its' current shape) or inner-movement migration (where progressives are torn between the principle of freedom of movement and responding to fears of indigenous citizens). The motivation to change may however not derive from seeing the "challenger parties" as the main enemy, but from acknowledging that without convincing answers on those, progressives will not obtain the strong mandate needed to be a political force in charge of shaping the next decades.

Guideline 9: Reinterpreting the meaning of representative democracy

The belief in the principle of representative democracy underpinned the establishment and subsequent emergence of socialist (social democratic, labour) parties in Europe. Back then they were the ones to claim a right to speak on behalf of the workers. Consequently they advocated for a specific transformation that would increase the power of labour versus the one of capital, while imposing laws guaranteeing equal opportunities, social justice and resulting in improvement of living and working conditions for all. There was a clear causal relation between the party and the societal group, which depending on the degree of identification and involvement would engage either through membership or through incessant voting.

The studies show that this sort of a bold link between social democracy and "workers" cease to exist in the way described above. There are a number of reasons. On the political level it is connected with the change of way the traditional parties conceptualize their respective agendas. On one hand they have an aspiration to reach out to new groups of electorate and acquire as much as possible the centre ground (the famous claim "you win elections in the middle"). So issues that used to be traditional for one of them easily become "claimed" (one way or another) by their traditional opponents. On the other, the already mentioned "challenger parties" push the limits on what is politically acceptable (to say, to claim, to do). With that, while the centre is being targeted by the "traditional" parties – effectively it gets to "shrink" with the stretch of the political limits on what used to be just fringes.

Secondly, there is a mismatch in between the ways the traditional parties continue to be organized and the societal developments. The societies became more polarized, fragmented and divided – while people have turned to become more individualistic. But there a note has to be taken. As Mark Elhardus and Monika Sie once put it: there is a difference between individualism and individualization. And once the first one would refer to an empowerment, the second would

effectively point out towards disintegration. On the wave of it, people tend to get convinced that they are "left to themselves, alone". This distinction is important, as there is a tendency to assume they are the same and hence complain that they lead to dismantling of community feeling. While differentiating them, the progressives could perhaps strike a better balance in their agenda – which should celebrate emancipation of individuals without seeing that as contradictory to solidarity.

Thirdly, because of both – the blurring of the distinction among the parties on one hand, and deepening societal divides on the other – the once-upon-a-time existing clear classification of the electoral groups seems to fade. The disappearance of so called "core electorates" is a result of it. It is enhanced by the fact that to a large extent voters tend to feel discharged from "a duty" towards one or another party, identifying themselves rather with one or another issue (and supporting the party raising it) rather than seeking to find the most adequate overall representation among the candidates. Herewith the previous link between identity and representation in political terms has been undermined.

Therefore the ninth reflection is a following one. The progressives have to embrace the understanding that the voters decide following the conviction who is going to raise their issues rather than who is going to represent them in broad terms. Hence the key to win back votes lies predominantly in identifying the core issues and proposing sound solutions. In that they have to become bolder, which will require from them, as Patrick Diamond proposed, sorting internally of what they consider radical (which they now hold in contempt in reference to the radical parties) and what for them is radical enough (in reference to themselves).

Guideline 10: Define a "fairer deal" for Europe

The European project has been enormously troubled in the last two decades. Reaching an agreement on its' future has proven to be an excruciating exercise. Even if each subsequent treaty presented itself as a reform, most of them turned out to be provisional – of which the fact that there have been 5 draft treaties within the course of only 15 years is a proof. What is more, the European voters have not validated all these accords. The prime, and somewhat symbolic, rejection was expressed by the French and Dutch citizens who said 'no' to the draft of the Constitutional Treaty in 2004. Even though the consequent disarray and division within the EU was subsequently "fixed" with the Lisbon Treaty, the sense of horror it prompted is still well recalled by all the EU political actors.

What is no longer remembered however are two aspects of the Constitutional Treaty. The first of them is that it was developed by the largest "drafting committee" ever – namely by a Convention set especially for that purpose. Secondly that it was designed to be a fix for the institutional problems mainly, as at this point of time it was considered that with the expected Eastern Enlargement the contemporary structure would not be able to offer ways to reach and execute decisions from the EU level. These concerns, though echoed by the discussions around the Lisbon Treaty later on, were soon overshadowed by the preoccupations connected with the global crisis and the recession that Europe fall into. With that the questions on "how to rescue the economic model than underpinned the integration to begin with" appeared more profound.

The point is however that these two debates – on institutions and on socio-economic set-up are of course interrelated. The fact that it has been allowed for them to be separated led to the situation in

which it was possible for decisions to be taken in another, than treaty-foreseen matters. The emergence of Troika is the best example of it. Furthermore, since the crisis caused so many divisions among the member states (euro-zone and not-euro-zone, richer north and poorer south etc.), it also had an impact on the procedures of policy making on the top level. The infamous "fragmentation in complex times" had its impact on the EU institutions, where the firstly the Council and then certain states within the Council (Germany and France) assumed dominant positions.

Within this context, the progressive family found itself in a difficulty. One on hand they have been outspoken protagonists of the European integration, on the other naturally they could not be in favor of the way the things were (and were developing). Simplifying here, with the crash and the subsequent austerity policies that appeared as imposed from the EU onto the countries meant that their distinctive vision of Social Europe was heavily undermined. Their idea on the institutional architecture was diluted by the practice, in which communitarian method seems no longer really applied – of which subsequent rounds of dealing with the Greek bailout is the proof of. The parallel raise of nationalism within the Member States pushed them further into an uneasy position. In this context a prospect of getting out to campaign ahead of any EU referendum remains obviously puzzling.

The upcoming "EU referendum" in the United Kingdom appears therefore as a major challenge not only for the Labour Party, but also for the entire progressive family in Europe. It is being called following the electoral promise of the competitors and is by now framed alongside the question spelled out by the Conservative Party, which claims it would vote in favor of remaining in the EU should there be a "fairer deal for the UK". Following Roger Liddle's words, the fact that it remains unclear what this "fairer deal" would entail makes it absolutely open for the Tories to spin either on any (even illusionary) gains that can be negotiated by the Prime Minister or/end to play on the anxieties of the British electorate, troubled both with the general, above described developments and also with the particular aspects of the EU integration, such as inner-EU movement of workers.

Therefore the tenth and final reflection is a following one. The progressive family has to stand firmly on a principle that "fairer" deal for any Member State is only possible, should European Union find its way out of the crisis and with joint efforts would start to prosper again for the benefit of all. Hence partial Union is not only not an answer, but a real threat to any further integration. Therefore a new concept is needed, which would re-vitalize the value-based ambitions of Social Europe and operationalize them within an agenda that would replace the reminiscences of the Lisbon Strategy and the EU2020. It is not enough (and taking into account the social democrats evolving approach to austerity also not true) to claim that the Conservatives "ruined our Europe". To the contrary, it is essential to prove that there is a way to set the course differently. To that end, difficult topics must be dealt in honesty. Progressives must use their European cooperation mechanisms to jointly develop sound, convincing and European answers to the conflicts arising between Western and the incoming Eastern workers, between the societies of the net-payers and loan-takers. And to that end they should fight Grexit, Brexit or any other exit to gain grounds both as realistic choice or as a idea defining the perception of the European electorate.