The Mobilisation of the European Left in the Early Twenty-First Century

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Europe's political landscape has undergone spectacular changes at the turn of the new century. The June 2004 elections for the European Parliament confirmed changes in political dynamics that emerged at the 1999 European elections and persisted through subsequent elections in EU member-states. Beyond national idiosyncrasies, four trends have shaped the current political environment on the continent: the rise of support for far-right formations, electoral victories of centre-right parties, the ideological shift of some traditional centre-left parties to the right, and a relative decrease of electoral support to radical and orthodox left-wing formations.[1] The last European elections seem to have consolidated these trends into shared, trans-European phenomena: The centre-Right has become a dominant political force, far-right populism has established its lasting presence, electoral support to the radical-Left is steadily diminishing, while support for the centre-Left is faltering.

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Collectively, these occurrences have produced a profound crisis in the Left's political perspective. This has placed the European Left, in its broad spectrum of political formations, at a point of reflection on its current predicament and its future: Is the perceived crisis of the Left caused by a temporary concurrence of events, or does it have its roots in lasting socio-economic shifts to which the Left is extraneous?

On the basis of the latest rounds of elections held in the fifteen 'old' member-states of the European Union (before its enlargement in May 2004), the present study attempts to discern significant peculiarities in the electoral mobilisation of the Left and offer an insight into the way recent social changes throughout Europe are affecting political discourse and voting behaviour. In exploring the causes of the Left's decline we will consider the combination of longer-term (structural) factors and short term ones (electoral mobilisation), which have influenced societal support to the Left in recent years. This will lead us to the contention that, rather than a stable re-alignment in favour of the Right, the latest sequences of elections in Europe gave expression to protest against the system of governance (the state) and of policy-making (the parties) that had become the norm in European Welfare States after the Second World War. Further, the analysis will advance the hypothesis that this critical vote is part of a larger and more stable transformation in which the *left-right* alignment along economic policies is being challenged by the emergence of a new fault-line shaped by the *security-risk* dilemma of the neo-liberal knowledge economy. We will argue that the Left's incapacity for coherent ideological and organisational mobilisation is rooted in its failure to adjust to this emerging

alignment. Eventually, we will seek to identify a new conceptual core for the Left's vision in the new century.

1. Electoral dynamics in Europe at the beginning of the century: a right-wing re-alignment?

Despite the initial blow which the collapse of state socialism in Eastern and Central Europe inflicted on left-wing ideologies and on the status of left-wing political formations[2], the last decade of the twentieth century saw the triumph of centre-left parties throughout the European Union. Thirteen of the fifteen EU member-states had socialist governments by the late nineties. The exceptions were Spain, Belgium, Luxembourg and Ireland.[3] In contrast, the recent political dynamics in Europe seem to be marked by the Left's decline: By mid-2004, the four left-wing governments – those of Britain, Germany, Sweden, and Spain - present an exception, rather than a rule.

The 1999 elections for the European Parliament already signalled a general tendency of decline in voter support for the Left and a parallel increase of support for the Right. This made the Socialists lose their dominant position in the European Parliament to the Christian Democrats and Conservatives of the European People's Party at a time when left-wing parties dominated national politics in most EU member-states. As national politics usually are the main considerations for voters in European elections (Guyomarch, 2000:161), the 1999 elections for the European Parliament were indicative of the onset of a right-wing shift in electoral preferences throughout Europe.

Indeed, the last rounds of general elections in EU members brought a series of shifts to the right (as featured in the table in Annex 1). Seven of the fifteen EU governments (Denmark, France, Portugal, Italy, Netherlands, Austria, Greece) shifted in composition from centre-left to centre-right. Internal shifts to the right within the ruling rainbow coalitions occurred in four of them (Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Finland). By early 2004, only three EU member-states had preserved the dominance of centre-left parties in government: Britain, Germany, and Sweden. No shift took place from right to left in the formation of national governments before March 2004, when the Spanish Socialists won a surprise victory over the incumbent centre-right Popular Party.

With the Spanish (relative) exception[4], the shift to the right deepened in three out of the four countries that did not have left-wing governments in the late nineties – Belgium, Ireland, and Luxembourg. Where the ascendancy of left-wing parties was preserved - Britain, Germany, Sweden and, until March 2004, Greece – it was largely due to an internal shift to the right in the parties' policy orientation, embracing a formula of social liberalism in the style of British New Labour's 'Third Way'.[5] Most recent scores at local elections in Britain and Germany, as well as results from the June 2004 European Elections, testify to a rapid decline in support for centre-left incumbents here. Electoral losses for the Left were also registered at these elections in the majority of the new EU member-states: the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Cyprus, Latvia, and Slovenia.

The latest European Elections confirmed the dominant place of the centre-right: the EPP-ED political group in the European Parliament gained the highest percentage of seats, and the share of the Liberals (ELDR) rose. To this adds the stable performance of far-right formations: Despite a drop in support to the far-right parties in Austria, France and the Netherlands (a tendency countered by Greece's far-Right scoring its first electoral success in 20 years, and the rising vote in favour of the Flaams Blok in Belgium), right-wing populism has found a stable representation in the European Parliament, enhanced by the populist vote in many of the new member-states (such as the League of Polish Families). Against the increased voter support for right-wing formations, the overall support to left-wing parties at the European elections decreased: the vote for the Socialist political group continued to drop, while the alternative left and green formations (the EUL/NGL and Greens/EFA) saw their share significantly diminish despite the strong showing of Germany's ex-communist Party of Democratic Socialism.[6] Overall, the presence of right-wing formations in the new European Parliament significantly outnumbers that of left-wing ones. Worth noting is also the phenomenal electoral gains of eurosceptic parties (such as the British Independence Party, Hungary's Fidesz and Sweden's June List), as well as fringe formations (such as Holland's Transparent Europe, or the Austrian vote for Hans-Peter Martin).

Despite the electoral gains of the centre-Left in France, Spain, Netherlands, Italy, Portugal and Belgium at the last European elections, the series of shifts to the right in the course of the past five years – both in terms of electoral support and in the structures of governance at national and European level - seem to indicate a relatively stable change in

voter's preferences and consequently, a re-alignment in favour of the Right. More significant even is the particular distribution of voter preferences, at the backdrop of rising abstention rates– the shift to the right, combined with a rise of support to non-mainstream parties is a pattern which emerged at the 1999 European elections, recurred at most national elections in EU member-states since, and was confirmed by the June 2004 European elections.

Surely, the historical perspective of some five years within which these changes occurred is too compressed to establish with certainty whether we are at a turning point in the electoral fortunes of social democracy. For this, of course, we need to study trends of participation over a longer period.[7] Yet, the sheer geographic scope of the changes – the fact that shifts to the right (in governments' composition, policies and ideological discourse) have occurred in all EU member-states -- is sufficiently suggestive of a trans-European phenomenon that merits an attempt at diagnosis.

2. Interpreting the shift to the right: the protest vote hypothesis

How should these similarities in changes in the composition of national governance across Europe since 1999 be interpreted? Are they symptomatic, as it seems, of a sharp, and potentially durable re-alignment in favour of the Right?

There is no sufficient evidence to support a hypothesis of a stable shift to the right in voters' preferences. Comparative results from the two last rounds of national elections show that, at least numerically, the left-right balance throughout Europe has not been

significantly disturbed (Consult charts 1-3 in Annex II). Remarkably, a discrepancy between governmental shift to the right and popular support for the Left can be observed in the majority of member-states.[8] This discrepancy invalidates the thesis of stable re-alignment in favour of the Right. Quantative indicators (levels of electoral support, or average losses between consecutive elections) provide unsteady ground for the analysis of this phenomenon. To be able to understand the nature of the recent electoral dynamics in Europe, electoral outcomes should be examined in the light of public and political responses to the evolution of the Welfare State, as precisely this evolution has been the backdrop of political mobilisation in recent years. From that perspective, rather than a stable re-alignment in favour of the Right, the apparent shift to the right appears to be a vote cast against a certain political culture and style of governance which, in different varieties, had established itself throughout Europe in the past four decades. This perspective will lead us to identify the vote, first, as a protest vote against the consensus politics of the Welfare State, as well as against the attempted evolution of this consensus in a neo-liberal direction. Further, we will advance the hypothesis that this critical vote is part of a larger and more stable transformation of Europe's political cultures away from the left-right alignment along economic policies, signalling the formation of a novel ideological axis.

a) The political culture of the welfare-state consensus

The post-war Welfare State consensus in Europe was supported as much by the centrist nature of European conservatism, as it was by the strong leverage of organised labour. Most of the conservative parties in continental Europe never embraced totally free-

market capitalism; instead, they opted for a 'social market' economy. Thus, the centrist conservatism of the German Christian Democrats, for instance, provided a comfortable institutional framework for the Welfare State in much of Germany's post-war existence (it has been the largest party in every election except in 1972 and 1998.)[9] The conservative-socialist overlap on social policies made possible the red-blue coalitions in most governments with proportional electoral systems, such as the Netherlands and Belgium. Recent ideological shifts of socialist parties to the right would only seem to confirm and strengthen the consensual centrism on which the Welfare State is founded. However, it is this very consensus and the style of politics it generated, more than the alleged unsustainability of its economic and social policies, which has eroded the Welfare State as a form of relationship between citizens and governments.[10]

Decades of conservative-socialist governmental cohabitation, and the continuing loss of ideological distinctions between centre-left and centre-right brought about professionalized political establishments marked by a style of politics based on elite policy-making, compromise and consensus, increased bureaucratisation, absence of political debate or involvement of civil society. Throughout Europe, ruling establishments were discredited by mismanagement and corruption scandals in the nineties. To recall just a few examples: In Belgium, the Dutroux scandal exposed grave weaknesses of the justice system. Later, the Belgian hormone and dioxin scandals revealed the absence of control over intensive industrial agriculture, especially in Flanders. The Augusta helicopter scandal exposed corrupt political and financial practices that especially hit the Socialists, leading to a spectacular trial of numerous

Socialist Party personalities in late 1998. In France, the contaminated blood case and a series of corruption allegations against leading left- and rightwing politicians had similar effect. A sequence of administrative failures in the Netherlands allowed for a systematic defiance of safety regulations and led to the explosion of a fireworks factory in 2000, and a fire at a café that killed 14 young people on New Year's Eve 2000-2001. These and similar instances of political mismanagement increased public sensitivity to governance deficiency throughout Europe.

Of further support of the protest vote hypothesis is the fact that the defeat of incumbent parties at the turn of the century (before the economic slowdown of the past two years) was carried out in conditions of good economic growth and low unemployment. Despite the extraordinary prosperity that Europeans enjoyed in the late nineties, the sense of anxiety and insecurity at the everyday level was steadily growing, paralleled by a general loss of confidence in governments. Despite economic growth, problems with the health system, schools, public transportation, as well as growing urban violence, intensified. The fact that national governments had done so well in economic terms made these problems ever so harder to accept.[11] Populist leaders (from Pim Fortuyn in the Netherlands, to Haider in Austria and Le Pen in France) mobilised unprecedented support by alleging that political establishments had left the society in ruins. They made a link between the failure of some groups to become integrated into society and crime, and managed to mobilise a widespread social dissatisfaction with an administrative model of consensus building and avoiding conflict at the price of escaping political responsibility.

In that sense, the tumbling of political incumbents in Europe in the late nineties, combined with increased support for far-right parties, can be seen as a vote of non-confidence equally for the centre-left and centre-right establishments that had dominated the political scene since the Second World War. Rather than a genuinely right vote, this was a vote against a certain style of old consensus politics void of clear principles and marked by privatisation of the public interest and short-term expediency.

b) The crisis of electoral politics

Two particular signals further support the notion of the recent vote in national and European elections as a protest one, rather than as a sign of a stable re-alignment to the right: the persistent decline in voter turnout and the rise of support to non-mainstream political formations.

Researchers have repeatedly noted a long-term decline in people's trust in institutions over the past three decades. (This trend is often halted by economic and political crises, such as the recent Iraq emergency). The growing political apathy is manifesting itself in a low and decreasing turnout at elections throughout Europe.[12] The continually declining levels of electoral turnout points to an incipient crisis of democratic legitimacy, caused by the worsening relationship between state and society. The consensual democracy of the European Welfare State seems to be degenerating into what David Arter (2000:185) has named a 'demobilising polity'. Quite significantly, participation is not only low among the most disadvantaged groups (a phenomenon linked to socio-economic determinants of political culture). It is also declining among young, well-educated urban voters.

The thesis that low turnout is indicative of a tacit revolt, or alternatively, of civic alienation is not, however, uncontested. Low turnout is a likely outcome of a change in the significance attributed to party systems, which is part of a broader change in the way people perceive the role of the citizen in democracy: Fewer and fewer people regard voting as a civil duty or an effective instrument for influencing the political agenda and, instead, turn towards forms of 'elite changing action' – unconventional political participation, petitions, boycotts. (This phenomenon was analysed more than two decades ago by the authors of *Political Action* - see Barnes et al., 1979). In that hypothesis, declining electoral participation is not an unequivocal sign of civil alienation, but of a shift in what citizens perceive as valuable and efficient channels for political input. Indeed, non-electoral political mobilisation - from protest movements to special interest lobbying - is steadily on the increase (Catterberg and Inglehart, 2002). Theorist of postmodernization [†]see this increase in direct civic action as part of the larger value shift in contemporary Western societies towards post-material values (see Inglehart 1977, 1997, 2000; Abramson and Inglehart, 1995; Beck, 1992).

The protest vote hypothesis finds additional support in the fact that in many European countries unconventional parties have lately become the beneficiaries of the above-described discontent with mainstream politicians and entrenched political hierarchies, or discontent with politics, altogether. The quest for new political culture prompted the development of new parties or movements (such as the *White March* movement in

Belgium, *Attack* in France, the *Margherita* alliance in Italy, or *Bloco de Esquerda* in Portugal), or the re-foundation and "renewal" of existing parties. In Ireland, the *Sinn Fein* – an anti-establishment, all Ireland party with a progressive social agenda, had the most significant percentage rise in the 2000 general elections.[13] Its electoral message was focused on rejection of old politics: 'We are a party that offers a real alternative to the stale and corrupt politics that have marked life here for long. We are asking people to join with us in building an Ireland of equals', announced Sinn Féin's leader Gerry Adams (Ingram, 2002). The June 2004 elections gave fresh evidence against the right-realignment hypothesis and in favour of a protest vote interpretation: In countries where the demand for political accountability could be channelled through new political formations (the Dutch Transparent Europe party or the vote for Hans-Peter Martin in Austria), the vote for previously successful far-right parties here significantly dropped.[14]

The emergence of non-mainstream political formations in the new accession countries (such as the Polish Self Defence, or the League of Polish Families) also supports the thesis of the incapacity of established political systems to respond to new public demands. The rise of new parties is all the more significant because it goes against the trend of small parties' terminal decline in increasingly bipolarised political systems.

The protest vote at the beginning of the century -- embodied simultaneously in the rebuff of incumbents, the rising support of fringe parties, and the growing abstention rates-- expresses a growing demand throughout European publics for a new political style of governance and a change of policy priorities to address new themes such as ethical

issues, accountability, physical safety and economic stability. Thus, although at first sight it appears that concerns with order and security draw voters to the right, it is more likely that the protest vote was cast against the complacency of the political establishments and the incapacity of enacted policies to confront the changing social realities in Europe.

3. Critical re-alignment beyond left and right

The preceding analysis established that the shifts to right-wing rule in Europe do not necessarily indicate a long-term electoral advantage for the Right. Neither was the vote a simple gesture of protest against left-wing political establishments. Although, as electoral results show, numerically the left-right *balance* is not disturbed, it is the very left-right *divide* which is becoming obscured. We are witnessing an end of left-right ideological vectors, driven by capital-versus-labour dynamics, and stretching from the pole of free enterprise to that of (re)distribution.

Since the late eighteenth century, when the terms 'left' and 'right' entered the vocabulary of politics in France and spread throughout Europe, the nature of the left-right cleavage has changed significantly a number of times. It was only after the Second World War that the left-right divide started to be based primarily on the issues of free enterprise and state control of the economy. This constellation lasted until recently. A number of studies in the last two decades have begun to observe new shifts in the basis of political alignment (Evans et al., 1996; Giddens, 1994; Inglehart and Rabier, 1986; Inglehart and Welzel, 2003; Kriesi, 1998; Kitschelt, 1997; Knutsen 1995). Postmaterialist theory, for example, has contended that the old left-right cleavage in party politics has lost much of its validity

since the 1960s due to the increasing importance of non-economic values and the transition from class-based politics to quality of life politics (Inglehart, 2003; Knutsen, 1995).[15]

From a different perspective, Jean Laponce (1981) has contended that, as a result of continuous changes within the political cultures of the Left and the Right, the only stable core element of the left-right contrasts now seems to be 'power that be' on the right and 'the weak' on the left, with 'left' and 'right' being a spatial translation of 'up-down' in the distribution of political power. Yet, as we will argue in what follows, the national elections across Europe at the turn of the century not only confirm the erosion of the left-right continuum, but also contain signs of the appearance of new fault-lines in politics that the left-versus-right division can no longer accommodate.

Apart from being a protest vote against the centre-left and centre-right political establishment, the most recent elections seem to indicate a more radical, structural change in Europe's political cultures, deepening the crisis of left-right ideological identifications through the appearance of new vectors of political alignment. This change could be approached in the perspective of what, after the work of Key and Burnham, has become known as *critical elections*: elections that mark a sudden, considerable and lasting realignment in the electorate and leads to building of new electoral majorities (Key, 1942, 1961, 1970, 1993; Burnham 1970, Evans and Norris, 1999).[16] Realignment is provoked by rapid social and economic changes that forge new political coalitions. This carries significant consequences for the party order in a long-term perspective, as well as for the

general process of governance: Realignment implies changes in the social basis of party support, as well as in the ideological basis of party competition (orientations towards parties change as the parties themselves come to represent emergent social groups), and finds expression in the new thematic composition of campaigning. It further incurs a change in the policy agenda of national political formations and elites beyond electoral campaigning. In that sense, critical elections affect a profound change in the essence and rationality of politics.

Has Europe undergone such a radical realignment at the turn of the century? Has there appeared a new fault-line in politics? What is the Left's place in this re-alignment? Let us now turn to examining the signs of ideological re-alignment in Europe.

The emerging critical re-alignment is signalled by at least three phenomena reoccurring at national elections throughout Europe in recent years: a) changes in the political agenda; b) alternations in the social background of typical electoral groups associated with the Left and the Right; c) the merging of left-wing and right-wing ideological programmes.

a) **New political agenda**

The nature of the agenda of political debate throughout Europe has changed (both in terms of public sensitivities and official political discourse), moving beyond the left-right divide over economic policies along the poles of free enterprise and redistribution. Psephologists (specialists in elections analysis) have established that throughout the twentieth century elections tended to be won on governments' economic record, in line

with the traditional (at least since the late nineteenth century) left-right alignment on social policies. National surveys of general elections since 1998 reveal almost uniformly that this is no longer the case. Apart from the usual focus on personalities rather than policies, analysts of national elections in Europe at the very beginning of the new century often recorded a remarkable absence of debate on social policies. Economic issues seemed to be disappearing from the electoral agenda. For the first time in many years campaigns were no longer centred on taxation and redistribution, but on political and economic insecurity: concerns about risk have become central political issues.

Characteristic of this shift is the new way in which the issue of unemployment appears in political discourse: The old paradigm is concerned with employment in terms of overall growth and efficiency, while the new one focuses upon unemployment in terms of fear, loss, and marginalization.[17] In a neo-liberal economy marked by global economic competition and downsized labour markets, job insecurity (rather than unemployment rates) is a form of discontent of a different order than the standard evaluations of short-term economic performance.

The formation of the new safety agenda in recent years has been prompted by voters' perceptions on the growing salience of the following four large social trends:[18]

i. Physical unsafety

The massive spread of terrorist threats (after 11 September 2001, but also before these attacks) has brought issues of political security (safety) to the fore; this has coincided

with a rise in urban criminality: cities have witnessed growth in crime, especially juvenile delinquency. Public anxiety has also been increased by "diseases coming from abroad", such as BSE or SARS, or drugs).

ii. Immigration.

Immigration has intensified and deepened protectionist instincts in society.[19] It is important to note that the perception of the growing salience of immigration is not necessarily a consequence of immigration growth. The ghettoisation, rather than the volume of the immigration, is at the root of the growing societal concern. While public anxiety grew over cultural mixity, which the large public perceived as a source of declining standards of living (diminishing educational standards at schools, for instance), the whole subject of immigration in the second half of the twentieth century was placed at the margins of political respectability, thus making it a taboo topic. Behind political correctness, which silenced the political expression of social concerns, frustrations throughout societies grew.

iii. Political crisis and democratic deficit.

Endemic mismanagement and instances of corruption have undermined confidence in the established mechanisms of political and economic governance. As mentioned earlier, a series of scandals in the nineties exposed dysfunction of the state and party system.

iv. Economic slowdown and employment insecurity

Economic growth in the past two years has stalled or declined in a number of EU member-states while unemployment is on the rise, together with eroding standards of social security.

Surveys throughout Europe indicate the growing salience of the safety agenda: restoration of the rule of law and political ethics has become public priorities, often overtaking the economic and social agenda. As a result, right-wing populism stormed onto the political scene in the late nineties campaigning to stop new immigration, fight crime and rebuild neglected public services. Labour in the Netherlands lost nearly half its seats in parliament to Fortuyn's populist party in 2002. Opinion polls in Netherlands prior to the January 2003 general elections showed that the second priority (after fighting crime and increasing security) was a call for the restoration of "norms and values", a kind of moral renewal inviting a return to civil behaviour, respect for the law and an end to fraudulent business and political practices (Simons, 2003:1).

The sense of uncertainty that has been gathering momentum throughout and despite the economic boom of the mid-nineties is being currently increased by three factors. First, the enlargement of the EU to include ten East European countries as of May 2004 finds the population of EU member-states uninformed and unprepared. This risks to enhance cultural prejudices and to deepen the current protectionist instincts. Second, whether Europeans have been actually more exposed to terrorist attacks or not, populations have become aware of their societies' vulnerability to terrorism.

The most important factor in intensifying the sense of uncertainty, however, has been the recent deterioration of the economic environment in Europe, after the economic boom of the late nineties. The peak in the NASDAQ stock index (of technology industry) was in March 2000; what followed were two and a half years of disastrous decline. Economic stagnation has spread throughout Europe reaching Germany, France, and the Netherlands. The noticeable weakening of growth in the eurozone and the diminishing consumer confidence throughout Europe are further deepened by the uncertainty over the possible outcomes of the Iraq reconstruction effort.[20] Despite recent signs of economic recovery, the experience of economic decline, which followed the unprecedented economic boom of the nineties, has induced a lasting shift in public attitudes towards protectionism.

Overall, as a response to these new social trends, a new agenda of order and anxiety has appeared with four constitutive elements: physical security, political order, cultural estrangement, and employment insecurity, as the economic component of the mix.

Parties that gained political support in the last few years have been those which reacted quickly to the new set of socially significant concerns and managed to articulate a swift (not necessarily most adequate) political solution to these issues. The "order and safety" overhaul of the political agenda generally translated into an increasing support for right-wing political platforms that put the stress on security and authority. With safety becoming the core concern (especially for the urban populations in Europe, which have been the traditional supporters of left parties), the anti-establishment reaction fed into an extreme-right vote. Although right-wing populism is currently receding, public

preferences for order and stability do not falter. In fact, it is the incorporation of the safety discourse into the political rhetoric of mainstream leftist and right-wing parties that explains the withdrawal of electoral support to right-wing populism, not the diminished relevance of the security-and-order agenda.

The reflex of the left-wing political incumbents was to incorporate in their platform typically right-wing solutions such as prioritising political safety over both social protection and civil liberties, or market liberalisation over employment stability and social security. Due to its progressive and culturally liberal legacy, the Left has not been able to respond to the changed political agenda dominated by "order and safety" themes. Unlike the far-right formations, their progressivist heritage prevented traditional left-wing parties from linking political safety, employment security and cultural openness in a coherent programme. Typically, leftist parties during the last round of national elections were silent on such issues as immigration and urban criminality.

Given the silence of traditional left parties on the order-and-security agenda, there have not been any policy alternatives that address the theme of insecurity – analysts repeatedly have observed that there have been few programmatic differences to distinguish between the major parties at the last rounds of national elections. This has prompted authors to observe that the opposition between left and right seemed less clear-cut at the end of the nineties (Perrineau, 2002).

b) New social composition of constituencies

Differences between centre-left and centre-right are being effaced not only in terms of ideology and policy but also in terms of societal alliances and bases of mobilisation. Thus, the traditionally strong link between Social Democratic/ Labour parties and trade unions is rapidly weakening (most striking current example is Germany, which is following in Britain's path). The changes in societal alliances are provoked by the continual disintegration (though not the disappearance) of class structures throughout the twentieth century – a process further intensified by the new stage of post-industrial development that Europe entered in the late 1970s, the social and political bearings of which are currently surfacing (and which we will address subsequently).

Symptomatic of the declining relevance of the left-right divide in the past five years are also changes in the social composition of electoral constituencies. Thus, surveys of the last French elections indicate that the typical voter for the Socialists is female, aged 25-30, educated, in middle or higher management or the civil service, rather than the quintessential blue-collar male worker. The socio-professional profile of the Le Pen constituency is working and middle class: male, young (20 per cent), blue collar (one in three), unemployed, self-employed and small traders (Miguet, 2002: 209).[21] The Right (such as the German CDU or Austrian ÖVP or the three rightist parties forming the Italian government) has had a more or less firm grip on those strata that can be appealed to through anti-establishment, anti-foreigner, and anti-European populism. Most successful has been the far-right vote in areas where it can rely on sub-nationalist mobilisation: Flanders, Northern Ireland, Spain. However, there seems to be a strong additional classifier that currently determines voters' party preferences. As we will argue

later, this classifier is the attitude to employment possibilities along the risk-opportunity divide that the neo-liberal economy has brought about.

c) Merging of left and right platforms

A palpable phenomenon signalling the fusion of left- and right-wing policy agendas is the recent shift of the centre-Left to the right. The Socialist establishment almost uniformly undertook, in a varied ratio between politics and rhetoric, a shift to the right, first initiated by the British Labour Party led by Tony Blair. The Left had abandoned the traditional agenda of socialism already in the 1980s and undertook a partial conversion to the ethos of the market. In Donald Sassoon's account, the "neo-revisionism of the late 1980s marked the second historical reconciliation between socialism and capitalism: The first, on social-democratic terms, took place after 1945. The second represented a compromise on the terms set by neo-liberalism" (Sassoon, 1996: 733).

With this shift in agenda, centre-left parties in continental Europe started to overlap with the centrist position of conservative parties of the Christian Democrat family. With the exception of Britain, European conservative parties after the Second World War never completely embraced laissez-faire capitalism and instead adopted a centrist position in terms of economic policies. In the period of the social-democratic hegemony (1945-75) the Right had adopted many of the positions of the Left (ibid, 743). With this, Conservative parties in continental Europe early on occupied the centre of the left-right political spectre. The exceptional (for Europe) placement of the British Conservative Party clearly to the right provided the vacant space in the centre of the left-right

alignment that New Labour took in the late nineties. This could not be the case in Europe, where the Socialist parties' move to the right made them overlap with the Conservatives who had already taken the centrist space. In Italy and Greece the centre-left parties have recently surpassed the centre-right in their new espousal of labour-market flexibility. Indeed, a shift to the right in the style of Blair's 'Third Way' was undertaken also by Italy's centre-left (Social Democrats) in the late nineties. We must note, however, that the motivations behind the shift to economic liberalism of the Italian Social Democrats are different from the shift of British Labour to the right. Interventionism in Italy has been associated with the right (in a 'co-operation' between economic and political elites), and recent centre-left governments have sought to liberalise Italy's political economy in order to benefit the nation as a whole (Donovan 2001: 205).

With these shifts social liberalism (the Third Way, or *Etat social actif* in the French parlance), became the predominant policy paradigm in Europe, currently being embraced not only by leaders of centre-left parties, such as Germany's Gerhard Schröder, but also by traditional conservatives like Spain's José María Aznar, as well as by many German Christian Democrats. The current policy orientation of the French centre-Right (the ruling RPR-UDF[22] coalition under J. Chirac) can also safely be characterised as a form of a Third Way (state-directed social liberalism) as it displays all main elements of this paradigm.

The electoral fluctuations and recent policy shifts throughout Europe, which we described above, give some, but not sufficient, ground for asserting that what we have been

witnessing is critical re-alignment. In the classic version by Key, the term connotes an election that decisively alters vectors of partisanship for a long period, usually lasting at least one generation. These elections shift votes from one side to the other by two mechanisms--first, by increased turnout that brings new voters into the system, and who are mobilised on a new basis, second, by durable shifts in partisanship among established voters. While critical elections are said to be marked by uncommonly high turnout rates, turnout in Europe is not radically up and often is down, and we cannot know yet whether the shifts in partisanship will prove durable.[23]

However, even if the recent policy shifts and electoral dynamics have not (yet?) crystallised in well-articulated critical re-alignment, there is enough evidence to suggest that at the turn of the century Europe is entering a new political era. What shapes this new political era is the emerging of a new fault-line in politics which starts to exist in parallel to the traditional left-right alignment and is often opting to replace it. The challenge for established and new political formations is to respond adequately and quickly to the on-going changes in the political culture of European publics.

4. The new political vectors: social roots and political essence

If the above mentioned developments suggest the withering of the left-right cleavage in politics, they, by themselves, are not a sufficient evidence to prove the appearance of new political cultures, that is, of a new ideological axis of alignment beyond Left and Right. Thus, the recent shift of Socialism to the right could be seen as a simple re-enforcement of the red-blue centrism typical of the Welfare State throughout the eighties. However, in

the rest of this analysis we will argue that the nature of political centrism itself has undergone a change in the nineties, and thus given rise to new political cultures. At the root of this change are the deep socio-economic transformations in Europe caused by the transition towards high-tech, post-industrial global economy. This, in turn, has been translated into the appearance of new risk-opportunity political vectors, expressed at three levels: 1) the new ideological basis of party competition, 2) the new social basis of party support, and 3) new poles of political alignment.

The broad social background of the current changes in political identification has been the novel socio-economic constellation that emerged at the end of the twentieth century in all major post-industrial societies. The most palpable symptom of this development was the spectacular economic growth these societies experienced in the 1980s and 1990s, growth enabled by the revolutionary shift towards sophisticated forms of technology. Analysts tend to describe the new stage of the post-industrial constellation in the broad terms of the "knowledge society", or the "high-tech" economies. Indeed, the relevance of specialised knowledge in modern societies is ever increasing. Yet, fundamentally, all modern societies are knowledge-based, which makes the term 'knowledge society' inadequate to the qualitative changes now taking place: it fails to grasp the tensions and transformations triggered by the economic dynamics at the turn of the century.

The new economy (the information-technology stage of the post-industrial, global economies) has induced profound changes in the organisation of work and lifestyle patterns throughout society. It revolutionized existing social and occupational structures,

diversified the forms of ownership, created new career opportunities and flexible employment options, which in turn increased personal chances and choices over lifetime. Under the impact of the new economy 'the traditional form of work' based on full-time employment in a specific occupation and entailing a 'career pattern over a life cycle' is being eroded away (Castells, 2000: 290). This has led to the appearance of the 'portfolio person', a person without permanent attachment to any particular occupation or organization. (Gray,1998: 71-2, 111).

The most significant social impact of the new economy has been the flexibilisation of existing class distinctions due to increased professional mobility and proliferation of forms of ownership and tenure within a person's lifetime. Throughout the twentieth century, occupational categories, such as 'blue-collar' and 'white-collar' workers, had already infused economic class distinctions. However, the new economy increases the speed of entry and exit between professional and social groups, thus putting an end to the relative fixity of personal identity to one occupational/class group within an adult lifetime. What gains maximum relevance for people is their chance (and not existing position) of upward, or risk of downward, mobility. Hence, the increased salience of the risk-opportunity vectors in politics, which start to exist in parallel with the old capital-labour orientation of Left and Right, and often to replace them.

It is too early to make a full diagnosis of the social impact of the New economy, and this is not the purpose of this study. What is relevant for our analysis of changing political cultures is that the recent transformations and the intensity of pace they take, have

inserted a sense of insecurity even for those fractions of the population that were considered the uncontested winners of the technological boom of the nineties. This at least partly accounts for the dominance of "order" and "security" themes in current political discourse, and thus for the cultural orientation of voters to the right.

The transition towards the high-tech global post-industrial economy in the nineties is replacing the old socialist-conservative consensus on the Welfare State with a new division along the lines of the *opportunity*-versus-*risk* dilemma of the new economy. In this sense, the Socialists' shift to the right is symptomatic of a new type of alignment formed along the themes of employment security and risk, rather than the capital-labour dynamics of conflict, or the materialist versus quality-of-life cleavage identified by postmodernization theories.

5. The new political constellation

As a result of the political shifts analysed previously, the current political agenda in Europe is dominated by a fusion between centre-right and centre-left platforms into a new policy paradigm that combines a stress on safety and authority (inherited from the traditional political Right) and an emphasis on economic liberalism and labour flexibility (the core of Third Way social liberalism). Hence, although the political families of the Left and Right nominally still exist, they have developed a common ideological platform, centred on the opportunities inherent in the neo-liberal knowledge economy. On the other side of the political spectrum are parties and their constituencies for which the new

economy incurs rising risks: the fruits of labour-market flexibility, which translate into lower incomes and reduced social protection.

Therefore, despite preserved differences in political culture, we can assert that the new policy axis that aligns the old centres and the old extremes is the *opportunity – risk* divide of the new economy. On this basis a realignment is taking place between centre and periphery, between, on the one hand, the centre-left and centre-right midpoint, and, on the other, the circumference of far-right and radical-left parties. In this new alignment, the new centre (a simultaneous shift of the moderate Left and Right to the centre) becomes one of the poles in the political axis, embracing the 'opportunity' side of the dilemma, while the far-Right and radical-Left constitute the opposite pole responding to societal fears of the hazards of the new economy of increased competition and open borders.[24] This means that the old socialist-conservative consensus on the Welfare State which already blurred the ideological divide between the political Left and Right, now under the impact of the new economy is being replaced by a left-right neo-liberal consensus on the politics of 'opportunity', opposed by the far-right and radical-left protectionist drive.[25]

The old left and right extremes have come to overlap on two policy lines: First, in their protectionist reaction to economic and social risk. The far-Right is abandoning its economic liberalist stance and embracing social protectionism (Bastow, 1997). With this, a major policy differentiation between the radical-Left and the far-Right is lost. Second, the old left and right extremes have come to converge on the basis of their increasing preference to national, at the expense of international solidarity. The fear of competition

from immigrants on the low-skills labour market leads the traditional blue-collar constituencies of the radical-Left to embrace, be it tacitly, a nationalist reaction to global borders. The main lines of ideological divergence that survive seem to be of a purely cultural nature: the cultural conservatism of the far-Right versus the cultural liberalism of the radical-Left.

Surely, this is not the first time that the issue of insecurity and risk has driven the redefinition of left and right political ideologies. The social security policies of the post-war Welfare State were a particular political reaction to the opportunity-risk dilemma of industrial societies. The dilemma itself appeared already in mid-nineteenth century and furnished the ideological divide between Socialism and Liberalism, moving economic liberalism to the right of the main ideological divide.[26] The classical nineteenth-century cultures of economic liberalism and socialist solidarity saw industrial capitalism from the incompatible perspective of growing risks and opportunities for their respective constituencies (labour and capital). The post-war Welfare State managed to bridge the opportunities-risks divide through a variety of social policies that aimed mainly at minimisation of risk (rather than increase of opportunities) as well as a larger distribution of the costs of risk-minimisation. What we now witness is the re-emergence of the opportunity-risk dilemma, this time in the context of post-industrial, knowledge economies. The substance of the dilemma is now different because behind it stand new mechanisms of social (re)production and stratification, which are in turn translated into new grounds of political alignment and party loyalty. The crust of the change is that a certain kind of knowledge linked to the technological revolution of the late twentieth

century (and not knowledge as such) replaces the 'ownership of means of production' category in the stratification logic which in late nineteenth century prompted the opportunity-risk divide between the culture of economic enterprise versus the culture of state-sponsored social solidarity. The appearance of the new opportunity-precarity vectors of alignment, however, does not mean that it is culture, rather than economics (as postmodernism theories would have it), which drives social stratification. One's place in the process of economic production is still (and probably even more) ultimately decisive in a person's social identification.

Most significantly for this analysis, the rapid diffusion of information and communication technologies has incurred changes in the work organisation, which have created new status cleavages. For certain professional categories the new economy has meant increased employment opportunities, rapid career advancement and valuable job flexibility. Indeed, the pursuit of more than one career in a lifetime is gaining ground among the younger generations in Europe. Studies show that increasing number of professionals in their thirties and forties are leaving stable well-paid jobs – not because of the economic downturn but to gain more control over their lives. This has been beneficial for some of the traditionally weaker sections of the population, such as mothers, allowing them the flexibility they needed to combine child-rearing with a career.

Arguably, one of the most apparent social consequences of the globalised high-tech economies is the increase of the middle class: due to intensified global competition and the decoupling of many corporations, the weight of small business would be increasing –

small owners who have enriched themselves during the stock market boom and economic recovery of the late nineties. Within that hypothesis, the turn to liberalism would express the preferences of the growing constituency of the middle class. This would only mean a return towards the pre-Welfare State constellation of left-right political cultures along the lines of economic status (the traditional capital-labour vector).

Against this hypothesis is evidence that in general, social mobility has not merely made the middle class larger, but that 'it has destroyed many of the common elements previously possessed by, or understandable as middle class' (Wynne 1998: 8). The knowledge economy has made education a prominent identifier: 'Any cultural cleavage within the new middle class may relate more to educational level and its corresponding effects upon occupational choice than to initial class origin.' (ibid: 67).

However, despite assertions of growth of the middle class resulting from the overall increase of wealth in western societies, numerous studies indicate that social groups benefited from the economic growth of the nineties unequally and the rift between rich and poor has deepened.[27] Skills-based technological change of the last decade has produced a shift in demands in favour of highly skilled labour, especially in industries producing or making extensive use of information and communication technology, while it has worsened the employment and earnings prospects of unskilled and semi-skilled workers, especially in the manufacturing sector. Thus, mobility - the most progressive aspect of globalisation, has proven to create significant downsides in terms of risks, and to distribute these risks unevenly. It has deepened the rift between two categories of

people: skilled workers who can benefit from the opportunities of the globalised economy, and unskilled labour that is affected negatively by the rising risks. For instance, in the move of capital from Western to Eastern Europe (prompted by cheaper labour) and the consequent dis-investment in the North, the victims have been the least skilled workers, as they have been in the previous wave of move of capital from North to South.

The new economy has entailed an explosion of inequalities in the private sector between skilled and unskilled labour, and deepened the vulnerability of the weakest social segments. In this sense, the polarisation between rich and poor has recently been transformed into polarisation between professional groups who can profit from new opportunities and those who are affected mostly by the risks. This means that during the nineties and at the beginning of the twenty-first century occupational differences are continually being translated into class differentiation, which in turn invalidates Third Way's claim about the disappearance of class contradictions. Rather than increasing the middle class constituency, the new economy deepens social differentiation. This new class differentiation along the lines of career prospects inherent in the new economy furnishes the two general constituencies of the opportunity-risk political alignment. Consequently, the Socialist-Conservative consensus on the Welfare State is evolving into a consensus on the politics of opportunity (expressed by centre-left and centre-right, Third Way, parties) versus the fear of risk, embraced by far-right and radical left formations.

6. Consequences of the Third Way makeover

The most recent attempts to adjust policy agendas to the social reality of the new economy and the related to it emergence of new public demands has been the Third Way reformism which some centre-left and centre-right parties in Europe increasingly are embracing. However, this type of social liberalism which has indeed helped these parties find their place in the *opportunities-risks* axis of the new political alignment has led these formations to turn a blind eye to issues of structural social injustice. Deepening structural injustice renders the activation strategies deployed by Third Way governments irrelevant, and policies that condition benefits on active job-search – inequitable. Thus, while declaring an 'end of the class struggle' the Third Way is obscuring recurrent sources of structural social injustice.

The social differentiation, and the consequent split in political cultures along an opportunities-risk axes is being further fostered by the policy responses of Third Way governments (be it centre-left, as in Germany and Britain, or centre-right, as in France). The core of the Third Way policy turn consists in replacing redistribution-oriented, with employment-oriented, social policy. As a consequence, one of the most profound socio-economic developments of the past few years (since the second half of the nineties) has been the turn to labour market flexibility, a policy-trend largely and equally embraced by centre-left and centre-right governments in Europe.

Job flexibility has been embraced as a policy instrument in response to two different needs: as a reaction to rapid technological changes throughout the 1990s, and as a tool for

reducing unemployment. As a natural reaction to the dynamics of knowledge-based economy, labour markets in the EU start to be marked by skilled-labour shortages, especially in industries producing or making extensive use of information and communication technology. This has given rise to a flourishing of career options for highly trained professionals, resulting in *voluntary* temporary employment. This form of job flexibility is highly remunerated and often accompanied by a good safety network, be it on a temporary basis. Yet, the benefits of labour flexibility have so far been reserved for a small stratum of the population. Highly-paid, voluntary part-time employment has benefited a select section of highly specialised professionals in their 30s and 40s. Studies indicate that the prevailing category of people willing to take career risks are single, male, aged 30 to 45, people close to the peak of their earning potential and on fast-track careers.[28]

Overall, the group of highly skilled professionals has benefited from the emancipatory potential of the new economy: it has brought for them new opportunities, has enabled them to be in flexible relation to the process of economic production (through voluntary temporary employment), thus increasing their choices over life-time.

However, while labour-market flexibility has resulted in an overall increase in the quality of life of some groups, it has had a negative effect on other sections of the population. The distribution of the positive and negative effects of labour flexibility follows traditional class and occupational lines (skilled-unskilled labour), and deepens some traditional structural inequalities along gender and generational lines, as far as these

overlap with the lines of professional qualifications. In these cases, introduced as an effort to reduce the duration of unemployment, job flexibility has resulted in forms of *involuntary* temporary employment[29], mostly for low-skilled workers, which tends to be poorly paid and not matched with a reliable safety network. Even when successful in moving large numbers of persons into jobs, activation strategies of Third Way governments give predominance to this type of temporary and involuntary part-time employment where workers are not building career paths. The considerable successes that have been registered in bringing more people into work in some countries, open up a new challenge, since some of the individuals 'activated' by labour-market policies have difficulty remaining in employment and moving up job ladders. Concerns have also been expressed about the "quality" of the employment relationship – including perceptions of job insecurity, a rising incidence of non-standard forms of employment (short-term contracts, temporary jobs, casual employment, etc.) in some countries and an increased risk of in-work poverty.[30] Studies also show that the success of job-activation policies stressing the responsibilisation of the job-seeker is questionable in context of economic slowdowns, such as the one Europe has been recently experiencing.[31] For this category of people, the New economy has brought about an increase in social risk, while reform of labour-market policies has deepened, not reduced, their dependence on permanent participation in the process of economic production, which in turns has limited their life-choices and is progressively reducing the chances of upward mobility.

Labour-market activation strategies, combined with the circumstances of economic slowdown in the past two years, are deepening further the opportunities-risk schism

dividing the two big electoral constituencies (skilled and unskilled labour) of the new political constellation. In this process the latter group increases faster, strengthening the bases of the extreme-right/radical left poles, which are mobilising their electorate along the risk lines of the new economy dilemma.

This by itself undermines the political credibility of the Third Way project (the opportunity pole of the new political constellation), and erodes its electoral basis. The negative social upshots of the Third Way policies have been growing: While indeed managing to counter unemployment, economic liberalisation and growing labour-market flexibility have resulted in aggravating structural aspects of unemployment and poverty. Studies show that unemployment throughout Europe has increased in the last few years among young people and low-qualified workers. The negative trend towards segmentation in the working force is steadily rising. Reintegration into the labour market has become more difficult, while social security coverage is becoming ever less adequate to growing job insecurity. It is likely that these negative outcomes of the reorientation of European policies towards market liberalisation will persists and will start to be more acutely felt in the near future.

The new political reorientation along the lines of opportunities and risks, which was outlined in the preceding part of the study, is still evolving under the influence of the economic slowdown (in some cases, a downturn) that set in at the end of the nineties and led to the currently widespread economic weakness in Europe. The crisis of high-tech economies, a crisis which became socially significant at the beginning of the new century

and has just started to find its political expressions, indicates the emergence of a novel configuration between *new economy* and *old-economy,* with respective changes in socio-economic structures, the organisation of work, national and European employment and educational policies, and finally, the formation of ideological attachment and political preferences.

At the end of the nineties it seemed that the growing middle class of owners of small-scale businesses, who had enriched themselves during the stock market boom and economic recovery of the late nineties, together with the group of white collar workers which evolved into the class of highly skilled professionals, would compose a stable social base for the centre-left and centre-right political parties, embracing the politics of opportunity within the Third Way paradigm. In the past economic conjecture of growth, the newly enriched middle class was the group that disliked social spending and lent its support to Third Way policies, which stressed opportunity (policies which in final account benefit large-scale capital). However, it is exactly the group of small and medium owners that is now facing competitive pressures and is likely to reconsider their position within the opportunity-risk dilemma. The current signs of gradual economic recovery are not significant enough to invalidate this prospect by tipping the social sensitivities of this group back towards the opportunity pole. With increasing risk factors in the current economic slowdown this group turns into a group of volatile voters which would embrace the policy platform which proposes the most convincing minimisation of risk while keeping opportunities available.

Deepening social divisions and erosion of the electoral constituency of the post-Welfare State centrism now puts into question the Third Way project. With its impending failure, a mass of critical voters is forming which could become a potential electorate for the 'risk' pole of the new alignment (left- and right-wing populism). It is likely that, in the next round of elections throughout Europe this large group of voters will turn towards either a populist right and left-wing agenda, or embrace a reformed left agenda, wherever available. It is therefore now critical for the European Left to articulate a reformed agenda which will allow it to find its place within the new alignment of the early twenty-first century.

The Left after the Third Way

The Left perspective has been obscured in recent years under the impact of two developments: the decreasing electoral support for traditional socialist parties, and the ideological shift to the right endorsed by the Third Way (liberal) reformism.

We identified this seeming decline of the left perspective to be a part of a broader socio-economic shift produced by the economic dynamics of the late twentieth century. Mobility of economic, social and occupational structures, insecurity of the employment environment, volatility of political preferences and voting behaviour are the particular forms in which the transformative process of the early twenty-first century finds its expression. On the level of political cultures, we are witnessing the emergence of new political vectors along the poles of social opportunities and risks, which are challenging

the established left-right alignment. The weakening of the impact of the left vote is at least partly due to the incapacity of the traditional Left to find its place in the current shift of political cultures along the new axis of alignment. The failure to provide prompt and coherent response to the recent societal quest for both economic security (without sacrificing career opportunity) and political safety, accounts for much of the remarkable loss of electoral support for traditional left-wing parties. From this resulted its silence on novel issues of social concern (political safety, immigration), which reflected a general ideological confusion that in its turn triggered the structural fragmentation of left-wing formations.[32] Due to this counterproductive fragmentation, future lections risk being as much about competition within the Left as against the Right.

While gaining political credit for their swift reaction to shifting social concerns, both right-wing and Third Way (social liberalism) political formations have done so at the price of either obscuring social justice issues (such as adequate social security, gender equality, environmental responsibility and consumer protection), or guiding political solutions in the direction of political safety and away from social integration, as in the cases of the status of immigrants and refugees, or the issue of urban youth delinquency. What has been lost in the general re-orientation to the right are issues which have been at the core of left politics in Europe: a *long-term vision* for social development beyond considerations of economic efficiency, *sensitivity to human vulnerability* which has previously enabled industrial democracies to tackle issues of social justice, and an awareness of the *value of collective goods*.

The global shift in the political balance to the right which was described in this study has created a vacuum in the current political discourse which provides an opportunity for rebuilding and mobilising the European Left around the socially significant issues which have been abandoned or obscured by the socialist and right-wing incumbents. This opportunity for mobilisation of the European Left is enforced by the increasingly negative social results of the rule of Third-Way and conservative parties in recent years.

In terms of *electoral mobilisation* the transitional nature of the described social dynamic translates into two phenomena: First, the link between parties and electorates based on social class – a link which, arguably, has been eroding throughout the twentieth century – loses decisive relevance for electoral mobilisation. Second, as a reaction to the weakening of the class-alignment link, the capacity of parties to address urgent social concerns become the vital criterion in electoral mobilisation, taking precedence over voters' ideological orientation or social background. This means that the erosion of the class – based foundation of parties is as much to the advantage of the Left, as it is to its detriment: the European Left cannot rely as much on its traditional, social class – aligned electorate. But it can rely on mobilising the volatile voters on the basis of positive, forward-looking solutions to the socially urgent concerns of European publics.

The rate of future electoral success of the European left parties, therefore, will depend in the first place on how well their platforms address the social concerns within the order-and-safety agenda. It is a puzzle why the Left seems to leave the dominant protectionist demands to the rightist/nationalist populists, rather than responding to the challenge by a

universalist in nature, Europe-wide policy of social, as well as cultural, protection (such as a Europeanized Basic Income, for instance).

Further, the nature of the new socioeconomic dynamics we described presents the Left with an opportunity to advance a positive and open platform, in contrast to the reactive and defensive solutions the Right has so far successfully articulated. The new economy contains two potentials for building such a positive policy response: Firstly, it seems that post-industrial, knowledge-based societies contain an unprecedented potential for emancipating personal life from economic efficiency imperatives, and thus offset the commodification of human life.[33] Enhanced voluntary job flexibility, when backed by reliable system of social protection, can increase both the chances of decommodification (by decreasing the period of dependency on participation in social production), and the opportunities for participatory forms of social justice. Thus, accommodating people's choices over lifetime as a particular form of job flexibility may become one of the cornerstones of the left idea, replacing the previous concept of reducing inequalities between fixed categories of population through redistribution. There is also a second road through which the current socio-economic constellation responds positively to Marx's critique of capital-labour dynamics. By increasing the diversity of forms of capital ownership, the new economy has created a real opportunity to pre-empt the maldistributive effects of the market not through the interventionist methods of the Welfare State, but through diversification of forms of ownership and tenure, such as joint stock companies co-existing with co-operatives, employee share ownership schemes and other forms of social ownership etc.[34] These two potentials of the new economy (the

emancipatory, anti-productivist one and the redistributive, ownership-focused one) have not been effectively explored by Third Way governments, as their social and economic policies have deepened the unequal distribution of opportunities and risks in European societies.

To find its place within the novel political cultures of Europe, a reformed Left should thus move beyond the Third Way agenda, generating a policy programme which links the opportunity potential of the new economy to a new notion of social solidarity. This, in turn, would allow the Left to advance a policy framework of anti-productivist and citizenship-based ideas for social security.

The political transformation towards a new fault-line of left and right is just beginning. It will depend on the capacity of the Left to overcome structural weakness and ideological uncertainties to offer a real alternative to the opportunity-risk divide, an alternative that the volatile, protest vote is now seeking. In trying to find specific policy solutions for the tension between opportunities and risks that the new economy imposes on complex post-Welfare State democracies, a new constellation of the Left has now a chance to emerge.

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ENDNOTES:

[1] The anti-globalization movements and the most recent mobilization of public opinion against military intervention in Iraq have been prominent in political discourse. Nevertheless, these mobilisations are not discrete phenomena of electoral politics, but rather factors affecting policy-making and voting behaviour. Thus, anti-war protests in principle facilitate the mobilisation of Left electorate. However, linking the war with security risks in Europe is likely to deepen already strong public sensitivity towards safety and order and thus help mobilise support for the Right.

[2] The model of West European Socialism was in crisis before the collapse of communism and the end of the Cold War. Social democrats, in Donald's Sassoon's account of the history of Socialism in Europe, had lost faith in traditional social democracy already in the 1980s and embraced the ethos of the market (Sassoon, 1996: 733-736). For an analysis of the decline of social democracy in the 1980s from the perspective of political sociology see Kitschelt, 1994. The collapse of state socialism in Central and Eastern Europe provoked a crisis in left-wing ideologies in the classical Greek sense implying a catharsis: it prompted an effort at overcoming doctrinal Marxism which enhanced the standing of left-wing parties and

helped them improve their performance in electoral politics – which is much to account for the ascent of the Left in the nineteen-nineties.

[3] Yet these countries were hardly a stronghold of right-wing politics in that period. Before the Spanish centre-right Popular Party formed a minority government in 1996, the Socialist Party had maintained an undivided rule for 14 years (since 1982). Between 1988 until 1999 the centre-right Christian Democrats ruled in coalition with the Socialists headed by Jean-Luc Dehaene. Although the right-wing Liberals have been the largest political family in Belgium since 1883, the centrist blue-green coalition of Christian Democrats and Socialist (co-authors of the Belgian welfare-state) has been the usual governmental formula in Belgium for the past 40-some years. Similarly, until 1999 Luxemburg has been traditionally governed by a red-green-blue coalition. Only the Irish centre-right Fianna Fàil has had a stable dominance in national politics in the nineties. (Consult table in Annex 1.)

[4] The March 2000 general elections in Spain re-affirmed the mandate of the centre-Right Popular Party of José María Aznar, which in 1996 had formed a minority government. These elections for the first time brought a majority victory for a centre-Right party in contemporary Spain, and were a serious blow to the Socialists and the Communists. The Socialists (PSOE) lost over a million votes from previous election (seats in parliament dropped from 141 to 125) – the party's lowest vote and seat totals since 1979. The United Left (*Izquierda Unida*) lost over 5 per cent of the vote and finished with only 8 seats. In the 2004 general elections, the Popular Party had had a comfortable lead in polls before the terrorist attacks in Madrid three days prior to elections instigated a sharp reversal in public support.

[5] The choice of the term "Third Way" for the new policy constellation betrays a remarkable lack of historical memory on the part of political leaders who adopted this notion: The concept was first used by the German Nazis to distinguish their ideological and policy platform from mainstream socialist and bourgeois ideologies.

[6] Between the 1994 and 1999 European Elections the combined vote for the Left dropped with 4 pp, while that for the Right rose with 5.5 pp. Within the Left, the vote for the Socialist group decreased, while that of the alternative left (EUL-NGL group) increased. At the 2004 elections, the vote for the Socialist group dropped further with 0,6 pp, the vote for the European Greens - European Free Alliance (GRE-EFA) fell with 2 pp, and that for the European United Left - Nordic Green Left (EUL-NGL) decreased with 1,4 pp. Source: European Parliament (http://www.europarl.eu.int).

[7] For a historical interpretivist analysis of the left-wing formations' evolution in the twentieth century see, for example, Bartolini, 2000; Eley, 2003; Sassoon, 1996 and 1999. For the political sociology of changes within the left-right alignment in the late twentieth century see Kitschelt, 1994 and 1997; Knutsen, 1995; Kriesi, 1998; Mann, 1995; Manza, 1995; Offe 1985. For analysis of these issues from the perspective of social and political philosophy see Laponce, 1981; Giddens, 1994.

[8] To take France as the most drastic case of discrepancy between governmental shift to the right and popular support for the Left: Despite the apparent collapse of the French Left in last year's presidential and legislative elections, surveys do not register a significant shift in left-right alignment. Approached numerically, the overall left vote was larger than the right vote with 41,87 per cent to 37,5 per cent at the first round of presidential elections. Therefore, it is likely that the last round of presidential and parliamentary elections in France represent a case of deviating elections: the specific circumstances of the rise of electoral support for Le Pen allowed the centre-right to triumph. The hypothesis of deviating elections in the case of France's turn to the right is additionally confirmed by the March 2004 local elections when the Left gained 40,5 per cent of the vote against 35 per cent for the governing centre-right. Source: *Ministère de l'Intérieur* (http://www.interieur.gouv.fr)

[9] The great designer of Germany's post-war "social-market economy" was Ludwig Erhard, a Christian Democrat.

[10] We will confine our analysis only to the issue of the political culture which the consensus politics of the Welfare State generated. A detailed analysis of the social tensions and transformation of the post-war Welfare State in Europe here is not feasible. For such an analysis see Offe,1984 and 1985; Rosanvallon, 1995; Kitschelt, 1994. Some of the literature on the postmodern shift examine also policy reactions to this shift: see Inglehart, 1977 and 1997.

[11] For an account of this discrepancy as a basis for the rise of support to Fortuyn's party see Eijsvoogel, 2002.

[12] Unfortunately, there is neither uniform future election data nor uniform voter-preference data on the social and psychological bonds between voters and parties in Europe. Missing are also uniform surveys in Europe on confidence in politicians, but the trend is often reported in single country analyses.

[13] In fact, *Sinn Fein* defies left-right classification.

[14] In Austria, Hans-Peter Martin, who exposed MEP's benefits, won 14 per cent of the vote. Jorg Haider's anti-immigration, far-right Freedom Party slid to 6.4 per cent from 23.4 per cent and lost four of its five seats. Source of electoral data: Bundesministerium des Inneren (http://www.bmi.gv.at/wahlen). In the Netherlands, Paul van Buitenen's Transparent Europe party won two of the twnty-seven Dutch seats on a platform to purge fraud and waste in the European Union. Mr. Van Buitenen was the European Commission official who revealed a network of nepotism and financial irregularities, which ultimately caused the resignation of the Santer college of commissioners in 1999. The extreme-right Pim Fortuyn List which in 2002 concentrated the protest vote, did not pass the bar for representation at the European Parliament. Source of electoral data: *Politiken* (http://www.politiken.dk).

[15] For the opposite view, namely that we have not left the capitalist mode of production with postmodernity and therefore we should seek explanation of the political and social impact of globalization at the level of production-related class and not at the level of state or culture (a view shared by the author of this analysis) see Ashley, 1997; in the same vain, though not in terms of post-modernization: Offe, 1985.

[16] The critical election theories identify three other election types: *deviating dealignments* (marked by a temporary or sharp reversal), *secular realignments* (marked by a gradual strengthening of support for the party), or *secular dealignments* (marked by a progressive weakening in party support).

[17] I am grateful to Claus Offe for helping me clarify this point.

[18] We stress here popular perceptions of the salience of certain phenomena, which is different from the real magnitude of the social issues in question. The object of this study is not to judge the correlation between actual developments of such phenomena as urban violence and immigration. This pertains to another study.

[19] The perception of the growing salience of immigration is not necessarily a consequence of immigration growth. The ghettoisation, rather than the volume of the immigration is at the route of the growing societal concern.

[20] According to the International Monetary Fund the war in Iraq is likely to cut the pace of global economic growth in half: to 1.5 per cent from 3 percent in 2002. (*International Herald Tribune,* 18 February. 2003, p.10).

[21] There are, unfortunately, no uniform studies of the nature of voter constituencies throughout Europe.

[22] RPR – Rally for the Republic (Conservative, Neo-Gaullist); UDF – Union for French Democracy (Conservative).

[23] I am indebted to Ira Katznelson for pointing out to me the deficiency in seeing recent electoral shifts in Europe as critical realignment.

[24] The (quasi) novel rhetoric of opportunities and risks has been noted, in varied terms, by a number of analysts, and it is usually attributed to globalisation. However, no connection has been made to political re-alignment, fostered not so much by globalisation, but by the dynamics of the 'new economy'. (Globalisation focuses on the scale, rather than the quantitative changes of the new economy.)

[25] The described re-alignment is somewhat less salient in the south of Europe, which has been marked by stability of the socialist governments (Portugal, Greece), and a numerically strong left vote (Italy). Politics in these countries are still marked by what the Portuguese prime-minister Guterres called "structural backwardness", which despite all the progress made during the last decade, divides these countries from most of their European counterparts. Here, like in Eastern and Central Europe, issues of structural development are still the fault line of the left-right divide between the pole of free enterprise and redistribution.

[26] When the left-right constellation first appeared in the late 18th century, economic and political liberalism stood to the left, as against adherence to tradition, which formed the ideological core of the right.

[27] *People in Europe*: EUROSTAT report, March 2003.

[28] "Tempted by a New Direction", *Financial Times*, 5 Sept. 2002, p. 7.

[29] Involuntary part-time workers are ones working less than 30 hours per week because they could not find a full-time job *OECD Report: Involuntary Part-Time Workers*, February 2002. Lack of harmonization in definitions impedes the comparison across countries.

[30] *OECD Employment Outlook* 2002.

[31] ibid.

[32] Currently, the Left in Italy comprises at least 13 formations. It was the plurality of Left parties in France that was to a great extend responsible for the downfall of Jospin at the last presidential elections. Approached purely numerically, the overall left vote was larger than the right vote with 41,87 to 37,5. Only the vote outside the Socialist Party, the alternative Left vote came up to 25,69 per cent – well sufficient to win presidential elections. However, this vote was split between 5 formations. Source of electoral data: Ministero dell'Interno (http://cedweb.mininterno.it/ind_elez.htm).

[33] *Commodification* here is understood as market dependency of needs' satisfaction. I am grateful to Philippe van Parijs for helping with a succinct definition of the term relevant to the needs of this analysis.

[34] On ideas of countering inequality through diversification of capital ownership see Krouse and Macpherson 1988. I am grateful to Christopher Bertram (University of Bristol) for drawing my attention to this aspect of the prospective agenda of the Left.