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*The Mobilisation of the European Left  
in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century (I)*

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 for radical and orthodox left-wing formations (2). 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.

Collectively, these occurrences have produced a profound crisis in the Left's political perspective. This has placed the European Left,

(1) This work was initiated as a study conducted for the United European Left/Nordic Green group of the European Parliament in view of the European elections forthcoming in June 2004. I would like to acknowledge my gratitude to the team of the Hoover Chair for Social and Economic Ethics (Headed by Philippe van Parijs) of the Catholic University of Louvain for providing a medium for discussion in the early stages of work. I am also grateful for the stimulating feedback I received from Claus Offe, (Humboldt University, Berlin), Jean Laponce (University of British Columbia), Chris Bertram (University of Bristol), Ira Katznelson

(Columbia University, New York), and Arthur Mitzman (Amsterdam University) on earlier drafts. Their honest commentary gave vigour to my writing efforts, while I remain responsible for the ultimate content and organization of the ideas in this work.

(2) An analysis of the recent shifts in the left-right political alignment in Europe in support of my thesis of the emergence of new political cultures in Europe appears in *Contemporary Politics*, 10(2).2004. The current work takes up and extends this thesis, explores some of the sociological roots of the change, and considers its implications for the political mobilization of 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 in which 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 for 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 (3), the last decade of the

(3) 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 already lost faith

in traditional social democracy in the 1980s and embraced the ethos of the market (Sassoon 1996, pp. 733-736). For an analysis of the decline of social democracy in the 1980s from the perspective of political sociology see Kit-

20<sup>th</sup> 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 1990s. The exceptions were Spain, Belgium, Luxembourg and Ireland (4). 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 — represent an exception, rather than the 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 led to the Socialists losing 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 are usually the main considerations for voters in European elections (Guyomarch 2000, p. 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.

schelt (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 accounts for much of the ascent of the Left in the 1990s.

(4) 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

and 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 Luxembourg was traditionally governed by a red-green-blue coalition. Only the Irish centre-right Fianna Fáil has had a stable dominance in national politics in the 1990s (consult table in Annex 1).

With the Spanish (relative) exception (5), the shift to the right deepened in three out of the four countries that did not have left-wing governments in the late 1990s — Belgium, Ireland and Luxembourg. Where the ascendancy of left-wing parties was preserved — Britain, Germany, Sweden and, until March 2004, Greece — this 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" (6). 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 is added the stable performance of far-right formations: despite a drop in support for 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

(5) The March 2000 general elections in Spain re-affirmed the mandate of the centre-Right Popular Party of José Mar'a 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 the 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 the polls before the terrorist attacks in Madrid three days prior to elections instigated a sharp reversal in public support.

(6) 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.

Socialism (7). Overall, the presence of right-wing formations in the new European Parliament significantly outnumbers that of left-wing ones. It is also worth noting the phenomenal electoral gains of euro-sceptic 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 voters' preferences and, consequently, a re-alignment in favour of the Right. More significant even is the particular distribution of voter preferences, with 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 (8). 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.

(7) Between the 1994 and 1999 European Elections the combined vote for the Left dropped by 4%, while that for the Right rose by 5.5%. 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 by 0.6%, the vote for the European Greens—European Free Alliance (GRE-EFA) fell by 2%, and that for the European United Left—Nordic Green Left (EUL-NGL) decreased by 1.4%. Source: European Parlia-

ment (<http://www.europarl.eu.int>).

(8) For a historical interpretivist analysis of the left-wing formations' evolution in the 20<sup>th</sup> century see, for example, Bartolini (2000), Eley (2003), Sassoon (1996, 1999). For the political sociology of changes within the left-right alignment in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century see Kitschelt (1994, 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).

## II. *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 last two 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 (9). This discrepancy invalidates the thesis of stable re-alignment in favour of the Right. Quantitative 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.

### *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. 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

(9) 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 in 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>).

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 1990s.

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. Populist leaders made a link between the failure of some groups to become integrated into society and crime, and managed to mobilise 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 1990s, 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.

(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 is not feasible here. For such

an analysis see Offe (1984, 1985), Rosanvallon (1995), Kitschelt (1994). Some of the literature on the postmodern shift also examine policy reactions to this shift: see Inglehart (1977, 1997).



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.

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). Theorists 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. 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 significantly dropped (11).

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. The electoral dynamics in the past five years indicate a growing demand throughout European publics for a new political style of governance and a change in policy priorities to address new themes such as ethical issues, democracy, stability and openness. These changes of European publics' political sensitivities seems to bode well with the thesis that value priorities within the advanced industrial societies have shifted from "materialist values" emphasising physiological sustenance and safety, to "post-materialist values" prioritising human rights, self-esteem and individual expression (Inglehart 1977, 1997b, 1990, 2000), as well as a shift from class-based politics to quality-of-life politics (Inglehart and Rabier 1986). However, as our consecutive analysis will demonstrate, postmaterialist theory fails to convey the nature of the social transi-

(11) In Austria, Hans-Peter Martin, who exposed MEP's benefits, won 14 per cent of the vote. Jörg 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 twenty-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>).

tion which is currently at the root of the emergent political culture in Europe.

### III. *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.

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) (12).

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.

(12) 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 vein, though not in terms of post-modernization, see Offe (1985).

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 through 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 lead to building of new electoral majorities (Key 1942, 1961, 1970, 1993; Burnham 1970; Evans and Norris 1999) (13). 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 a new fault-line appeared 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; and 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 of economic policies

(13) 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).

along the poles of free enterprise and redistribution. 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 (14). 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.

Surveys throughout Europe indicate the growing salience of the safety agenda: restoration of the rule of law and political ethics have become public priorities, often overtaking the economic and social agenda. As a result, right-wing populism stormed onto the political scene in the late 1990s campaigning to stop new immigration, fight crime and rebuild neglected public services.

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.

This new stress on security has been interpreted as part of the post-modern shift: as existential security has become increasingly guaranteed people from advanced industrial societies have become more sensitive to risk (Beck 1992). With postmodernization the very nature of risk has changed: the attainment of existential security is followed by new forms of insecurity, related to quality of life problems (Inglehart 1997). Yet, to interpret the new concerns with risk as a shift away from economic concerns to “quality of life” issues is not convincing. On the one hand, the omission of economics from the agenda of recent electoral campaigning does not necessarily suggest that economics is not a relevant political issue. Quite the contrary, labour-market reforms have recently been the focus of policy-making. The marginalisation of these issues in election campaigning is rather due to the established consensus, across the ideological spectrum, on necessary reform of the welfare state.

The new security agenda, as outlined earlier, does not fit Beck’s or Inglehart’s diagnosis of the postmodern shift. In Beck’s account of contemporary society as “risk society”, the distributional conflicts over “goods” (property, income, jobs) that characterised the industrial

(14) I am grateful to Claus Offe for helping me clarify this point.

society, have been replaced by distributional conflicts over “bads”, such as the risk of nuclear technology, genetic research or environmental crises (Beck 1992). Postmaterialist theory presents this change as part of the postmodern shift from economic factors to life-style factors as the main determinant of survival, as a result of which concerns with materialist values emphasising physiological sustenance and safety give way to “post-materialist values prioritising” quality of life issues, human right, self-esteem and individual expression (Inglehart 1997).

However, the above enumerated four elements of the currently dominant order-and-safety agenda can hardly be described as post-materialist and post-economic issues (of identity and rights, or quality-of-life concerns with the environment). At the core of the new agenda is a concern with job insecurity (or more generally access to the labor market) and physical safety. Although employment insecurity is indeed a form of discontent which is distinctive from “standard” evaluations of short-term economic performance, in its nature it is an economic, rather than a “quality of life” issue. As for “physical safety”, it does not figure in the inventory of post-materialist, quality-of-life values (such as freedom or a clean environment) which the transition to post-industrial society makes predominant.

While indeed, the post-materialist agenda of the 1980s and 1990s gave new impetus to left-wing formations, the order-and-safety agenda of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century is giving momentum to right-wing parties. The rise of right-wing populism at the turn of the century is now being followed by mainstreaming of the extreme-right political agenda: the Fortuyn, Haider and Le Pen legacy has changed Dutch, Austrian and French politics by imposing their agenda and pulling all mainstream parties to the right. 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 left- and right-wing parties that explains the withdrawal of support to right-wing populism, not the diminished relevance of the security-and-order agenda.

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 (but 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 suppor-

ters 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 1990s (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. (A 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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).

Party politics in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was transformed by the organized working class. Left-wing parties became associated with the urban

working class, trade unions and the underprivileged. As Michael Mann (1995) has pinpointed, it is specifically industrial development, rather than simply wage labour, that was the critical factor disposing workers to support parties of the left. With the decline of the manufacturing industry, class structures have disintegrated and the workforce has become individualized. With the decline of the working class associated with industrialisation, the familiar form of socialism based on an organised working class has become a thing of the past (Eley 2002). The rise of the politics of identity and difference in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century has added a second cleavage in parallel to the economic stratification cleavage, thus further fragmenting the organised electoral basis of the Left. These social dynamics not only contribute to the crisis of the Left, but to a more general crisis of the left-right political identification.

Also symptomatic of the declining relevance of the left-right divide in the past five years are the 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, p. 209) (15). 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. The far-right vote has been most successful 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 Left had abandoned the traditional agenda of socialism already in the 1980s

(15) There are, unfortunately, no uniform studies of the nature of voter constituencies throughout Europe.



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, p. 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 (1945-1975) the Right had adopted many of the positions of the Left (*ibid.*, p. 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 1990s. 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.

The electoral fluctuations and recent policy shifts throughout Europe, which we described above, provide some, but not sufficient, grounds 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, who are mobilised on a new basis; and 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 has not increased dramatically and is often down, and we cannot yet know whether the shifts in partisanship will prove durable (16).

However, even if the recent policy shifts and electoral dynamics have not (yet?) crystallised into 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 emergence of a new fault-line in politics which is starting to exist in

(16) I am indebted to Ira Katznelson for pointing out to me the deficiency in seeing recent electoral shifts in Europe as critical re-alignment.

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.

IV. *The new political vectors: social roots and political essence*

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.

A substantial part of the research on the impact of post-industrial economy on political visions and practices hinges on the idea that current socio-political developments are driven by the dramatic post-1970s rise in international capital mobility (economic globalization). From this perspective the contemporary crisis of socialism appears to be a by-product of the globalization of capitalism and the resulting loss of the regulatory framework of the national state (Ashley 1997; Sassoon 1996, Wallerstein 1984). Increased economic interdependence since the 1980s has generated a new push for productivity, which has created a shift to market liberalism and the intellectual climate in which the Left's shift to neo-liberal positions became natural. "What is new, especially since the 1980s, is that interdependence has reached such an intensity that it has thrown into crisis traditional concepts of national politics and all political parties and ideologies. Socialists have been more affected than conservatives, because of their essential conviction that politics can govern the economy. In a global economy, national politics can survive only at a less ambitious level, although this will not necessarily lead to the end of major differences in economic policy between Left and Right" (Sassoon 1996, p. 773). This perspective leads to the negative conclusions about the inevitable withering of left-wing policy options. More recently, Duane Swank (2002) has tried to challenge the thesis that the dramatic rise in the international mobility of capital pressures elected governments to roll back the welfare state, arguing that domestic policy conditions — electoral inclusiveness, social corporatism, authority centralization, and existing welfare system structure — shape democratic governments' responses to capital and trade integration. He concludes on the optimistic note that there is nothing inevitable in the retrenchment of the welfare state: democratic processes and national

institutions are fundamentally important to determining how internationalization affects domestic policy change. However, the statistics on which the study is based end in 1992 and 1993, while the consequences of global capital mobility were really only seen in the 1990s. With this, the anti-retrenchment thesis becomes a purely normative argument. Recent policy shifts have shown that in fact there has been a cutback of the welfare system even in such established welfare states as Germany, France and Sweden.

While the majority of scholarship stresses the global dimension (a quantitative criterion) of the new post-industrial wave (and the resulting loss of national sovereignty over economic policies), a more fruitful perspective can be achieved by focusing on qualitative aspects of the economy in contemporary post-industrial societies. This perspective, as subsequent analysis will attempt to show, will enable the European Left to replace its present defensive response to the current economic dynamics with a positive, emancipatory policy vision.

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, p. 290). This has led to the appearance of the “portfolio person”, a person without permanent attachment to any particular occupation or organization (Gray 1998, pp. 71-72, 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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 possibility (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.

The transition towards the high-tech global post-industrial economy in the 1990s 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.

v. *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).

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 (17).

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,

(17) 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).

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.

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 so) 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 work organisation that 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 numbers of professionals in their 30s and 40s 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 1990s. 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 lies 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, p. 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.*, p. 67).

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 most affected by the risks. This means that during the 1990s and at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century occupational differences are continually being translated into class differentiation, which in turn invalidates the 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.

#### vi. *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 emergence of new public demands has been the Third Way reformism which some centre-left and centre-right parties in Europe are increasingly 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 axis is being further fostered by the policy responses of Third Way governments (be they 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 1990s) 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 the knowledge-based economy, labour markets in the EU are starting 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, albeit 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 (18).

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 flexible in 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 in order to reduce the duration of unemployment, job flexibility has resulted in forms of *involuntary* temporary employment (19), mostly for low-skilled workers, which tends to be poorly paid

(18) "Tempted by a New Direction", *Financial Times*, 5 Sept. 2002, p. 7.

(19) Involuntary part-time workers are those working less than 30 hours per week

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 (20). Studies also show that the success of job-activation policies stressing the responsabilisation of the job-seeker is questionable in a context of economic slowdowns, such as the one Europe has been experiencing recently (21). 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 their chances of upward mobility.

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 21<sup>st</sup> century.

because they could not find a full-time job. OECD Report: *Involuntary Part-Time Workers*, February 2002. Lack of harmonization in definitions impedes comparison across countries.

(20) OECD Employment Outlook 2002.

(21) *ibid.*



VII. *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 Third Way (liberal) reformism.

We identified this apparent decline of the left perspective as part of a broader socio-economic shift produced by the economic dynamics of the late 20<sup>th</sup> 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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 new 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 (22). Due to this counterproductive fragmentation, future elections 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

(22) Currently, the Left in Italy comprises at least 13 formations. It was the plurality of Left parties in France that was to a great extent 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 — more than sufficient to win presidential elections. However, this vote was split between 5 formations. Source of electoral data: Ministero dell' Interno (<http://cedweb.mininterno.it/indelez.htm>).

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 20<sup>th</sup> 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 becomes 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 puzzling that 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 (23). Enhanced voluntary job flexibility, when backed by a 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. (24). 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

(23) 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.

(24) On ideas of countering inequality

through the 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.

tension between opportunities and risks that the new economy imposes on complex post-Welfare State democracies, a new constellation of the Left now has a chance to emerge.

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*ANNEX I*  
*Shifts in electoral support \**  
*and government composition in EU member states: 1999-2004*

COUNTRY	1990s	Early 21 <sup>st</sup> century.
<b>Austria</b>	In its post-war history through 1999 Austria was ruled by a “grand coalition” of the centre-left Social Democrats and the centre-right People’s Party.	1999: The far-right Freedom Party became the second strongest party and replaced the Social Democrats in the coalition government. 2002: the People Party’s biggest electoral success in four decades. 2004: The Social Democrats formed a regional coalition with the Freedom Party.
<b>Belgium</b>	The coalition of Christian Democrats and Socialists (co-founders of the Belgian welfare state) has been the usual ruling formula for the second half of the 20 <sup>th</sup> century. Between 1988 and 1999 the Christian Democrats ruled in coalition with the Socialists headed by Jean-Luc Dehaene.	1999: Voter support for the Liberals, (to the right of the Christian Democrats) increased to make them the dominant party in Belgian government. They replaced the Christian Democrats in the governing coalition. In Flanders, the vote for the far-right <i>Vlaams Blok</i> increased, while that for the Socialists dropped. 2003: The <i>Vlaams Blok</i> won 18 per cent of the Flemish vote, doubling its electoral results in 12 years. The biggest increase of voter support was marked by the reformed (in the direction of social liberalism) Flemish Socialists <i>SPA-SPIRIT</i> , while the two green parties suffered significant losses. At the 2004 regional elections the Socialists took the lead in the Walloon region and in Brussels, while the vote for the <i>Vlaams Blok</i> rose to make it the second biggest party in Flanders.
<b>Britain</b>	1997: Labour’s biggest lead in vote percentage over the Conservatives since 1945. The total of Labour MPs was a post-war record for any party.	2001: Labour maintained its lead, yet shift to the right was registered in the rising vote to the Liberal Democrats (18.8%) — their greatest success since 1929, a slight rise of the Conservative vote, and drop in the Labour vote (by 2.5%). 2004: The regional elections placed Labour third, after the Conservatives and the Liberals — the worst electoral score for a governing party at local elections.
<b>Denmark</b>	The Social Democrats have been the leading party since 1929.	2001: The Social Democrats lost to the right-wing Liberals ( <i>Venste</i> ) both at the general and the municipal elections. Parliamentary majority for the rightist parties for the first time in 80 years.

\* Unless otherwise indicated, the data refers to legislative elections.

<b>Finland</b>	In most of its post-war history Finland was governed by a core red-green Social Democratic- <i>Centre</i> (agrarian, liberal) government. In 1995 the Social Democrats in Finland scored their best post-war result while the Conservatives had their worst score for nearly a quarter of a century. The Finnish former communist Leftist Alliance and the Greens entered government for the first time.	1999: The <i>status quo ante</i> of the rainbow coalition between the Social Democrats, Conservatives and the liberal <i>Centre</i> was preserved. Internal shift to the right: an increase of the vote for the centre-right with 5.6% and an equal drop in support for the centre-left (Social Democrats and Leftist Alliance). The Conservatives made the highest gains of any party and the Christian League (to the right of the Conservatives) gained its best results in 20 years. 2003: <i>Centre</i> became Finland's leading party, while the Social Democrats came second by a small margin. The Left Alliance lost 1% and 1 seat in parliament.
<b>France</b>	1997: The Socialist Party again became the largest party in Parliament, after electoral support for it had been rising throughout the decade.	2002: Historical defeat for the Left at presidential and parliamentary elections. At the first round of the presidential elections the leader of the far-right <i>Front National</i> , Jean-Marie Le Pen, scored his highest victory with 16.86% of the vote. The Socialist Lionel Jospin lost more than 2.5 million votes over seven years: the worst result of any Socialist candidate in a presidential election since that of Gaston Defferre in 1969. The 3.4% for the Communist candidate Hue was the party's worst result since it was founded. The legislative elections gave an absolute majority to the centre-right Union for Presidential Majority. 2004: the municipal and the European elections brought a victory for the Socialists.
<b>Germany</b>	1998: The Social Democrats became the largest party in the Bundestag, ousting the Christian Democrats after four terms in office.	2001: The German Social Democrats kept power with only a small margin over the Christian Democrats and suffered losses at the 2003 state elections, losing in Lower Saxony for the first time in 13 years. The Social Democrats had one of the worst scores in the party's post-war history at the 2004 European and regional elections.
<b>Greece</b>	The Panhellenic Socialist Movement ( <i>PASOK</i> ) has been Greece's ruling party for most of the country's existence as a modern democracy after 1975. A tradition of influential leftist political formations:	2000: PASOK won by a narrow margin from the centre-right New Democracy. The vote for the latter rose by 4.6%, increasing conservative parliamentary representation by 17 seats. The vote for the three other main left formations declined and they lost 13 seats. A significant rise of support to

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	the Communist Party is the third largest party, followed by The Coalition of the Left ( <i>Sinaspismos</i> ) and the Democratic Social Movement ( <i>Dimokratioi Kinoniko Kinima</i> ),	the far-right at the 2002 regional elections. 2004: The Christian Democrats ( <i>Nea Demokratia</i> ) defeated PASSOK and ensured a comfortable absolute majority of 15 seats in parliament.
<b>Ireland</b>	The centre-right <i>Fianna Fáil</i> has had a stable dominance in national politics in the 1990s.	2002: Support for <i>Fianna Fáil</i> increased while the centre-left vote for <i>Fine Gael</i> and <i>Labour</i> decreased significantly.
<b>Italy</b>	1996-2001: a governing coalition around the Left Democrats of R. Prodi, M. D'Alema and G. Amato.	2001: Victory for the centre-right <i>Casa delle Libertà</i> headed by Berlusconi. For the first time in Italy's democratic history the electorate gave a large majority to a prospective government alliance, thus providing the Right with an unambiguous mandate.
<b>Luxembourg</b>	Traditionally governed by a red-green-blue coalition between the Socialists, the Greens and the centre-right Christian Social People's Party (CSV).	1999: The right-wing Democrats replaced the Socialists and the Greens as the coalition partner of the CSV. The Luxembourg Democrats are the most right-wing formation in the European Liberal Democratic and Reformist Group in the European Parliament. 2004: The legislatives confirmed CSV's leading position, followed by the Socialists and, with a narrow margin, by the Democrats.
<b>Netherlands</b>	Labour-led governments (purple coalitions) held sway in the Netherlands for most of the last decade. In 1994 Labor ( <i>PvdA</i> ) was able to lead the first government in modern Dutch history without the Christian Democrats.	2002: A coherently right-wing coalition came to power composed of the Christian Democrats, List Pim Fortuyn (far-right) and the Liberals. Labor lost nearly half its seats in parliament to Fortuyn's party, whose sudden rise to prominence with 1.6 million votes was unprecedented. Elections in 2003 checked the extremist vote (the Pim Fortuyn List seats diminished from 26 to 8), and Labor recovered its losses, but did not defeat the Christian Democrats.
<b>Portugal</b>	The Socialist Party had unprecedented dominance controlling the presidency, the National Assembly, and the important town councils. 1999: The Socialist Party had the highest ever share of vote since 1975. The Communist vote rose after 20 years of electoral decline.	2002: A steep rise of the centre-right: the vote for the Social Democratic Party (to the right of the Socialist Party) increased by 7.8% to make it Portugal's leading party.



<b>Spain</b>	The Socialist Party held an undivided rule between 1982 and 1996.	1996: The centre-right Popular Party of José Mar'a Aznar formed a minority government. 2000: The vote for the Popular Party increased and its mandate was confirmed. A majority victory for a centre-right party for the first time in contemporary Spain. Serious losses for the Left: The Socialists ( <i>PSOE</i> ) 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 ( <i>Izquierda Unida</i> ) lost over 5% of the vote. 2004: Victory for the Socialists (42.6% of the votes against 37.6 for the centre-right.)
<b>Sweden</b>	The Social Democrats have been in power in Sweden for all but nine of the past seventy years. Their partners in coalition government in the 1990s were the Party of the Left (ex-communist) and the Greens.	2002: The mandate of the left-wing coalition was renewed.

*Sources of electoral data throughout this study:*

European Union: European Parliament (<http://www.europarl.eu.int>); Austria: Bundesministerium des Inneren (<http://www.bmi.gv.at/wahlen>); Belgium: Official website (<http://verkiezingen2003.belgium.be>); Britain: Electoral Commission (<http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk>); Denmark: Politiken (<http://www.politiken.dk>); Finland: Tilastokeskus (<http://www.stat.fi/tk/he/vaalit>); France: Ministère de l'Intérieur (<http://www.interieur.gouv.fr>); Germany: Bundeswahlleiter (<http://www.bundeswahlleiter.de>); Greece: Ministry of Interior (<http://www.ypes.gr/ekloges/content/EN/default.htm>); Italy: Ministero dell'Interno (<http://cedweb.mininterno.it/ind-elez.htm>); Ireland: Irish Times (<http://www.ireland.com>); Luxembourg: Centre Informatique de l'Etat (<http://www.elections-99.lu>); Netherlands: NRC Handelsblad (<http://www.nrc.nl/verkiezingen>); Portugal: Comissão Nacional EleiçCes (<http://www1.cne.pt>); Spain: Congreso de los Diputados (<http://www.congreso.es>); Sweden: Valmyndigheten (<http://www.val.se>).

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Annex II  
 Chart 1-Comparing Results from the Previous Two Parliamentary Elections of E.U. Member States  
 (1999-2004)

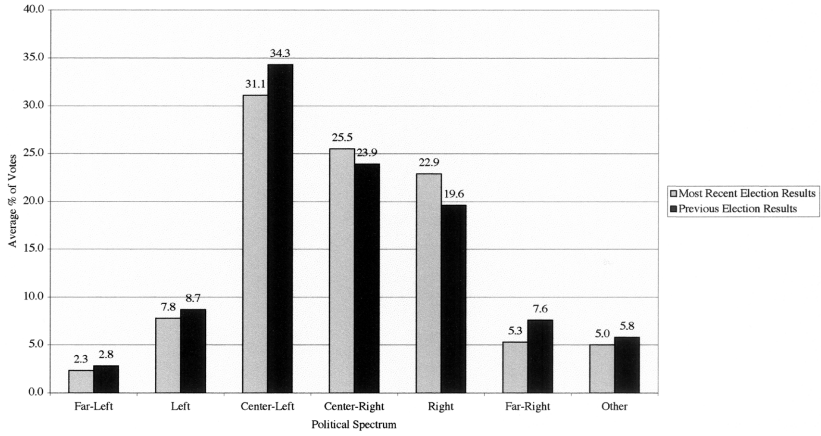
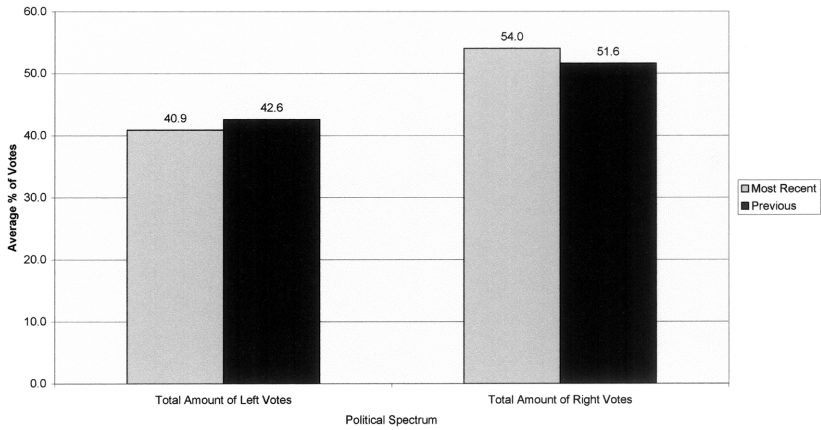


Chart 2-Left vs. Right in Past Two Parliamentary Elections  
 (1999-2003)



ALBENA AZMANOVA

Chart 3-Gains and Losses of Center-Left Parties in Previous Two Parliamentary Elections (1999-2003)

