

## **Future of Europe (Of Lisbon and Generational Interval)**

The EU of social welfare or of generational warfare, the continent of debt-bound economies or of knowledge-based community? Is the predatory generation in power? Why the only organized counter-narrative comes as a lukewarm Mouse Mickey – between *Anonymous* and *Pirate party*, from the Wiki-leaky to Snowden-picky.

Europe's redemption lies in the re-affirmation of the Lisbon Strategy of 2000 (and of Göteborg 2001), a ten-year development plan that focused on innovation, mobility and education, social, economic and environmental renewal. Otherwise a generational warfare will join class and ethnic conflicts as a major dividing line of the EU society in decline.

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Back in the good old days of the Lisbon Strategy (when the Union was proclaimed to be the most competitive, knowledge-based economy of the world), the Prodi and Barroso Commissions have been both repeatedly stressing that: “at present, some of our world trading partners compete with primary resources, which we in the EU/Europe do not have. Some compete with cheap labor, which we do not want. Some compete on the back of their environment, which we cannot accept...”

What has happened in the meantime?

The over-financialization and hyper-deregulations of the global(-ized) markets has brought the low-waged Chinese (peasant converted into a) worker into the spotlight of European considerations. Thus, in the last two decades, the EU economic edifice has gradually but steadily departed from its traditional labor-centered base, to the overseas investment-centered construct. This mega event, as we see now with the Euro-zone dithyramb, has multiple consequences on both the inner-European cultural, socio-economic and political balance as well as on China's (overheated) growth. That sparse, rarefied and compressed labor, which still resides in the aging Union is either bitterly competing with or is heavily leaning on the guest workers who are per definition underrepresented or silenced by the 'rightist' movements and otherwise disadvantaged and hindered in their elementary socio-political rights. That's how *the world's last cosmopolitan* – Europe departed from the world of work, and that's why the Continent today cannot orient itself (both critically needed to identify a challenge, as well as to calibrate and jointly redefine the EU path). To orient, one need to center itself: Without left and right, there is no center, right?!

### **To orient, one need to center itself, at first**

Contemporary Union has helplessly lost its political 'left'. The grand historical achievement of Europe – after the centuries-long and bloody class struggle – was the final, lasting reconciliatory compromise between capital and labor. (E.g. tightening the 'financial screws' while unemployment kept its sharp rise, was a big mantra of the French, British, German and Italian political center-right in late 1920s and early 1930s.) It resulted in a consolidation of economically entrepreneurial and vibrant but at the same time socially just and beneficial state. This colossal civilizational accomplishment is what brought about the international recognition, admiration, model attraction and its competitiveness as well as inner continuity, prosperity and stability to the post WWII Europe.

In the country of origin of the very word *dēmokratía*, the President of the Socialist International (and the Nation's PM) has recently introduced to his own citizenry the most drastic cuts that any European social welfare system had experienced in the last 80 years. The rest of official Europe (and the rest of 'unofficial us') still chews the so-called Greek debt

tirade as if it is not about the very life of 12 million souls, but a mere technical item studied at secondary schools' crash-course on macro economy.

The present-day Union, aged but not restaged, is (in) a shadow of the grand taboo that the EU can produce everything but its own life. The *Old Continent* is demographically sinking, while economically contracting, yet only keeps afloat. Even the EU Commission, back in 2005, fairly diagnosed in its Green Paper *Confronting demographic change – a new solidarity between generations* that: “...**Never in history has there been economic growth without population growth.**”

The numbers of unemployed, underemployed or underpaid/working-poor are constantly growing. (Simply, the unemployed is not a free person, but an excluded and insecure, obedient and backward-minded, aggressive and brutal individual.) The average age of the first labor market entry is already over 30 in many MS – not only of Europe's south. The middle-class is pauperized and a cross-generational social contract is silently abandoned, as one of its main operative instruments – the Lisbon strategy – has been eroded, and finally lost its coherence.

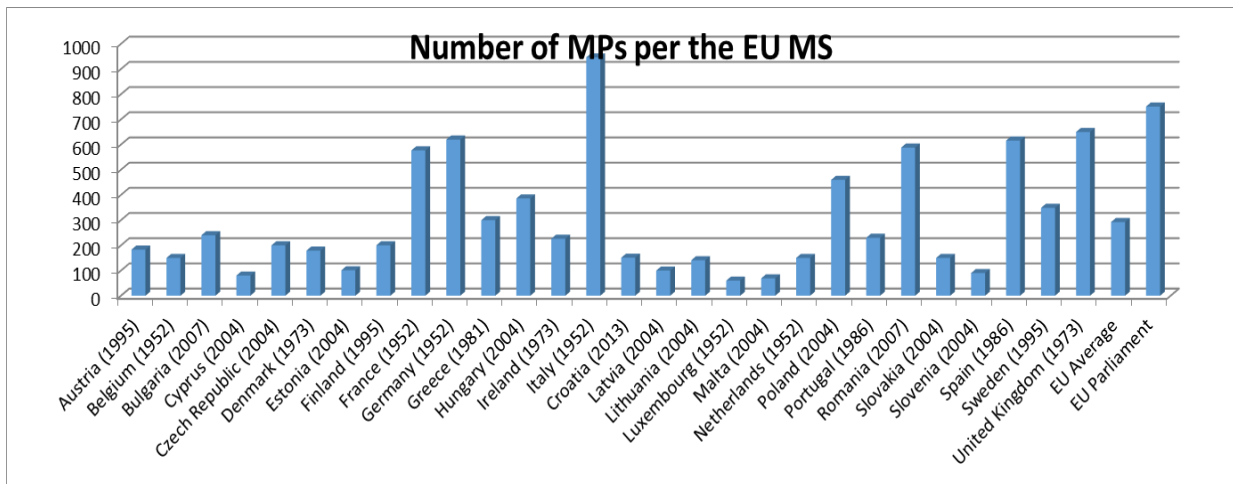
To worsen the hardship, nearly all European states have responded wrongly to the crisis by hammering down their respective education and science/R&D budgets. It is not a policy move, but an anti-visionary panicking that delivers only cuts on the future (generations). (E.g. the EU investments in renewables have been decreasing ever since 2008. Still, today, the EU budget allocation to agriculture subsidies is 10 times bigger than to R&D.) No wonder that our cities at present –instead of blossoming with the new technologies– are full of pauperized urban farmers: a middle class citizenry which desperately turns to mini agriculture as the only way to meet their nutritional needs.

### **Silenced Youth with Bluetooth**

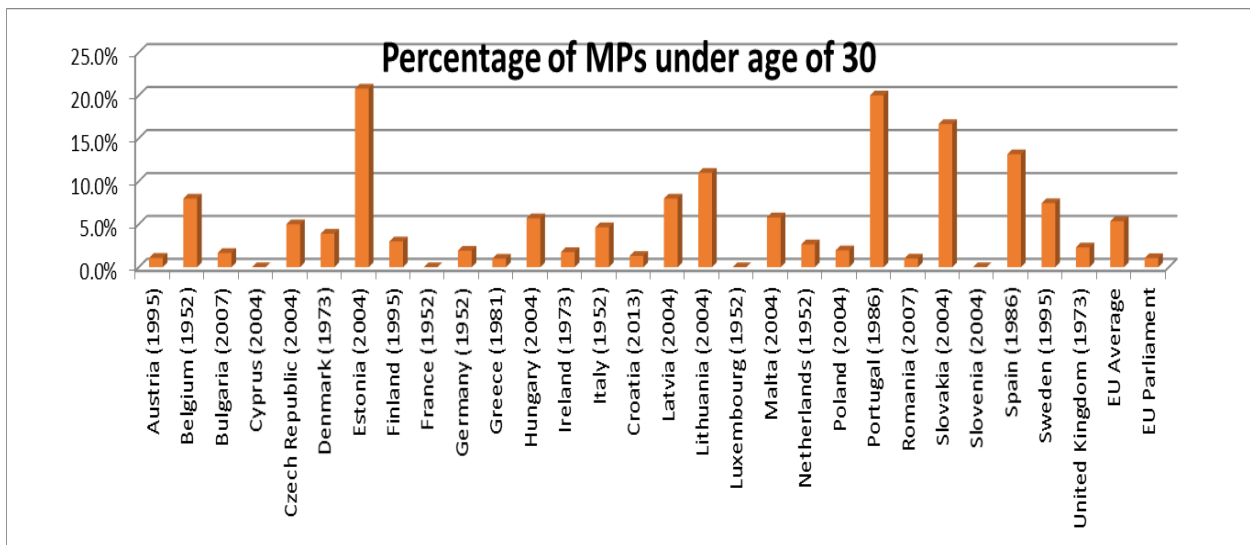
Is the subtle, unnoticed generational warfare, instead of the social welfare already going on?! Recent *generational accounting* figures illuminate a highly disturbing future prospect for the EU youth. Decades of *here-us-now* disheartened consumerism corroded the EU's community fabrics so much that, cross-generationally speaking, the present is the most socioeconomically egotistic European society of all times.

Elaborating on the known 'ageing argument' of Fukuyama, I earlier stated that: “...political, social and economic changes including very important technological breakthroughs, primarily occurred at generational intervals...Presently, with demographically collapsing European societies, of three or more generations active and working at the same time, the young cohort (of go-getters) will never constitute more than a tiny minority. Hence, neither generational change nor technological breakthrough (which usually comes along) in future will ever be that of our past: full and decisive.” (*Our Common Futures: EURO-MED Human Capital beyond 2020*, Crans Montana Forum, Monaco, 2005). Conclusively, many of the Third World countries are known by having predatory elites in power that continuously hinder the society at large and hijack their progress to its narrow ends. The EU might easily end up with the predatory generation in power.

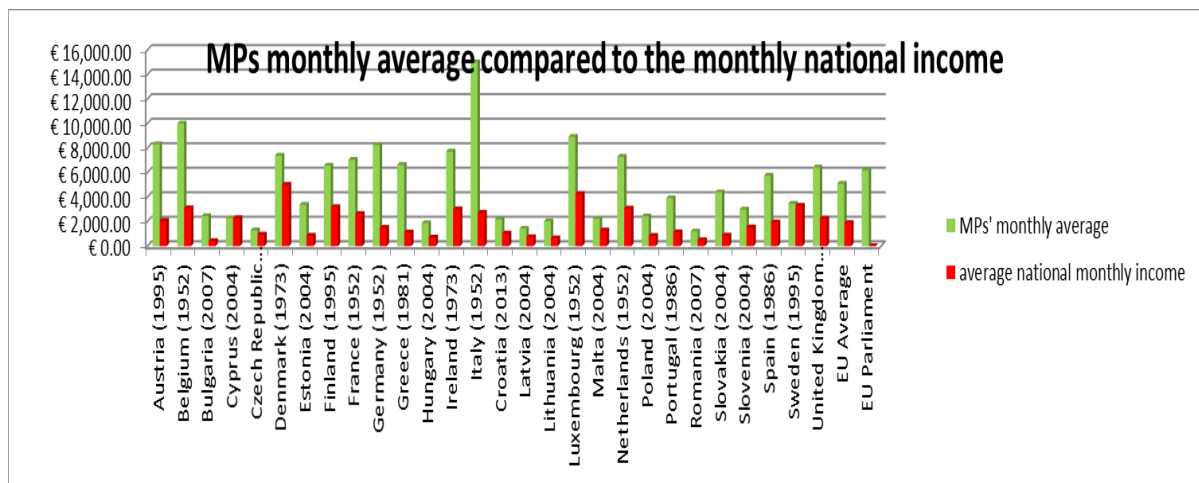
On the other hand, Europe has never witnessed its own youth so apolitical, apathetic and disengaged in last 250 years – as their larger front of realities has contracted into the sporadic and self-disfranchising protests over the alleged, but isolated cyber freedoms or over decontextualized gay-rights *à la* Lady Gaga, only.



Interestingly enough, in the times of a tacit generational warfare, any consolidated fight for a social and generational cause is completely absent. The only organized revolt of European youth comes as a lukewarm demand for a few more freedoms to download internet contents (Anonymous, Pirate party, Wiki-leaky, Snowden-picky, etc.) or through colorful sporadic campaigns for de-contextualized gay and other behavioristic rights. Despite their worsened conditions, the young Europeans didn't come even close to the core of representative democracy – e.g. to request 20% seat- allocation for the below-30 age cohort in the European and national parliaments – as one of the effective means to improve their future prospects.



Demographically, socio-economically and politically marginalized, European youngsters are chronically underrepresented since exceptionally few MPs and MEPs are below age of 30. Or as Fukuyama noted in his recent essay: “Something strange is going on in the world today. The global financial crisis that began in 2008 and the ongoing crisis of the euro are both products of the model of lightly regulated financial capitalism that emerged over the past three decades... most dynamic recent populist movement to date has been the right-wing... where the left is anemic and right-wing populist parties are on the move... This absence of a plausible progressive counternarrative is unhealthy, because competition is good for intellectual debate just as it is for economic activity. And serious intellectual debate is urgently needed, since the current form of globalized capitalism is eroding the middle-class social base on which liberal democracy rests. (Fukuyama, F. (2012) *The Future of History* Foreign Affairs Magazine 91(1) 2012).



### The troll of control: No prosperity via austerity

What is the additional pervasive effect of (any) crisis on democracy? 9/11 is just one in series of confirmations (e.g. from the ‘Nixon shock’ to the ongoing Greek/Euro debt saga) that any particular crisis may turn beneficial to those seeking the nontransparent power concentration.

Once a real democracy starts compromising its vital contents, it corrodes degenerates and turns formal. Many contemporary examples show us that for a formal democracy, it is not far from ending up as an oppressive autocratic dictatorship with either police or military or both residing outside a strict civil and democratic control. A real democracy will keep its financial establishment (as much as its armed organs, and other alienation-potent segments) under a strict popular democratic scrutiny and civil control through the clearly defined mechanisms of checks and balances. That is the quintessence of democracy.

(E.g. Without any electoral dependence on EU governments or EU voters, thus, with unconstrained authority and means – the ECB quickly produced over € 1,000 billion to refinance the banks. It seems as if the European integration does not rest on social welfare, public services, job creation and labor protection, enveloped in a democratic, transparent atmosphere of full accountability and universal, especially cross-generational, participation.)

“There has been little willingness to strengthen civic watchdogs of international financial institutions, which might provide a more accurate service than the commercially driven credit-rating agencies that performed so disastrously in the financial crisis...” – laments the FRIDE Institute Director, Richard Youngs in his luminary book: *Europe’s Decline and Fall*. Indeed, is there any **rating agency for ethical bankruptcy**, for a deep moral crisis affecting all societal segments around us? The ability to comprehend our common destiny, to show our cross-EU empathy and solidarity is also hitting its record low. The southern/peripheral member states are already pejoratively nicknamed as PIGS by the bank analysts and bond traders (an ill-made, but increasingly circulating acronym referring to Portugal, Italy/Ireland, Greece and Spain).

Currently, the end game of the so-called Euro-crisis seems to reveal that the financial institutions are neither under democratic control nor within the national sovereignty domain. (E.g. 20 years ago, the value of overall global financial transactions was 12 times the entire world’s gross annual product. By the end of 2011, it was nearly 70 times as big.) How else to explain that **the EU** –so far– **prefers the unselective punitive action of collective punishment** on the entire population/s (e.g. of Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Ireland, etc.) – meaning: to control, then it is keen on a thorough, energetic investigation of responsible individuals – meaning to: resolve? So far, Iceland remains the only country that indicted and sentenced its Prime Minister in relation to the financial crisis.

From the democratic, transparent, just, visionary and all-participatory, a *holiday from history*-model of the European Community, the EU should not downgrade itself to a lame copy of the Federation of Theocracies – the late Ottoman Empire.

This authoritarian monarchy is remembered as a highly oppressive and undemocratic although to a degree liberal and minority-right tolerant feudal state. The Ottoman Federation of Theocracies was of a simple functioning system: with the Sultan's handpicked Grand *Porta* (verticalized/homogeneous monetary space of the EMU and ECB, moderately restrained by the Council of the EU) that was unquestionably serviced by the religious communities from all over the waste Oriental Empire (horizontalized/heterogeneous fiscal space of the EMU, in which every state freely exercises its sovereignty in collecting taxes and spending), unless otherwise prescribed off-hand by the Sultan and his *Porta* (ECB and IMF).

Ergo, negotiating on the coined “Euro-zone debt crisis” (debt bound economies) without restaging the forgotten Lisbon strategy (knowledge-based Community), while keeping a heavy tax on labor but constantly pardoning financial capital, is simply a lame talk about form without any substance. Simply, **it is a grand bargain** of a tight circle behind the closed doors **about control via austerity, not a** cross-generationally wide-open debate about **vision of prosperity**.

### **Tomorrow never (D)Lies**

Despite a constant media bombardment with cataclysmic headlines, the issue is not what will happen with the EURO or any other socio-economic and political instrument. The right question is what will happen with us – as means are always changeable and many, but the aim remains only one: the self-realization of society at large.

Indeed, **the difference between a dialectic and cyclical history is a distance between success and fall**: the later Lisbon (Treaty) should not replace but complement the previous Lisbon (Strategy). It is both a predictive and prescriptive wording: either a status quo of egoism, consumerism and escapism or a concept of social dynamism resting on a broad all-participatory base. **To meet the need is/was always at our reach, but to feed the greed no wealth will ever be enough**. Restaging the Lisbon Strategy and reintroducing all of its contents is not just Europe's only strategic opportunity, but its grand generational/historic responsibility as well. Or as Monnet once explained this logic of necessity: “Crises are the great unifier!”

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### **Key words:**

Europe, austerity, control, Lisbon strategy, cross-generational contract, employability, ageism, social justice, vision, technological breakthroughs and generational intervals, decontextualized rights *à la* Lady Gaga