

SOME PROJECTIONS ON POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN THE CONTEXT OF NEOLIBERALISM

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Abstract

Projections of leadership, specifically of political leadership, in the conceptual framework of neoliberalism have demonstrated a total shift of this leadership from ground principles, rules and technologies both in the theoretical and in the practical concept of leadership as we know it, serving and of benefit to the whole society and supporting the social development.

The dominating in the so-called developed world neoliberal ideology has created prerequisites and real conditions for shifting the focus of development of modern civilization from national states to transnational conglomerates. The turbulent passage of the era of industrialization in conditions of another political model has pulled the trigger for the processes of total globalization, not only in economics and finance, but also in all spheres of social life. Information and knowledge have begun to play a peculiar role and significance incomparable to any patterns of humanity's historical development. Modern society calls itself "information" one, but people have actually become such a society; real economy has transformed into an "economy of knowledge". Not only have these processes been "explained" by the neoliberal ideology, but they have also served as its actual legitimation.

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Introduction

Social systems in current realities develop on the territories of Europe, North America, Australia and partly South America, Africa and Asia. They are facing problems whose inception suggests a risky life. This risk in its essence is civilizational and is expressed both in the deceptive value of the development perspective and with regard to deficits of working ideas for the protection of basic human values, rights and interests. The presence of such a risk is felt most strongly as regards the defence and protection of national self-defining in separate countries of the above-mentioned regions. The issues of the risk, the lack of trust in the political system as a whole, in institutions, in active politicians, in statespeople and in leaders as well as the social skepticism concerning the capability of overcoming emerging crises and the legitimate settlement of relations within society are not just current. These are issues specifically referring to challenges concerning survival and existence, guaranteed by sustainable social balance. In particular, here the question of political leaders and their value, functionality and efficiency in their actions as regards social organization and achieving socially common goals but also personal goals referring to each individual as a social member has never been as crucial. Even a fragmentary look could see that when achieving the goals that are supposed to be directed towards a satisfactory level of a lifestyle and a level of spiritual peace of mind as a motivational background to making one's life worth living there is neither a suitable social environment, nor are there suitable conditions within the civilizational model framed by the characteristics of the industrialization and the information society.

Touches to the current neoliberal political model

It is only natural to ask why this is so. And of course the answer is not unambiguous, nor is it one-sided, but it is a starting point to be aware of the dominating political model and in this context to introduce the topic of the current and future challenges to society and the way they are tackled. Here it is all about challenges linked to processes referred to as globalization, but also those that are directly linked to the condition of social structure, whose natural expression is the national state, "experimentally" involved in artificially created regional structures.

There is hardly any doubt that the dominating political model in the regions mentioned earlier is the one of neoliberalism. By definition, neoliberalism is a doctrine for deregulation and limiting

the state's interference in the economic life to benefit the expansion of options for action and realization of the interests of transnational companies and the bank capital. Naturally, the main goal is to achieve maximum profit for the corporations seen as transnational financial and business subjects. Ideologically, the most prominent representatives of neoliberalism are the Freiburg School, Chicago School of Economics and the Austrian School, whose works and scenarios are at the heart of particular policies of the USA, the EU, World Bank, The International Monetary Fund and in general that part of the world (and organizations) seen and defined as Euroatlantic political space (this is where we should add Japan and South Korea). We should not be mistaken that neoliberalism deals only with issues of finance, economics and business. In practice, neoliberalism goes beyond economic development and the prospect of this development; it conquers not only political life but social life in all its aspects as well. Actually, an attempt is seen to replace the mentality of the people, their culture, values and their perceptions against reality, which are based exclusively on their established nationality and national identity. And this substitution, considering the quality of life and cultural and educational development is not in favor of the vast majority of society. For neoliberalism enslaves the essence of human nature, the question of economic order, which presupposes where, how and in what quantities something should be produced; it raises consumption and consumerist mentality to a "higher" value, but also determines what the economic incentives to get people to work hard are, especially in favor of corporate profits. I.e, here it comes to the type of society regulation through the so-called "Invisible hand of the market". In theory, this should not preclude any conflicts, unrest and controversies. But the reality is quite different. Not only is there no exclusion of the possibility of crises that go far beyond their recently observed local expansion, but these crises deepen and practically already represent a global world crisis of values. The turn of events in the last three or four years in Europe and in particular within the European Union (EU), has shown not only a lack of the interests of national societies, but a deepening of the inability to overcome emerging crises. Here are two examples:

Following the corporate interests, mainly of the US, but also of Germany and France protected namely by the neoliberal political model, the gas project "South Stream" was terminated. Of course, those interests found their mediated carrier in the face of the European Commission (EC) of the EU, reasons were highlighted that it is necessary to overthrow the monopoly of Russian

gas through the implementation of the provisions of the Third Energy Package of the EU. This document, protecting the direct interests of only a small part of the EU Member States, suggests the separation of production and supply from transmission, which in fact violates the interests of Russia as a country producer and supplier of gas. Indeed, if the Russian gas holds no more than 30 to 35% of the European market share, it is not serious to talk at all about monopoly. Here, behind the political words of EU leaders based on the unclear structure of the “Euro-Atlantic values” hides the truth that it comes to an attempt to simply shun Russia from the European gas market in favor of the interests of those corporate and political entities that had and still have the intention to exploit the energy resources of the countries in the territory of which were implemented the so-called “Color Revolutions” or “Arab Spring”. In this case, however, actually the national interests of a number of European countries were broken such as Bulgaria, Macedonia, Serbia, Slovenia, Austria, Hungary and Italy. Under the sign of the alleged agreements reached in the EU, political leaders in the above countries, especially those that are members of the Union, gave up their own national interests. These political leaders, complying only with imposed codes of conduct and commitments dictated by the “strong ones” (primarily Germany, Britain and France) in the EU, ceased to function as national political leaders. At a socio-political level, however, the so-called leaders explained the retreat from the protection of national interests in an important sphere such as energy, for example, in the vague talk of democracy and Euro-Atlantic values and European development. So in this case it could easily be spoken of not just about political arrogance but of degradation not only of the functional characteristics of the leaders but also of their essence

The second example refers to the crisis with the flow of immigrants into Europe (who have deliberately called themselves refugees) namely from countries where their “Color Revolutions” or “Arab Springs” came about but also from countries in a situation of an actual social and economic disaster, like Syria or Afghanistan. Of course, this flow can be defined (by unofficial data and investigations) as organized and in this sense classed as an intentional invasion. Here, however, the aim is not to characterize the nature of the invasion of the migrants, but rather look at the behavior and actions of the formal leaders as far as this invasion is concerned. From the very beginning, the political leaders of the European countries, but mostly those who represent EU Member countries declared that it is because the Euro-Atlantic values are an emanation of

what is called democracy that it is just normal and civilized to accept the crowds of immigrants, inexplicably called refugees, who later turned out to be incapable of fitting in the norms of the European world. Moreover, some of the political leaders, like Ms Angela Merkel for instance, extended a direct invitation to the immigrants to go to Germany. There is just one explanation for such a behavior and that is the immigrants are only and naively seen as possible cheap labor force, again in favor of the corporate interests. All this, as political discourse by political leaders, is conveyed through concepts such as “integration”, “multiculturalism”, “principles of the EU” and the like, used not just as ideology but as a basis for implementing specific policies. In practice, however, especially after cases of assaults on defenseless women, like in German town of Cologne, it is obvious that these concepts are depleted of content and, moreover, they never actually had content that is compatible with European social realities. And this is mostly due to the fact that they go into controversy and irreconcilable conflict with established cultural, anthropological, valued and specific national-psychological characteristics of the national societies in Europe. Here comes a huge problem that is primarily related to the inability of political leaders to overcome their ties with the corporate interest to be able to work for the benefit not only of the so-called community interest but also for the national public interest. In other words, it is a failure of their function as national political leaders.

Political leaders in context of neoliberalism

The examples, of course few of the many ones, ultimately raise questions about the nature of modern political leaders in terms of neoliberalism. Above all, here it is necessary to keep the focus on their ideological identification, since it is precisely that which imposes on society these thesis and norms of behavior. Today still in the world of politics we talk about “left” and “right” as the main identification ideology. But the “left” and “right”, notably by words suggest the existence of ideologies, and they in turn suggest specific stratification of parts of society, known as classes. But the question is that in today's reality of an existing albeit controlled free movement of people, goods and capital, and in fact an established global information society, even with the best will, the existence of classes can not be established.

In fact, one of the fundamental tenets of neoliberalism is that each choice of every individual is supposed to obey the market, understood as a territory belonging exclusively to corporate

interests. This view, of course, theoretically and practically destroys the possibility of the existence of classes. In this sense, the identification of political leaders in the left-right axis is simply a replacement for the truth about their actual attitudes, beliefs and way of thinking and actions. I.e, in this case political leaders mislead the public in terms of the conceptual foundation of governing. To this should be added the imposed neoliberal thesis of these same leaders that people are free because they are free to pursue their own interests. But facts such as unemployment and the low standard of living of the majority of people, the destruction of the so-called “middle class”, the lower level of protection and security, do not just contradict the neoliberal thesis, but also reveal the nature of the political leaders in neoliberalism as mediators and as an expression of ideology contrary to the actual national interests.

We can definitely conclude that national societies are placed in a situation where education is no longer a field of intellectual development but a market niche, healthcare is no longer a valid part of the national security but a market niche, culture is not a state of the spirit, but a market niche, art is not an emanation of the human understanding of beauty and ugliness, good and evil, of what’s valuable and what’s vicious, but a market niche. It is in this environment and under these conditions that political leaders do not just function but successfully impose principles, norms, laws and political practices. What is it that allows them to do so having in mind their blatant destructiveness against their actual national public interest? The question above all is about the real, not based on laws and other regulations, legitimacy of political leaders.

Legitimization of political leaders in terms of neoliberalism has its three basic foundations – the political system the so-called “Civil society” (for the most part created and cultivated by themselves) and the media.

The political system defined as “democratic” in practice predefines the choice of only political entities that have been negotiated in advance in compliance with the concept that the only rightful technology of governance is the liberal one carried out by the notion of interest that is focused (allegedly) in the sphere of material well-being. In this sense, each deviation from the neoliberal idea (deviations can be defined the political figures with leadership qualities like the Prime-Minister of Hungary Viktor Orbán and the President of the Czech Republic Miloš Zeman,

who preach “civilizes” nationalism) is declared non-democratic, it is necessarily linked to doctrines such as fascism, national-socialism or ideologies like communism. At public level, the image of such leaders who go out of the paradigm of neoliberalism are daemonized and eventually described as marginal even in cases when they have ideas that are obviously logical and feasible in terms of protecting the national interest. Thus, the political arena is cleared and it is a question of electoral “mechanisms” that the power should be acquired by those political leaders that obey the neoliberal idea. In this case the forged elections bear no significance or consequences, violent manipulations are made regarding the personal qualities of the “pointed out” leaders; it is a well-known fact that for long periods of time (a succession of mandates) the political stage enjoys the same political faces. In other words, the political system functions as a formula for gaining power with a foregone conclusion. In this sense, the vast majority of the so-called political leaders in neoliberal conceptual framework not only refuse, but they also become incapable of possessing one of the most important features of true leaders, and that is to come up with ideas that benefit the national societies. They do not know how and cannot draw the way for implementing such ideas even if they have been put forward by other informal spokespeople of society.

Why can the so-called “civil society” be determined as the second fundament of the legitimation of political leaders in neoliberal conditions? By definition, civil society is a voluntary union of people whose main and only task is to achieve socially significant and useful purposes, it is mandatory that it should self-organize, self-control, self-finance and remain outside the aspirations of political organizations and state institutions, but act within law. In practice, however, this definition has never been followed to the full or if this has happened with individual NGOs, their importance to the public’s vital and useful purposes has been negligible and in fact bears no relation to the settlement of social relations in favor of the national interest.

In most cases, the representatives of the so-called “Civil society” are organizations that have been funded by external to the citizens of the country political and financial circles. (In Bulgarian formal society’s conditions these are organizations like Soros’ Open Society, Protest Network, Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, The Institute for Development of Public Environment, the America for Bulgaria Foundation, Transparency International, etc.)

Due to the nature of their funding sources, their actions, theses and ideas are outlined, necessarily in protection and in sync with neoliberal theses and ideas imposed by certain political head offices namely as policies and political practices. Therefore, these organizations that should by default be developing their activities in the field of the non-government sector have made in fact a vicious symbiose with politicians, respectively with the political leaders in conditions of neoliberalism. Through their public speaking, protest and anti-protest activities and many other public venues, those who define themselves as representatives of the “civil society” appear not only as advocates of political leaders, but they impose on society their role of a moral judge, moral censure and a democratic guardian portraying themselves as the last line of democracy.

It is this symbiose that gives ground to the statement that the so-called “civil society” is an inseparable part of the construct of a violent legitimation of the neoliberal political leaders.

But of course, the political system and the “Civil society” wouldn’t be sufficient for the legitimation and legitimacy of the political leaders in conditions of neoliberalism if it weren’t for the media, which do not only focus, but also impose their legitimacy at a public level. And this becomes possible due to the fact that modern media have changed their nature through their three functions: as transmitters of information, as transformers of information and as mediators. It is their third function that provides the opportunity to change the real nature of political leaders in terms of their ideological anonymity. In fact, political leaders in neoliberal conceptual framework do not have their own authentic ideology based on general and common values typical of national societies as they function under the sign of the copied and pasted by the neoliberal idea system of values serving the transnational capital and business. It is in this direction that media as “mediators” manipulate the public opinion presenting the political leaders in neoliberal conditions as true political leaders capable of demonstrating responsibility for the national interests. And yet the media are convinced of their correctness and usefulness since they themselves have already become corporate entities and a natural part of the mega-entities representing the neoliberal idea. Therefore, in terms of the process of legitimizing political leaders, issues such as “journalistic objectivity” and “freedom of speech” are just concepts, completely exhausted of content, but imposed as an integral paradigm. In this sense, the role of the media is twice as destructive because, in addition to fixing the public legitimation of the political leaders in terms of neoliberalism, they act destructively against the system of identity of

the national society itself. In fact, it comes down to actions that undermine the foundations of society, turning its members into hesitant, uncertain in attitudes and ways of thinking people who ultimately have no other option but to agree to be just staff and consumer biological entities.

Conclusion

So what can be said in conclusion of the essence and character of political leaders in terms of neoliberalism, from the standpoint of defending the national and public interest? Above all, it should be pointed out that this type of political leaders is a mimicry of their political nature. This mimicry leads to the denial of protecting the interests of national societies towards the creation of benefits and rewards of transnational capital. In this sense, political leaders in conditions of neoliberalism virtually function as an introduced by the outside foreign body for those societies.

But is it possible to change this? Could the political system, directly related to the power of business and capital be eliminated from the public life? At first glance, this seems impossible in the material world in which we live. However, neoliberalism is not void of alternatives. For the neoliberal idea ignores the fact that the nation-state as a form of governing the society is not “dead”.

On the contrary, the social development shows that the imposed general norms, for instance within the EU, are not carried out in most of the cases not because of some organized resistance on the part of the member states, but because they enter the insolvable controversy of the specifics of what we define as nations. In this sense, the alternative should be sought in negotiating different national interests and the search for an interception between these interests without this leading to the downplaying of nations and violating their system of values and their specific culture. Perhaps this alternative could be defined as a doctrine of patriotic pragmatism which will give birth to its true political leaders.

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