



## Yes we can...change Europe. A statement

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Colaboraciones n° 2209

March 12, 2008

As commentators here and there plead for more *progressivism* in European politics, the French just outlined their policies for their upcoming presidency next semester. Everyone has the right to infuse into those principles whatever they wish, including *progressivism*. They may even state that this is what is good for Europe. I beg to differ.

Hereafter, an argued statement on why actually the proposed lines of action should be interpreted in a conservative way.

The French will worry first about declining demography. Funny that it should be so. Not that the "secular progressives" have been lobbying for it. It so happens that not so long ago this line of thought, generously speaking, sided with the neo-malthusians. Who were these?

In 1968 a scientist called Paul Ehrlich wrote a book called *The Population Bomb*. The same year he founded a group by the name of Zero Population Growth. The outstripping of resources by population growth would lead to famines in the 70's and 80's paving the way for the end of humanity. In 1972, the Club of Rome predicted similar dismal outcomes in *The Limits of Growth*. Ehrlich himself proposed abortion as a mean to achieve a - one hesitates to write - *healthier* evolution in order to prevent the "cancer" - his word - of population from spreading.

Capitalism was, of course, the cause of all these awful consequences. The economic basis of the Western world had to be revisited so that people would not die. However, here we are - 40 years since then - and the problem seems to be the opposite. Yet, it has not been

brought to the attention of the public by the “progressives”.

Nowadays one can find among conservatives those who have denounced the problem of underpopulation. The catholic writer George Weigel spoke of a “suicide of Europe”, the columnist Mark Steyn was probably the first off the starting blocks with his book *America alone*, and historians such as Walter McDougall have put the matter in perspective calling it a first, excluding times of war or epidemics. None of them are *progressives*, although, what do you know, they happen to defend the necessary precondition of progress, the existence of human beings, otherwise called persons.

This situation, worrisome in itself, is rich in troubles linked to economics and the general welfare of Europeans, both materially and spiritually. Pay-as-you-go pension systems make Europeans rely on future generations for the sustaining of the elderly. No future generations, no sustenance. Older people becoming a problem, the temptation to get rid of them increases, hence the proposals of active euthanasia disguised as *dignified death* or other understatements. None of it spells progress, however you may stretch the term.

Immigration has been pouring into Europe in the years since the Limits of Growth were presented by the neo-malthusians. It seems the people coming-in had better senses than the writers of the report. The fabulous cocktail of Rule of Law countries, with freedom and rights, com-

pounded by scientific economics founded on classic liberal principles, has brought leisure to the continent. Others who had entered in the roads to serfdom felt the urge to move. And so they did. Now we had to integrate them. We failed. Multiculturalism – a banner of *progressivism* – is the ugly word that explains why.

We departed from the premise that all cultures are equal – those who created the serfs that came to Europe to be free, and those who created the freemen that were to be their hosts – and, naturally, the *dégringolade* that started then never stopped since. We now face increasing illegal immigration plus large numbers of non-integrated immigrants on European soil. As a result, such is the response of *progressives*, more multiculturalism is needed. If you fail to see the logic in this, get ready to hear the racist cries.

The French also worry about the competitiveness of Europe. Actually Mr Sarkozy won last year’s French elections on a programme to revamp the French economy by the way of a more merit based education and a more productive society based on work.

The fact is that, apart from the present behaviour of the ECB which seems determined not to generate inflation in the current crisis, Europe does worse than the United States in this respect. How may we explain the difference in GDP growth and unemployment? The first is close to 4% in the US and close to 2% in Europe as a whole. Unemployment

is around 5% in the US, and around 10% in Europe. It has got to be because we are more social. We care more, evidently. We do not create *petit boulots* and we redistribute more. Or perhaps we believe less in freedom and let people depend more on the State than we let them depend on themselves. It is a choice. The temptation of security – not always granted – is preferred to the air of liberty. We may discuss as to which is better in order to promote competitiveness, or we may just tell the French –after having criticized them for doing so – to go back to their protectionist tradition, and let others deal with competition.

The French will also put on the agenda climate change. Fortunately what they mean by it is a discussion on energy and protection of the environment. Dependence on energy and the use of more polluting ways of production, strangely enough, has *progressive* roots. Nuclear power was opposed at the outset by the radicals of the 60's and we never seemed to regain the courage to promote for Europe a clean and independent system of producing energy. Therefore, we used coal and depended for the rest on others. Some may seem to remember that trade unions, which we cherish – there were none in the Soviet Union –, had something to do with it.

Finally the French would like to see Europe as a serious actor internationally. What they propose is to stop adding countries for a while and concentrate in a few consensual policies increasing defense budgets at the same time, to reach effectual

cooperation in missions abroad. Neither of them are traditional *progressive* ideas.

Nevertheless a Europe worthy of her tradition and values deserves more. When Margaret Thatcher went on to become the leader of the British Conservative Party she heard a speech by a colleague before speaking herself. It is said that she grew weary by the unconvinced statements of the predecessor. Simmering, simmering, it brought her to a boil. She stood up and banging a book on the table she said: *This is what we believe!* It was Hayek's *The Constitution of Liberty*. Well, aside from what the French seem to soundly propose, this is what we believe:

.- We would like to stand “athwart History, yelling Stop” in the name of liberty.

Stop the bureaucratic exaggeration. Stop the political correctness. Stop the multiculturalism as an only way out. Stop the weakness of principles cross-dressed as sensibility. Stop the cynicism of not expressing beliefs for fear of declarations of social unfitness.

We mean to make our case unapologetically and full-throatedly. We will hear disagreement and we will treat it not only with justice, but with mercy. But we will not be deterred in our speech by the guardians of bien-pensant opinion. Borrowing from Kennedy, we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship in order to assure the survival and the success of liberty.

.- We shall look for example wherever we deem appropriate.

*To the unknown civilization that is growing in America.*

These are Hayek's forewords to *The Constitution of Liberty*. We will look to the other side of the Atlantic, to the other lobe of the Western world, for advice. We will draw from conservatism, from the tendencies of lively and cultivated debate that the recently deceased William F. Buckley Jr. gave light to. We will draw from neo-conservatism too; we will learn from them how they defeated liberalism and became mainstream. We will not shy away from principles or from the attractiveness of an argument well shaped or from the persuasiveness of beautiful literature founded on the cultural richness of the Western world. No matter how much others want to drag us down, we will not share their vulgarity or false simplicity

.- Free markets and free people are key European Union tenets.

We stand for free trade and stable money, low taxes as a measure of control of government, against collectivism and arbitrary decision making, be it from a dictator, a self-designated elite, a bureaucracy or even a temporary majority. We are for individual autonomy, free thought and the free expression of ideas. If that makes us unfashionable, so be it.

.- We believe in the sanctity of human life, in devotion to holy causes and in Providence.

We particularly remember that the two totalitarianisms of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, both born in Europe, were deeply against personal beliefs. Many of us believe in God, and yet, as Buckley said: "*We never exclude those who discountenance transcendent perspectives, but we tend to live by them*".

.- We will not be conservative.

This might come as a shock since *we are called conservatives*. What it means is we are closer to classical liberalism than anything else in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. We have no sympathy for the weaknesses attributed to old conservatism, such as distrust of the new embodied in hostility to internationalism and strident nationalism, different from the patriotism we advocate. In fact when strident nationalism comes from non-national bodies, then we are stridently hostile to it. We remain attached to the party of Liberty, to Old Whigs if you will. We believe principles are the key to practical possibilities which we are fond to discuss. In essence we wish to free the process of spontaneous growth, be it material, or more importantly spiritual, from the encumbrances that human folly has erected, our *hopes rest on persuading and gaining the support of those who by disposition are 'progressives', those who, though they may now be seeking change in the wrong direction, are at least willing to examine critically the existing and to change it wherever necessary*.

Finally, we are by nature optimists and believe words and ideas shape the world. By applying these princi-

ples to the European continent, as part of the Western world, we believe we will succeed in bettering our contemporaries' lives, our children's, and ours. To wit, we believe

*progressivism* will shortly be dismissed as a defining feature of our times, and that it will be swept by the wind of change we represent. Yes, we can.