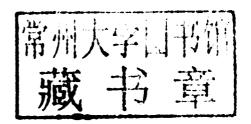# The Road to Social Europe

A contemporary approach to political
cultures and diversity in Europe

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Taponier**

Routledge

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Abbreviations

BEPG	Broad Economic Policy Guidelines
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CJEU	Court of Justice of the European Union
Commission	Commission of the European Union
Council	Council of the European Union
DG	Directorate-General (of the Commission)
ECB	European Central Bank
ECJ	European Court of Justice
EES	European Employment Strategy
EFSF	European Financial Stability Facility
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
ESM	European Stability Mechanism
ETUC	European Trade Union Confederation
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
OMC	Open Method of Coordination
PES	Party of European Socialists
Plan D	Plan for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate
SAMAK	Nordic social-democrats and confederations of trade unions
SEA	Single European Act

Preface to the English edition

The writing of this book was completed in April 2008 and the final proofs were submitted before the Irish referendum on June 12, 2008, an event that once again plunged Europe, particularly Social Europe, into a state of havoc. Having foreseen the victory of the "no-vote," we assumed that a second referendum would be held, without knowing the date. It is worth noting that, in an effort to woo Irish voters, the president of the European Commission suddenly decided to visit the small town of Limerick in October 2009, where he announced a European Union subsidy to cover the cost of retraining laid-off IT workers.[1] The Council of the European Union made every effort to reassure the Irish electorate: on June 19, 2009, it went so far as to make legally binding commitments to preserve "public services," despite the consistent refusal of European law to make any pronouncements about these services as such in the European treaties. Even so, as of this writing (early 2012), the corresponding modifications have yet to be made in the treaty. There are other far more strategic changes on the horizon and Gordon Brown's desire, expressed in 2008, to have done with institutional questions (see Chapter 3) now seems quaint indeed. It must be said that, since 2008 and the collapse of Northern Rock in February and Lehman Brothers in September, Europe has had to cope with a series of rather catastrophic events, which the present author had surely not predicted. Today, as the book is being translated, the situation is still up in the air and we do not know what the year 2012, which carries its own uncertainties, will hold.

The text had to be adapted for English-speaking readers to take into account the unprecedented events that have occurred since 2008. We did not propose a complete revision for several reasons. First, the "political-cultural" diagnosis, which is the heart of the book, is not a short-term phenomenon linked to the economic situation. In this regard, certain colleagues who have discussed my theses have correctly noted that the book actually encompasses "two books": one is devoted to very long-term political-cultural phenomena, and the other to "Social Europe," which concerns the medium term. The developments recorded since late 2008, especially since the first "aid plan" to Greece in early 2010, seem to have entirely confirmed our analysis. At the same time, modesty compels us to acknowledge that the "solutions" proposed in Chapter 8, though still relevant in our view, have little *immediate operative value* for the people making immediate

monetary, economic and political decisions. The solutions we sketched out in 2008 were neither intended nor claimed to provide – then or now – short-term keys for European decision-makers. Many readers have criticized us for this fact, of which we are well aware: the horizon of our reflection transcends the jolts and starts of the current crisis, which is by no means over, even though in all probability the Union, as an institution *sui generis*, will manage to avoid splitting apart from one European summit to another.

In the concluding chapter, we have chosen to exercise hindsight in commenting on the scenarios proposed in 2008. The corrections in the rest of the book have been kept to a strict minimum, updating the original text by changing verb tenses and introducing the new names of institutions (e.g., the Court of Justice of the European Communities has become the Court of Justice of the European Union, the Lisbon Treaty has come into force, etc.). The bibliography has been enriched and notes have been added in the course of the text to take new research into account. The core of the book, between this Preface and the concluding Postscript, has therefore remained unchanged.

It has nevertheless been a trying experience to look at analyses made more than four years ago and nourished by research over a much longer period (1980–2011) in the light of today. The situation in 2011–2012 is extraordinary and, aside from a handful of economists who predicted a crisis without knowing when it would occur, very few researchers foresaw the century's most severe economic recession since the 1930s, followed by a major political crisis of the Union, which hardly dares to use that name nowadays.[2] No political leader, a fortiori, had imagined such events. It is obviously not up to the author to decide whether his analyses hold up: we will limit ourselves more modestly here to explaining why we think they are still relevant. In a certain sense, the political crisis of the European Union in early 2012 essentially stems from a crucial factor we identified in 2008: *European political cultures are decisive in conceiving and legitimizing social protection and decisions regarding social justice.*[3] Yet these cultures are separated by languages and by the unavoidable compartmentalization of public spaces for debate. Unfortunately, European forums and arenas are not accessible to the majority of European citizens, who, by the way, do not speak English well enough to discuss politics *seriously in that language.*[4] As a result, nationalist tendencies aside, essential democratic debate takes place country by country, with each one looking out for its own interests. This is not to suggest that the Member States of the European Union can in any way exist independently of each other, as John Meyer and his colleagues clearly showed a long time ago.[5] Whether they like it or not, they have in fact become even closer and more interdependent because of the crisis. But it does mean that any act of substantial solidarity poses a political problem.

What we want to determine now is how the current crisis in 2011–2012 has modified or confirmed our analysis in 2008. The permanent aspects of this analysis are the ones we would like to explain in this short preface. Beyond this, at a greater distance, the crisis can also be considered from the point of view of its historical unpredictability.

The book's main theses and the current crisis

The paradox: a need for greater solidarity and impeded development of greater federalism

First of all, as soon as the crisis – which in the beginning could still be considered economic – started, the *problem of solidarity* arose. The quantitative weakness of solidarity at the federal level became even more obvious: the statistical information presented in Chapters 1 and 3 is still valid from this point of view. The European Globalization Adjustment Fund, established in 2006 with an allocation of 500 million Euros, had not even been used up by October 2011 and had thus far benefited only 76,000 people. Clearly, solidarity with the victims of corporate restructuring, and a fortiori with the victims of the crisis in general, was still situated *at the national level*, with a limited European budget of about 130 billion Euros. This de facto strengthening of the national level refutes the theses of the advocates of "cosmopolitism" (self-proclaimed "cosmopolitans"), as we shall see in a moment.

During the initial stages of the crisis, the Member States were able to rescue the banks with discreet support from the European Commission. The leaders of the main countries carried out these actions. Then the issue of solidarity came into sharper focus in the bailout of Greece, which was solidarity organized between states and not between citizens. Critics have objected to the term "solidarity" in this case because the funds were *loaned* to Greece rather than *given* without interest. The degree of solidarity stepped up, however, with the introduction of the European Financial Stability Facility in 2010, and its planned transformation later on into the much more powerful European Stability Mechanism (ESM) starting in 2012. What was originally a private fund has become the subject of a new treaty, which still has to be ratified by the 17 members of the Eurogroup and possibly other members of the Union by the end of 2012. This time, the members of the ESM are required to contribute 80 billion Euros in capital starting in 2012–2013 in five annual installments, and the citizens will be directly affected by the repercussions of these commitments on national budgets. Germany and France alone are supposed to contribute 48 percent of the funding; with the addition of Italy and Spain, 77 percent of the burden is deemed to be borne by four countries, an indication of the importance of the large Member States. All these mechanisms have helped to reinforce *solidarity between states*, despite the reluctance manifested by most of the governments and by a large percentage of their populations. They were even expanded to international discussions with the IMF at the G20 Summit in Cannes in November 2011.

But probably the most remarkable development in regard to solidarity is that a genuine debate opened up concerning *trans-European social justice*. Admittedly, the debate was truncated; it was engaged mainly by politicians in their own language and centered on the national political terrain, with the help of a press with a similar national focus (this does not include the economic press in English, which is read by only a tiny fraction of European citizens). But for the first time it raised

the issue that it may be unfair for some citizens of the Union to be allowed to retire before others on the grounds that their national system is more generous. German politicians were particularly adamant on this topic, criticizing "the Greeks" for being lazy and supposedly able to retire much earlier than Germans. Doubtful figures were bandied about in support of openly xenophobic controversies. Nevertheless, it marked an essential step in the transnational debate on social justice. As the crisis deepened and bailouts became necessary for Ireland and then Portugal, and Italy, Spain, France and Belgium were threatened in turn, the scope of the debate expanded to the issue of the economic government of Europe, which a growing portion of the international press considered necessary to protect the Euro. Famous economists revived the theses put forth during the preparation for the launch of the Euro regarding the impossibility of a currency without a single political authority. Here again, one cannot fail to see that the issue of transnational solidarity is explicitly at stake as never before.

At this point, as the federalist theses regain unexpected strength due to the economic shock that has turned into a political shock, the government of every single Member State is locked into its national "prison," confronted by voters demanding answers. In early December 2011, the former German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt delivered an outstanding speech[6] to the Congress of the German Socialist Party (SPD). He pleaded for a renewed and consistent commitment on the part of Germany to the European cause. This remarkable speech went almost unnoticed in France and the UK. This forced ignorance of each other's political debates unfortunately vindicates the image of "prisons." Considerable precautions are necessary before any steps towards federalism or additional solidarity can be taken, as the tandem of Angela Merkel and her finance minister Wolfgang Schäuble has demonstrated since 2010.[7] The present book is centered precisely on this point. National political systems and cultures, which are essential to the functioning of all national democracies, are closed in by their borders, their language, national mechanisms of identification and reciprocity and their democratic procedures. In the course of discussions about this book conducted in several countries, I was sometimes criticized, and rightly so, for maintaining my "national biases," which are precisely what I exhort my colleagues to abandon (particularly in Chapter 1). Danish colleagues noted that one of the book's postulates was based on the idea that "more Social Europe" was desirable, whereas more Social Europe was definitely not recommended in Denmark. Beyond our individual preferences, we pinpointed an opposition between Denmark and France because the dominant opinion in France, especially since the 2005 referendum on the draft constitutional treaty, has long been that Europe should also be "social."

Limited Europeanization despite proximity: a test of "cosmopolitan" views

From this standpoint, the current fate of ordinary Greek citizens resembles that of the Germans, which Klaus Mann wrote about in 1933:

A people has chosen a certain type of leader for itself and has not resisted his authoritarian power; this is the business of the people in question and theirs alone (...) it is certainly not the business of foreign colleagues to give them the voice they have lost (...) from abroad one has neither the possibility nor the moral duty to intervene in their fate, deserved or not, fair or unfair.[8]

This approach has remained true of Europe as a whole, as regards how people decide on their government, even when certain "federalists" wanted to forbid the Greek prime minister to even mention the idea of a referendum.[9] The penalties imposed on Austria by the European Union in 2000, when the far right joined the government coalition, have remained an exception.[10] The Union took no offense from 2002 to October 2011, when a decisive, if not *the key*, force in the Danish government was the xenophobic, anti-Muslim *Dansk Folkeparti*.

In the countries most opposed to federalism, the characteristics of relatively closed political cultures have become more pronounced. The Scandinavian countries and the United Kingdom, both longstanding Member States, have adopted the attitude of impartial observers, centered on traditional defense of their national interests, in keeping with the logic of their inherited political cultures.[11] Their systems are not directly affected by the shockwave caused by the "federal" issue. But the weight of political culture is observable in every country. It is at work everywhere, like the legacy of fear carried by German society concerning currency and bank management ever since the crisis in the 1920s. This heritage continues to play a role in the hesitations of the German government. Similarly, Greece has its own specific historical heritage and marks of political culture, not only in the patronage mechanisms identified well before the crisis, but in the traces of the German occupation of Greece, where some scores have been left unsettled.[12] The relative closure of political cultures was also illustrated between 2007 and 2011 by the accumulation of xenophobic measures taken by the Danish center right government at the instigation of the far right *Dansk Folkeparti*. These are just a few examples of a situation that is far more widespread but always assumes a particular national form.

What role do languages play in keeping countries focused inwards and closing them off from others, though never totally, as we noted in the introduction to this Preface? The cases of Belgium and Canada, which are discussed in the text, would seem to contradict our thesis. As we indicated in the original publication in 2008, the heart of the Belgian system of social security has remained federal. Since then, however, the situation has seriously deteriorated in the country; as of December 2011, it had been in search of a government for nearly a year and a half due to communitarian and linguistic divisions. In a way, Belgium has become the prime example of the crucial importance of languages (and political cultures) in European political life and we are perfectly within our rights to draw more general conclusions from it for the Union: something that is so hard to organize in a small country is a fortiori far more difficult when 23 languages and 27 countries are involved. Canada, on the other hand, is exemplary

in that several languages have not prevented the possibility of a political life and federally organized social protection. Yet contrary to the hopes of some,[13] which are discussed throughout the book (particularly in Chapters 2 and 7), the conditions of the legitimacy of its complex social protection system rely on an institutional architecture that is only formally comparable to that of the European Union. The first of these conditions, as Axel van den Berg of McGill University has pointed out, is that the provincial and federal governments enjoy direct and competing legitimacy through elections, which have no equivalent in the Union. The linguistic diversity cherished by Canadians – or at least by a portion of them – is therefore not an obstacle to sharing a system of solidarity and reciprocity. But the European Union combines two traits: linguistic diversity and the absence of political legitimacy at the federal level, which makes it impossible to assimilate it to Canada other than formally.

In the end, even as *Europeanization* is taking many original and still insufficiently studied forms[14] in Europe, the national framework of political organization and identification has not lost its relevance. No doubt it is on this point that the "cosmopolitan" theses have been undermined the most by the facts of the crisis. In the area of social protection, the cosmopolitans' mistake was to minimize the resilience of national systems. David Held,[15] for example, thought that these systems were no longer able to deliver such protection in 2002, whereas ten years later, the crisis has shown, on the contrary, that had these systems not remained national, the catastrophe would be infinitely greater. In what from an empirical standpoint looks like a totally unrealistic proposal, Ulrich Beck and his colleague Edgar Grande[16] recommend using the referendum method to legitimize the "empire" and retirement pension reform at the Union level. By neglecting the constraints of the real sociological nations, these authors make the same mistake as the "de-territorialized" elites, which Craig Calhoun mockingly calls "frequent flyers."[17] They minimize the role of *sociological* nations (which we describe in detail in Chapter 2) for purely ideological reasons that generally have nothing to do with sociology because their aim is primarily to combat nationalism. They take their desire to be "citizens of the world" for a reality. But the facts have proved them wrong.

From the point of view of sociology, the mistake has further ramifications in the notion of "methodological nationalism" actively promoted by U. Beck. The limitations of an approach based on the national framework were identified in the past by sociologists such as Norbert Elias in the 1970s. But this notion, modeled by analogy on that of "methodological individualism," is very poorly constructed, if not dishonest: it confuses *nation* with *nationalism*. These authors detest nationalism so much that they consider it equivalent to a "crime against humanity." As they declare in their book: "the traditions of colonialism, nationalism, expulsion and genocide originated in Europe; but so did the values and legal categories against which they are measured and condemned as crimes against humanity."[18] This indicates the normative weight attached to the concept as it is now used. Everyone is free to detest nationalism,[19] but normally this does not keep sociologists from empirically observing the characteristics of the sociological nation, which manifest themselves more acutely precisely in a time of crisis.

The sudden invasion of the political scene by the word "populism"

Another point discussed in the book concerns what is called, mostly out of sheer laziness, "populism," which we talk about in Chapter 8. The ambiguity of this notion, as we point out, has increased, together with confusing and vague usage of the term. There is no room here for an in-depth study and we will limit our remarks to the relationship between what goes by the name of "populism" and the European Union. Generally speaking, European political elites try to de-legitimize the numerous currents opposing them by branding them as "populist," and all too often researchers do likewise.[20] With that in mind, the European Commission and the formal institutions of the Union have been irreproachable from the standpoint of democracy and the policies they have conducted. They assume an attitude of irritated condescendence when European voters fail to recognize spontaneously their immense merits! From this oligarchic point of view, only backward voters and parties – which need to be enlightened – could question the way the Union operates. The convenient scapegoats are thus "populists" of all stripes. Yet, as R. Dupuy and P.-A. Taguieff have shown, in quite different ways,[21] there are many forms of "populism" and at least one of them corresponds to an authentic, legitimate reaction of the people – Dupuy calls it "the people's politics" – and any attempt to de-legitimize it is anti-democratic. To identify it implies that we acknowledge some reactions as perfectly legitimate, like those expressed by segments of the populations that do not enjoy the benefits of Europe, who cannot afford to travel, do not know languages and lack access to the full rights of European citizenship because they are not mobile.[22] It is inadmissible from a sociological standpoint to group together under one and the same meaningless label racism, xenophobia, the defense of social protection, concern in the face of economic deterioration, multiple identification concerns, questions about the forms of European democracy, etc.

Renewed sociological wonder in the face of historical creation and its variety

As we explain in Chapter 3, European law continues to be a central instrument in the construction of the European Union. In 2008, we had questions about its legitimacy. Three years later, in a situation of crisis, the contrast is even sharper between a totally decontextualized tool and the enduring pluralism of political cultures constructed on a foundation of national sovereignty.

Is European law becoming illegitimate or even despotic?

European law has continued on its trajectory, inexorably expanding its influence, and today it is tackling the production of social services, in particular, as well as stronger oversight of national budgets. The Treaty of Lisbon, which came into force in 2009, now contains a reference to the European Charter of Fundamental Rights – while awaiting the promised commitment of the Union to the European

Convention on Human Rights. According to some European jurists we interviewed, the project for a European legal order that would be not only *sui generis* but also "autonomous" and ultimately replace the national orders from which it stems is now within reach. In our view, this project is a caricature of a form of *hubris*, reflecting the intoxication of all-powerful jurists. But the ideology underlying the project is very present and, with it, the threat of destabilization, as Alain Supiot indicates.[23] No doubt, fortunately, there is no shortage of differing interpretations within the legal community on the issue of universalism in law. Mireille Delmas-Marty has taken a balanced look at how universal references have progressed in relation to, but not as a substitute for, other legal trends based on national sovereignty. Without taking sides on the question, she shows that these approaches co-exist in a dynamic of close reciprocity that maintains the universalism of human rights,[24] a topic we discuss in Chapter 5. The decontextualized universalism of European law is nevertheless present and clashes directly, as we have seen in macroeconomic coordination, with the traditional sources of democracy and threatens to join forces with "enlightened despotism" – despotic about principle – embodied by certain high-ranking European officials.[25] Jurists who are sensitive to the diversity of languages are diametrically opposed to such a conception. And after all, the continuing variety of rights will perhaps benefit from the fact that, according to certain linguists, the days of English as the lingua franca or hyper-central[26] language are counted.[27]

The aporia of cultural pluralism

The 2008–2011 period has been an opportunity for very rich historical creation. We have witnessed the failure of a certain type of large-scale, financial capitalism and the search – at once frenetic and hesitant – for means to regulate the economy. At the time this preface is being written, we are far from knowing the outcome of the political negotiations under way to set up new European and international "governance" of the markets and the economy. In this situation, the nation-states, faced with similar problems and an absolutely unavoidable manifestation of their close interdependence, have nevertheless maintained their diversity. From a much more distanced perspective, those three years represent unquestionably a new empirical illustration of the variety of Europe (and of the tension between universalism and relativism discussed in Chapter 5), which can also be detected in the parts of Europe that remain – for the moment – outside the Union.

Isaiah Berlin was a major twentieth century thinker who spent many years struggling with the tension between the two terms of universalism introduced in Europe by the Enlightenment and cultural pluralism. He rejected the idea of relativism in favor of "pluralism."[28] His thought is especially appealing because it did not elude – far from it – the many contradictions and pitfalls inherent in any discussion about the cultures of Europe.[29] Our task, while more modest of course, nevertheless communicates directly with the reflections of this great political philosopher. It is therefore not surprising to observe that the sociological

explanations we provide here are partial and no doubt partly contradictory. J.-C. Passeron has rightly noted, "The surest way to reconcile the quiet pursuit of everyday research with a confirmation of one's epistemological status is to don the rigid mantle of references to Popper."[30] In our discipline, it is frequently (and rather awkwardly) said that researchers must "operationalize" (*opérationnaliser*) their theories. That is certainly so. But when in-depth study forces the analyst to grapple with complex lessons at different levels of abstraction, the demanding practice of historical sciences – including sociology – is seldom conducive to peace of mind or epistemological certitude.

Preface to the French edition

It goes without saying that people like me, who have had the privilege of discovering foreign cultures and learning languages in a variety of ways, are committed to the project of ever-greater European solidarity. My interest in the countries still known as "England" and "Czechoslovakia" in the 1960s and a taste for the diversity of languages dates from my childhood and adolescence, when I first came into contact with several regional languages in France, including *Bourguignon*, and later with George Orwell's British English. This penchant, developed through opportunities that came my way, was not limited to Europe: South Africa was the first foreign society I studied in depth at the end of the 1960s,[1] without speaking Afrikaans; the endless discussions I had with French or English-speaking guides in China in the mid-1980s convinced me that Europe could not be Eurocentric: if it is going to develop solidarity, it can do so only by not excluding others, that is, non-Europeans. I learned that the intellectual and moral roots of European integration go very deep from a passionate interest in Erasmus and his remarkable intellectual exchange with Thomas More in their Latin correspondence in sixteenth-century Europe when scholars traveled from country to country despite persecution.

Like any researcher, these predispositions determined – though not always consciously – the subjects I chose to study. When I look back on my research itinerary during the period I am discussing here (1988–2012), I realize that I was always drawn to languages. I introduced linguistic issues, which are not necessarily obvious in sociology, wherever I could. At the same time, since the mid-1990s, I have had the good fortune to be in close contact with the European Union administration (known as "Brussels") to examine European social policy in detail. The problem of linguistic diversity, an ongoing concern of mine, prompted the writing of this book in an attempt to elucidate, as informatively and reasonably as possible, why it is taking us so long to build a truly Social Europe that generates solidarity. I discovered that carrying out systematic sociological research using the most rigorous concepts possible could help to answer this question. This statement may seem naïve, but it can be explained no doubt by the fact that I came to sociology rather late and have worked in many other fields in the course of my life.

The guiding thread that runs through this work is an invitation to take cultural diversity into account in a reasoned way. It is undoubtedly of utmost interest to

me because it has played such an important role in my life. Though my profession differs from that of the poet who conveys a love of linguistic and cultural diversity, we definitely share the same deep-seated goal.[2] It is my job to conduct systematic field research, in accordance with professional and ethical standards for which I remain accountable to my peers.

The work you are about to read has had to grapple with two major problems: on the one hand, the notion of *cultural difference* is commonplace in human experience; on the other hand, because this "intuition" is so widely shared, research in political sociology is quite profoundly reluctant to adopt a cultural approach. Social Europe or national systems of social protection are seldom studied from this angle. For this reason, I have endeavored to construct a clear notion of *political culture* that encompasses *collective representations of social justice and solidarity – not in general but as necessarily connected to collective practices and national institutions both today and in the past.*

Friendship has facilitated my extensive research: I would like to thank Jean-Paul Clipet and Rita, who initiated me to Danish life; Bea Green, with whom I have kept up a dialogue on languages for 30 years; Jean-Louis Dayan, for our constantly renewed discussions about public policies and ethics; Olivier Büttner, who has provided unwavering support for my research; and Ndongo Samba Sylla, who helped me decipher the workings of the Open Method of Coordination.

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