Time to say Good-bye



September 20th 2009 – a short walk through the busy city of Brussels: Journées du Patrimoine and Dimanche sans Voiture – though using the car is apparently not forbidden it is widely accepted not to use it. Nevertheless, the streets are crowded.

The sun is shining, and it is ideal for people from the Belgium and European capital to enjoy lovely day outdoor. Not just the Grand Place is reminiscent of a modern version of Pieter Brueghel' s paintings but the main streets are occupied by colourful ado. Variegated syllables in different languages, the sound of music from everywhere and the people in their various dresses: simple and modern, jaunty and a little bit frivolous or conservative-respectable. Men, women – showing their faces au naturel and others who still look more like a masque of themselves – despite the vibe of the folk's fair, despite people apparently taking over the lead.

And it is in the middle of this hassle and bustle and bursting joyfulness that I begin to get contemplative: Finally a decision had now been taken – a decision that stood in waiting position since some time, but loosely only, still needing confirmation. And a decision that is not really a single event – it is part of a series of events, decisions, part of a long development. A historical decision? A fundamental change?
So many decisions had been taken and are frequently taken – though they seem to be large or small, we do not really know what their meaning is in the historical development – a history made by men, a history that is made by us and nevertheless weighs as nightmare on our shoulders.

European Parliament

September 20th 2009 – the day when the people apparently take power over the streets of Brussels, few days after the European Parliament gave leeway for José Manuel Durão Barroso for another term in office. About two weeks after returning from a visit to Spain where we, a delegation of the Social Platform had been discussing with Spanish NGOs about European issues, presenting the Platform as European receptacle of NGOs and presenting the Spring Alliance, an outcome of a

wide range of NGOs from different sectors, much beyond the social array.
About three weeks after returning from a trip which amazed me not least by the omni-presence of the Catholic fundamentalism, the old power going well hand in hand with a lively and young people, going well hand in hand with engaged debates about challenges we all face today.

It is about eight weeks after ending a study visit in Amsterdam with its inspiring atmosphere of a city of apparent diversity and liberty, tied into a well preserved …, no: tied into a well carried on tradition. Few weeks after receiving the confirmation for a visiting scholarship for next year: far abroad; and about two weeks after having received a (though very) tentative invitation for a fellowship at 四川大學 some time later. And as well only a couple of days after being confronted with some issues that seem to be so far from such apparent globality – just private stuff in small village, West of Cork though not yet in the West of Ireland. Unconnected and still all belonging together in a small life, merging like the different tiny strings that make what appears to be a Gordian not.



Max Horkheimer - Illustration by Ingrid Bouws

It seems to be far-fetched, but looking at life is like judging reason and the joyfulness, the excitement of life comes from its diversity that makes its totality, with every single fibre and their concurrence. Incidentally I am just reading Max Horkheimer's contemplation on the '*Term Reason*", where he said (in 1951): "*All judgements on reason remain wrong as long as they orient on the isolated character, which, of course, is going back on the modern systems since Descartes*." Yes, this is the more precise grasp of what I frequently emphasise as

need to look at processes and relationships.

Nearly twenty years ago

September 20th 2009 – as well a day with a permanent a slight haze blearing the view on the Brusseloise skyline. A day which is somewhat marked by my own decision: as said moved for some time already in my mind, definitely taken recently in Madrid and at this stage only communicated to few friends and catching me emotionally this Sunday while I am walking along the Boulevard de Waterloo, back to the apartment at the Rue de Pascale where I have to do some work at the desk.

It is nearly 20 years ago that I walked the first time along the Boulevard – then into the other direction, to the Espace Louise from where I then moved to the hotel, then joining the colleagues for the meeting at the rue Washington. That day I passed the Rue Defacqz, at the time hosting many NGOs of the social sector – organisations that moved in the meantime to the other side of the city: towards the European quarter.
In those years I arrived from Germany, and not at all used to travelling, I felt sponged by what I perceived as Mediterranean vibes along the Boulevard de Waterloo. The restos, the street musicians, the shops … – and though I arrived relatively late, the place had been full of life, full of surprises and full of expectations. While I am walking again along this Boulevard this September afternoon, my attention is caught by a poster, advertising a film: *The Time That Remains* by Elia Suleiman.
This second, twenty years seem to be The Time That Remains, the time that is present in my memory, condensed though present with the fibre of every little second – it is "my time" not allowing me to do what I occasionally do: just going somewhere to watch a movie.

About twenty years: experience of entering another world, the world of 'ordered politics' after I had been many years active in other scenes: politics outside of the 'officially respected' spectrum and actually something for what I had to pay a rather high price: Freedom and Democracy as Bert Brecht described it once so frightening well.

Three times

Years 'in Brussels', years of accompanying three falls of men – may be that our

Christian societies are so much obsessed by the idea of trinity that it needs as well three times to fall.
In some way all started in the early/middle of 1990s: Jacques Delors being President of the Commission and Padraig Flynn Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs; the launch of the White Paper on Growth, Competitiveness, Employment: The Challenges and Ways Forward into the 21st Century and nearly isochronal the considerations on European Social Policy – A Way Forward for the Union – as well published as White Paper. In this context we learned about social policy not being limited to employment policies and policies of flanking economic processes. So true and this is what we actually discussed: in NGOs and in academia. In 1997 we expressed in the Amsterdam Declaration on Social Quality the request for "*a Europe in which social quality is paramount. Its citizens would be able and required to participate in the social and economic life of their communities and to do so under conditions which enhance their well-being, their individual potential and the welfare of their communities*."

It had been a success story since the early 1970s, when amongst others Ireland joined the institutionalised Europe. A success story topped now by Padraig's flagship: a civil dialogue, going hand in hand with the social dialogue. A flagship going hand in hand with the beginning of another event, ostensibly a step back when the European Court of Justice rejected a fourth program to combat poverty, however a boost for getting social competencies in the later Treaties (the Employment chapter, the article 113 and even the debates of the 11th working group when it came to elaborating the "Constitution" which never came through). Success stories and at the same time critical points of ventures: separating economy and society. It had been a strange course which frequently popped up without being really and fundamentally considered. What would all this be about? An economic interest and a social interest? A general interest which lost its economy? Or an economy that claims to be in the general interest?

A dizzy undertaking

An undertaking that causes dizziness; and a dizzy undertaking, with at times bewildering arguments and argumentations! And as important as detailed debates about exact regulations are the challenge is to closely observe with every colon that it is part of an entire sentence, a political statement about the judgment is deceptive as soon as it enters the Cartesian trap of being a judgement about the isolated character – the judgement of a parenthesis of which the novel is long

written and published. For many it had been a slow learning to see the truth in the need of a civil dialogue as matter of civilising the social dialogue and the need of a civil dialogue that follows an understanding of rights that are not individual's rights in society but that are truly social rights, the rights of citizens that are enabled and challenged and required "*to participate in the social and economic life of their communities and to do so under conditions which enhance their well-being, their individual potential and the welfare of their communities*."



Vote No

There had been surely some truth brought forward by the voices of those who stood outside of the conference centre of the Heysel in Brussels, while we met inside launching the civil dialogue. Different organisations gathered, holding posters and expressing their disappointment about the denied access to the centre where some NGOs and these so-called high-ranking politicians met. Disappointment surely as well by people inside, being afraid that it is just another time that participation is not meant to happen in real terms. Another time the truth we know here in Ireland where the voluntary and community pillar in the partnership agreements has only a voice as partner but where the doors are closed when it comes to questions of civilising the economy and where the microphones are switched of when it comes to socialise civilisation.

There are always two sides: "*a building completely constructed of glass, bearing the sign 'information'. [Looking] quite open and welcoming somehow representing a transparency of a united Europe.*" These are the words Cathy Byrne once used in the little essay on "*Glass Walls around Democracy*" which she wrote as HDip-student. And a reality where participation is arduous. And a walk on a ridge, garnished with the tension of pouvoir: abilities and controls;

embellished as well with laborious work on details and the joys of conference dinners, interesting chats and opportunities for friendships: in places with Mediterranean atmosphere, in cosy places with chats at the fire places, the frost patterns and the obligatory sauna visits, visiting galleries and concerts – and with many nights spent in front of the laptop, preparing the documents for next day's meetings. – Living in some way in the political HELLO-world and seeing the glamour crumbling, the arguments getting sober and, indeed, trying to find solutions for the world we live in …

The other side

… the world we participate in – a democratic world of democratic states and a world that looks for furthering its own claims: Participatory Democracy seems to be an answer not simply on increasing democratic demands. Rather, the other side is surely the fact that any reasonable politician, but definitely every political official "needs a people". Imagine governing just as a job – not the HELLO-position of glamour but the position of working as "service provider". Sure, many are well paid for it; and not less sure in many cases not at all exciting: study of documents, flipping through the 10th draft of something, hastening to a meeting, trying to make decisions but also trying to influence decisions by others. Taking part in cabinet meetings, delivering something for decision-making.



Max Weber - Illustration
by Ingrid Bouws

Ghost writing and reading a text that is ghost-written. All has to be understood – and as much as we can contemplate with Max Weber about the role of the

political official and with Max Horkheimer about subjective and objective reason, as plausible as Robert Michels remarks on oligarchy are, and as correct Norbert Elias writes amusingly objective about Court Society, there is another moment, strong and nevertheless usually misjudged: People – politicians and officials as people. And people like to interact, people like to listen, to know and not least: people are people. It may well be that some politicians carry on, working in and for a democracy without people, just for the sake of the mask of power – pouvoir sans pouvoir: Power without ability to act.
But political officials rarely do. They are not elected and this is why they need real people; they are people themselves and have to bear in everyday life the outcome of their own decision – surely to different degrees and in different ways. But democracy has a different meaning here, as they need in one or another way people who co-decide, who participate and not least to implement.

Imagine, the European Institutions, a government for a vast array of member states, for a vast amount of people is just a tiny group of officials. You don't believe it? You may have seen the enormous buildings from the Commission's bâtiment Berlaymont over the Council's bâtiment Juste-Lipse to monumental building complex of the parliament (by the way: if we do not include the old Eastman we have three of them now)? You spotted the Commission's website '*Buildings occupied by the Commission in Brussels*'?

Right, consider then the amount of people actually employed and compare this with the number of people working in government buildings in Dublin; the imperial power apparatus of the old and the new Vienna or Berlin. Brussels, is without doubt in many respect a fortress and it is surely a court society like that described by Norbert Elias.

But it is at most comparable with the court society of a tiny princedom under a mighty emperor. And if you actually compare, you will see soon that the emperor has lost the power and gave it to the prince. And the new emperor can only govern if the demos plays the game, participates in the exciting and contestable plan, in the project that aims on bringing subjective and objective reason again together. And a project that increasingly just reproduces the shortcomings of the member states. Is it too weak to do otherwise? Or is it too strong, already too much state itself?

Take the phone



Bruxelles

I remember one of the recent visits in Brussels. The trouble with C. from the Commission had been going on for a long time – and the plan of meeting the Italian women failed again. I left the hotel, not exactly clear about how best spend half of the morning which had originally been planned with meeting her. I walk slowly into the direction to the place of the next meeting …, take the phone, saying to myself: Call J. – he is the boss and he will finally at least provide clarity. Bad luck, I don't have his phone number in the memory of my phone and before just trying to drop into the office, knowing that it is extremely unlikely that he is there and free to talk, I call G., the deputy: *Non, Monsieur Herrmann, Monsieur F. … n'est pas … – un moment, … Oui, il vient d'arriver …*
a short second, I hear a click … – *Wie geht es*, the broad Austrian accent sound friendly. *Ja, aber heute* – a short hesitation – *heute ist es nicht moeglich. Morgen frueh* … – Yes, perfect: we can meet the next day.

I have a little leeway with other appointments and all this results in sitting the next day in the office at the Rue Joseph II. Isn't this J.'s office? I don't ask: Please, take a seat. Small talk, G. offers me the most delicious dried fruits – "*It is from a small stand in Berlin. I always get it when I go there.*" – I take some of it: "*Oh, that reminds me of what I buy in the market in Budapest, next to my office …*" "*I saw, you are teaching there. What exactly and how is that going on. You are still in Cork, aren't you?*" "*Yes, sure …*" Austrian charm, Prussian straight-forwardness and British utilitarianism (G. is economist of the classical school) on his side; Westphalian bullhead, "*Hungarian Švejk attitude*", finish reckoning and sobriety and Irish way of being a little bit laid back on my side make a pleasant atmosphere.

And then the question – after a short while actually: "*What can I do for you*?" I talk about the difficulty of publishing some scientific information from a project, financed by the Commission: "*Social Services of General Interest and the varieties in provision. Not least the legal issues in the context of the implementation. A still burning issue, important as well for the debate as you*

raised it yourself the other day during lunch."

Well, I know at least some of the rules. And I can play them: picking up information there, making use here and saying as much as needed and as little as possible – and observing the one golden rule: never say from where you have information if not agreed that you may say the name of the information provider. Sounds like intelligence, but for me it is more a rather stupid game between cat and mouse without really knowing which animal one is. I mention the difficulties with C., as well that I never managed to meet her, always having been promised to meet another time soon. And I get the confirmation: *there is no reason for these difficulties I have in publishing what I want to publish – "At least there is no reasons that I know of. I have to ask C., of course, if there is something of which I am not aware."*

Walk to the hotel

I leave the office: Bis bald wieder einmal. Mach's gut. – Ja, und danke fuer die Fruechte. I pass the office next door, make a step back, to have a look: I got the impression that somebody else is in this office now; well it has to be somebody different as the person who had been there before. I am aware that the person whom I knew from before, left. Now, a person with black hair is in the office, I cannot see the face – I move already forward when I see that he turns to the door, I only get a tiny glance and I hear the words she is speaking to a colleague "*Ma l'incontro è stato importante … .*"

I move on, walk to the hotel and have a strange feeling: C.?? The meeting they talked about in Italian had definitely not been the meeting with me. Angry, upset but still smiling as even with all the hassle I have to admit I had been frequently captured by the voice, the melody of the Italian language and the strange Italian charm: harsh and vividly-friendly at the same time. – I arrive in the hotel from where I have to leave to the train station but I take the time to quickly check my e-mails – read only the one: from C. *"Certo – Sure, we can meet any time …"*.

I pick up the phone, I could take a later train – no reply despite several attempts – the mobile phone, which displays my Irish phone number, slips back into the pocket of my jacket. I give up as well to publish this material.

Surely important – but there are other areas where I can invest my voluntary work as such publication is not paid for; there are other areas where I don't have

to face this kind of censorship. Though I surely won't face C.s charm either. The letter I will receive later – from G. – does not even try to be charming. It does not say NO, but it says enough to underpin the decision taken.

Yes-vote

Participatory democracy then: getting people, getting citizens to take part. But not as gaining peoples' sovereignty, instead and after what became known as Open Method of Coordination a matter of a technocratic process. And in some even dangerous way possibly undermining democracy. What the peoples' vote actually means is so visible these days in Ireland where the "*wrong*" decision means bringing the topic up again, asking for a new decision.

I remember from a previous referendum when Romani Prodi told "*Dublin to think again on Nice*" – and he also told Cork: In a 60 minutes speech he emphasised 55 minutes the importance of the Irish voice, the right of the Irish people to express the genuine opinion, whatever this may be. And he left 5 minutes for emphasising that there will be just so many referenda which are necessary to get a Yes-Vote. – Yes, they can; and we can do only what they want us to do. This is not meant to express a lack of the success.

And it does not want to express a lack of acknowledging the engagement for instance by J., who prepared the ground for the issue to emerge by working on the governance issue – himself actually paying high prices of "*political bullying*" within the higher political ranks. It is about a political process that gets independent of itself – the nightmare of history we make and the question when we should awake, not carrying on.

But there is surely another dimension to it – the one of perspectives. If I decide these days that I cannot go on working with this, it does not mean that all this is finally meaningless. But the participatory democracy of this kind requires again what it claims to overcome: full-time activists, close enough to the institutions – and one can only hope that there remains a sufficiently strong group, keeping objective reason alive within the institutional system of perfect subjective reason. But the danger remains – in the words of Max Horkheimer: "*That the meaning of language is replaced by its function or effect in the world in rem [i] cannot be taken too serious. The terms that once expressed reason or had been sanctioned by reason are still being used but they are hackneyed, neutralised and remain*

without obligingly rational identity."

There are jokes

The work, the engagement over the last twenty years had been in different ways the experience of moving on such a boarder – with its excitements and sharp edges. Being involved in policy making, even on occasions deliberating with high-ranking politicians and officials though never being one of them or even aiming to be one of them. Dinners with B. and lunches with S. and small talk with D. and in any case making different moves in the centre.

And always coming from outside: not being based in Brussels and acting with people who, though not being Brusselois are living in Brussels; expressing contrarian positions to the mainstream policy and barely speaking Euro-jargon; being academic in a field of strongly pragmatically defined agendas and strategies; being interested in exploring the field in order to find more fundamental answers rather than approaching the field from given perspectives. Sure, there are no clear-cut lines … –

– … but there are jokes. Seems to be weird to mention this? Well, actually it is quit simple. Some years back I heard a joke in Brussels and thought it would be an excellent one. Coming back, I told it to people here in Ireland and to people in other countries … and nobody laughed. Simple: only knowing the language in which a joke is told makes it possible to understand it. And the language spoken in Brussels is not English, not German nor is it Flemish or French. It is a very special language of consent even amongst dissenters. And being dissenter is only possible in a certain role: the court has own jesters and even such positions are contested, a closed court with its own agenda and not easily allowing people in from outside. There is even a close rule for mockery in the court society.

And it definitely is a court society, presenting itself as so open and being actually rather accessible. Sure there are limits of accessing the institutions. But not less sure: it is not really a fortress – the actual walls had been build outside of Brussels: as real walls of Shengen or as walls in the mind of people who don't even dare to think about going so far (or doing so at most as exhibits of and for their MEP). I remember some time back – four, five years perhaps. I still have had my permanent access to the EP, the one day going there to meet P. We know from different occasions, not least from meetings here in Ireland and though there are

may disagreements there is at least a general agreement of respect and readiness to talk in a serious way about important issues. I called P., but could only talk to the secretary. "*We have had the meeting scheduled for 7:30. But may be it is possible to meet now?*" I could only hope as I have had spare time now, at 6, and later it would be hectic again. "*Give me a second. I'll just check*." And it had been really quick. "*Yes. It is possible. Just come into the lobby next to the plenary*". *You now where it is, don't you?*" – "*Sure, will be there in five minutes*." Really a lobby, a monitor showing what is going on in the plenary meeting room. P. asked me if I would like to have a coffee which he got from the bar. We had to sit next to the monitor. "*No problem to meet now. But at about 6:30 I have to leave briefly.*"

It had been a session where MEPs have the opportunity to speak on various issues – relevant to them, and without connection to each other, without debate. Just 60 seconds to make the point. It has to be presented – and then other instances deal with it. But they cannot do so without such presentation. Highly pressured: 60 seconds. Still, we could talk in the relaxed atmosphere of the lobby. I always admire the arts work – art s needs space and it is here where it finds space. Arts needs openness and here it finds openness, perhaps only pretended by some but surely honestly granted by others. Lived openness in this space without borders – or at least overcoming some of the usual borders.

Language apparently doesn't play a role – especially during lunchtime in the canteen one listens to the various languages and one frequently sees people speaking in one language and obvious nobody is using his/her native language. One is offered dishes from the various countries and regions – and only one thing seems to be moving against this stream of gobality: water. As diverse as this place presents itself, it presents various waters from the different countries: French, Belgium, Irish, German, Spanish, Italian … water … the spring of life. An important rest of nationalism: the national springs.

In any case, still an open space though it is no accident that most of my individual meetings with MEPs had been with Germans or Irish MEPs even I am actually member of a French party. Meetings with S., with E., N., B., D. … – and that day with P. And even if bring forward "*my French perspective*" – that had been the reason for being there – I am talking to the Irishman, my "*country fellow*".

Social Services of General Interest

And the topic had been actually the one which occupied me during mot of the time these years, finally known as Social Services of General Interest – indeed, they are on the agenda now and perhaps I really "*have been an active protagonist of what has become now a fully recognised central social subject in the EU policy field of the social services (of general interest) as we say*" – this is at least what I had been told recently in very kind words by an official whom I still highly respect, despite the fact that "*Indeed, we did not always agree*." A Frenchman, citoyen who still is committed to the trinity of liberté, égalité, fraternité. But back to the topic: these services can be seen as well as third fall of men.

For a long time it had been a serious problem that those who are really engaged in the service sector hesitated to engage. It was about sleeping dogs and the wish not to wake them up. It had been about subsidiarity and the idea of keeping this area under national control. It had been about standards and the fear that they could be undermined – undermined not by market rules but by competitors from other countries. And it had surely been as well about protecting little princedoms. But finally these sleeping dogs raised their heads, first snarling just a tiny bit and finally being fully awake – the yap snapping as fast and firm as the yap of a crocodile. But at this stage it had been too late and the issue could only be defended rather than allowing designing them, rather than allowing discussing them as matter of socialisation. – Isn't it strange that we have socialised capital and production and hesitate to even clearly spell out the need and possibility of real social, i.e. socialised and socialising services? Isn't it strange as well that we even agree to a common currency and still hesitate to agree on certain standards for public responsibility and obligation? Isn't it strange that we reject intervention in this area, knowing at least instinctively quite well that social services cannot be delivered privately?

Twenty odd years

Surely, these debates developed for me during these twenty odd years in different ways: initially working on issues of discrimination; only later getting involved in the debate on services – being strongly influenced by the German model of subsidiarity. There had been the debates, early in the morning, when B.-O. had been already in the office, reading a bulk of newspapers. Occasionally we took the opportunity of the quite time around 7 a.m. to discuss the problematique: he emphasised that services would be a local issue, a personal issue, sure; but I always pushed, saying that social services would be personal, but we would have

to look for a clear definition for their social dimension: being a matter of society as complex and dialectical interdependencies. Being a matter as well of pushing for higher quality … – for European quality and European responsibility. "*Actually, if we accept European competence for a single market, we need to put forward a demand for a strong European social competence*." And what ever my role had been – there had been a move: B.-O. agreed more and more, changed his opinion and we found agreement.

Later, in the meeting rooms such discussion could hardly take place. The matter in question had been left behind by rather canny dodges: introducing terms that had been technical but without any meaning – or even worse: with the opposite meaning in the wider debates: the distinction between economic and non-economic services; the claim of a general interest in a society that is split by fundamentally split interest; the orientation on quality by means of formalist approaches … – It came to the stage where the splitting of hairs appeared to be more important than looking at the hairstyle.

Kitchen table

Sure, it is a little bit over the point, but one may say that it had been by and large only the French who continued to look at the headdress. And it had been for me a shift in thinking. In my own terms, linking to what I mentioned before, linking as well to my previous political engagements. And influenced by the debates with friends in France: Anglo-French Frances, Christian, the debates around the large kitchen table in the suburb of Lille with an even larger family; by living more or less short time in Paris and by the contacts to the party; by the collaboration and as well friendship with Paul.

That this French experience in Paris meant as well joyful times doesn't play role here – though I will miss the inspiring walks and talks with friends the visit to Edith, the impressions just sitting in the evening in the park near to the Pantheon or the two lads, playing the guitar at the bank of the Seine – though they had been obviously not used to playing together and though they had been obviously rehearsing, the sound which merged with the airy swoosh of the waves against the Quay invited to allow for a break, to enjoy the sunshine and take the opportunity to link the rather abstract work on the French legal system to the reality of the society in which the norms are actually brought to life – or searched to be bypassed. – That this time in Paris meant a bizarre experience, living in an

apartment building that had been under police protection, is only indirectly of relevance here – but indirectly it is as police here, in front of the house, being there to protect us, as body guard had been so different to the experience at Gare du Nord where I perceive the heavily armed forces more as menace. – Side remarks – not relevant for the course of history, not even decisive for the personal biography but surely experiences to be remember.

Back again: My attitudes to these social services developed as well on an entirely different route, the point of departure being the Grand Place in Brussels where I met a strange men from the Netherlands, Laurent. Looking back one could probably see already there an evolving relationship of mutual mentoring and learning, a friendship that had been as bizarre as the exchange of letters between Kant and Marx, but that been and is more then ever real. And the political debates had been accompanied from this day on the Grand Place by highly philosophical contestations, by ever opening borders, allowing global thinking and allowing thinking getting global. And allowing for so many good laughs, lovely dinners after the work at our "*Rousseauean Desk*" and even some brisk cycling tours to the lovely spot of which the name always slips out of my mind – and it may be for the sake that I can egoistically keep it for myself, as gem for me, "a present and an absentee person …, somebody who is an outsider and an insider, somebody who does not live in one place but always departs and – I wouldn't even use the term now – returns."

The latter is surely again another story – at least showing that all the work still allowed enjoyment. But coming back to the core: the debate on social services of general interest. Entering a debate too late – and I think this is what happened – meant giving the steering wheel into the hands of those who didn't fear to sail the ship. And when they steered it against the wall it had been too late – the wreckage we are facing now for instance in education, in social and health services surely has something to do with this. Not with EU nor with the nation state but with general steering, the oar in a firm grip by (neo-)liberals and equally problematic: socio-technocrats.

Leaving the boat

Yes, I leave the boat now – or more precise: one of its decks. And right, I leave it to others. One may say that experience says we have to move on, keep the ball rolling and the ship sailing. And I cannot even oppose. And I definitely know that

my decision is far from a heroic deed and even more will have some consequences I will regret one day.

There had been things – joys I had to learn: looking for little windows for the joy of visiting galleries; friendships; talks during long evenings and the nice sides of travelling: new places, guided tours "for us" and the bonding with locals who allowed to see and experience the unknown beauties. There had been new contacts – new opportunities, new worlds opening – some of them surely remaining open.

A – politically and privately – exciting, full and fulfilling time; though resting on the readiness to accept "flexible working hours", demanding material investment rather than providing profitable jobs, asking to sit and read rather boring documents and easily switching between issues, languages and ways of thinking. Requiring as well the acceptance of conditions that surely would not pass the investigations under occupational safety and health considerations let alone the rules of my trade union. And a time that had been at times psychologically extremely demanding: ignorance, bullying, direct pressure …

Power point presentations

Demanding as well by requiring living in different worlds and roles: swapping and mixing languages but as well frequently moving between stages – and surely occasionally severely failing: making presentations in the political arena which had been more suitable for academic debates and vice versa: giving classroom presentations which would have been more appropriate for Parliamentary speeches – the latter being something which I experienced a long time ago as sufficient to "*justify*" the end of careers.

Statements that do not fit into power point presentations seem to belong into a different world – and it is surely not least up to everyone not only to state this but to act accordingly. And then it may come to the surprises. Once I opened a presentation in the Parliament by talking about the statue in front of the building: a woman, a little bit in the posture of the US-liberty statue, holding the Euro-symbol high into the air. "And look then at the other piece of arts, marking the staircase: a spiral, no: different spirals, interweaved, complex and only allowing to detect the order by using equally complex analytical tools." – I remember M., looking surprised, bewildered at me, her eyes saying something like: You are

supposed to talk about social services, we needed some time to understand POSSGIs – it had been odd two years of cooperation on it, and yes: full of surprise and actually of interest.

But now, at the end, you come with a new surprise? “We can see the limited view of official politics: the single market; and we can see on the other side the complexity of POSSGIs: Person-oriented social services of general interest. A term not least challenging to take the general interest for granted. A term looking not least for a clear understanding of the social and its quality.” I could see relieve then: yes, “It is necessary to sow systematically bewilderment. By this creativity is set free” (Dalí).

I continued to ignore the press, taking notes, looked at the colleagues from the NGOs and the political institutions, knowing that it wouldn’t be simple; but also knowing that simplification would easily mean accepting mistakes in dealing with the topic. – Another of these many paradoxes in politics: there is barely a clear-cut decision between black and white – and this requires a clear decision for (a) colour.

From Hallstein to Prodi

To be clear on another issue: the world had not been better during the early days, when the European Institutions had been concentrated at the one end of the town and the European NGOs gathered at the other end. When political processes had been more about debate and political arguments than about professional procedures – matters that do not exclude each other anyway. Sure, early European politicians – from Hallstein to Prodi – had by no means been honest political souls and not less sure there are many so-called newcomers who strongly fight for opinions, for matters rather than forms. Recalling vaguely all presidents of the Commission, closer remembering them at least from Malfatti onwards, the experiences are extremely mixed: Obsessed with power and technocratic solutions, celebrating the latter even as social engineering.



W. Brandt

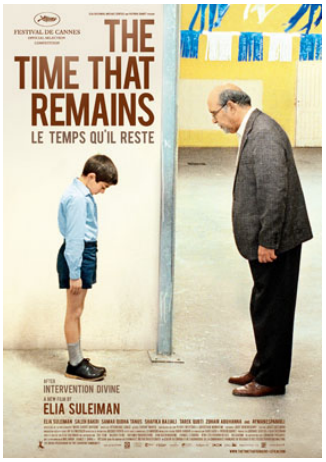
And I surely remember the times when we had been struggling in Germany with and against Willy Brandt – fighting for détente with the Eastern countries and finally succeeding with the efforts and, paradox of history, finally opening against all intentions the way for today's unbridled capitalism – and to me it says much when I pass this day in September 2009 the new building of the European Parliament, the entrance being marked by the letters of his signature: Willy Brandt. Old times full of struggles – springs of hope – and as well times where opportunism gained upper hand. Power-obsessed as well today people who easily change hats, move to another organisation and different issues in order to stay in positions; making statements for their candidature "*for a last period in office*" – and then reappearing a year later as candidates though they are surely beyond the age of supposed innocence of youth. And the other way round: the "*newcomer generation*" who surely know that office work and the engagement on the colon in the sixth line of the third para on page 23 of the recent regulation is definitely not the central issue – people whose aim is looking for and finding and making another world possible.

A personal decision taken, not heroic but I hope finally consequent – a change in my life and not really making a change in political respect. A personal decision but as such still not least a political decision; marking an end for me, reflecting a watershed of political developments: technocratic, managerialist, and implicitly neo-liberalist politics and policies which I am not ready to cross. A development which is surely not least marked as well by unintended developments. A development which is characterised as well by political dilution: people honestly showing respect and claiming diversity – though not even being able to see own discriminatory practices, hidden from within the cocoon of new charity which goes along with the new prince as the old prince had been flirtatious fawn over by benevolent artists and the thinkers of a new Trinitarian libertarianism.

In the rocking chair

This day in September I send a SMS to a friend, mentioning the decision I made. I hear back: Change is good most of the time and I think you had to stop something in your life to have energy left to enjoy it more. Well, about twenty years – time that remains with me; a time full of work, marked by tensions and quarrels, carried by successes and friendships and being accompanied by many joys – small at times, and many of these joys much smaller than the joy of sitting in the rocking chair, looking at the green grass growing in the own fields. But a time as well which build up energy to look forward to new engagements – to the other world which is possible, which has to be made possible. Though for me it means now to argue for it on other fields. And perhaps and hopefully still collaborating with some of those I leave.

Change is good – but it is necessary as well and for me the paradox is that the lack of general change leads now to personal change – it is only so far that one can go one way.



The Time That Remains

It is some time ago now, already September the 30th – in the meantime I had been travelling again: to the Netherlands and to Germany, not least attending a federal congress of social work, working on the same issues though in an entirely different context. Myself giving presentations, one on the EU-debate on social services and its meaning for professional standards, another on human rights and the difficulty of achieving rights and at the same time law based approaches. In the meantime I did as well some of the usual office work. But finally, sitting in the

tiny village of Aghabullogue, I did something that has apparently nothing to do with all this: taking a closer look at the film which I saw advertised in Brussels: *The Time That Remains*. It has nothing to do with what I wrote about but still one paragraph in the interview catches my attention – some of the words you may remember: 'The Time That Remains is linked to the narrative of the film, it's linked to the narrative of the global situation that we live in. It is linked to the very personal story that the film tells. The subtitle of the film [Arab-Israelis] is a political term that describes the Palestinians who remained on their own land, who were considered as absentees while they lived on their own land after 1948. So it's a very political term, but I appropriated it at the same time, also in a personal context, which is from my personal context of being a present and an absentee person myself, somebody who is an outsider and an insider, somebody who does not live in one place but always departs and – I wouldn't even use the term now – returns."

A place that remains – I look across the Irish country side, ahead the mountains of Kerry, the sun of the Indian summer glaring the country side, the noise of the harvester conveying a peculiar silence: The silence of reality with its past and presence and future – as much as they come along as the repetition of the eternal sameness and actually being afar.

Thanks to all for going with me – even if it meant at times going different ways and even going against each other. And we surely will walk again together where we can.

note: "dinglich" – real, material

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"Legacy" – Something to read – from experiences throughout the years

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Peter Herrmann started his work in researching European Social Policy and in particular the role of NGOs, His main interest over the last years shifted towards developing the Social Quality Approach further, looking in particular into the

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Member of several editorial boards; editor of the book series Applied Social Studies – Recent Developments, International and Comparative Perspectives (New York, USA) and Studies in Comparative Pedagogies and International Social Work and Social Policy (Bremen, Germany); peer-reviewing for several journals in the social area and book series.