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Social Citizenship between Regionalization and the European Community

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Trends in the Welfare State: Social Citizenship between Regionalization and the European Community¹

Massimo Paci²

ABSTRACT

This work aims to frame some hypothesis about the impact of two recent trends in the welfare state: the “regionalization” and the increasing role of the European Union. Both these trends seem to favour the “universalist welfare regime” grounded on social citizenship rights and, for this reason, they meet some resistance in the European welfare states which adopted a “corporatist welfare regime”. This is so particularly in France, where the corporatist regime rests upon a cohesive society and a central State enjoying a wide social legitimacy. The trends towards regionalization and the increasing role of European Union may have however a more significant impact in those European countries -like Italy- where the corporatist welfare regime combines with a fragmented society and a weak social legitimacy of the State.

1. “UNIVERSALIST” VS. “CORPORATIST” WELFARE REGIMES IN EUROPE.

The welfare state is not conceived everywhere in Europe as a system of universal social rights belonging to each individual citizen. Many European countries, particularly in Continental and Southern Europe, still adopt a “corporatist regime” of welfare - as Esping-Andersen [1990] called it - that is a system of social insurance rights, belonging to the individual citizen only through his affiliation to a given trade, profession or other employment-based group. This is so, for instance, in France where, according to Bruno Palier [2005; 2007], even if many social benefits are provided as citizenships rights, a quite coherent and socially grounded

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corporatist regime of welfare exists today. This is also the case of Italy where, nevertheless, the national welfare state is not as much coherent and socially grounded as the French one, due to the higher fragmentation of Italian society [Paci, 2008].

A “universalist regime” of welfare has fully developed in Europe almost only in the relatively small Scandinavian countries, where social and cultural homogeneity is high and universal social rights have been supported at certain pivotal points in time by large political coalitions [Ferrera, 2005]. In these countries the welfare state is mostly financed by general tax revenue rather than by workers’ contributions and it provides a wide range of social and health services to all citizens (besides money transfers and social insurance benefits).

To stress the difference between the universalist welfare regime and the corporatist one, we could say that the first has come to encompass within itself the employment-based social insurances rights and is resulting in a more socially inclusive system, because it is in principle open to everybody, independent of him/her being part of the labour market. (The growing importance of public social services provided to all citizens is eventually the feature that contributed most to the success of the universalist regime).

But, besides the degree of social inclusiveness, there is a second feature that differentiates these two welfare regimes: the kind of social solidarity that support or enforce them. Following Donzelot [2007], we could say that the corporatist welfare regime is grounded on workers solidarity, which is an “objective solidarity”, based on the affiliation to occupational groups emerging from the division of labour, while the universalist welfare regime is grounded on “citizens solidarity”, as a more “subjective” or “chosen” solidarity, which is no longer the necessitated outcome of the division of labour, but is instead the expression of a “political” or “voluntary” mobilization of civil society. This distinction between objective and subjective solidarity is of interest because it exemplifies the historical trend toward individualization in European societies, which goes together with the increasing variety of social groups and is especially characterized by the growing opportunities for the individual

to choose one's own social affiliation, in a context of a deeper control or "empowerment" over one's own life [Paci, 2005].

Nowadays European welfare states face two sharp-cut trends, towards regionalization, on the one hand, and towards the increasing role of the European Union in social matters, on the other. Our main hypothesis is that the pressure emerging from both these trends favours a shift towards universalist welfare institutions, which are more socially inclusive and suited to an "active" or "chosen" citizens' participation.

Here we will first outline these two trends and then we will examine their impact on European welfare states, with particular attention to French and Italian ones, as two different cases of the corporatist welfare regime.

2. "REGIONALIZING" THE WELFARE STATE.

As far as the trend towards regionalization or decentralization of welfare is concerned, this is first of all due to factors coming from the supply side, and particularly from the attempt of central institutions to reduce their social expenditure and tax overburden. But even more it comes from the demand side: as a matter of fact new social problems arise today which had not been foreseen by the existing welfare state: for example the ageing of society, changing family arrangements, mass migrations, the growth of precarious jobs (which has come to also interest the new ranks of skilled labour), and the new nature of disease which more and more often requires a long or very long hospitalization. These new problems cannot be only resolved through insurance-like, standardized and centrally managed monetary benefits, but require first and foremost a range of social services provided on a local base.

Moreover, the regionalizing welfare is characterized by a shift from a passive to an active way of providing social benefits, and it implies an important change, as it bears the potential to stimulate citizens' "empowerment" vis-à-vis local welfare authorities [Paci, 2005]. This may happen at the individual level, for instance when the unemployed is asked to play an active role in the project of his job replacement or when the migrant is asked to actively participate in the project of his social integration. But it may also happen at the collective level, when associations of

citizens are officially asked to participate to the public planning and implementing of social services in a given region or district.

As far as the individual activation policies are concerned, a discussion is presently underway on how far a citizen is really empowered. In fact, citizen empowerment is crucially influenced by the way in which activation policies are set in place. If the unemployed's job replacement is considered, it has been stressed that self-empowerment is rarely to be found in the "workfare" measures Margaret Thatcher's government set in place in Britain. The kind of control and sanctions the unemployed had to undergo (once he had signed his job replacement contract with the local unemployment agency) voided any real power of his to negotiate and participate. On the contrary some of the measures enacted in Sweden, Denmark and again in Britain by the Blair government are much more open to an actual empowerment of the individual [Paci, 2005].

The second instance of citizen empowerment is when the latter is achieved through to the mediation of local associations: many European countries have experienced instances of participative democracy in defining and sometimes also in managing social programs [Ascoli and Ranci (eds.), 2003]. In France, for instance, a law on "democracy of proximity" was approved in 2002, which made compulsory in every city over 80.000 inhabitants the institution of "neighbourhood councils", enhancing their participation to the decision-making in local urban policies [Bacqué, 2005].

In Italy, after the political crisis of the 1990s, local governments have become a fruitful ground to experiment innovations in participative democracy [Bobbio, 2005; Ramella, 2006]. In welfare matters, a comprehensive reform of social assistance was approved in Italy in the year 2000, which has revised the pre-existent centralization, as it has empowered municipalities to plan and implement social services by encouraging them to enter into partnership with different actors of civil society. As a result, non profit organizations, social cooperatives, foundations, unions, voluntary associations are asked to cooperate with local governments. A crucial feature of the reform has been the introduction of the Social Zone Plan, as the site where the participative planning and governance of local welfare takes place and where actors of civil society are involved not

only in a consultative but also in a deliberative capacity [Bifulco and Centemeri, 2007; Bifulco, Bricocoli and Monteleone, 2008; Paci (ed.), 2008].

Sure enough, associations are not necessarily expressive of citizens' choices nor do they normally act on the foundation of an explicit citizens' delegation. However their knowledge of the social problems of a their region or district is not to be underestimated and is often better than that of civil service bureaucracy or of political personnel. A reasonable forecast could therefore be that, within their local scope, social associations might come to play in the near future an institutional role of representing citizens' interests in the governance of regional welfare.

In the final analysis the trend of regionalizing welfare may be of significant impact, particularly on the corporatist welfare regime. In the first place, it pushes towards more inclusive welfare institutions. Secondly, it may enhance citizens' empowerment and participation.

3. THE EMERGING OF THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL CITIZENSHIP.

For many years, the European Union social policy definitely trailed behind market-oriented interventions. Nowadays there are however clear symptoms that the Union inroads into the sovereignty of national states in this matter are growing more explicit. The interest of such new beginning for our analysis is that the new European social policy seems to be characterized by two fundamental principles: that of a European social citizenship, and that of the social participation of citizens and their associations.

With regards to the former principle (that is the European social citizenship), it is in the first place to be recalled that the Charter of Fundamental Rights approved in Nice at the summit of the year 2000 and then officially proclaimed by the European Parliament in December 2007 (which coincided with the approval of the new text of the Treaty on the European Constitution in Lisbon) includes a notable Title IV, "On Solidarity", which stresses the principles of social protection of all European citizens. Sure-enough, this is a matter of general principles more than of actual rights. Nor is it possible to identify a real supranational European welfare, since there is no institutional machinery to redistribute the cost

of welfare among European countries. The fact however that these social statements are part of the Charter of Fundamental Rights has prevented that the strong accent the Union put on the market and on the economic growth in recent years (and particularly in the Barcelona and Brussels Councils of 2002 and 2003), would result in the diminishing relevance of issues of social protection. As a matter of fact all through recent years European justices have utilized the Charter to especially defend social rights [Rodotà, 2007].

On the other hand, the Barroso Commission which has been seated in 2004, has adopted a policy stressing the tight interdependence between economic growth, high employment and social cohesion. This interdependence has been a moving factor in developing the recent Community's social policy. For instance, at the Brussels Council in 2005, the Commission has actually prioritized two policy areas: full employment and the growth of a more cohesive society. A case in point is also the "Program for Employment and Social Solidarity" which has been launched in 2006, where the different un-coordinated social policies of former years have been unified.

Moreover, the Community programs against social exclusion have been reinvigorated. As a matter of fact, after the Treaty of the European Constitution has been approved in 2007, the community competence to deal with social policy is no longer based on structural Funds only. The Treaty indeed has created a new avenue as it states that the Council's deliberations only need a qualified majority if the necessity arises to adopt specific actions in favour of social cohesion outside the structural Funds. The end result is that a competence vested in the Council could now be utilized for instance to fund the right to professional training or to income subsidy during shifts in job placement [Ales, 2007].

But what is also to be noted is the change which has taken place in the policy in favour of the "transnational" citizen whose residence moves from one to another country thanks to the principle of free circulation within the European Union. The European Court of Justice has already produced a significant body of principles, decisions and guidelines to guarantee that welfare benefits which the European citizen is entitled to in one country can be transferred to another. This is a relevant principle

in the light of the growing mobility within the boundaries of the European Union. For example as far as health care is concerned, with the exception of hospitalization no previous authorization from national authorities is needed to be treated in a country of the Union different from one's own. As a consequence there has been a marked increase in the number of European cross border patients (from Italy in particular where some types of treatment are prohibited, as, for example, the one utilizing stem cells).

The European Directive on assistance of 2004 has also been very important, as it has established the right to be assisted in all European countries after an uninterrupted five-year residence. The wording of the Preamble is especially notable, as it proclaims that the measures indicated in the Directive may "strengthen the sense of a Union's citizenship" [Ferrera, 2005].

What is to be particularly stressed, here, is the change that has taken place in the regulatory framework that presides over subjects that move around within the Union, following the principle of free circulation. As a matter of fact, this set of regulatory norms and principles, which had originally been stated only in favour of full time wage workers, has been gradually extended to autonomous workers, part-timers, students and eventually to non-active citizens. A new paradigm of solidarity is coming to light which is focussed on the citizen as such, is prevalently aiming at the general and the universalist, not the categorical, and is not conditioned by the functional position of the subject in the productive process nor by the economic role of the individual in the common market [Giubboni and Orlandini, 2007]. Differently from its beginnings, the European Union does not refer any more to the worker or the "market citizen", and is distancing itself from the corporatist employment-based welfare state of many European countries.

Finally, as far as the principle of social participation in the planning of European social policies is concerned, it must be said that it was already vindicated by the European Community since the early 1990s, when the notion of "social dialogue" was adopted, together with a policy-making model which encompassed a plurality of public and private actors. The Lisbon Council of the year 2000 has then further moved in the

same direction and has launched the idea of an "active and dynamic welfare state", meaning one that would allow all citizens to fully participate in the core economic and social life. Moreover, the White Paper on the European System of Government issued in 2001 has proclaimed the participative principle through the explicit consultation with both citizens and their associations, as one of the cornerstones of the Union's government [Gbikpi, 2005]. Of relevant importance for the participative principle is also the so-called "Open Method of Coordination", which enhanced the participation of a variety of social actors (from employers' associations to workers' unions and social associations), in the area of employment policies of the European Union. In this way, between the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century, Europe has become a sort of "laboratory" to try and build participative decision-making [Alacevich 2004] .

To sum up, the place of the European Union in the social issue, while is still evolving, seems to be based on two main principles or notions: that of a European social citizenship, and that of a participative democracy or of the involvement of citizens and their associations in framing the social policies which touch upon them.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS.

A few concluding remarks are now possible, aimed to frame hypothesis more than verify facts or reach final conclusions.

We have referred, here, to two main trends in European Welfare States, towards regionalizing, on the one side, and towards a growing role of the European Union, on the other. Both these trends enhance the principles of social citizenship and social participation, which are, indeed, highly congruent to the notion of "universalist welfare regime".

We may suppose, then, that both trends will end up by strengthen the basic foundations of the Scandinavian welfare states, which, in fact, moved quite early towards a universalist regime, taking advantage of their high cultural homogeneity and strong cohesion of national society. A case in point is the Swedish "Adel reform" of the '90s, which devolved to local authorities the power to provide many social services without

engendering any significant decrease in amount and universal access [Ciarini, 2007].

We may suppose instead that the regionalization of welfare and the growing role of European Union would have a more significant impact on the welfare states of Continental and Southern Europe, which adopted a corporatist regime. In these cases both trends could meet some resistances and could bring about some changes in existing welfare institutions.

In France, for instance, central authorities try to keep under control the regionalizing trend in welfare matters, via financial means and very detailed definitions of services and benefits whose provision is left to local authorities. The previously mentioned “neighbourhood councils” (*comités de quartier*) have a nature merely consultative and are clearly subordinated to the top-down regulatory framework [Sintomer and de Maillard, 2007; Bifulco, 2008]. Moreover, as far as the impulses towards a European social citizenship are concerned, it is not by chance that in France they have met an higher resistance, both when the so called “Bolkestein guideline” (which liberalized also social and insurance services) was first proposed, and when the referendum on the European Constitution, in its former text, took place.

France, in fact, is witness to a mutual reinforcement of a corporatist welfare regime, a strong cohesion of national society and a wide social legitimacy enjoyed by the central State [Rosanvallon, 2004]. As Bruno Palier [2007] puts it, in the French corporatist welfare (which - by the way - has hundreds of public pension funds) each occupational category worries about keeping his own position vis-à-vis her neighbours, but this helps to assure an overall social stability.

For sure, in France too there are some pressures towards a universalist welfare regime based on the principle of social citizenship. For example, the Jospin administration put forward some years ago a social allowance, called APA (*Allocation Personnalisée d'Autonomie*), in favour of all non-self-sufficient citizens, which has been funded by a tax on general revenue. Since 2004, however, this allowance is been financed also (although in a minor part) by workers' social insurance funds, a fact which has been given wide publicity by proclaiming a “national solidar-

ity day”, when APA receives from all workers a financial contribution equal to the pay of one workday. The result is that workers’ corporatist-based welfare, symbolically restages its strength vis-à-vis the trend toward enlarging social rights to the whole citizenship.

To sum up both trends towards the regionalizing of welfare and the growing role of European Community don’t seem to imply any major break in the French corporatist welfare state, which is actually undergoing only some limited adjustments.

Italy is apparently following a different course. This country too, like France, has adopted a corporatist welfare regime, which however does not rest upon an equally cohesive national society. As a matter of fact Italian society is highly fragmented, particularly along regional lines. Moreover the Italian national State does not enjoy the same social legitimacy of the French one.

On the other hand, the Italian corporatist welfare has already known two remarkable blows: in 1979, when the National Health Service, inclusive of all citizens, took the place of the previous insurance system of employment-based health funds, and in the year 2000 when, as already mentioned, a comprehensive reform of social assistance took place, which devolved to regions and municipalities the power to provide many social services building up new institutions of participative democracy. As far as the Italian case is concerned, then, one could formulate the hypothesis that the regionalization of welfare and the diffusion of the principles of social citizenship and social participation furthered by the European Community could eventually bring about a shift toward a more universalist regime.

Should Italian central authorities increase their skills in the governance of the redistributive aspects of the system, such inclusive and participative regional welfare could enhance the social legitimacy of the Italian welfare state as a whole. The century-long issue of the wanting cohesion and fragmentation of Italian society, which the corporatist welfare state has given no answer to, could perhaps be better dealt with through the European support to social citizenship rights and the strengthening of regional levels of welfare governance, to which Italians seem more willing to participate and give credit.

We made reference, here, to two trends, both of which seem to favour the universalist welfare regime. These trends of course will strengthen the European welfare states, like the Scandinavian ones, which already adopted such a regime. They may instead meet some resistance in the Continental and Southern Europe welfare states which adopted a corporatist regime, particularly when – as in France – it rests upon a cohesive society and a central State enjoying a wide social legitimacy. They may have, however, a more significant impact in those European countries, like Italy, where the corporatist welfare combines with a fragmented society and a weak social legitimacy of the State.

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