

Europe - A good Idea?

A Critique of the European Ideology

A common answer among the broader left when it comes to *Europe* is that while it is a good idea - equality, peace, democracy and last but not least the end of the dark times of nations - it is badly executed. The left considers itself the true bearer of the European Idea and sees it as up to her to make reality match with the good and innocent idea. It appears that the left is bearing quite a heavy burden here.

However, “*Europe* as a good idea” is not shared among all of the left. Increasingly today when we ask ourselves which approach to take towards Europe and the EU the left is split in two camps. The other camp rejects the European Integration in its current institutional set up as a whole and argues - in particular around the question of the Euro - for a return to the nation state. To be fair most of these approaches favor a different kind of integration or cooperation outside the framework of the EU: This view, which can be posed in more or less nationalist terms, argues mostly economically and in respect to the alleged unchangeable character of the European Union. This left which is still committed to the nation state of modernity is criticized by what can be described as a post-modern left. This critique centers around discussable economic arguments but for very good reasons also on the uncritical notion of the nation state . After the horrors the 20th century in particular in *Europe* the nation appears to be anything else than an innocent point of reference.

In the context of this growing debate, the question arises if the left is right in changing its ideological terrain to *Europe* and whether this will enable it to leave behind all the problems of the nation state ideology. However, we then have to ask what the relationship between the ideological concept of *Europe* and the reality of Europe/EU is. Is the latter only a deviation from the initial idea that only has to be matched with the progressive concept of *Europe*?

To present the idea of *Europe* and the real Europe as separated if not contradictory things doesn't seem plausible. At least from a post-colonial perspective it is doubtful to distinguish a pure and innocent Idea from Europe's violent past and present. Thus I aim to show the relationship between the ideology and its reality. The problematic of the relationship between

reality and ideology - in this specific case the Market - is very well put by Frederic Jameson: "the ideological dimension is intrinsically embedded within the reality, which secrets it as a necessary feature of its own structure. That dimension is thus profoundly *imaginary* in a real and positive sense; that is to say, it exists and is real insofar as it is an image, marked and destined to remain as such, is is very unreality and unrealizability being what is real about it."¹

With this point of departure in mind I will outline a critique of the *European* ideology related to some important proponents of this ideology around the following questions:

- Is a progressive concept of *Europe* possible that is not Eurocentric?
- Taking into account Europe's (post-)colonial past and present, can there be a progressive concept of *Europe* that is not rooted on exclusion of the Other?
- To realize an emancipatory project is it necessary to overcome and break with the real Europe in terms of uneven economic relationships within the political space of *Europe* and between this space and the rest of the World.
- Is *Europe* really the abolishment of the nation or does it rely on it?
- Can we think of a *Europe* that is truly a peace project and not rather a project of pacification?

The aim of this contribution is not to take sides in the pro-/anti Europe conflict within the left which is an ideological problem that is imposed upon the left by the political enemy. The aim is rather to contribute to overcoming this split and make space for a genuine left approach towards emancipation that is neither bound to the political space of either the European nation state nor *Europe*. I will also try to outline what this critique of *Europe* means for a political strategy of the left. How can a left that operates in a political arena structured by both the EU and the *European* nation state formulate political concepts for those arena with going into the trap of reproducing a highly problematic ideologies?

¹ Frederic Jameson (1991/2005): Postmodernism. Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, Duke University Press, p. 262