

THE END OF THE "END OF IDEOLOGY" PARADIGM REVISITED

A Hypothesis for the Longevity of Ideology and the Role of the Modern University

Abstract: This paper deals with the current state-of-affairs of the well-known "end of ideology" debate in social sciences. Starting with some Bulgarian examples which are contextualized in the dominantly pejorative perceptions of the concept of political ideology in mass consciousness, we examine the main pillars of the "end of ideology" paradigm together with the most popular approaches of their scientific verification. We formulate a hypothesis for the longevity of ideology based upon the factual contents of the concept and huge historical evidence. Finally we emphasize the role of the modern university in achieving better understanding of others and of ourselves in complex societies so that tensions and conflicts can not be an inevitable consequence of ideological diversity.

Keywords: political ideology, end of ideology, mass consciousness, Daniel Bell, Francis Fukuyama, education in ideology

1. Introduction

2011 was an election-year in Bulgaria. At the end of the year, in October, after two terms in office of the left-wing president Georgi Parvanov, a new right-wing head-of-state, Rossen Plevneliev was appointed through universal suffrage by the majority of Bulgarian voters. Parvanov and Plevneliev represent not only different parts of the political spectrum but also different notions of the role of the institution and the presidential position in the balance of powers and the public debate. This is a stipulation evoking some interest in the similarity of their opinions of ideology in current politics.

"By their vote they [Bulgarian citizens] put an end to ideology"

/19.01.2002/

"10 years ago... I said that the end of ideologies in Bulgarian politics had come. I think I will not be refuted at this discussion as well"

/11.11.2010/

Georgi Parvanov, President of Bulgaria (2002-2012)

“From this moment on, I can definitely say that in politics ideology is going to be less and less important, and pragmatism is going to be more and more important, which means obtaining concrete results for people and society”

/07.11.2011/

Rossen Plevneliev, President of Bulgaria (2012-)

Surely this is not some kind of intended agreement. Its explanation rather requires a broader context. In many cases Bulgarian political elites are not eager to be associated with ideological standpoints. Pragmatism is the new flag of appropriate and effective political behaviour. Examples may be borrowed from other countries as well. Moreover one cannot reasonably argue that this is a radically new situation. It is widely believed to be firmly rooted in previous developments and presumed attitudes of electorates.

2. Ideology in mass consciousness

Public perceptions of ideology are generally shrouded in pejorative connotations. Ideology¹ is a bad word. Far too many reasons amass to produce, maintain and explain this impression.

Ideology is said to reflect **narrow party interests**, the plans and wishes of a small group of people engaged in a struggle for political power. And because of the violent competition characterizing political life in East European and Balkan societies, it may be seen as a **barrier to national consensus**, to the dreamed-of unity of the efforts of the entire nation to achieve an allegedly well-deserved better future – in fact the perpetual ideal of small divided societies with a complex and contradictory historical fate. This way ideology remains a privileged field for political intrigues and battles. It appears to be **remote from everyday life and people’s problems**. By this particular notion of ideology, politics and society seem to be isolated and detached spheres of action with no visible points of intersection. “Politicians play their (ideological) games, and we ordinary people should find our way”. The accumulated public distrust for political elites results in the belief that ideology serves primarily as a **deception concealing real intentions**, as a more or less attractive façade of dubious behind-the-scene political bargains and distributions of influence, rather than as an expression of visions of society and paths for its positive change. It takes a long process for these views to attain significance and gain prevalence. East European societies have an extra reason for that. Their experience with state socialism in the second half of the 20th century propagating a single and exclusively true ideology generated an additional feeling of ideology as **something embedded in the past**, as some

¹ With some exceptions related to popular dissatisfaction with acts of unprincipled political manoeuvres where “lack of ideology” is often identified with “lack of clear positions”.

entity implying a familiar gap between words and deeds.

These considerations may be expanded and supplied with other explanatory factors and many historical illustrations. They can be easily checked through empirical sociological studies. Actually, we already have some studies of popular values and beliefs which can be used as a starting point of a more extensive and rigorous confirmation of the existing impression we sketched briefly above. At any rate, all which is written above is sufficient enough to contextualize the ground for different political figures of different ideological origin stating that the end of ideology has come.

Such idea should be examined in the light of a rich theoretical tradition coming from the West but possibly exercising a greater influence in the East.

3. The “End of Ideology” Paradigm

The “end of ideology” thesis took a considerable place in the academic debates during the whole second half of the previous century. It grew up as one of the important paradigms explaining in its framework social and political changes in the contemporary world.

Most probably **Karl Mannheim** was the first to insist in his famous “Ideology and Utopia” (1936), that there could be a social group (but not yet a historical era!) committed to meta-ideological knowledge, thus remaining outside of the grip of ideology: the so called intelligentsia².

But the “end of ideology” paradigm has, as we see it, two unsurpassed chronological peaks deserving special attention: the 1950s (with Daniel Bell as the most notable figure) and the 1990s (with Francis Fukuyama as the most popular speaker even outside academic circles)³. Without exhausting the subject, here are some of the main arguments running through Bell’s and Fukuyama’s works.

Daniel Bell 1960. The Second World War was the bloodiest and most devastating event in the whole human history. Its essence beside geopolitical and economic dimensions was perceived as an ideological conflict confronting Western

² Nevertheless there are authors generally doubting the very idea of „self-emancipation of human mind from ideological bondage“. This idea is rejected and labeled as a set of wrong propositions of many scholars from Mannheim onwards who have stepped onto the increasing criticism and simultaneous social ascension of intellectuals in modern society but who have forgotten the ideological nature of their own positions. See e.g. Hodges 1967: 142ff.

³ Similar is the viewpoint of some ideology scholars prominent nowadays. The “end of ideology” debate is explicitly situated by Sargent in these two decades with discussion on Bell’s and Fukuyama’s works (2009: 9-10). In the second edition of a monograph on political ideologies, Eatwell devotes a new conclusion to the “end of ideology” problem, outlining two major sets of “endist” arguments and pointing out Bell and Fukuyama as focal points of the debate. After that he provides many historical examples to demonstrate the methodological and conceptual limitations of Bell’s and Fukuyama’s approaches (1999: 279-290). Vincent differs in his assessments since he chooses a broader context which encompasses research developments in Western schools of thought, and leads to almost neglecting of Fukuyama’s importance for revitalizing the thesis (2010: 8-11).

Liberalism with German National Socialism and Soviet Communism. Ideologies, whichever they may be, were largely responsible for the war bringing humanity to the edge of extinction. So after the end of the war it should be clear that peaceful coexistence was crucial to everyone, that there were some values of life and human dignity transcending all ideological differences and indispensable for the future of our race. As human beings, we profited by our own mistakes and began searching for objective, rational aims. The result was the global process of the so called convergence. To Bell's mind Western democracy was becoming increasingly social while the Soviet system was adopting more and more liberal traits. In mass consciousness these trends reflected in the diminishing attractiveness of ideological parties giving way to moderate formations (Bell 1960).

Francis Fukuyama 1989/1992. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the peaceful disintegration of the Eastern bloc were genuinely an evidence for the global victory of one single ideology, Liberalism. It proved its sustainability and ability to generate economic growth, a good economic standard and proliferation of human rights wherever it took the lead. People's desire for recognition turned out to be stronger than all the delusions of ideological utopias. The end of history has come. It didn't mean that events would cease to happen; it just marked the end of ideological clashes replaced by competition of pragmatic rationally and liberally motivated visions. And all the underdeveloped countries would gradually try to adopt these conditions ensuring better and prosperous life for their societies. Formally speaking, Fukuyama's insistence was not on an "end of ideology" but on an "end of history". His point was not ideological convergence (like Bell) but ideological victory. Anyway, it is essentially the same because of the emphasis on fading ideological oppositions (Fukuyama 1992).

We are not going to synthesize and structure the enormous debate which followed the appearance of these conclusions. But there are several ways to verify them.

By empirical testing. One may employ different sociological methods to critically examine the theoretical debate's messages and assertions against the background of public opinion. Most often this means surveys of social values and political attitudes permitting conclusions on the general degree of confrontation and radicalization in a given society. For example, Dalton used the huge amount of data available from the World Values Survey as an instrument to measure ideological views. According to him, we have two opposite theoretical positions. The first of them is the "end of ideology" thesis stating that ideological differences would become more moderate as nations experience social modernization. The second one is the so called "Post-material hypothesis" elaborated by Ronald Inglehart. It proclaims the appearance of a new type of post-material issues evoking conflicts over environmental equality, gender equality, life style choices, and the New Right reaction to them. Dalton tested both in their capacity of aggregates and stimuli of changing political identification. His result: "It is premature to argue that ideology is ending in any region of the globe. Citizens in affluent and less affluent societies still rely on broad orientations such as Left/ Right identities as

heuristics for political action". But: social modernization gradually makes things more moderate (Dalton 2006: 21).

By conceptual reformulation. Here one of the problems with the "end of ideology" paradigm, and the explanation for the multitude of its different and often mutually exclusive corollaries, is seen to consist in an initial ambiguity of the very concept of ideology. In this case, the correct way of assessing theses such as Bell's and Fukuyama's lies in unifying the conceptual premises. Whether ideology is to end or live on, better first understand what ideology actually is. For example, Sainsbury singles out as a central problem the question: which properties of ideology ought to be regarded as definitional ones and which ones - as hypothetical variables. It is pointed out that many of "end of ideology" writers attached special weight to certain elements of ideology and confused their dilution or disappearance with decline or disappearance of ideology in general. Definitional vagueness is the most important thing to address even in the context of one and the same author often using ideology first in one sense and later in another one. Sainsbury advocates for a minimal definition of ideology disclosing its subject-matter and leaving all the other components and functions aside as topics for further inquiry (Sainsbury 1986: 118, 125).

By theoretical transcendence. There are also approaches attempting to reassess the "end of ideology" debate in the light of new concepts and new theoretical frameworks. They suggest we cannot get sufficient information about contemporary societies by just speaking of ideologies. Rather we should look at social problems and divisions disregarding our usual instruments. For example, Jacoby draws a vast and rich picture of the "end of ideology" debate by tracing it back to European and American intellectual dispositions after the end of the war and outlining the importance of figures as Albert Camus, Raymond Aron, Seymour Martin Lipset, etc. But even if their contribution to social science was undoubtedly great, historical changes worked against them. Once again, the time of Fukuyama's predictions proved not to be an anti-ideological era. Nevertheless, Jacoby maintains that the obvious existence of ideologies was not so much central to the real societal state-of-affairs. The defeat of the left just made liberalism lose its vigour. No project of the future is present and therefore no incentive for development is on the way. "Radicals have lost their bite and liberals their backbone". That is what the author calls "age of apathy" rather than "age of the end of ideology" (Jacoby 1999: xii, 17ff.).

But probably **the heaviest verdict for the "end of ideology" paradigm is threefold: it was passed on by the historical evidence, by its main representatives, and by the intensity of the academic debate.** (1) Soon after Bell announced the end of ideology, it was covered up by the outburst of the New Left, by the revolutionary wave of 1968 and the forward march of the Third World ideologies⁴. And soon after Fukuyama came out with his famous

⁴ Here is one summary of the consequences: "The 1960s buried the talk of "the end of ideology"... For the next several decades the end-of-ideology thesis took a beating. The civil rights movement, black power, antiwar protests, national liberation struggles, feminism – the world seemed drenched in revolution and ideology" (Jacoby 1999: 6).

statement, the tragedy of 09/11 in the United States and the powerful rise of Political Islam rejected the hopes for a globally triumphant liberalism. (2) Forty years after his remarkable book, Bell had it republished with an addition of a special new text: "The Resumption of History in the New Century" where he virtually admitted a renaissance of ideological clashes now interpreted by him not as conflicts of universalist claims for the future (Protestant Christianity, Communism, Nazism) but as clashes of ethnic groups and peoples on the basis of their values and beliefs (Bell 2000: xxvii). Twelve years after his own book, Fukuyama issued "State-building" wherein he made a drastic turn and almost adopted the ideology of Etatism emphasizing the great importance of the state and the state-organized order as a solution to a good deal of the big problems facing contemporary humanity (Fukuyama 2004). (3) Everybody interested in the ideological problematic is familiar with the fact that discussion on these issues has never stopped to produce new ideas, theses and generalizations. A whole new journal was founded to examine political ideologies⁵. We shall mention just one more illustration, a very well made empirical study of the uses of the concept of political ideology in the influential American Political Science Review since its launch in 1906 (Knight 2006). This study, encompassing a period of a century, flatly ascertains that debates on ideology show no visible trend of calming and decreasing, quite the contrary. And that this is indicative of the secure place the concept of ideology enjoys in academic life⁶.

4. A Hypothesis for the Longevity of Ideology

The leading speakers of the "end of ideology" paradigm made two important observations which unexpectedly formed the ground for understanding the contemporary ideological landscape. Bell argued that the social world was going increasingly complex. Fukuyama argued for the proliferation of a dominating idea of social order. Both these factors produce a specific reaction which can be succinctly described as a search for new social cohesion through a multitude of alternative perceptions of the world and the place of man therein.

Our hypothesis: The longevity of ideology surviving some powerful attacks by the representatives of the "end of ideology" paradigm **is due to the need for solidarity in a rapidly changing world and in the absence of uniting great social ideas. People either look for new mental constructions** of the part of reality they inhabit **or go back to their primary views, attitudes and identities** previously obscured by the rational comprehension of the modern world.

⁵ "Journal of Political Ideologies" by Routledge has a frequency of 3 issues per year and already a 16-year history.

⁶ Here is a single quotation from Knight's study: "Notwithstanding Daniel Bell's contention that ideology "ended" in the 1950s, the second half of the twentieth century turned out to be an age of ideology. Far from ending, ideology became, and has remained, a common focus of attention in political science" (Knight 2006: 619).

It should be stressed that ideology is most of all a **social phenomenon**. It is not rationally closed, unlike political doctrines, nor systematically arranged, unlike party programmes. Ideology is a **form of mass consciousness** and as such it reflects its complex and unstructured characteristics. By ideology we usually mean an **aggregate (not a system!) of viewpoints and ideas** expressing one's relation to one's social and political environment. This relation functions through an **ethically justified scheme** enabling people to define anything socially existing or happening by moral categories such as "good" or "bad". It is a cognitive necessity because scientific explanations as a rule are as sophisticated as their object of study. We need a **simple landmark in the complex social world**. And our cognitive efforts are facilitated by its **strongly symbolic character** enhancing the impact and the basis of further differentiation among social groups. By means of ideology, in the long run **people (1) get to know the world, (2) evaluate it, (3) act in it, (4) identify themselves in it, (5) identify the others differentiating themselves from those others, and (6) conjecture for the future**. These peculiarities of ideological thinking serve to explain its immanent flexibility and durability in the face of external pressure.

Today our world is indeed more complex than ever, and bound by a global doctrine with its ties and influences as it never was before. That is why it is all the more natural that ideology appears to be mightier and richer in display than what we would have supposed. In the first decade of the new millennium we are witnessing a picture which may be adequately labeled as **ideological bloom**.

The political and governmental teachings initially elaborated in the United States and Great Britain in the 1980s and familiar as Reaganomics and Thatcherism gradually led to a powerful synthesis of Liberalism and Conservatism (liberal in economy, conservative in social values) which is called either **Neo-Liberalism** or **Neo-Conservatism** and which turned to be undisputable dominant in the Western world since the end of the Cold War. The traditional Anarchism changed a lot. Some of its anti-status quo nucleus has nourished the contemporary **Anti- and Alter-Globalism** as a highly critical negation of the ways of development neo-liberals carry out and glorify. The politics of difference emerged as a creed of social groups all over Europe and America and provided for the persistence and growing importance of Green and Gender Movements. **Greenism** and **Feminism** draw in addition on the exhaustion of previous models of organization of the human-nature relationship and hierarchies in the private sphere. In many parts of Europe, both Western and Eastern, ethnic tensions have exacerbated and multiplied to a politically decisive extent. The rise of radical **Nationalism and Xenophobia** has modified the political landscape in too many countries and has opened up new gaps and lines of demarcation among the population with the corresponding invasion of anti-immigrant actions and populist leadership. One should also have in mind the parallel process of **Religious Revival** on the continent expressing itself in the growth of a Christian view of life especially in youth circles. The lack of convincing rational explanations inevitably produces a demand for

faith. The **European idea** which was the one most entrusted with hopes and bright expectations in the last half a century now appears to be at a crossroad. The formation of a European identity is confronted with the centrifugal forces of self-isolation in local communities and neighbourhood *mutualité*. "Crisis of solidarity" is probably the correct term for the heavy choice of emphasis challenging Europe even in its motto: UNITY in diversity or Unity in DIVERSITY. But diversity includes extra-European elements as well: for example, the recent dilemmas of the Arab Spring have put the questions of possibility and desirability of secular **Arab Nationalism, Muslim Democracy** and **Political Islamism**. Surely the outcome concerns large Asian regions and the future of peace in general. **Islamic Fundamentalism** does not seem to be on the agenda as much as it was some ten years ago but it should not be ignored as an option of development and self-identification of Islamic societies in the years to come. Moreover, the geopolitical transformations and the movement directed at some form of a multi-polar world have affected great states as much as their citizens. National ideologies have more or less established themselves with the aim of encouraging self-awareness and self-esteem of big national communities. **Chinese Communism** is moving away from Mao Zedong and coming closer to Confucianism. The **Brazilian ideology** takes a pride in the mixture of races, the deeply rooted sense of liberty and the strong social sensitivity the country fosters. The **Russian idea** slowly absorbs elements of former imperial self-confidence through Slavic, socialist and orthodox signs and symbols. Turkey is about to transform **Neo-Ottomanism** from foreign policy approach to a worldview and behaviour of the whole Turkish society. And so on, and so forth. The varicoloured ideological picture we just briefly sketched can be seen as a tool of both justifying historical validity of our concept of ideology and heaping up facts in favour of our hypothesis for the longevity of ideology.

5. The Role of the Modern University

Various historical and geographic factors have combined to make **the Balkans** of our day a genuine focal point of ideological diversity. Here we have **Ethnic Nationalism and Liberal Cosmopolitanism, germs of the European idea and remnants of the South Slavic ideal, Communist nostalgia and Neo-Liberal governance, Christian unity and Political Islamism**. The contradictory, complex and difficult relations between states and communities have resulted in mutual distrust and accusations. The Balkans "successfully" exemplifies the thesis that no end of ideology has come.

Here is one of the major challenges to the Balkan university education. Political ideologies should be treated as an important discipline in university curricula. They are indispensable for many reasons. First of all, ideology is a **concept in the humanities** directly related to the life and attitudes of all individuals. It is a part of their learning about themselves rather than simply a general learning about social

facts. The study of ideology presumes, most substantially, a **better understanding of others and of ourselves**, which is a central prerequisite for alleviating tensions and avoiding conflicts and wars. Being aware of the existence of people who think quite differently from us maintains open-mindedness and minimizes the damages of bigoted dogmatism and political Manichaeism. Teaching ideology as a social phenomenon also serves the necessity of **deeper academic study of societies**, of their structures, behaviour, motives, prejudices, driving forces and internal dynamics. A better future is hardly possible without some idea of who we are and what the actual condition of society we are trying to improve is. By analyzing different ideologies we come closer to the mechanisms of social consciousness, to its often irrational and mutually exclusive features, to its strange and sometimes inexplicable axiomatic suppositions. That is how we realize **the limitations of human nature and the human capacity to know** independently of correctness or erroneousness of our speculations. There is no exclusive holder of truth. And here comes the next step, from passive awareness of the above to civic activity expressing itself in the **search for opportunities of harmonizing identities and worldviews** – in fact that is what Europe as an idea should be. Then education in ideology would fulfill its grand aim: creating citizens and specialists with active stances with regard to the world and our own positioning.

The modern university is to demonstrate that no “end of ideology” is possible in a global scene of conflicts and clashing interests but this is not necessarily something bad or lamentable. On the contrary, it may be a precondition for competitive development and multi-polarity, and manifestation of one of the eternal features of politics as such. Of course, it requires both respect for the others and awareness that there are problems that can be solved only by joint efforts.

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