

AEC REPORT ON THE PHENOMENON OF POVERTY IN EUROPE & FRANCE

(A summary of the report that took 4 years to make in several European States with widely diverse situations and with the participation of 100 members of the INGO AEC (Association européenne des cheminots i.e European Railwaymen association) whose headquarters is in Brussels.

(To welcome someone other than yourself, you have to have faith in yourself) Paul Ricoeur

Poverty occurs everywhere and it occurs amidst islands of wealth. This is true for all countries and therefore, also for Europe. According to independent analyses there are today just under 124 million poor people in the world who suffer hunger. This includes Europe also because poverty is not confined, as is generally too frequently believed, to the developing countries. The “Phantom of Poverty” as the Chinese call it, haunts also the countries of Europe and consequently France, as stated in a recent parliamentary report “*La République en échec*” (The failure of the Republic) (François Cornut Gentile et Rodrigue Kokuendo,).

Participation in the fight against poverty implies a project with multiple aspects. First of all, it implies a never-ending commitment that is both moral and civic with as its main objective respect for human beings, whatever their origins, respect “for the other person” who often lives this situation as a humiliation and consequently as an infringement of his/her fundamental rights. As human beings, the poor are prey in turn to incomprehension, shame, revolt, discouragement, to a feeling of uselessness and rejection. The fight against poverty is in fact a struggle against human distress and its aim is to reconcile poor people with society. This fight requires therefore strong humanist convictions and an unshakeable faith in the dignity of each person. Help is in fact a many sided objective which means welcoming the poor, sheltering them and accompanying them for the duration and also preparing their future. It is also a means of encouraging them to regain confidence, engage the future, accompany them to an employment, a reconversion generally implying training and adaptation. This commitment cannot be summarised therefore by simple economic considerations.

However, the economic aspect cannot, unfortunately, be forgotten, since today, perhaps more than yesterday, to succeed in the fight against poverty it is necessary to possess important financial resources, and this is what is lacking in our societies where generosity becomes more sparse, as a result of the economic crisis that is eroding the West over the recent decades. The aid agencies need the support of donors convinced of the usefulness of their mission, endorsements that are not just simple tokens of admiration, but which allow concrete actions. But, most NGOs are noting a current reduction of donations and this has the result of limiting their activity programmes. Additionally, they also suffer a drastic fall in budgetary credits allocated by the States to the associations’ sector, whilst the challenges of today are much more difficult and those of fifty years ago. Poverty therefore will continue, and even increase a little everywhere, and we are a long way from the situation brandished by those supporting the “utilitarian” theories of Jeremy Bentham consisting in proclaiming “the search for the greatest happiness of the greatest number”.

This report made up by our INGO has as its objective to highlight, by means of situations and analyses experienced, *several widely different typologies of poverty* in Europe and in France so as to establish different activity levers adapted to the different situations. As the European experiences have shown us, poverty wears a multifaceted aspect from one country to the next, from one region to another; therefore its treatment cannot be uniform.

I- SOME REMINDERS OF AN ECONOMIC ORDER :

The economic growth of the community of nations grows from year to year and even during a year if there is perceived to have been an inflection over several months since this long cycle of more than a decade is coming to an end. Some pundits have deduced therefore rather quickly that consequently poverty should reduce, correlating rather too easily “ the evolution of growth with a reduction in poverty”. Everyone has heard the liberal theoreticians proclaiming that the worldwide economic liberalism, over the last twenty years, by increasing the GDP of each country and by “stimulating the wealth of nations”, has contributed to separate more than a billion people from the vicious circle of famine and therefore of poverty. They have recourse to justify these claims the macroeconomic results expressed by the evolutions of the major aggregates of national accounting (GDP/per capita or national income/inhabitant, for example). However analysing these situations in greater detail, these claims are far from reflecting the truth. It is tempting indeed to deduce almost automatically that from the annual and real progression of the ratios such that GDP/per capita or national income/inhabitant a correlative reduction, consequently, of poverty. But, if these arguments are not lacking in intellectual attraction, they are all the same erroneous.

Indeed, these theoreticians forget the essential, namely the analysis of the discrepancies between social groups within the same country, discrepancies that constitute not only a marker of income inequalities between groups, but also, if the discrepancies are excessive, since in a low income group there is a corresponding presence of poor citizens, a poverty that can be either absolute or relative. In this domain the coefficient of Corrado Gini plays a fundamental role. The **Gini coefficient** is a statistical measurement of the dispersion of a distribution in a given community. This coefficient is a number varying between 0 and 1, where 0 signifies absolute equality and 1 means a perfect inequality (for example, a single salaried person receives all the income whilst the others receive no income). But what is happening over the last fifty years in Europe, is clear: Growth is increasing in the world, even if it is in a variable rhythm from one country to the next, from one year to another, and consequently, the average ratios of the major aggregates per inhabitant likewise. But at the same time, the national Gini coefficients are not improving at all, a large number even exceed the figure of 0.5 denoting the existence of a strong inequality of incomes, therefore the presence of groups with low incomes generates inevitably manifest poverty pockets, that the economists sometimes call “poverty traps”, because the people who are entrapped there, even the social groups engulfed, often have a great deal of difficulty to escape. On the contrary, they sink deeper in. This sad reality which you can find in almost all European countries, contradicts the theory known as the “trickling down effect” consisting of saying that by creating inequality intentionally by favouring the rich, a new added value generated by new investments or by an increase in consumption “will trickle down” profiting also the less favoured groups and also the poorest groups who will benefit by the effects of the trickling down. Unfortunately, the reality, already experienced at the time of President Reagan has shown that the poorest people only receive a few crumbs of this creation of added value. These poverty pockets constitute a real trap and that is why State policies are so incapable of eradicating them, since that implies considerable resources that the States no longer possess in these periods of permanent crisis nor do they have an unwavering will to attack the roots of the evil, a will that is often lacking. Without attacking the roots of the problem public authorities are reduced to surf with cosmetic effects accompanied by fine words and media actions without any major effect on the problem (eg.: the Nth “suburban plans” that follow each other with almost no change).

Futhermore, there are at least two ways of calculating and therefore of assessing poverty. It can be absolute, measured thus by a level of annual income or by a degree of accessibility of certain products or vital services. It can also be relative and measured by a statistical discrepancy with respect to other social groups, which is the case when the Gini coefficient is greater than 0.5.

Very often, the threshold is fixed with respect to the distribution of the standards of living of the population as a whole or with reference to the median income (the median income is the income separating the population in two, namely one half of the populations has a higher income, and the other half, a lower income). This is the way that Eurostat fixes the threshold of poverty relative to 60% of the European median. This method of calculation is sometimes criticised for being more a measure of inequalities than of poverty. Unfortunately, poverty and inequality are the front and the back of the same medal in contemporary societies, and therefore also in Europe, the object of our study.

We must not be surprised in “our opulent Europe”, if we believe in the OECD statistics, that poor people will always remain poor, and even become more so with respect to other social groups. Now there is emerging at the other end of the social chain, a caste of increasingly wealthy people, the caste of the new millionaires. Thus, the Swiss bank “Le Crédit suisse” has just published that the number of millionaires has increased in France by 259,000 between June 2017 and June 2018, the first year of Macron’s presidential mandate, increasing the number of these French millionaires – whose wealth exceeds a million dollars – to 2,157 million households, this progression turns out to be the second strongest increase in the world after that registered in the United States, placing France now in 5th place in the global ranking. In such a universe, the poor of France become inevitably poorer with respect to the new group of millionaires, at least in relative value.

Consequently, you can understand that the measurement of poverty has a double dimension: one measurement of poverty in absolute terms, one measure of poverty in relative terms with respect to the other social groups, especially to the richest. But, relative poverty is certainly psychologically heavier to bear, since it gives the impression that society is breaking up and that one group tends to increase its income more quickly and pull away from the others, isolating the poorest people. This is a gap that is widening unceasingly within our society.

II -SOME GEOGRAPHICAL & SOCIOLOGICAL CALLS TO ORDER HIGHLIGHTED BY OUR ACTIVITIES ON THE GROUND

The geographical implantation of poverty: This implantation is dual and it is appropriate to highlight two distinct typologies of implantation. First of all, it is important to focus on the major cities where the historical centres are often inhabited by wealthy families, taking into account the continuous increase in the price of stone and that of leases. But in the case of medium and small towns, the situation is the opposite. In these towns the historical centres have been evacuated by the local bourgeoisie generating, as a result, the closing down of a large number of shops and the subsequent apparition of commercial deserts. The wealthy people of these towns have progressively installed themselves in the outskirts whilst the urban centres, thus abandoned, have in general been resettled by low income nationals and especially by the new migrants. To make matters worse, the rates in these last towns, instead of the authorities revising the rating system, continue to punish the homes in the centre of town (previously qualified as bourgeois, but whose quality has deteriorated over the last thirty years, due to the desertion of the rich) and to lower the property taxes in the outskirts areas (formerly considered as poor, but which are poor no longer, since they are lived in by the wealthy categories). Consequently, the underprivileged now installed in the centres deserted by the wealthy categories, tend to pay more than they should for degraded housing since they are not maintained because the rateable values, unchanged since 1970, continue to classify this housing as bourgeois, whilst the more wealthy people, recently installed in the outskirts tend to pay less for their housing since they are still considered for tax purposes to be located in poor areas, even though these rates have been recently applied. Here we face a grave paradox and a blatant injustice mentioned to our researchers in hundreds of medium sized French

towns. Insofar as the rates basis remains unchanged, we can state, with hardly any exaggeration that the rich pay “the property taxes of the poor” whilst the poor pay “the property taxes of the rich”. Admittedly, the progressive suppression of the housing tax could, if this is confirmed, slowly erase this paradox but this injustice remains for the other types of property taxes (eg.: the taxes on domestic rubbish, etc..) The injustice, the inequalities that it gives birth to and the poverty that arises from this will still have an almost unending future. Today fourteen of the twenty French communes where the poverty rate is highest are located on the outskirts of Paris. Roubaix, Maubeuge, Béziers, Vaulx-en-Velin, Lens and Mulhouse complete the classification.

There is a historical relationship between the pockets of poverty and deindustrialisation in most European countries. Indeed, the northern regions of England (around Birmingham and especially Liverpool) are the best example, but France is not far behind in this field. All the old industrial basins, today disaster areas (the departments of Nord, Lorraine), are a striking example, in spite of timid reconversion policies, but it is also the case of all the other old industrial basins around the Massif Central (Alès, Decazeville, etc.) A very small part of human resources have undergone reconversions but the majority of resources have plunged into poverty and distress, without hope of remission.

We have thus seen clotting into these former industrial centres important pockets of poverty which are somehow solidifying and which no government has succeeded in stamping out. We can speak in this case of long-lasting poverty. This phenomenon has doubled over recent years by what can be called the “Amazonisation” of activities, a destructive phenomenon affecting a large number of shops and companies and creator of an enormous impoverishment that extends under our eyes.

In France, the Borloo Plan about the suburban areas, which wanted to revitalise the outskirts of the large towns by eliminating poverty, has been abandoned, whilst at the same time the Court of Auditors demanded a reduction of local spending without taking into account local situations and the attempts by local authorities to redevelop certain urban areas to eradicate poverty.

The relationship between poverty and life expectancy: The discrepancies of standards of living in the French population have a very visible impact on life expectancy. Inequalities affect life expectancy. According to the latest study by the Insee (The French National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies), published on 6th February 2018, the discrepancies of life expectancy with respect to life expectancy present very strong disparities. Thus, according to the results obtained by the experts, men with greater wealth tend to live on average 13 more years than men with more modest incomes. And if life expectancy at birth continues to increase regularly, the different averages of incomes frequently mask very marked discrepancies. On this scientific basis elaborated by the INSEE our NGO has wanted to know what has happened in greater detail in one of the reputed poor regions of France, Occitania (considered the second poorest region of France). Interviews carried out in the large number of towns of the region by our association show the appearance of vicious circles. Not only relative or absolute poverty is the cause for the reduction of life expectancy, but additionally, it encourages addiction to alcohol and also to smoking, which in their turn reduce life expectancy. Thus, the level of smoking in the Occitania region is 30,5% for its population compared to 26.8% for France as a whole. Thus the poorer the region, the greater the addiction to tobacco and the decline in life expectancy. As one of the mayors we met said “the poor dig their own graves”. The eradication of poverty and the eradication of addictions constitute everywhere a simple and unique combat which, in view of the issues and means required – can only be handled by public authorities. But no public policy worthy of its name has been carried out in this field.

The relationship between poverty and housing. The cases of slum housing landlords are called to mind when occasional fires take place in slum housing whose condition escapes all the administrative controls. The poor are generally badly housed even if one can see a slow increase in the number of social housing units, whose number is notoriously insufficient in France. Access to a satisfactory housing should play a crucial role in policies for the eradication of poverty. However, in addition to the insufficient number of social housing units, France is characterised by a high percentage of empty housing, the vacancy rate has never been so high; it increases by 1.5% per year and grows even faster than the housing available. This phenomenon affects all French towns and to a greater degree the Paris region and northern France, and in spite of the introduction of a specific tax on empty housing which appears to have no deterrent effect. Any policy for the eradication of poverty implies that this last problem must be resolved on an urgent basis.

The permanence of many empty offices in the centre of many French towns is also a break on the eradication of poverty. We continue to wait for legislative reforms concerned with the problem that permit transforming without delay or impediment these empty offices into social housing.

Now that the European economy is becoming increasingly liberal and americanised, retired people appear in the majority of countries where pensions are based on a sharing system as the prototype of the future poor person. No country has succeeded in providing the retired persons with a decent pension with respect to the assets, the number of which diminish whilst the number of retired persons increases not only under the weight of the pyramid of ages but also especially due to the large number of plans of obligatory retirement to leave "jobs for the young". Everywhere, there is a resulting drastic reduction in the level of pensions, a pattern started by the "2000 Agenda" and the Hartz laws in Germany. The problem occurs in all the countries of Europe, even though there are differentiated circumstances. Thus, in the United Kingdom the average income "of the 65 years and over" is barely 80% of the average income of the whole of the population. These persons are already poor or are going to become poor. In Germany this percentage is 85% and for the whole of the OECD 84%. France looked as though it would be an exception up to now, but this could change soon. Indeed, the next reform of pensions in France includes in its existing version a less explained section consisting in "desocialising the cost of social protection by making the insured persons liable to the uncertainties of there being funds available, *the problem being that the amount of money will be strictly in proportion to the amount of money available which generates an uncertainty on the real level of pensions and can also means that pensions can fluctuate according to the amount of cash available at any moment*, the value of the points acquired at the end of the working life would then be the subject of an adjustment to the income received from contributions, determined by demography and growth. Nobody knows if this version will be retained or not, but if it is, it will inaugurate a new period of variable pensions based on the situation and unlikely to induce frequent revalorizations. It is likely in this sense that French pensioners will rejoin one day the cohort of pensioners of the majority of European countries who have seen their pensions eroded by discriminatory measures. It is clear that in the majority of countries the credits allocated to pensions have become a simple adjustment variable of the budget of the States. The pensioner of tomorrow in the majority of European countries will probably be a "new poor person" of society.

* * additional clarification by Jean-Pierre ESTIVAL

III- OUR SPECIFIC EXPERIENCES IN EUROPE AND IN FRANCE: OUR ANALYSES, OUR RECOMMENDATIONS, OUR CONCLUSIONS:

These conclusions are going to appear contradictory to those accustomed to the unchanging traditional measures in the fight against poverty. They are however the fruit of our experience over several years especially in different European countries. They question certain “considerations”, some specific “certainties” strongly anchored in some NGOs, but you have to take into account that the world has changed and the resulting nature of poverty implies differentiated strategies should be established depending on each case increasingly typical. Some experiences described here might frighten some people but as Chateaubriand said “Danger vanishes when you face it”. But in the numerous cases related the dangers appear considerable resulting in serious conclusions but which are adapted to the reality experienced by our one hundred members who participated in our international enquiry in Europe.

The situation of poverty is far from being homogenous in Europe and it seems interesting to extract and highlight some specific typologies, each according to its specificity, its history, its intrinsic nature. It follows that the strategies to eradicate it must be diversified. That is what our experience in Europe has taught us with respect to the practical typologies and actions mentioned below.

First typology: our experience in Bucharest (2011-2016) in a country plagued by an immense corruption

During a little more than five years, our INGO worked to aid financially and materially a group of young adolescents without families, without fixed domiciles, abandoned in the streets of Bucharest. These young people are purely the result of the dictatorial regime of Nicolae Ceaușescu. Escaped from grim institutions, they continued in 2010 to wander in groups in certain neighbourhoods of Bucharest, spreading terror, living by their wits, from thefts, trafficking drugs, prostitution.

A German delegation of our organization, located in Cuxhaven, succeeded in approaching them. From 2010 they regularly supplied material assistance, namely: food, medicines and clothing. The approach phase was very delicate with distrust existing on each side. From 2012, the exchanges became more open, more regular and important, the German delegation going so far as to freight trucks to supply these goods coming largely from donations of individuals and companies in Germany. However, from 2013 onwards, the situation became more difficult, because some intermediaries who said they were agents of public authorities wanted to mediate between our delegation and the group of adolescents. It has never been possible to ascertain if these intermediaries were truly or not real representatives of the public authorities of the country. From 2014, they demanded that all the goods were remitted to them in the first instance, promising to later redistribute them to the interested parties. From 2015, they even demanded becoming the sole distributory of the aid, going so far as to prevent our organization of having any direct contacts with the group. Gradually it became apparent that these intermediaries constituted a mafia group which profited from humanitarian aid to appropriate all the goods that came from abroad. Our delegation complained to the local police who took no action. The whole of our aid was interrupted during 2016 since the public authorities offered us no protection nor did they pursue this well organised mafia.

Second typology: the experience of humanitarian aid for our local representatives in Athens, in the midst of the Greek crisis, in the OMONIA district between 2014 & 2016:

In spite of the local crisis generated by the economic crisis and the major influx of migrants with regard to the restricted capacities of absorption by the country, this experience took place, contrary to the preceding case, in very acceptable conditions since the local public authorities (city hall) and other humanitarian organizations present (like the Greek Orthodox Church) gave us their support and that, in spite of the existence of a grave economic crisis generated by the drastic decisions of the troika (IMF/CEB/Commission) whose reign has remained uncompromising for years on end. During this time, the Greek GDP reduced by 35%, unemployment rose by 200%, whilst salaries, wages and retirement pensions were so much diminished that salaries had lost one third of their purchasing power. The homeless, previously a rare phenomenon in Greece, made their appearance whilst cuts in the refunds of the insurance companies, increased the suppressions of public services, the closing of schools and hospitals. The health sector was especially affected. Spending on health was reduced by 40% and 35,000 doctors, nurses and other health professionals lost their jobs.

Some of the people who could no longer count on being cared for by the official health system then approached the NGOs. It is in this apocalyptical situation that our INGO worked firstly by opening an assistance office, a kind of single window to offer guidance to all the disinherited, and also by providing a nutritional aide in the measure of our means to all the victims of the crisis: children, adolescents, unemployed and pensioners. **It is remarkable, that contrary to our Rumanian experience, the rule of law never weakened in Greece and the security services always defended all the NGOs sheltering them from all the mafia organizations. The rule of law is therefore necessary for any humanitarian activity whilst a corrupt State is the major obstacle to the deployment of all strategies for fighting against poverty.**

3-Third typology about a major poverty, but invisible and relaxed: case study in the Italian Mezzogiorno carried out with our Italian members from the province of Pouilles

This study was carried out in the port town of Barletta, a town of 150,000 inhabitants in the province of Pouilles. This region, even if it has known a certain renewal over the last ten years, remains a poor province and the port town of Barletta has an unemployment rate of 35% of the active population, a rate which has been maintained at this level for years. Whereas according to tradition women remain in the home, this structural unemployment affects essentially the men of whom many are excluded for life from the labour market. This important section of the population is however hardly visible. In a country where the unemployment benefits are of short duration, these adults are nearly always looked after by the rest of the family from which they never separate, whatever their age. It is a poverty little visible from outside, entrusted to the good care of each family which assumes this responsibility for life. This situation is one of the characteristics of the Mezzogiorno, possibly of the Mediterranean civilisation, and one finds it again and again in practically all the towns of this province. **Consequently, in this context outside aid can only be of minimum quantity, even if it exists, the majority coming from social works of the Region but also from the Church strongly represented in the south of Italy and socially very active. Due to this fact any implantation of an NGO in this social context would be counterproductive and could even be interpreted as an infringement of the existing code of honour, namely a negative judgment of the capacity of the families to support their members affected by unemployment.**

4- Fourth typology relative to a destabilising “ghetto type” poverty that generates delinquency and revolt: the experience of our interventions in the town of Fréjus (the Gabelle neighbourhood) with our representatives of the Var department:

This poverty is contained in a sort of ghetto where a very strong population of relatively young people of North African origin dominated by an endemic unemployment, involuntary for some, asserted by others according to our surveys. Nobody knows how this ghetto began, namely if it was the result of a voluntary community withdrawal or rather if it is the culmination of a slow rejection by the rest of the conurbation. In any case, poverty is in charge there. Declared incomes according to our surveys are very low there near to the social minimums, at least with respect to official income, since because it concerns a relatively young population one can consider there might coexist “parallel” activities more or less legal. Contrary to the nature of the previous poverty, this one is very visible and is the origin of protests sometimes pacific, but often stormy going so far as street riots containing hundreds of youths against “the system” (sic) represented by the public authorities in the broadest sense. **Poverty here is a phenomenon that arouses anger, protests and humiliation, the resentments tending to explode periodically like an active volcano. The NGOs that have tried to attack this problem have never been able to find longlasting solutions, since apart from the phenomenon of poverty one must know how to adapt to the well established communitarist phenomenon. This is a double test difficult to assume.**

Fifth typology corresponding to a poverty of a multiethnic character confined in a neighbourhood defined administratively as “priority of the town policy”: the case of multiethnic poverty in the neighbourhood “La Bastide” of Villefranche-de-Rouergue (a study with our correspondents and friends of the Aveyron department)

Contrary to the previous case, this is a relatively pacific concentration of poor homes, some of them very poor, corresponding to new arrivals regrouping a large number of nationalities and ethnicities, confined in the perimeter of a historical town centre abandoned by its original inhabitants and which has become a commercial desert. Thus the heart of this medieval town has been resettled in 90% by this multiethnic population characterised by average incomes in the order of 800 to 900 Euros per month, and also presenting an unadapted professional profile and consequently a high rate of unemployment.

The ethnical multiplicity of this population (DOM TOM (an abbreviation meaning inhabitants from French colonial and overseas territories, Mayotte, Comores, black Africa and the Maghreb) makes any kind of cohesive regrouping difficult so that this neighbourhood “abandoned by the Republic” remains a relatively peaceful district for the moment. This absence of troubles makes it easier for NGOs to intervene positively in tandem with the public authorities. However the results are less clear-cut, and that is because the public authorities have not known how or not been able to supply the financial aid promised in the scope of the priority neighbourhood so that the fight against poverty has not been led with the necessary speed and vigour. Notably the means for professional training, adapted teaching (insertion and qualification workshops with insertion contracts supervised by technical staff) have only been partially introduced so that poverty has every chance to remain. On this basis, we can speak of a semi-defeat of the governmental policy of priority neighbourhoods, where the NGOs only play a supporting role in the well defined administrative context.

Sixth typology corresponding to a multiethnic poverty rendered hardly visible in the heart of Paris: a neighbourhood amongst so many others, the La Fourche district:

This neighbourhood borders the limits of the 17th and 18th *arrondissements* of Paris, districts considered globally as wealthy. However, this neighbourhood has always been considered a poor district with respect to the surrounding districts of the two *arrondissements*. Over the years to the initial indigenous population have been added people coming from all the continents. This new

population has mixed with the original local population without too many clashes creating a true melting pot. Due to this fact, one finds two distinct types of poverty which are superimposed. The first “layer of poverty” is constituted by people who have lived there for a long time and who correspond to French nationals. The public authorities have recognised this type of poverty and make efforts to treat it correctly in function of the existing laws and regulations. The “second layer of poverty” is essentially composed of multinationals, new arrivals of almost 60 different nationalities, some of whom are in partial or total administrative illegality. There is consequently no need for these new arrivals to become recognised, but rather a need to be forgotten, which is hardly beneficial to obtaining any public or private assistance. This second type of poverty is passed over in silence and is especially not asserted by the interested parties. It therefore remains hidden and escapes the attention of observers. However, it exists. Thus, to find dwellings it is not unusual to see a studio of 25 square metres occupied by 5 or 6 people so as to be able to pay an onerous rent; it is not rare either to see brawls multiplying outside the supermarkets in the evening when the supermarkets discharge their perishable products. Nor is it rare that the dustbins are systematically searched and on the pavements, the public containers for textile recycling are systematically emptied during the night. This poverty is so much less visible that it exists in a neighbourhood with a very high demographic density which does not allow an adequate follow up of individuals. It is difficult to identify in this way the poor of foreign origin. This poverty of foreign origin exists however, but since it is hardly visible, it remains administratively ignored. Only the NGOs venture there in the field of teaching French without their pupils getting noticed since many of these persons do not have their papers in order.

AS A CONCLUSION OF THESE EXPERIENCES

The typologies of poverty are increasingly diverse in Europe and demand nevertheless strategies adapted to each case

A) For the European countries it is completely essential to make a distinction between countries that apply the rule of law and countries that remain deliberately contrary: in the first category, the exercise of humanitarian activity is not only authorised, but also encouraged by the public authorities who consider the NGOs as useful and serious partners. In the second category of countries, the NGOs that venture there, often naively, become more or less quickly an easy prey of certain private, semi-public, or fully public mafia groups, completely uncontrollable and uncontrolled. NGOs should not be encouraged to venture there since the State, which often distrusts them, cannot in any way offer guarantees with respect to good governance and protection. Our NGO has known, at the time of the Arab Springtime, the same situation in Cairo where we were charged with a report for the Council.

B) Poverty and Mediterranean civilisation : The Mediterranean countries are characterised by an endemic poverty of historical characteristics and for these reasons they have long been lands of immigration. Italy does not escape this destiny but this characteristic is amplified by the fact that the South has never been a land of industrialisation and it has been abandoned for a long time by the central government. The result is an endemic poverty with a historical character and which remains relatively hidden, the family almost always taking the place of the defaulting public authorities. It corresponds to an interiorised poverty, a situation which is acceptable to governments which see it as a way of economising the public finances. The Mezzogiorno functions according to this model and the NGOs, consequently, even if they are not rejected, far from the scene, from the “*playing field*” do not benefit from a space of liberty to act correctly.

C) In France, many poverty ghettos escape nowadays the laws of the Republic, as everyone knows. Jacques Colomb has just reconfirmed speaking of the “people who used to live here up to now side by side but quickly risk having to live in opposition”. When they are formed by a homogenous population from the point of view of origins and life styles, these poverty ghettos become “inflammable”, ungovernable and inaccessible to every curative treatment of poverty. This is what we have seen at Fréjus, but this also happens on much greater scale in the northern districts of Marseille, in the Mirail neighbourhood at Toulouse and in the Parisian periphery. The essential public services only play a partial role there. Poverty, due to a lack of implication by public authorities – the latter being sometimes rejected by the population – has the tendency to become impossible to eliminate, because it has become inaccessible this strengthens still further the identity characteristics of these ghettos, increasing their endemic opposition and their marginalisation. By definition, NGOs cannot obtain access there unless they submit to the obligatory codes, synonymous with compromise. It is in this way that we have been brutally rejected by the districts of the northern suburbs of Marseille and from the Mirail district of Toulouse where we wanted to carry out a detailed social research. These areas have become both “forbidden cities” whilst being islands of major poverty. Besides, the NGOs – frequently not desired – cannot play there a saving role especially if the public authorities have largely “lost their hold”. It is clear that then illegal activities develop to take the place of the financial means of the people, and even in the context when all kinds of benefits are still granted there by the public authorities which “continue to put on a brave face”. The future of these areas is becoming more and more problematic. This is a French problem that one does not find in any other European country.

D) The other French poverty ghettos classified as “priority neighbourhoods of urban policies” are nearly always located in the centre of medium size towns, with the centres abandoned decades ago by their original population and deserted by the shops which accentuates their sinistrality. You have there a special typology: the existence of a poverty in an area lacking in local shops, shops that are essential for survival. This is an economic, sociological and political nonsense. Very often the multiethnic characteristic of these neighbourhoods prevents any coagulation of discontent, which makes it difficult to reach a level of common protest. However, the public authorities, despite media enchantments, have only marginally fulfilled the role that they had proclaimed. The State, lacking sufficient financial means, has asked the local authorities to take their place, but the latter, also lacking sufficient resources, have returned the responsibility for action back to the State. For these reasons, as it turns out these projects have only partially been implemented. The NGOs could become interested in this question, but that would demand an enormous concentration of means, relating to public order contracts in which they could never legally interfere. Consequently, these priority areas in spite of numerous publicity enchantments are “left abandoned” without anyone knowing what could happen tomorrow. The destitution that one wanted to evict remains present. It can become the breeding ground for future protests especially since the modules of professional training that are so necessary have only been sparingly introduced. The problem is one of a political order. Does not France have the financial means for its policies?

E) Finally, with respect to Paris, although the major poverty is concentrated especially in the suburbs, there remain not less than a score of islands of poverty within the capital itself. This poverty is concentrated in the districts that were already considered underprivileged over twenty years ago. The original population still lives there, but over the years another type of multiethnic population consisting of migrants has become superimposed, so that now

the two types of underprivileged populations and now superimposed. The oldest underprivileged elements there still receive the help of the social services, which only occasionally treat the cases of the new arrivals. Indeed, the latter in general do not demand any aid, for fear of drawing the attention of the public authorities on their administrative status which is frequently irregular. We find therefore two typologies of poverty, one recognised and aided, the other ignored and not treated. This dual situation has every chance of continuing and getting worse.

In conclusion and only highlighting the fundamental and most striking points of our broad spectrum of experiences in Europe where our INGO is represented, it seems necessary to underline the following points:

Those European countries where corruption is a gangrene that affects the whole of society often use authentic destitution as a shield and do not allow NGOs to insert into the national tissue. Before fighting against poverty the European authorities must first fight against this type of governance that some call anti-liberal and of which there are many examples. Only then can the eradication of poverty be the object of a policy worthy of this name.

Poverty wears in the rest of Europe very differentiated faces, even opposing ones: Thus there is a cohabitation in Europe of visible poverty and hidden poverty that does not want to mention its name (eg, the Messogiorno) but also accessible poverty that is permeable to the classical therapies of social intervention and what our specialists have qualified as inaccessible poverty since it does not permit an easy approach unless you submit to compromising admission codes. France is the only country of Europe where this inaccessible poverty consists of a relative importance. Camouflaged, even considered as a sanctuary in the territories known as the “urban periphery”, this poverty resists all the classical therapies of the fight against poverty. This poverty then secretes from networks of illegal activities where some of the funds serve to “heal the wounds” of the existing poverty. This is the longtime procedure of the *octopus organizations* of the Italian mafias in the conurbations of the south of Italy but recently this type situation is extending in France within the “urban peripheries” where no one dares to enter any longer and where a part of illicit money serves to compensate the effects of poverty.

With what concerns specifically France, but also Belgium, contemporary poverty wears a multiethnic dimension which does not make it always easier to visualise and understand. It was different twenty years ago, at the time when the sight of poverty was easier to understand because it was more homogenous from one country to the next. This obliges all the public services concerned with poverty and the voluntary NGOs to radically modify their strategies. The traditional monolithic aid is no longer valid. You cannot enter into contact with this or that community in the same way. Thus in the poor communities originating in the Maghreb that we have approached the men insist on being the centre of discussions and resent all contact with the feminine members of their community.

This illustrates that poverty is no longer a question of treating at an individual level but rather at a community level since in this field the community tends to displace the individuals. Humanitarian aid in these sensitive areas must therefore be reinvented.

Finally in France where poverty extends, in spite of the soothing speeches of the governing classes, a much more serious danger is starting to emerge: France is tending to become bipolar taking into account the progressive disappearance of the middle classes, an area where there is a sharply growing opposition between the “haves” and the “have nots”, thus indicating the probable event of new confrontations since it is in the area of the “have nots” that poverty extends. It is besides in this distressing context that the public services are profiling the return to “a third class” well described and defined by the sociologist Dominique Mmmi in her recent essay where she writes in particular: “Hospitals, dental care, funeral services, universities, TGV: everywhere the public service restores without mentioning it a third class reserved for the poorest people”. All this is true and deserves that the NGOs take charge of the future of this disturbing issue that is tending towards a shameful stratification of public services, an issue in which our NGO would have many things to say because our profession is at the centre of this new cyclone which is crushing down on the poor. We are witnessing the forced march of an American type social segmentation in which the poor retain a marginal share (“fall outs” in American jargon) of the benefits of society.

Finally, and once again in what concerns France, poverty is secreted increasingly by what Bourdieu called “the social reproduction of the elites” which, if this social phenomenon is perpetuated, will contribute to create for ever more what one of my colleagues called “the French machine to replicate social poverty”. It is the structure that must be changed, by strengthening the access to culture, without which poverty will persist. There must be investment in this field and in this spirit we must multiply the philanthropic organisms that disseminate free culture for everyone, and consequently for the most underprivileged.

In this context, agencies like *Philotechnique* (founded in 1848) in Paris must be multiplied everywhere with the support of public authorities, because these kinds of agencies attack the roots of the evil: the need for education, the fundamental remedy against poverty. That is the true remedy. We must continue to be outraged by the current situation but we must continue to wait as Seneca suggests: The only person who has the right to be indignant is the person who is capable of waiting”.

Summary drafted in Berlin & Toulouse during October 2019
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