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REASONS FOR THE CRISIS OF CHRISTIAN DEMOCRACY IN WESTERN EUROPE

The article discusses the causes and characteristics of the crisis of Christian democracy in West European countries in the second half of the XX century and at the present stage. The author notes that the crisis manifests itself in several directions: on the one hand, it is expressed in a significant decrease of the electoral support of the Christian Democratic parties in most West European countries and, on the other, in the crisis of the European Union as an integration project of a united Europe, the founders of which were the authors of the concept of the pan-European "Christian republic." The article analyzes both "external" and "internal" reasons of the loss by the Christian Democrats of their ruling status in Europe. The key factor contributing to the development of the crisis is the desire of the demochristians to expand their electoral base by"secularizing" their ideology and moving away from the fundamental Christian Democratic principles.

Key words: *Christian democracy, demochristians, European Union, EU, EEC, integration, democracy, liberalism, socialism, elections, de Gaulle, Merkel.*

After the end of the World War II, the Christian Democratic forces were able to achieve a significant political dominance in a number of West European countries. One of the reasons for the transition to the ruling status of the demochristians was that they were able to present to their voters an alternative path of development that neither the socialists nor the liberals proposed. The program of the Christian Democratic forces envisaged a policy that was not only oriented towards Christian values and ideals, but also included democratic principles of public administration, which took into account the interests of all groups of the population and suggested a broad public participation in the government decisions.

At the end of the War, the Christian Democratic forces not only took a dominant position in such countries as Italy, Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg, but also significantly influenced the formation of the future European Union, initiating the creation of the association that preceded it, the European Coal and Steel Community. Guided by the principles of the political

doctrine of Catholicism, the demochristians who were at the forefront of European integration pursued the goal of creating a "Christian republic," the political ideal of a post-war united Europe [6].

We would like to highlight the following factors that contributed to the political success of the Christian Democratic forces in Western Europe after the World War II:

– the presence of a specific value-ideological foundation based on the Christian values and democratic principles, which were in demand in the post-war society;

– support by the Vatican and the absence of obstacles on its part for the implementation of political activities. As a result, an effective mobilization of the Catholic part of the electorate;

– lack of a strict ideological framework that allowed the Christian Democrats to more flexibly develop provisions of their programes on certain issues of the political and economic agenda and to quickly respond to the changing demands of the population. As a result, the expansion of the electoral base, also by attracting votes of supporters from the right and left forces;

– constant political confrontation between the Christian Democrats and the left-wing forces and maintenance of a distance with the liberals, as a result of which they were able to offer the only systemic alternative within the framework of the ideological confrontation of the two main ideologies.

We can distinguish three main stages of development of the Christian Democratic political movement. The first stage took place almost a century ago: from the middle of the 19th century until the end of the World War II. It was the period of formation of the Christian-democratic ideology and of the first political parties.

The second stage is associated with the emergence of modern parties of demochristians, that enshured their ruling status in several West European countries after the end of the War and lasted for almost the entire second half of the 20th century.

Finally, the chronology of the third stage starts from the beginning of the 1990s and continues to this day.

The "Christian Republic" as a political and ideological project of a united Europe at the first stages of the development of integration processes in that region really looked viable not only because the Christian Democrats were at the head of the founding states of the European Coal and Steel Community [1. P. 21], but also because a wide integration was promoted by the general cultural and civilizational identity of these countries, firmly connected with the Catholicism. However, already in the 1960s, the project of a unified "Christian republic" faced difficulties arising from both French politics led by de Gaulle [23] and the desire of Denmark, Ireland, Norway and the UK to join the newly formed European Economic Community (EEC).

The "French" threat to the Christian Democrats was due to the fact that de Gaulle completely denied the supranational character of the European integration association, insisting on the need of an intergovernment cooperation, that would

not limit French sovereignty. This contradicted the transnational ideology of the Christian Democrats and the very idea of a single "Christian republic." Among other things, de Gaulle's claim to France's leadership as a key country in Western Europe and as a "third force" in the confrontation between the United States and the USSR was in conflict with the policy of the Christian Democrats aimed at the close cooperation with NATO in the field of security [13].

To a certain extent, de Gaulle's foreign policy led to the premature expansion of the European Economic Community, as it became a pretex for the US leadership to exert pressure on Britain to join the EEC, thereby ensuring a balance of power within the framework of the pan-European union. Obviously, the UK application for membership in the EEC, as the subsequent applications from Norway, Ireland and Denmark jeopardized the dominant position of the Christian Democrats in the political life of the West European countries.

Demochristians faced the necessity to build interaction with completely different political strategies, preferences and decision-making institutions [9. P. 132]. Since the Christian Democrats did not have strong allies among the conservative forces in the protestant North European countries that became members of the EEC by 1975, they lost their political advantage and Socialists became the leading party in the European Parliament (they had 66 mandates versus 53 mandates of the Christian Democrats) [3].

Despite the structural crisis, internal differentiation of the Christian-democratic movement and de Gaulle's policies, the demochristians remained the main and leading agents of the strategy of supranational integration of the European countries [19. P. 71]. The emerging threats forced them to initiate modernization of the ideological platform and their own program in accordance with the rapidly changing requirements of the socio-political agenda of the European society. However, the most important step for the Christian Democratic movement in the 1960-1970s was the transition from a system of inter-party cooperation to the creation of a common transnational political structure.

At the 1965 Taormina Congress the "New International Movement" (Nouvelles équipes internationals – NEI), an international union of christian-democratic forces, was transformed into the European Union of Christian Democrats (UEC) [16. P. 295]. If prior to that transformation, NEI members were individual citizens of the European countries, after it, only political parties were members of the new organization. In order to consolidate resources and synchronize political actions within the framework of the Unified Economic Development Committee, in 1970, a permanent conference of Christian-democratic parties began to work, which, in fact, became the official organ of the organization [12. P. 310].

After the United Kingdom, Denmark and France agreed to the introduction of a system of direct elections to the European Parliament, the demochristians of the EEC member states founded a new European People's Party in 1976 [20. P. 269-286]. Two years later, the EPP members were able to agree on the development of a unified

political program for the participation in the 1979 elections to the European Parliament. Organisation of a single federation in Western Europe was formulated as one of the key points of their program [18. Pp. 413-432; 15. P. 557].

It is worth noting that even before the expansion of the European Economic Community in 1972, the popularity of the Christian Democratic parties in most West European countries began to decline. Already in 1969, the German CDU/CSU lost elections to the coalition of socialists and liberals headed by Chancellor Willy Brandt, and went into opposition. After a devastating defeat in the 1962 national elections, the French demochristians were dissolved in 1967. In the Netherlands and Belgium, the rating of support for the Christian-democratic parties fell to just over 30% by 1968, despite the fact that they continued to remain in power and were able to form national governments. After 1970, the support of the Austrian ÖVP, which was able to enter into a coalition with the socialists only in 1986, decreased significantly. The Italian Christian Democrats remained in power for a long time, but since the late 1960s their electoral base has also been steadily declining.

An important factor in reducing the support of the Christian-democratic parties was their inability to mobilize the West European society in the context of its large-scale secularization, which was observed in the 1960-1970s [5. Pp. 376-388]. In this regard, the key opponents of the demochristians – socialists and liberals – have shown greater flexibility. The former were able to transform the Marxist ideological program by adopting anti-clericalism, which helped them to lure some Catholics of moderate views to their side. The liberals, who included the ideas of neoliberalism and libertarianism in their program, were also able to successfully move to the electoral field of the Christian Democrats.

A serious blow to the dominant position of the Christian Democrats was dealt in the light of the riots and revolutionary events of 1968. The students' unrests were directed precisely against those traditional values (primarily family and religion) and the "bourgeois" attitudes that were fundamental to the conservative political ideology of the Christian Democrats [25. P. 21-36]. At the same time, the feminist movement spreaded widely [17. Pp. 43-59]. It is worth noting that the protest mood played into the hands of the socialists, who were able to channel the public discontent and direct it against the Christian-democratic forces, which were in power at that time.

Perhaps one of the most striking examples of the transformation of public views was the Italian referendum of 1974 on the issue of legalizing divorces. Christian democrats, confident that their position on banning divorces would be supported, were shocked by the results of the referendum, when 60% of Italians voted for the right to divorce.

A logical step for the demochristians was a change in their political rhetoric and modernization of their platform in an attempt to attract voters who did not traditionally support the Christian Democrats [22. Pp. 42-61]. An attempt of such modernization was the formation of an international movement of demochristians. In

1961, the World Union of Christian Democrats (WUCD) was created in Santiago, its name was changed in 1982 to the Christian Democratic International (CDI) [24].

Despite the prospects of the chosen integration strategy, the Christian Democratic International soon implemented a number of destructive decisions that have led to a complete erosion and destruction of its ideological platform. It was primarily accelerated by the acceptance to the organization of parties from the non-Christian countries (mainly the Maghreb) and the change of its name to the "Centrist Democratic International."

The desire of the Christian Democrats to overcome the crisis by joining various political coalitions, their retreat from their positions with the aim of expanding their electoral base have ultimately led to the discreditation of their organizations, and, as a result, to a decrease in electoral support [27].

For example, on the eve of the 1994 national elections in Italy, the position of the local Christian Democrats was extremely weak, given that in 1993 they completed regional and municipal elections with a serious defeat. In this connection, Mino Martinazzoli, the last leader of the Italian demochristians, decided to carry out modernization by changing the name of the political party to "Italian People's Party."

Modernization was of a conservative nature and implied a return of the ideology to the "sources," to the principles and values that were laid in the foundation of the Christian Democratic movement in Italy at the beginning of the last century. Despite attempts to reform the party, Italy's Christian Democratic forces, represented by four parties, were defeated in the 1994 general election, the number of Christian Democrats in the parliament fell from 207 to 46.

Already at the present stage, many representatives of the Christian democratic forces are demonstrating a significant change in their political rhetoric and a departure from the Christian democratic ideological principles. During the 2005 election campaign, the future German Chancellor Angela Merkel interpreted the concept of "dominant culture" promoted by the CDU as a concept of "tolerance and cohabitation" [14. Pp. 711-723], which, according to experts, meant a reorientation from the traditional Christian Democratic electorate to a wider population with all the possible accompanying risks [7. Pp. 47-52].

Merkel's subsequent rhetoric related to the promotion of ideas of multiculturalism and tolerant attitude to migration and her restrictive policy towards Christian traditions (for example, a ban on the Christmas markets) have led to a sharp growth in the popularity of the right-wing political movements. For example, in 2017 the Alternative for Germany party gained 7.9% more votes than in the previous elections [11], while the Christian Democrats lost more than 8.5% [2. Pp. 556-573].

Among the factors that caused the crisis of Christian democracy in Western Europe, it is worth mentioning the foreign policy context. It is obvious that in the conditions of the Cold War and bipolar confrontation of the two ideological systems, the Christian Democrats could offer their voters an alternative strategy for the development of their countries. Influential Soviet-sponsored Communist

movements in post-war Europe posed a serious threat to the European middle class, business, and large capital [4; 21 Pp. 137-157]. Therefore the Christian Democrats remained a "deterrent," which stood in the way of the coming to power of the Communist forces.

The collapse of the Soviet Union has automatically eliminated the "Communist threat," depriving the Christian Democrats of the opportunity to argue their protective position [28].

In the 1990s and 2000s, a factor of globalization began to play its role [26. P. 60-77]. The end of the Cold War and disintegration of the socialist camp contributed to the dominance of the Western point view regarding the lack of an alternative to the liberal ideology [8]. In this context, the Christian democracy was positioned as a politically "obsolete" force, which has already fulfilled its historical role by ensuring the transition of the European post-war society to democracy.

One way or another, the main cause of the crisis of the Christian democracy in Europe, in our opinion, was an internal crisis associated with the attempts by demochristians to expand their electoral base not by popularizing Christian values and relying on the traditional conservative electorate, but by adapting their program to the changing needs of the population and the constant search for compromises both with other political forces and with the challenges that arose in the second half of the 20th century [10. Pp. 359-367].

Such actions led to the distancing of the demochristians from the Catholic Church and Christianity itself, which at the turn of the 1960-1970s were constantly attacked, both by liberals and socialists. The departure from the original ideology and the internal secularization of the political platform, in fact, preceded the crisis of the Christian Democrats and their subsequent electoral defeats.

However, it should be noted that already in the 21st century there is a systemic crisis of the liberal worldview, which dominated the political space of Western Europe in the last decades. Today, issues of migration, a decline in economic growth and negative demographic trends in light of the degradation of the institution of the family are especially relevant for the European agenda. Brexit and the desire of a number of the EU member states for a greater autonomy testify to the growing crisis of the integration project of a united Europe.

In this regard, the Christian Democratic forces may have a chance for revival if they can offer the European society a strategic vision of the future development based on those values that helped Europe to democratize and embark on the path of economic growth after the end of the World War II. In our opinion, the future of the European Union will depend on the ability of the demochristians to unite Europeans around the idea of a common cultural and civilizational identity.

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