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Germany and Its Social Market Economy

*The Social Market Economy does not develop in law books
but in the minds of people and becomes visible
in their actions.*

Richard von Weizsäcker

Abstract. *The main goal of the study is the explanation of the ‘social’ element in the Social Market Economy style of socio-economic order in Germany. To understand what Social Market Economy means exactly, it is necessary to explore its main particular elements – orders. The lack of public awareness regarding its importance, leads to the following hypothesis: the contemporary interpretation departed significantly from Social Market Economy sources, and German society does not thoroughly understand its nature and essence. Political parties are using its “brand” to improve their political image and gain electorate, which contributes to the deformation of its origins significantly affecting the shape and direction of change in the socio-economic governance of Germany, social attitudes and social expectations concerning social benefits, and social well-being.*

Keywords: *Max Weber, Germany, Social Market Economy, social order, social element, ordoliberalism, political parties, Denken in Ordnungen*

Introduction

Governing in the society and for the society in order to build prosperity for all had become a primary line of thought in postwar Germany. This universal thought underlines the social and economic order of Germany, despite its evolution, to this day.

The policy of order is crucial for economic, social and political development of Germany, where it has taken an original meaning and unprecedented impor-

tance. The issue is not about centralized control of market processes and state egalitarianism; those being in fact unethical and unfair. Neither does it mean invisible hand or *laissez-fair*, because those do not lead to an optimal allocation in relation to Pareto principle, due to market failure, in the sense of both micro- and macroeconomics, as well as social and political processes.

According to Nobel Prize winner Joseph E. Stiglitz the free market mechanism will never be perfect, and therefore perfectly effective, due to: unreliability of competition, failure resulting of public goods, incomplete information which is result of external effects; due to the fact of incomplete markets and occurrence of inflation, unemployment and for lack of balance. What is more, according to J.E. Stiglitz, all those ‘failures’ and ‘unreliability’ are interdependent [Stiglitz 2004: 91-102].

This opinion is commented by another Nobel Prize winner, Paul Samuelson, who, in the interview for “Der Spiegel” admits: “Capitalism needs rules. A reliable law system.” Market alone does not perceive problems and their complexities, especially in the reality of global and international and trans-border relations: “the market has no heart, the market has no brain” [Honrig, Jung 2005]. The market needs rules of coordination and organization, which will prevent chaos and discipline the political actors.

The goal of this paper is to underline the ‘social element’ in the concept of Social Market Economy, by showing the importance of its specific orders.

The lack of social understanding of the importance of the ‘social element’ leads us to the following hypothesis: contemporary interpretation of the Social Market Economy has greatly drifted away from its sources and the German society does not fully comprehend it’s nature. Political parties use this term to brand to boost their own image and acquire voters, thus twisting its concept and influencing the shape and direction of the social and economic changes of Federal Republic of Germany and social attitudes and expectations, that constantly rise. This in turn causes the changes in the system of values, where there is less space for satisfaction and wellbeing developing and streaming by – property shaped – social policy; the sphere of wellbeing is replaced by the feeling of greed, demanding and wants, which is correlated with paradigm of “more and more” instead of “better and better.”

1. The pillars of Social Market Economy

The Social Market Economy is based on German freiburger ordoliberalism, which has its roots in so-called stems *Ordnungspolitik*, the policy of order. This in turn draws from the political economy, that shape the market policies and it patterns in Germany. The goal of German *Ordnungspolitik* is creating the rules and

principles that govern “the interactions between economic actors, and between them and the state” [Priddat 2009: 41], where the state oversees the following of the rules, according to the rules of free market.

The ordoliberalism – the first pillar of the Social Market Economy, organizes capitalism and ordering the liberal market freedom in so-called the constituting and regulating principles and fuses the elements of economic, political and legal order in the name of the concept of interdependency of orders (*Interdependenz der Ordnungen*).

Ordoliberalism determines and is the base for the Social Market Economy and the economic order in postwar Germany.

The second pillar of the Social Market Economy is an economic humanism, which introduces to the economic order the rule of personalism from the Catholic Social Teaching.

It places the human, with his dignity, in the heart of every economic and social decision and action on the one hand, and on the other – based on the concept of solidarity – it unites the individual – a person with the society, by participation, pluralism, free initiatives and the rule of ethical behavior. Personalism assumes the solidarity, “according to which all people are united and social oriented, despite their differences and therefore it promotes behaviors aimed the simultaneous development of a man and society” [Gaburro, Cresotti 1997: 104].

The process of economic management, under the economic humanism, is included in the socio-anthropological frames realizing, that “the market economy presents only a narrow domain of social life, that is embedded in the area, which surrounding them: ‘where people are not competitors, producers, traders, consumers, members of their communities, beings of flesh and blood, together with their thoughts and feelings, with the need of justice, honor, helpfulness, the need of community spirit, peace, performing their daily duties, with the need of beauty and the life in harmony with the nature’” [Röpke 1979: 82].

Third pillar is *Vitalpolitik*, the normative idea, which does not use the reference of GDP as a valid measurement of the development, but instead uses happiness, satisfaction and wellbeing of people. The policy of *Vitalpolitik* guides the Social Market Economy in the social and cultural, as well as anthropological and axiological and ethical direction.

It is oriented on the human being, it’s *Vita Humana* – everything that supports the innate dignity, self-development, the quality of life, that are guaranteed by constant sustainable development of social and natural environment. *Vitalpolitik* supports the happiness in categories different than material, steering away from the mechanization of economic life and from the economy in which productivity and instrumental efficiency and is only manifested in statistics or, according to Aristotle, steering away from the chrematistics.

Vitalpolitik is a way of understanding the economic politics as a style of government of the society, for the society and for human, that is compatible with properly shaped style of social politics.

And at least, the fourth pillar of the Social Market Economy is based on the integrative formula: ethics with economy, morality with social attitudes, solidarity with efficiency, freedom and entrepreneurship with social security, economic order with the social order.

What is more – taking into account the contradictions in certain systems of faith and thinking, that may lead to loosening of the social bonds – the Social Market Economy does not eliminate the contradicting attitudes (i.e., liberalism and socialism, Catholicism and Protestantism) but draws the elements that are the best for the society, by the peaceful coexistence of rules and values, based on the Christian irenics.

2. The essence of the Social Market Economy as an economic style

The Social Market Economy is mostly associated with the postwar German ‘economic miracle’ which came into being thanks to the minister of economy Ludwig Erhard, in the government of chancellor Konrad Adenauer. In this understanding the economic aspect is crucial, and Social Market Economy is treated as a base of social and economic order. The role of the state brings to regulate and interfere in the social sphere, that needs to be “taken care for,” using the mechanisms of redistribution and fiscal instruments.

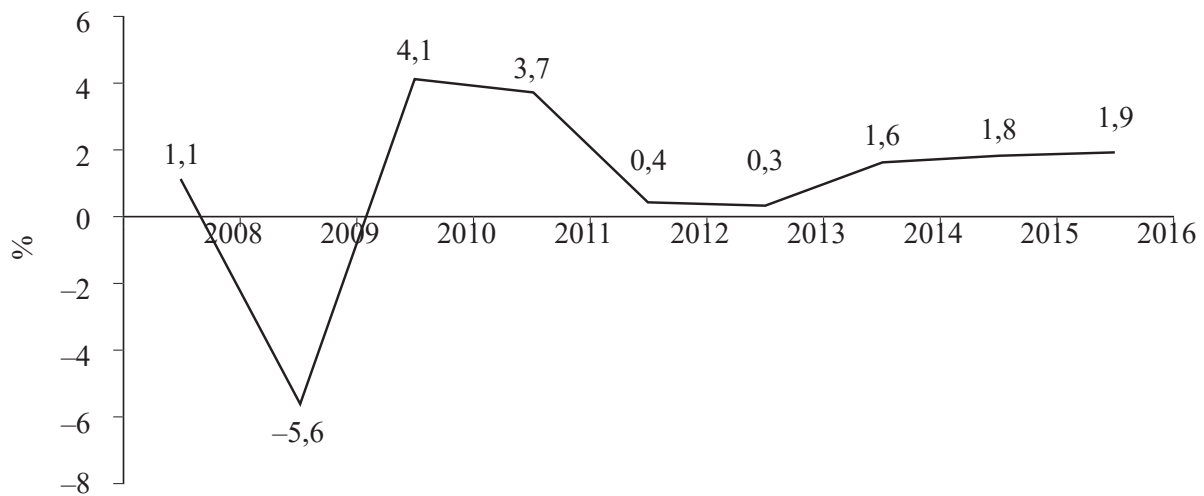
According to this – completely erroneous – approach, the German Social Market Economy would have been a true miracle, since – following the economic logic (especially classic and neoclassic) – the welfare state would have killed the active spirit of individualism by expansion of the public sector and widespread social aids.

This in turn would have slowed down the economic growth, which would have meant that German economy would not be one of the most developed economies of the world, and certainly would not show such a good growth dynamic – as indicate the evolution of real GDP in the years 2008-2014 (Chart 1) – in comparison with other countries, despite the crisis in Eurozone.

In other, and more widely accepted interpretations the state defends obeying the law and the free market, being a neutral arbiter.

This approach is close to this of Walter Eucken, the ordoliberal economist and founder of the Freiburg School. The state shapes and stabilizes the economic order of the competition a “through the resignation with a direct intervention in the course of market management process, obtains the position of natural arbiter standing above the various, contradictory interests of the particular participants in the economic game” [Pysz 2008: 84].

Chart 1. Real GDP growth in Germany in the years 2008-2014
and forecast the German Institute for Economic Research for 2016



Source: Statista – Das Statistik-Portal, *Entwicklung des realen Bruttoinlandsprodukts (BIP) in Deutschland von 2008 bis 2014 und Prognose des DIW bis 2016 (gegenüber dem Vorjahr)*, <http://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/74644/umfrage/prognose-zur-entwicklung-des-bip-in-deutschland> [12.02.2016].

By introducing through W. Eucken the constituting and regulating principles, the economic order influences *per se* the social order and thus, the creation of the social policy is not necessary; to the contrary, it would generate the unnecessary government spending, increasing the economic inefficiency.

Alfred Müller-Armack concludes that “competitive economy is not joined society to whole, does not introduce any common attitudes and feelings, common ethical standards and without them the society does not exist, indeed.” Following only the free market principles, often leaves the individual in “the painful isolation” and the society atomizes itself [Müller-Armack 2000: 88].

To prevent this, the social policy is necessary, as well as the understanding or – following Max Weber – “intellectual understanding” and explanation of the meaning of Social Market Economy.

The sole term is often considered a pleonasm, set of words with no added meaning which, like ‘people’s democracy’, are used to ‘soften’ the ‘bloodthirsty capitalism’ hidden in the term ‘market economy’, or suggest the omnipotence of the state and the domination of the social sphere over economic freedom.

The lack of understanding of the Social Market Economy led to the situation in which in Federal Republic of Germany this term was used as a “prehensile” slogan. It was very liked by the populists, interest groups and by the society that tried to achieve bigger social privileges; by the politicians in search of profits and additional votes using it in their campaigns, especially to convince so-called the median voters [see Bokajło 2014: 297-317].

The term Social Market Economy was first used by Alfred Müller-Armack in his book *Wirtschaftslenkung und Marktwirtschaft* published in 1947. It's important to notice that he was not a representative of the Freiburg ordoliberalism, but he has represented the Cologne School, strictly connected to the views of German Historical School.

The Social Market Economy thus, does not prefer any of the particular order (economic, social, legal, cultural, environmental, political etc.), but instead – and in accordance with the German Historical School – it holds the holism, unity and interdependency of these orders. It therefor introduces the model of “Thinking in orders” (*Denken in Ordnungen*), which was propagated by the member of the younger German Historical School, Max Weber. It renounces the thinking in terms of domination of the market (as in liberalism) or the state (as in socialism). It is also not “the third way,” but a completely new style of governing, effective and justice in the society and for the society in the reality of scarce goods.

The term ‘style’ is also not random. A. Müller-Armack does not explain the Social Market Economy in other ways, than: “this style is a flexible reaction to the current situation,” while it is not “an ideology and also not either perfect system or kind of recipe given once for all, and – in the same form – could be used at any time.” This is also not a theory, but rather “evolutionary order,” whose “emphasis should be distributed in accordance with the requirements of the changing times” (the historical moment), “with the exception of the constancy of a very key principle: everything have to be done under the free order” [Dietzfelbinger 1998: 221].

The Social Market Economy is far from creating abstract entities, like liberal *Homo Oeconomicus*, rationally pursuing to the maximization of profits, becoming a certain tool “in the hands” of economic theories. This style has been devised in the historical and cultural processes and was characteristic for certain historical moments: 1948-1957 (ordoliberalism and first phase of the Social Market Economy) and 1957-1963 (the second phase of Social Market Economy and real coexistence of the orders based on *Denken in Ordnungen*).

The sole term of ‘style’ comes from the German Historical School, where the researches on styles (*Wirtschaftsstilforschung*) was conducted by Bruno Hildebrand and Wilhelm Roscher (The Old Historical School), Gustaw von Schmoller (The Young Historical School), or Arthur Spiethoff, Werner Sombart and Max Weber (The Youngest Historical School).

Thus style of the Social Market Economy is an integral part of the social and cultural life of postwar Germany, being adopted as a style of living by the society.

It solidified in the mentality of the Germans not as a sturdy model, but rather as a concept, a dynamic method (*progressive Stilgedanke*), as the economic and social policies management. That is why this ‘Market Economy’ is called ‘Social’ the economic actors are socially conscious and cooperating together by the rule of

division of labor in order to combat the scarcities by join forces [Pszczółkowski 1990: 68-69]. They are free to act inside that, so to speak, economic and social constitution (*Wirtschaftsverfassung*), and have a right to choose the best social and economic policies that can adjust to the times.

Similar context is seen in a political constitution of the economic and social order, proposed by theorist of the public choice theory, American economist James M. Buchanan.

It does not speak only of constitution understood as a legal document, but rather private or social constitution, created by: “restrictions that an individual imposes on herself in order to achieve its goals” or by “the restraints imposed on each other by individuals in various social situations, which there are in their own, free will” [Matelska-Szaniawska 2012: 111].

This kind of constitution characterizes the style of the Social Market Economy in categories of co-creation, sustainability, coordination and complementing the social and economic actions by:

- the free market – creating the environment for entrepreneurship, innovation and competition,
- the state – which role is to support the functioning of the economic order, not to steer the economy,
- the society – understood as *Civitas Humana*, the civil society, participating in social order is responsible and engaged in the economic growth and non-economic development (*Vitalpolitik*) [see also: Bokajło 2013: 113-132].

2. How social is the German Social Market Economy?

The Social Market Economy is glorified due to the ‘economic miracle’ (*Wirtschaftswunder*), but rather rarely it is referred to its social role, being – according to *Denken in Ordnungen* – one of the orders of the Social Market Economies’ style.

Moreover, this social function is equivalent to the other orders and “is complementary to the economic policy, by the spirit and character of the Social Market Economy, in order to qualify all of orders into the holistic lifestyle” [Dietzfelbinger 1998: 219].

It is important to point out the original writings of the creators of the Social Market Economy: W. Röpke, A. Rüstow, A. Müller-Armack, F. Böhm and its political maker – L. Erhard, which understood it not as *soziale Marktwirtschaft* but rather capitalized: *Soziale Marktwirtschaft*.

In that way it was underlined that “Soziale” is not an adjective, nor a just an esthetical form added to the market economy, but it is firmly an integral part of the style, which manifested by the existence of social policy.

L. Erhard in his book titled *Wohlstand für Alle* seems to be emphasizing the meaning of ordoliberalism (though not using the term itself), as a legitimate and necessary concept of economic policy right after II World War.

He pointed out, that the creation of economic order has been a condition of *sine qua non* for bringing in – as a next stage – a social policy: “in the first phase, aimed at achieving the goals of economic policy, the main attention was concentrated to the economic expansion, in order to increase the supply of goods in general, and thus boosted the mechanism of competition” [Erhard 2011: 19].

The Social Market Economy in Erhard’s understanding, is developed not only as the economic concept, but predominantly as a social concept. In the first phase of the Social Market Economy implementation, the society “have become the opportunity to use their energy and initiative based on the principle of freedom” [Erhard 2011: 195]. The second phase, according to Erhard, was a time to “secure the future of our young, democratic state. [...] In this demand are combined entirely an economic and social policy and politics” [Erhard 2011: 28].

Similar views are expressed by W. Röpke in his *Civitas Humana*; he pointed that to overcome the effects of the war in Germany was necessary first, the implementation free market mechanisms to boost the economy, however following the growing social problems, the time has come to introduce the social policy in the second phase. He admits, that the liberals were wrong thinking that the market economy is capable of solving all the social problems [Röpke 1979: 82].

The social policy is concerned mainly, so called social questions, than the problems that relates to human freedom, respect of the dignity and public responsibility for all citizens.

It is the common responsibility for the social coherence, without which even the best “design” economic order will not contribute to the welfare and wellbeing of all.

Furthermore, it is very closely related to the constitutional principles of: the legal personality, solidarity and subsidiarity.

The principle of solidarity should be understood „not only as a virtue, but institutional criterion by which political, economic and social institutions should be assessed.”

It is of course crucial to notice the boundaries of justice; they should only indicate the proper direction and the shape of the order and its governance, to correct the failures of the market, not to create the failures of the public sphere, through the overgrown state and institutional apparatus and its actions [Schumann 2007: 49-50].

The social aspects should integrate and solidify the society, build peace, solidarity and above all develop responsibility and motivate to activities: „a society, that strives for social justice, creates the conditions for markets (such as the right framework conditions, for development of the social capital), an alternatives for

the market (as public goods: infrastructure, education) and for compensate the market failures (social policy)” [Schumann 2007: 46].

This understanding of the ‘social element’ is written in the German, constitutional principle of social state; since according to Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany, Article 20 (1) declares, that Germany is “a democratic, social federal state.” D. Janicka notes, that the social clause meets adjectival function, appears a noun complex: ‘social state of law’, ‘social federal state’ [Janicka 2009: 99].

That binds the category of ‘Soziale’ with the principle of subsidiarity, indicating on:

- the level of dealing with social questions – Federation is obligated to deal with them as close to the citizen as possible,
- the laws that relate primarily to the human being, that do not allow the limiting of the initiative and personal development as a consequence of the social policies, that would promote “thinking in terms of redistribution and demanding” [Neuhaus, Langes 2012: 67], thus being irresponsible.

The lack of understanding of the style of Social Market Economy allows various (mis-) interpretations, that can build its erroneous perception in the society. As mentioned above, the Social Market Economy was loved in Germany by all major political parties, that invoke it, in their political discourse.

In the pursuit of gaining more voters, and thus boosting their particular interests, they use the Social Market Economy’s brand, but take certain values, rules and the meaning of the orders of which it is built, and interpret them according to their own criteria and views. In that sense Social Democrats, SPD concentrates on the protection and social state, the Green Party follows that line of thought in the context of ‘*ordered economy*’ (*geordnete Wirtschaft*) adding the questions of protection of the natural environment preservation, creating *Eko-soziale Marktwirtschaft*. The left – wingers, Die Linke, makes the excessively extended social policy a major aspect of *soziale Marktwirtschaft*.

It is noteworthy to point out the way these parties choose to write. They don’t use the capitalized *Soziale Marktwirtschaft*, instead using the adjective form *soziale Marktwirtschaft*. Free Democratic Party, FDP and Christian Democratic Union, CDU-CSU uses the capitalized version, but they take ordoliberalism as a dominant aspect of the Social Market Economy.

The German Christian Democrats is the closest to the original style – the Social Market Economy has been implemented by them in the actual social and economic order in the purest version until 1963.

In March 1965 during the 13th Congress of the CDU in Düsseldorf, L. Erhard was named Chancellor and introduced the concept of ‘*formed society*’ (*formierte Gesellschaft*). On one hand it was limiting the freedom and influence of some major actors in the civil society (workers unions, NGO’s) on the social and eco-

conomic order. On the other hand – according to Chancellor – they were the ones responsible for the slowing down of the economic growth and his ‘*formed society*’ was a direct answer to new challenges.

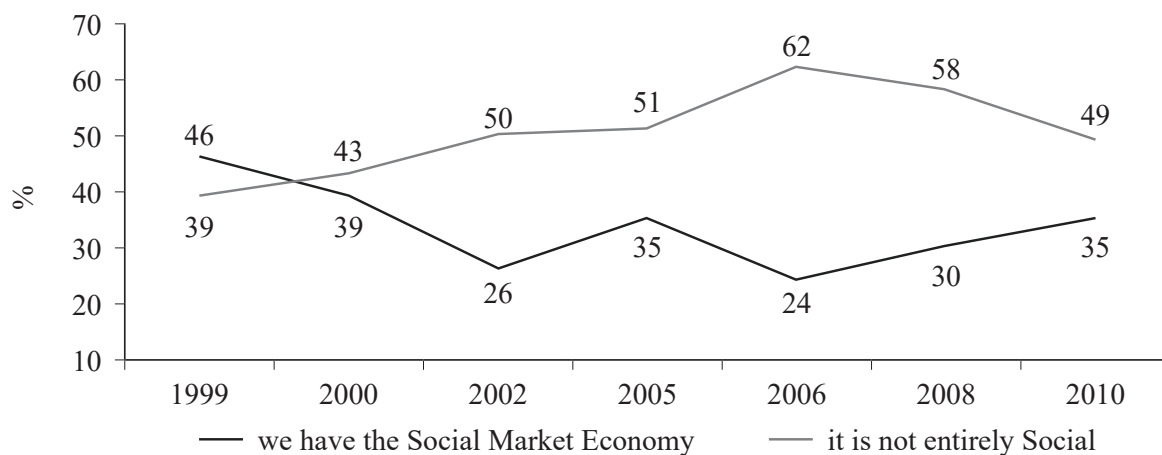
This move however, was considered leaving the ‘ideal type’ of the Social Market Economy, only to completely transform it, in the spirit of Social Democratic interpretation in 1966.

Due to changes in the governmental party coalitions in the years 1949-2015, creates a political cycle, that had a major influence in the shape of social and economic governance in Germany [see Bokajło 2014: 297-315]. It creates a certain mental sublimation in the German society that seems not to remember the original concepts of the Social Market Economy.

Research conducted by the renowned Institute of Public Opinion Research in Allensbach in 2010 proves, that the society sees a dissonance between the ‘social’ and ‘economic’ aspects of Social Market Economy.

When asked the question: “Would you say that Germany has the Social Market Economy order, or the market is not entirely social?” only in 1999 the majority (46%) stated that Social Market Economy, is a base of social and economic order. In the following years the respondents answered that market economy is not favorable to the society, as stated by 62% of the respondents in 2006 (Chart 2).

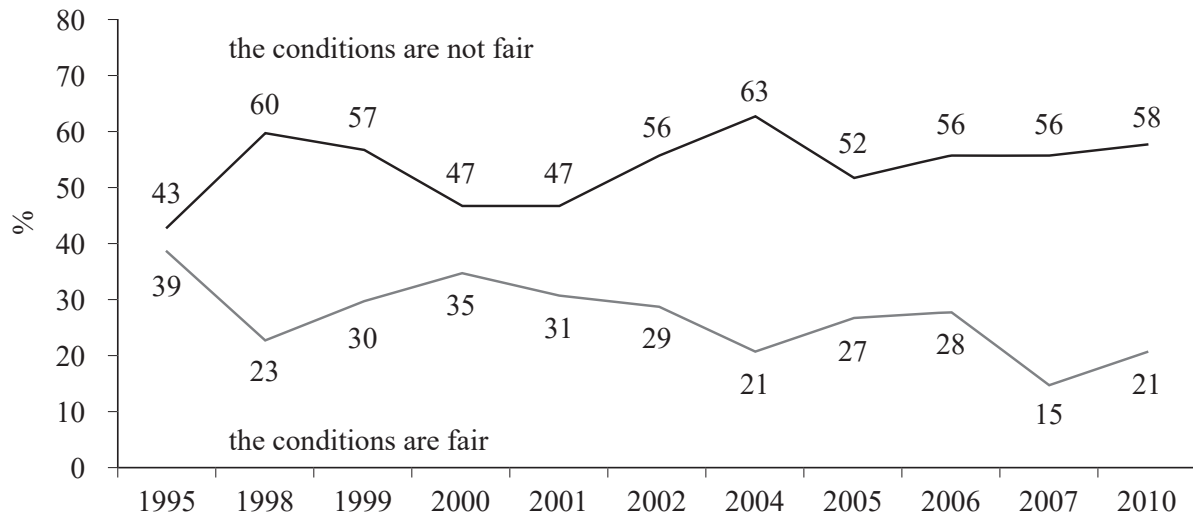
Chart 2. The public opinion in the years 1999-2010, on the following question: “Would you say that Germany has the Social Market Economy order, or the market is not entirely social?”



Source: Institut für Demoskopie 2010: 5.

The society also thinks that the contemporary style of government is not socially just, and people do not receive what they deserve. The biggest dissatisfaction can be observed in 2004, so before the reforms in the labor market and health policies (Agenda 2010 and Hartz IV), implemented by Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (63%) and we can observe it's growth from 1998. After 2004 according to public opinion the system is still socially unfair, furthermore this unfairness rises (Chart 3).

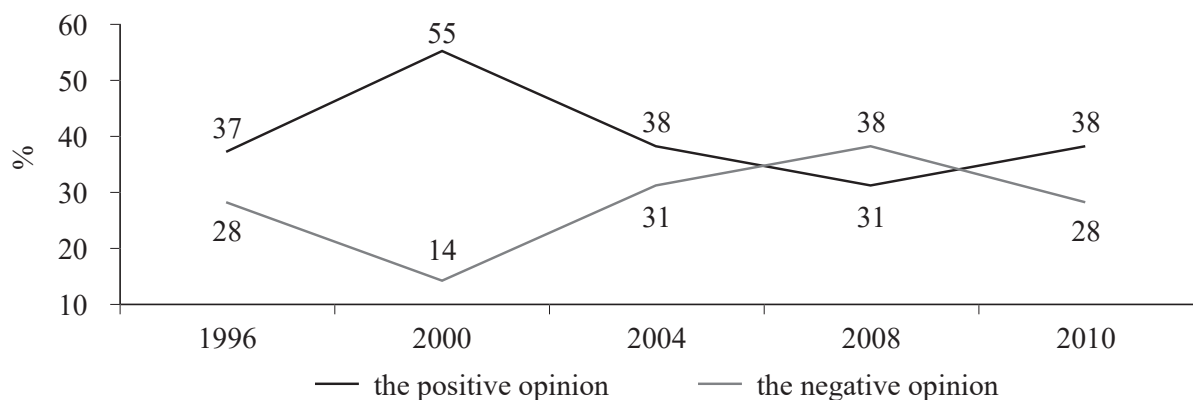
Chart 3. The public opinion in the years 1995-2010, on the following question: “Are the economic conditions in Germany fair, i.e. Whether people have as much as they deserve?”



Source: Institut für Demoskopie 2010: 8.

The researches by Bertelsmann Foundation indicates, that the Social Market Economy is not as popular as it has used to be. Although it's popularity rises – especially in comparison to a drastic decline noted in 2008, thanks to a global economic crisis – the satisfaction does not reach even half of respondents. It may be noted, that in 2010 the positive opinion concerning the socio-economic order presented 38% of respondents. According to different sources the satisfaction in 2012 raised to 48%, which is a better result, yet it's still less than a half (Chart 4).¹

Chart 4. The public opinion in the years 1996-2010, on the following question: “Do you have a positive or negative opinion on the Social Market Economy?”



Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung 2010.

¹ Aktive Wirtschaftszeitung, *Sieben Fragen und Antworten zu unserer Sozialen Marktwirtschaft*, 18.09.2012, AKTIVonline, www.aktiv-online.de/nachrichten/detailseite/news/sieben-fragen-und-antworten-zu-unserer-sozialen-marktwirtschaft-4051 [3.01.2016].

These are of course only examples of data related to public opinion about Social Market Economy, and more profound conclusions would require a deeper analysis, but even they indicate, that the German society is not treating the Social Market Economy as a comprehensive concept of the style of government following the *Denken in Ordnungen*.

The social perception leans towards the Social Democracy's way of understanding the Social Market Economy (that is mean: sozial Market Economy), that is connected to increasing of interventionism of the state in the market, that should lead to more justice, which in practice means raising the social benefits. This demanding attitude of the society was manifested in the elections of 2013, where the government was taken by the Great Coalition, yet the CDU-CSU union was influenced by Social Democracy, when it comes to reforms of policies, especially the social ones.

Conclusions

Nils Goldschmidt is his paper titled: *The dispute over the social element of the Social Market Economy* cited the words of W. Eucken: „a social problems for the fathers of Social Market Economy are only the means of coordination of all economic and social aspects” [Goldschmidt 2007: 7]. The social problems are also the roots of the Social Market Economy, and these reasons developed and conceived a style of governing in society and for the society, which called Social Market Economy.

In this style the ‘Social’ does not solely belong to the state competence, and the ‘Market Economy’ is not a perfect, self-regulating model, but rather a social product.

Its goal is to grant a possibility for citizens, to build their prosperity, not only material but especially in relation to the quality of life, manifested by vitality and well-being.

To reach this goal it is necessary – apart from the economic policy – to implement the social policy, directed to ‘public governance’ and aimed at the most disadvantaged groups in risk of exclusion.

Based on the methodology derived from Weber's *Denken in Ordnungen* and Eucken's *Interdependenz der Ordnungen* the researched ‘social element’ of the Social Market Economy is responsible for its integrity, complementarity and unity.

Understanding of the Social Market Economy and strengthening its concepts (orders) in the public consciousness, could shift the focus from forming of the modern ‘homo consumeris’, strongly based on quantity, towards qualitative and axiological values of the common goods and, on the other hand, it provides the set of guidelines on participation in the development of the civil society.

What is the most important however is the fact, that it would limit the possibility of (mis)-interpretation of the concept, by the actors that shape the social and economic order, which currently is strongly shifted towards the Social Democracy's understanding. This departure from the original interpretation blurs the lines between market-related and social-related components, twisting the understanding of the "self-constituted and self-consciousness civil participation."

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Niemcy i ich Społeczna Gospodarka Rynkowa

Streszczenie. Przewodnim celem opracowania jest wyjaśnienie znaczenia elementu „społecznego” w Społecznej Gospodarcie Rynkowej, będącej stylem społeczno-gospodarczego porządku w RFN. Pomocne w tej kwestii jest odwołanie się do poszczególnych porządków (ładów) Społecznej Gospodarki Rynkowej. Brak świadomości społecznej o jej znaczeniu prowadzi do następującej hipotezy: współczesna wykładnia odeszła znacznie od źródeł Społecznej Gospodarki Rynkowej, a społeczeństwo niemieckie nie do końca rozumie jej istotę. Partie polityczne zaś, używając jej „marki” do poprawy własnego wizerunku i zdobycia elektoratu, przyczyniają się do zniekształcenia koncepcji i wpływają istotnie na kształt i kierunek zmian społeczno-gospodarczego ładu w RFN. Wpływa to również w istotny sposób na zmiany w światopoglądzie społecznym, które przejawiają się we wzroście oczekiwań społecznych co do socjalnych korzyści i socjalnego dobrobytu.

Słowa kluczowe: Max Weber, Społeczna Gospodarka Rynkowa, ład społeczny, element społeczny, ordoliberalizm, partie polityczne, myślenie w porządkach