

Center-Right Symposium: Institutionalizing the Discussion of Ideas in the Sector

The Second Symposium of Programmatic Discussion is an important step to consolidate and project over time this center-right discussion space regarding its ideas and principles. Still more relevant is that the sector recognizes the existence of a central core of widely shared ideas on people's dignity, freedom and rights, the role of the state and the social market economy as an instrument for allocating resources.

The Second Symposium of Programmatic Discussion, called "Projecting the Center-Right Ideas in the Political Action", took place last week, and it was organized by the think tanks related to the pro-government coalition, *Instituto Libertad* (RN), Jaime Guzmán Foundation (UDI), and *Libertad & Desarrollo*. These symposiums seek to become a permanent discussion space (especially in non-election periods) for the different center-right stakeholders: political leaders of the parties RN and UDI (members of the governing bodies, parliament members, mayors, political commissions, etc.), government authorities, intellectuals, academicians and organized groups of the civil society (NGOs).

Thus, it is a space searching to plurally convoke the live forces of the center-right, from the community of the sector's essential ideas and principles, not only in terms of the parties (RN & UDI), but also from the different sensibilities which coexist within it: conservatives, liberals, libertarians, progressists, etc. In fact, and as an example thereof, there was an active presence of emerging think tanks, such as *Horizontal* or the *Fundación para el Progreso*, and NGOs such as *Foro Republicano* or *Res Pública*; all these institutions were also invited to collaborate with their publications and other materials.

While the First Symposium ("Future Ideas and Priorities") was focused on relating our ideas with specific issues of the public agenda (such as education, public security and consumers, which marked 2011), the Second Symposium was centered on the discussion of ideas and debates about the political grounds and ideas defended by the supporters of a free

society and the new frontiers of the social market economy. There were also speeches from the President of the Republic, the presidents of RN and UDI and the presidential pre-candidates Andrés Allamand and Laurence Golborne.

Although there were nuances in the different presentations –regarding the form, emphasis and approach-, there was a wide consensus concerning substantial issues, both in political and technical expounders: political action has a sense inasmuch as it advances ideas; more than government programs (many times a sort of supermarket list) the relevant point is to design a clear political project for the country, different from that of the left, and based on our ideas; and the center-right should rely on a central core of shared ideas based on: (a) the person's dignity, (b) people relying on rights and liberties which are prior to the state, (c) the exercise of freedom should go correlatively together with responsibility, (d) the respect for the law's empire, (e) a limited role of the state in the social and economical issues (guided by the subsidiarity principle), and (f) the social market economy as an instrument which promotes people's entrepreneurship and creativity.

Thus, this association of ideas and principles allows facing relevant issues such as poverty uprooting, job creation, increasing the quality of education, or energy and environmental challenges; ideas and principles that are an inspiring source and a guide for public policies and technical proposals to face these matters.

Coalition's Political Leaders

The President of the Republic, Sebastián Piñera, opened the Symposium and affirmed that the ideas which identify the center-right have proven to be the best “to achieve the people's full self-realization, the progress of the countries and the search for higher wellbeing levels”, but what is still more important is to clearly identify them to “indicate the direction of the political action we undertake”. He said: “We believe in human beings endowed with an intrinsic dignity, and those of us who have faith also believe in human beings endowed with a transcendent destiny. We are dealing here with fundamental rights, prior to the state, such as the right to life, freedom, physical integrity, equality before the law, the search for happiness and many more. These rights, which are prior to the state, are not free grants given to us by the state, on the contrary, they are rights prior to the state and, therefore, our Constitution does not grant these rights, it only gives the state the responsibility of ensuring and safeguarding these rights to all the people”.

At the end of his speech, and highlighting the global economy's difficulties, the President commented the results of applying center-right ideas during his government, stating that we are seeing an economy that has grown again with strength, created jobs again with great dynamism, and which is

solidly improving wages, all this based upon fiscal balance, investment and productivity increases, thus reducing the extreme poverty and inequality.

Afterwards, the RN President, Senator Carlos Larraín, stressed the importance of advancing in a society which does not only vigorously demand its rights, but also gives the same importance to its duties. He underlined the central role of families as a pillar of society and the duty of the state to strengthen it. On the other hand, the UDI President, Deputy Patricio Melero, listed next year's diverse political and electoral challenges for the center-right, based on the results and trends observed in the recent municipal election. He strongly criticized the non-existence of a consistent political project in the left, wondering about the identity of ideas and principles between the Christian Democracy and the Communist Party. Both highlighted in their speeches the need to face the primary process with a clear profile of the center-right political project in a frame of unity and avoiding disqualifications.

Think Tanks and Academicians

From the perspective of the actual discussion sessions, the first one called "Political Sense and Foundations of a Free Society" was addressed by the executive directors of the three organizing think tanks.

In the first place, Najel Klein, from the *Instituto Libertad*, referred at length to the key role of the principle of freedom in the center-right thought, stressing its integrality. In fact, he said that: "...the concept of freedom must be addressed from its philosophical sphere to a more earthly context and of political nature. We believe in freedom as the maximum expression of human kind...our sector which believes in and defends freedom with all its implications". Likewise, he highlighted that our society must currently balance at least three essential elements: governability, meaning order; progress associated to development; and justice related to equity: "These variables are in constant tension and it is necessary to wisely harmonize them in order to reconcile the conditions of democratic governability, sustainable growth and fair income distribution and, mainly, the opportunities allowing to consolidate a system of ascending social mobility". He appealed to be able to incorporate a wider reading of development, "through the interdependence between quality of life and economic productivity, eliminating the rigid dichotomy between personal and social wellbeing with capital accumulation or economic growth".

Luis Larraín, from *Libertad & Desarrollo*, started his speech by stressing that the center-right is driving very decisive moments in the history of Chile, which as a society faces "a breaking point in the positive road that we started as a country several decades ago, which has led us to be recognized as the most successful case of economic progress and social mobility in the region, and one of the most outstanding in the world too. Facing this breaking point with the correct ideas and principles is precisely

the responsibility of the center-right political leaders today: “the moral obligation to offer Chileans our own road to consolidate this society of liberties that we have all been creating”.

He stressed the importance of freedom and individual responsibility, the dignity of human beings and the relevant but delimited role of the state in the society, making (usually in a wrong way) things that it should not do, and neglecting basic functions which are inherent to its nature, such as the achievement of social peace, the administration of justice or the provision of public goods. He also added that “it is neither the task of regulation nor the law to achieve virtue in people. We do not want a nanny state, telling us what we have to eat or how to behave”. He invited to look at the crisis of the Welfare State and, skeptically, the handout policies that the Chilean left seeks to promote; to optimistically trust our ideas, many times fostered by the government of President Piñera, is a much more successful alternative, which is based on giving more credit to the creativity and talent of Chileans, and their capacity to progress based on their own means, rather than the state.

Jorge Jaraquemada, of the Jaime Guzmán Foundation, tried to answer two main questions to help understand the current state of the center-right ideas: After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, what did the center-right, apparent winner of that battle (social market economy and democracy respectful of individual rights and liberties) fail to do in order to be able to truly and permanently permeate its free society ideal? Why is it that the validity of the market economy, which emerged once the Cold War was over as a sort of global application standard, is still threatened today by the left and even, not rarely, by a deep-rooted corporatist right? For him, the answer lies in a progressist reinterpretation of freedom, understood as autonomy with no limits and no connection whatsoever with public goods: “This perspective leads us to economic statism, ethical relativism, and reducing politics to a mere technical activity and a pluralism concept which is increasingly closer to ‘all’s fair’”.

For Jaraquemada, the former has an impact on the discussion concerning the “fading of the center-right”, and the fact of having great relevance lately in the public debate: “...the term discourse (*relato*) –that is, the philosophical grounds which justify and give a consistent sense to public policies so that they do not become erratic- has circulated within the political sphere more because of its absence than for its eventual content. Therefore, it is urgent to revalidate a discourse, a project, a heroic deed to which we can invite the citizens”. He concluded saying that “what is now at stake in the current debate is not profits, nor the constituent assembly, nor an eventual tax increase, but the vision of person and society that every sector proposes”.

The second discussion panel, called “Frontiers of the Social Market Economy”, included the presentations of the economists Felipe Morandé

and Jaime Bellolio. The first one referred to the basic pillars of the social market economy model defended by the center-right, characterized, among others, by skepticism towards interventionist policies versus trusting the decisions of the companies and consumers; a mixed system in the provision of public goods and services; a spending-oriented tax system. Likewise, he underlined that these pillars have contributed to increase the Gross Domestic Product, a greater access to goods and services and, in short, an improvement of people's quality of life. However, he also set out that there are challenges concerning access and quality matters in health and education, and also a negative perception of the citizens regarding a high economic concentration and low social mobility.

On the other hand, Bellolio put forth that the social market economy is a tool to achieve goals and, thus, it can never be treated as an end in itself. Nevertheless, when defining what we want to do, we have to associate it with how we wish to do it. Here is where the social market economy has proven to create the biggest freedom, innovation and creativity spaces, aspects that definitely syntonize with human nature. He also criticized the postures which warn about the fall of the model and propose to advance towards a Welfare State and state intervention in economic matters; this alternative has globally failed over and over again and it withdraws from the model followed by Chile in the last decades, which has contributed to put it on the edge of development.

Message of the Presidential Pre-candidates

In the first place, Andrés Allamand set forth that the invitation to think about the role of ideas is particularly appropriate, since we are beginning a presidential campaign and "we have to decide, neither more nor less, which is the role that ideas will play in this campaign". He highlighted the following pillars of the center-right thought, and the political project he wishes to promote in political matters: advocating the representative and liberal democracy, not believing in the utopia of direct democracy and dismissing the jump into the void of the constituent assemblies; supporting a democracy with strong institutions and solid parties which must evolve without delay towards greater participation and transparency; the belief that presidential regimes, electoral systems with majority ranges, are better since they guarantee greater governability; and being able to transfer the highest possible number of decisions and implementation of public policies from the central government to the regional and local governments.

In economic matters, he declared that private entrepreneurship should always be the growth engine, and that the market's imperfections should not be corrected by the intervention from public companies, but by guaranteeing greater competition and transparency, less information asymmetries and less entry barriers. He also maintained that zero

tolerance should be applied to the abuse of consumers and small and medium businesses.

In social matters, he defended a quality education, starting from the preschool level, as the main tool to deepen social mobility; likewise, a strong public education, but not meaning thereby to weaken the position of private subsidized education, the right of parents to choose the school for their children, and without implying to forbid them to make economic contributions, precisely to improve the education of their children.

On the other hand, Laurence Golborne focused his proposal on the evolution of Chile and its past, present and future policies. He said that “it is not the same who governs” and therefore “it is not the same to have a constituent assembly as a mechanism to make the improvements that our institutional framework may require, instead of making them through the constitutional way; since it is not the same the freedom of teaching than a sole vision in education matters; since it is not the same to legalize marihuana when the message that we have to transmit is tremendously clear and strong concerning the fight against drug abuse. Certainly, it is not the same to consider abortion legislation, when our duty is to defend life”.

He set forth a political project based on three central elements. First, social mobility. Thus, the state must create the conditions to achieve social mobility, but based on merit and personal effort; and this effort should be rewarded, therefore education is a key factor. A second element is quality of life, which means to deal with key issues such as citizen security, health and healthy life, environment care, promoting culture and sports, and accordingly, we must strengthen and empower intermediate associations, clubs, neighbor associations, NGOs, etc. Finally, he proposed a third element regarding the capacity to grow and the need to strengthen the institutional framework and the respect for a state where the rule of law prevails; in this perspective, the energy, infrastructure and labor challenges are a primary issue.

Conclusions

The Second Symposium of Programmatic Discussion is an important step to consolidate and project over time this discussion space of the center-right regarding its ideas and principles. For some, these symposiums have allowed not only a forthright debate, but also holding back a sort of “fading” of the center-right political project. And of course all this is magnified by the new rules of the electoral game, which introduces automatic registration, voluntary vote and primary elections.

What is more important is that the center-right, as it was made evident in the different presentations, recognizes the existence of a central core of widely shared ideas: (a) the respect for the person’s dignity, (b) people relying on rights and liberties which are prior to the state, (c) the exercise of

freedom should go correlatively together with responsibility, (d) the respect for the law's empire, (e) a limited role of the state in the social and economical issues (guided by the subsidiarity principle), and (f) the social market economy as an instrument for allocating resources, which promotes people's entrepreneurship and creativity.

In brief...

DISCUSSION OF IDEAS IN THE CENTER-RIGHT

- The Second Symposium of Programmatic Discussion, called "Projecting the Center-Right Ideas in the Political Action", took place last week.
- These Symposiums seek to become a permanent discussion space (especially in non-election periods) for the different center-right stakeholders: political leaders of the parties RN and UDI (members of the governing bodies, parliament members, mayors, political commissions, etc.), government authorities, intellectuals, academicians and organized groups of the civil society (NGOs).
- The importance of the existence of a wide consensus concerning ideas and principles which constitute the center-right political project allows facing relevant issues such as poverty uprooting, job creation, increasing the quality of education or the energy and environmental challenges; ideas and principles that are an inspiring source and a guide for public policies and technical proposals to face these matters.