

# A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON POLITICAL CORRECTNESS

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## Abstract

The objective of this paper is to present some of the most relevant moments which have influenced the evolution of political correctness and to reveal the connection between these moments. The phenomenon appeared in America as an attempt to help certain categories of people which had been previously misrepresented or overlooked. In the 60's it became part of the ideology of the American New Left, who helped it spread to the universities, inspired by cultural Marxism, German philosophy and postmodernism. Globalization has brought political correctness to Europe, but the Western countries have been more receptive to it than Eastern ones, which have experienced communism and could not help noticing the similarities.

**Keywords:** political correctness, cultural Marxism, the Frankfurt School, nihilism, postmodernism, mini-narratives, deconstruction, freedom of speech, affirmative action, racial quotas, multiculturalism, banning words, negationism

## 1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The main objective of this paper is to present the evolution of political correctness and to describe some of the most relevant factors which have influenced its development.

I have chosen to include sections on cultural Marxism, German philosophy and postmodernism in order to show the main cultural tendencies (multiculturalism, nihilism and deconstruction) which shaped the mind of the American intellectuals in the 60's and made it possible for political correctness (the way we see it nowadays) to appear. I would like to point out the fact that the purpose of this paper is not to make an exhaustive presentation of the Frankfurt School, German philosophy or postmodernism. The ideas that will be mentioned are those which I consider important for understanding how political correctness came to be.

The paper will show that, although political correctness may have started as a means to help certain categories of people, it was later adopted by the political Left and turned into a form of censorship. H.R. Patapievici called it "the American communism" (Patapievici, 1996), probably because of all the elements the two of them have in common: the socio-political utopian hopes and enthusiasm, the rhetoric of struggle, the tendency towards uniformity, the radical manifestations such as "the mutilation of the critical spirit" (Vişniec, 2007) and the total disregard for those facts or events that do not serve their political interest.

## 2. A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE OCCURRENCE OF THE TERM *POLITICALLY CORRECT*

The oldest record of the term "politically correct" that I have found dates from 1793, when a U.S. Supreme Court judge wrote:

*"The States, rather than the people for whose sakes the States exist, are frequently the objects which attract and arrest our principal attention... Sentiments and expressions of this inaccurate kind prevail in our common, even in our convivial language. Is a toast asked? "The United States" instead of the "People of the United States" is the toast given. This is not politically correct." (United States Supreme Court: Original Jurisdiction Cases and Materials, 2010: 1-50)*

What he meant was that the government had no power over the citizens, because the citizens were the ones who gave in fact power to the government. In this case, not being politically correct meant being in contradiction to the premises of the constitution.

In the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, after the American Civil War (1861-1865) and the abolition of slavery, the phrase changed its meaning and began to refer to the linguistic, ethical and legal correctness of political, legal and administrative language in order to protect and at times even favour certain discriminated minorities (women, African-Americans, Mongoloids, other ethnic minorities, people with physical disabilities and even delinquents, if they were considered to be the victims of society).

### 2.1. From Dialectical Materialism to Cultural Marxism

While democracy was flourishing in America, Europe was becoming more and more fascinated with the philosophy of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Their ideas were developed in almost fifty volumes that were later interpreted and modified in many ways, knowing several permutations and bringing about a colossal orthodox and heterodox following. It was not at all surprising that their disciples managed to reinterpret them in so many ways. According to A.J. Gregor (Professor of Political Sciences Emeritus at Berkeley), “the very richness of Marxism assured that there would be many Marxisms, almost Marxisms and not-so-much Marxisms, that would inspire revolutionaries to destroy half a world with their enthusiasm.” (Gregor, A.J., 2008: 75)

I do not intend to go into detail concerning all variations of Marxism. Suffice it to say that some of them were nationalistic and reactionary (the most extreme of which was fascism), while others were internationalistic and revolutionary (the most extreme of which was communism). The extreme right and the extreme left had in fact more shared characteristics than one might suspect at a first glance. They were both oriented towards the rapid economic, particularly industrial development under the rule of a hegemonic political party, they both tried to control the forces of production by introducing a strict regulation system and they both required the entire population’s discipline and loyalty to the unitary party, its ideology and its great leader. (Gregor, 2008)

At the end of the First World War Marxist theorists were facing a big dilemma: the war had come to Europe and it had spread, but Marx’s famous revolutionary appeal, “Workers of the world, unite!” had failed to produce the result he (and they) had expected. The workers had gone to fight to protect their nation states, which meant they ended up fighting against each other in the absence of any class consciousness. In 1917 the Marxist revolution succeeded in Russia but it did not expand to the other countries as it had been predicted by orthodox Marxism. There were several attempts (Bela Kuhn’s government in Hungary, the Spartacist revolt in Berlin, the Bavarian Soviet Republic) but they did not get enough support and they all failed. This led to the disillusionment of many Marxist intellectuals, some of whom tried to find an explanation for what had gone wrong and perhaps a solution as well.

One of these intellectuals was Antonio Gramsci, a founder member of the Italian Communist Party. He was imprisoned during Benito Mussolini’s fascist regime and, while in prison, he wrote the well-known “Lettere dal carcere” (Letters from Prison), in which he supported the role of the intellectuals in the process of the ideological reconfiguration of the world.

While Gramsci was in prison, Mussolini signed the Lateran Treaty with the Vatican, which would turn out to be his most successful political manoeuvre: by recognizing the Vatican’s sovereignty and by making Catholicism the state religion, Mussolini removed the opposition between the Church and the state and transformed its former adversary into an ally. Gramsci feared that, as a result of the Lateran Treaty, the Catholic Church would change its teachings in order to support fascism (which was probably what Mussolini had wanted all along). He called this phenomenon “blocco storico” (the historic bloc) and realised that the power of the historic bloc resided in the intellectuals.

Gramsci saw the capitalist state as being made of two parts: the political society, which ruled through force and the civil society, which ruled through consent. He was a great supporter of the latter and believed that, in order to rule through consent, people needed to acquire a “mass consciousness”. He also believed that the proletariat fighting on different sides during the war had been animated by different values which were incompatible with Marxist ideology. Gramsci used the term “hegemony” to describe a certain system of values, attitudes, beliefs and morality that helped perpetuate the traditional power relations which were formed in society and he stressed the importance of creating a “counter-hegemony”, a way of overcoming the popular beliefs and of

manufacturing consent. According to him, the only way to achieve that was with the help of the “organic” intellectuals that would educate the generations to come:

*“The mode of being of the new intellectual can no longer consist in eloquence... but in active participation in practical life, as constructor, organizer, permanent persuader and not just a simple orator.” (Gramsci, 2000: 321)*

Another radical intellectual who was trying to find an explanation for the failed socialist revolution was Georg Lukács, the founder of Western Marxism. He was more inspired by heterodox Marxists such as George Sorel than by conformist ones such as Karl Kautsky and was mostly interested in how to cause the “revolutionary consciousness” to emerge under capitalism. He believed that the media and the schools (especially the universities) were controlled by the ruling class and that they played a vital role in securing consent for the bourgeois class. He rejected the idea of the 2<sup>nd</sup> International, according to which the socialist party would inevitably grow and include everybody (because it encouraged one to remain passive), but also Rosa Luxemburg’s ideological determinism, according to which capitalism would inevitably wake the proletariat’s revolutionary consciousness and he was a keen supporter of strategic political intervention.

*“If the proletariat wants to win their struggle, it must encourage and support every tendency which contributes to the break-up of bourgeois society and do its utmost to enlist every upsurge – no matter how instinctive or confused – into the revolutionary process as a whole.” (Lukács, 1924, 29)*

According to both Ruth Perry and Angelo M. Codevilla, the term “politically correct” started to be used again in the 30’s in both China and the Eastern European countries, but its meaning was different from the ones the term had had before. “Politically correct” was used to denote communist orthodoxy, i.e. following the party’s instructions to the letter without ever questioning them.

*“Comrade, your statement is factually incorrect.*

*Yes, it is. But it is politically correct.” (Codevilla, 2016: 1)*

This joke tells a harsh truth: whether something was true or not did not matter in communism; the party’s interest was a reality that ranked above reality itself.

At about the same time, in Germany, Felix Weil, a wealthy man interested in Marxism, set up the Institute for Social Research, which was supposed to serve as a think tank for Marxist intellectuals. Because of its affiliation with the University of Frankfurt, the Institute for Social Research became known as the Frankfurt School. In 1930, Max Horkheimer became its director and that was when the objective of the institute shifted from materialism to critical theory. Horkheimer and his colleagues tried to build a new kind of Marxism, very different from that of the Soviet Union and they were more concerned with ruling through ideology or ruling in the realm of culture, their ideas being similar to Gramsci’s theory of “cultural hegemony”. One of Horkheimer’s most important observations was that the working class would never be able to start the revolution on their own and that they needed a surrogate. However, it would take almost thirty years until another member of the Frankfurt School would find an answer as to who that substitute might be. While classical Marxists had argued that capitalism was oppressing the working class, cultural Marxists argued that Western culture was oppressing everybody. According to them, a political revolution was not enough, a social and a cultural revolution had to follow as well. Together with Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse and many others, Horkheimer developed the concept of “critical theory”. Given the political context (pre-World War II), Horkheimer decided to protect the safety of the members and moved the Institute for Social Research first to Geneva (in 1933) and then to New York (in 1935), where it became affiliated with Columbia University.

In 1950, Theodor Adorno and some of his colleagues published “The Authoritarian Personality”, where they presented a set of criteria by which to define nine authoritative personality characteristics on what they called “the fascist scale”. These nine traits were: conventionalism, authoritarian submission, authoritarian aggression, anti-intellectualism, superstition, toughness, destructiveness and cynicism, projectivity and exaggerated concerns over sex.

*“The research to be reported in this volume was guided by the following major hypothesis: that the political, economic and social convictions of an individual often form a broad and coherent pattern, as if*

*bound together by a ‚mentality‘ or ‚spirit‘, and that this pattern is an expression of deep-lying trends in his personality.*

*The major concern was with the potentially fascist individual, one whose structure is such as to render him particular susceptible to anti-democratic propaganda. [...] There was no difficulty in finding subjects whose outlook was such as to indicate that they would readily accept fascism if it should become a strong or respectable social movement.” (Adorno, 1950: 1)*

In 1955, Herbert Marcuse wrote “Eros and Civilisation”, where he combined classical Marxism with Freudian theory and introduced the concept of “sexual liberation”, which would make him extremely popular among the American youth. According to Freud, the biggest tragedy of the individual was the unavoidable dissatisfaction of the civilised psyche, but Marcuse considered the dissatisfaction couldn’t be avoided only in the capitalist society, which caused individual repression.

By the time he wrote “Eros and Civilisation”, Marcuse’s point of view had become rather different from that of many other members of the Institute. While most of them had a social philosophy rooted in nihilism, Marcuse revived the concept of the “utopia”, by introducing the notion of aesthetic experience, through which the individual could escape all constraints imposed by society. In his “Essay on Liberation”, Marcuse wrote that:

*“The aesthetic universe is the Lebenswelt on which the needs and faculties of freedom depend on their liberation. They cannot develop in an environment shaped by and for aggressive impulses, nor can they be envisaged as the mere effect of a new set of social institutions. They can emerge only in the collective practice of creating an environment, level by level, step by step – in the material and intellectual production, an environment in which the non-aggressive, erotic, receptive faculties of man, in harmony with the consciousness of freedom, strive for the pacification of man and nature.” (Marcuse, 69: 26-27)*

In 1964 Marcuse wrote an essay entitled “The Repressive Tolerance”, in which he said that “the function and value of tolerance depend on the equality prevalent in the society in which tolerance is practiced.” (Marcuse, 64: 84) His solution consisted in a selective “liberating tolerance” which involved the “withdrawal of toleration of speech and assembly” from groups and movements on the Right and the promotion of speech and assembly from groups and movements on the Left (Marcuse, 64: 81-100). In other words, one should be tolerant towards the Left and intolerant towards the Right.

Marcuse’s work became a great source of inspiration for the student rebellion in the 60’s. Trying to resist being drafted and sent to Vietnam, many young people were attracted by the utopic future in which there was no authority, only free love.

The Frankfurt School (especially Herbert Marcuse) became a source of inspiration not only for the American youth but also for the New Left movement. The New Left was obviously disappointed after 1968 (when protests against communism took place in many European countries) and they needed new role-models so they shifted from the more classical approach to cultural Marxism. Herbert Marcuse had provided an answer to Horkheimer’s question by realising that the minority groups were the ones that could replace the working class in bringing about the revolution.

## 2.2. “Nihilism Without the Abyss”

Another significant change in the discourse of the American Left was its nihilistic approach. At a first glance, this might seem rather unusual, but there is an explanation: Karl Marx had never written about the cultural life of the people in a post-revolutionary society; he had focused on economics, not literature or art or education. For this reason, the Left chose to reinterpret Nietzsche’s ideas in a way that suited them: the bourgeois was going to be the Last Man (Letzter Mensch), while the proletariat was turned into the Superman (Übermensch). This is perhaps ironic if we take into account the fact that Nietzsche was a critic of modern democracy who believed the human quest for values had come to an end. For him this was a major catastrophe and it meant the end of civilization. He was warning the modern man against the dangers of nihilism, not encouraging him to take this path, but it was precisely the idea of the egalitarian man which inspired the Left.

The New Left adopted a lot of new words related to Nietzsche's value revolution ("identity", "life-style", "charisma", "Gestalt", etc.), which quickly spread to politics, entertainment, even religion. Allan Bloom calls this phenomenon "nihilism without the abyss" or "nihilism with a happy ending". (Bloom, 1988: 155, 147) Surprisingly enough, people seemed to overlook the darker (the more extremist) side of Nietzsche's writings. History will show how compatible value relativism and the American society truly are.

While German philosophy was spreading through America, a new philosophical, artistic and literary movement appeared in Europe: postmodernism.

### 2.3. Postmodernism

Postmodernism was "a late 20<sup>th</sup>-century movement characterized by broad scepticism, subjectivism, or relativism; a general suspicion of reason; and an acute sensitivity to the role of ideology in asserting and maintaining political and economical power". (online Encyclopaedia Britannica) This movement appeared in France as a reaction against the values of modern Western history. This modern period included the Enlightenment and all its liberal values. Modernity also meant letting go of the old superstitions and the triumph of science. Last but not least, modernity was the age of the modern man, endowed with civil rights. Postmodern writers challenged all these notions, considering there was no objective reality independent of human perception. Stanley Fish said that in postmodernism one didn't have to be right, because right and wrong did not exist, one merely had to be interesting. (Hicks, 2004)

Jean François Lyotard defined postmodernism as "an incredulity towards meta-narratives". (Lyotard, 1984: XXIV) He suggested replacing the meta-narratives (theories that tried to give comprehensive explanations to various, large phenomena based on universal truth or universal values) with mini-narratives in order to discover more personal truths. Therefore, he advocated personal experience over empirical data, which led to the emergence of a pluralism of truths. Lyotard also supported the priority of minority groups' perspectives over the general consensus of the majority, which he considered dogmatic.

Another postmodern thinker, Michel Foucault, introduced the notion of the *episteme*, which described the knowledge and the discourse of a particular period. He believed that knowledge was the direct product of power, that people were culturally constructed to be oppressors or oppressed and that all this oppression happened through language and knowledge:

*"The activity of the mind will (...) no longer consist in drawing things together, in setting out on a quest for everything that might reveal some sort of kinship, attraction or secretly shared nature within them, but, on the contrary, in discriminating, that is in establishing their identities, then the inevitability of the connections with all the successive degrees of a series. (...) To know is to discriminate."*  
(Foucault, 2005: 61)

The peak of the cultural and epistemic relativism was reached by Jacques Derrida, who came up with the concept of "deconstruction", for which he offered several definitions throughout his career but which had one common denominator: the fact that this phenomenon relied on a kind of continuous thinking that never reached a final conclusion. What mattered in deconstruction was the impact of the discourse on every listener (or reader) who discovered his/her own meaning. In other words, the same discourse could generate an infinity of individual and equally valid meanings.

### 2.4. American Universities

In my opinion, nobody has ever explained the importance of the university as well as Tocqueville. He believed that the main danger of a democratic society was its people becoming enslaved to public opinion. All people are endowed with reason, but many are not accustomed to using it properly, they are incapable of making their own judgements and need to rely on public opinion. The purpose of the university is to help them overcome

the need for confirmation, to encourage alternative thoughts and to provide a safe space in which freedom of speech is guaranteed. (Tocqueville, 1840)

John Stuart Mill was another champion of the freedom of speech, which he considered essential even when people expressed opinions that were wrong and he brought four arguments to this effect:

*“First, if any opinion is compelled to silence, that opinion may, for aught we can certainly know, be true. To deny this is to assume our own infallibility. Secondly, though the silenced opinion be an error, it may, and very commonly does, contain a portion of truth; and since the general or prevailing opinion on any subject is rarely or never the whole truth, it is only by the collision of adverse opinions, that the remainder of the truth has any chance of being supplied. Thirdly, even if the received opinion be not only true, but the whole truth; unless it is suffered to be, and actually is, vigorously and earnestly contested, it will, by most of those who receive it, be held in the manner of a prejudice, with little comprehension or feeling of its rational grounds. And not only this, but, fourthly, the meaning of the doctrine itself will be in danger of being lost, or enfeebled, and deprived of its vital effect on the character and conduct: the dogma becoming a mere formal profession, inefficacious for good, but cumbering the ground, and preventing the growth of any real and heartfelt conviction, from reason or personal experience.” (Mill, 1859: 50)*

During the 60's the American universities started to experience changes that were similar to those which had occurred in Germany in the 30's. “The clerks had begun to play the game of the political passions”. (Benda, 2006: 28) “No longer believing in their higher vocation, both (American and German universities before them) gave way to a highly ideologized student populace. And the content of the ideology was the same-value commitment. (...) As in Germany, the value crisis in philosophy made the university prey to whatever intense passion moved the masses.” (Bloom, 1988: 313-314) By the late 80's and the early 90's the moderate centre had disappeared in several universities, having been replaced with what Roger Kimball called “tenured radicals”. Under the influence of deconstruction and multiculturalism, the syllabus underwent major changes and the traditional literary canon was the first one to be affected. A lot of literature was replaced with theory and students were encouraged not to look for the general meaning, but to focus on the political ideas that were present in a text. The universal human values became less and less important while the focus shifted towards the racial, gender and sexual identities that influenced the writers and their works. Students were no longer studying the classics, but whatever their professors thought to have a strong ideological content and they were doing it by applying new rules and methods which allowed them to say whatever they wanted. These methods encouraged oversimplifications and mediocrity. The students learnt a little bit of everything, but they became experts in nothing and this failure to actually learn made them unable to form their own opinions and process or even question the ideology they were being taught. “Lack of education simply results in students' seeking for enlightenment wherever it is readily available, without being able to distinguish between the sublime and the trash, insight and propaganda.” (Bloom, 1988: 64)

The term “political correctness” reemerged and it started to be used in correlation with that of “affirmative action”, which referred to a set of policies and measures adopted by several universities in order to encourage diversity by providing more opportunities for those categories that had been disadvantaged or underrepresented.

#### 2.4.1. The racial quotas

The Brown versus the Board of Education decision of the U.S. Supreme Court in 1954 started the Civil Rights Revolution in America. The massive protests against segregation were led by Martin Luther King and were animated by the egalitarian dream of a colour-blind society. They went on until 1965, when the civil rights legislation changed. Once the equality of opportunity had been achieved, the African-American community started to demand the equality of result. Their argument was that, although they had the same rights as everybody else, their social condition limited their opportunities.

U. C. Berkeley introduced the racial quotas in the admission process in order to offer what they called equal opportunity, but this action had the exact opposite effect. Not all the minorities found the measure to be advantageous, because some turned out to be more equal than the others. First of all, the percentage of Asians

who wanted to study there was higher than that of any other ethnic group, which led to a paradox: Asian students had to have much better results than any other category (including white students) in order to be admitted. On the other hand, African-American and Hispanic students were allowed with less good results. Secondly, many of the African-American and Hispanic students either dropped out at some point because they couldn't keep up with the high expectations and the level of difficulty or stayed on but felt that they were treated like second class students. In conclusion, the introduction of the racial quotas did not put an end to discrimination; it only made it worse.

#### 2.4.2. Multiculturalism

America has never been anything but multicultural and has often been called "the melting pot", i.e. a homogenous society made up of all the different cultures coexisting on American soil. However, supporters of multiculturalism argued that it was not so, that these different cultures should never be mixed and rejected the idea that some human values could transcend a particular race, class or gender. In other words, multiculturalism is not about what brings people together, but about what separates them. In "Illiberal Education", Dinesh D'Souza criticized the manner in which American universities interpreted multiculturalism when they incorporated it in their syllabus. Students belonging to different minority groups were never encouraged to learn foreign languages or to study anthropology, compared literature or the Arabic culture (which would have been diverse), but they were taught to identify texts that could be used to indict Western civilization, such as "I, Rigoberta Menchu", which became compulsory reading at Stanford University. (D'Souza, 1991: 59-93)

The search for multiculturalism had some incredible effects. At Howard University, which was dominated by African-American students there was an attempt to rediscover a glorious part of the black civilization by claiming that the Egyptian people had been black and that the Greeks had stolen from them all the great inventions on which the Western civilization had been built.

Moreover, multiculturalism turns out to be just as paradoxical as the racial quotas, because most of the other cultures are not as liberated as the Western one. In fact, many of them condemn Western values (social equality, feminism or gay rights) and still have practices such as: wife-burning, stoning or even genital mutilation.

#### 2.4.3. Banning words

In 1989 Michigan University was the first one to legislate against certain forms of expression and to ban speech that was considered offensive. Thus, racial minorities became "people of color", those who had a physical handicap became "differently abled" and older students became "non-traditional learners".

Banning words on account of their being offensive can be problematic for several reasons.

First of all, changing words does not change people's mentalities. Steven Pinker explains how replacing words is a cyclical process which creates a "euphemism treadmill" (Pinker, 1994, 1995, 2003). A neutral term (orthophemism) slowly acquires negative connotations and becomes offensive (dysphemism), it is replaced with a politically correct term (euphemism), which slowly assimilates the meanings of the previous term. The problem is never solved because the offensive meanings keep re-emerging and the number of insulting words increases.

A second difficulty appears when deciding which words to eliminate and which ones to keep. Some terms might offend some people but not others. Moreover, the intention and the perception of a discourse can sometimes differ. There are situations in which people who are oversensitive might feel offended even if the speaker had no intention of insulting them or someone can say something pejorative in such a subtle way that the listener is not aware of it.

Thirdly, the words which are banned always refer to certain minority groups, as if offense were somehow limited to a certain (race, gender, disabled, etc.) category. Therefore, banning words in order to protect only some people becomes discriminatory as well. Furthermore, this situation only accentuates the dichotomy between the oppressors and the oppressed by perpetuating a negative image of both the majority (who always seems

to be up to no good and trying to offend someone) and the minorities (who seem to be in a constant need of protection).

While the American universities were going through all these changes (banning words, eliminating books from their syllabus, overusing theory), Europe was going through its own transformations. The Soviet Bloc collapsed and Eastern Europe woke up from tyranny and discovered the meaning of democracy and freedom while Western European countries were dreaming of a united Europe.

### 2.5. The European Union

It was Winston Churchill who first introduced the idea of a united Europe in a 1946 speech, delivered at the University of Zürich. Two years later, at the Congress of Europe, he said that:

*“The Movement for European Unity must be a positive force, deriving its strength from our sense of common spiritual values. It is a dynamic expression of democratic faith based upon moral conceptions and inspired by a sense of mission. In the centre of our movement stands the idea of a Charter of Human Rights, guarded by freedom and sustained by law. It is impossible to separate economic and defence from the general political structure. Mutual aid in the economic field and joint military defence must inevitably be accompanied step by step with a parallel policy of closer political unity. It is said with truth that this involves some sacrifice or merger of national sovereignty. But it is also possible and not less agreeable to regard it as the gradual assumption by all the nations concerned of that larger sovereignty which can alone protect their diverse and distinctive customs and characteristics and their national traditions all of which under totalitarian systems, whether Nazi, Fascist, or Communist, would certainly be blotted out for ever.” (Churchill, 1948)*

Unlike the great dynasties, the empires or the nations of the past, which had been born as a result of various military or political victories, the European Union was the very first institution to have been born out of defeat. Its purpose was to guarantee that the atrocities of the past would never happen again.

In 1951 the ECSC (European Coal & Steel Community) was created. The productions of coal and steel from France and Germany were merged in order to stop the rivalry between the two nations. The ECSC Treaty from Paris was signed by six countries: France, Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Italy. Six years later, the same countries signed the Treaty of Rome and created the EEC (European Economic Community) with the goal of establishing a common European market. They also formed the European Atomic Energy Community (EURATOM) with the purpose to develop nuclear power. In 1965 the ECSC, the EEC and EURATOM combined. In the years to come the U.K, Ireland, Greece, Spain, Portugal and Denmark joined them. After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of communism in central and Eastern Europe in 1989, the dream of a united Europe became more plausible than ever. The Maastricht Treaty in 1993 changed the EEC into the EU (the European Union). By 2013 the Union expanded and included twenty-eight state members, only to lose the U.K. in 2020.

I would like to point out the fact that the idea of a united Europe was born into the old world of centralized government and that its supporters could not have foreseen the technological revolution (the Internet, the digitalization of the media, etc.), which changed the rules of the political game and added new players. Traditional politics took into account two aspects: the government and the market, but the EU politics include the civil society as well. For the last thirty years the number of CSOs (civil society organizations) has kept going up and many of them are rights-oriented, seeking to regulate human behaviour and language by establishing certain universal codes. These CSOs try to preserve the cultural diversity of the EU while getting the public involved in this process. The postmodern intellectuals from the 70's came up with the idea that change was impossible in a society which focused on the metanarrative and the nation state hegemony; the solution they suggested was multicultural perspectives.

Although there are many differences between the U.S.A. and the E.U., technology helped the globalization process, which led to the proliferation of different ideas including political correctness. Even so, European PC has been slightly different from its American variant. In Germany, for example, people tend to still feel a

collective guilt for the horrors of the Holocaust, even if many of them were not born in that period and had absolutely nothing to do with it. This guilty conscience perpetuates the need for atonement, which represents a fertile ground for political correctness. On the other hand, the Eastern European countries which were at some point under the influence of the Soviet Bloc seem to be more resistant to this phenomenon.

In his book, "The Negationism of the Left", the French journalist Thierry Wolton notices the fact that Western society tends to have very different opinions regarding the totalitarian regimes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, treating them quite differently. He defines the term "negationism" as the denial of historical facts and identifies two types: the one of the right, which denies the Holocaust and other crimes committed by fascism and the one of the left, which denotes the refusal to accept the atrocities committed by communism. In many countries there are laws preventing or punishing the negationism of the right, while communism is characterised by impunity and trivialisation. (Wolton, 2019) Socialism still attracts many Western Europeans who have never experienced it and who believe communism to have been just a failed experiment. This is one of the main reasons for which political correctness is so popular in Western European countries.

On the other hand, Eastern European countries (which have had a first-hand experience of communism) such as Romania seem more resistant to political correctness. Romania is also one of the few countries to have openly condemned communism. On December 18<sup>th</sup> 2006, former president Traian Băsescu read the report made by the Presidential Commission for the Study of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania (also known as the Tismăneanu Commission) in the Parliament of Romania. His reading was accompanied by the booing of many parliamentarians belonging to both the Greater Romanian Party (which is a right-wing party) and the Social Democratic Party (which is a left-wing party, at least in theory), proving that the political class was still rooted in the old regime. As far as political correctness is concerned, Romanian schools and universities have not banned books or words yet. There have been some attempts of "moral correctness". I am using this term with the meaning given by Diane Ravitch, who makes the distinction between "political correctness" (of the progressive Left) and "moral correctness" (of the conservative Right). (Ravitch, 2004). The rejection of teaching sexual education in schools and the referendum for the traditional family are two examples of this "moral correctness", which, as interesting as it may be, is not the subject of this paper.

### 3. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The objective of this paper was to present some of the most relevant moments which have influenced the evolution of political correctness and to reveal the connection between these moments. The phenomenon appeared in America as an attempt to help certain categories of people which had been previously misrepresented or overlooked. In the 60's it became part of the ideology of the American New Left, who helped it spread to the universities, inspired by cultural Marxism, German philosophy and postmodernism. Globalization has brought political correctness to Europe, but the Western countries have been more receptive to it than Eastern ones, which have experienced communism and could not help noticing the similarities.

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