

## POLITICS AND POLICY

Emil Dinga

---

### 1. Introduction

In the daily language (even, in some cases, in the specialized one) some confusions or, at least, some un-intentioned substitutions occurs between two terms (and, consequently, between two concepts which belong to them), namely politics and policy. Of course, etymologically the two terms (and concepts) are cognate, based on the Greek term πόλις, *polis* (castle, home, town, country) but, in the modern and contemporary language and habits of using, they gained and hold different significations, so addresses different referentials (denotations). Below I would try to identify both the similarities and differences between politics and policy and, consequently to suggest some precautions in using them in different situations, either cognitive or pragmatic.

Essentially, by *politics* should be understood a social conditioned action of an individual or, mostly, of a group of individuals aggregated under a certain criterion (for example, under an ideology of a party), aimed at to achieve a goal affecting the „polis”, that is, affecting entirely the nation or the population under a delimitating institutional border. So, what we call *politics* requires the accomplishment of at least the following attributes: a) it concerns the fate/destiny of the „polis” (at least as ambition); b) it is enacted by a distinct social group (no matter the criterion which the group is constituted under); c) it is ideologically-based (do remember that an ideology is a sectoral vision with the ambition to become a general one – for example, see here Bourdieu’s position); d) it is un-operational as such, that is, it requires operational devices (we’ll see this attribute allows the connection between politics and policy) to be implemented; this un-operational attribute could be called as an embeddedness attribute.

Essentially, by *policy* should be understood a social conditioned action of a formal institution (NB: I’d include into the concept of institution the organization too, either public or private), as vehicle to implement a politics purposes. So, what we call *policy* requires the accomplishment of at least the following attributes: a) it is politics-based; in the case of private organization (or, even, of individual decision) the policy always must be based if not on politics then at least on a larger policy which, in its turn, is politics-based; b) it is substitutable by other policy with a comparable potential to achieve the purpose of politics (for example, between fiscal policy and the monetary policy); so, the policies can be „arranged” on a qualitative indifference curve, in order that, based on contextual conditions (resources, institutions, external constraints, idiosyncrasies, etc.) one or another from the policies be selected for implementation; c) it has as finality a specific, sectoral, maybe punctual objective, but not a general one; d) it is independent from the politics – although the policy is politics-based, it can be based on any politics, because its specific, sectoral objective could be of the same signification for different politics.

Based on the above specifications on the concepts of politics and policy, I’d provide below some examinations of them related to Economics.

### 2. Politics and Economy

Economy is, at least in the current time, the most important social activity, both for the human being survival and for its emancipation. Consequently, the most part of politics, that is, of the ideological visions, strategies, and programs enacted by the political parties is aimed at to propose and achieve economic goals, especially on long term. So, politics and economy are strong related, connected, and inter-conditioned. When some analysts (be they economists, philosophers, or even politicians) require the lockout of the economy from the politics they can demonstrate at most their ignorance on the concepts used. As shown above, the politics has as its fundamental

purpose the designing of the general societal model, so, not only it is impossible to ignore the economic field, but the politics must focus on the economic component of the social structure as its sine qua non condition of existence and condition of legitimacy as well. In fact, Economics (as I claimed for many times) must return to its initial roots, so it must re-become a political economy. By political economy is understood just the inherent connection between politics and Economics, as I have here discussed about.

### **3. Policy and Economy**

Regarding the relationship between policy and economy, I would say the policy is the basic institutional vehicle of introducing and maintaining the rules of game in the economic process. As said before, the policy is the general term for a set of sectoral policies like: fiscal policy, monetary policy, income policy, employment policy, commercial policy and so on. So, in fact, at the economic level, we meet only the policies, not the politics as such. Different policies ensure that different sectors of economic activity/process go towards their objectives with that rate, at that size and with those externalities about other sectors as the economic theory „prophecies“. The policies in the economic field are operational instruments (without any ideological ingredients), so any of them could be used (applied) under politics if the targeted economic objective is the same. In other words, I'd say the policies are technical tools which are instrumented to get economic objectives, no matter if such objectives are results of a political ideology. This definitional neutrality of the policy is crucial to consider it in autonomous way related to the politics. In fact, a policy can be applied by any professionally competent public servant, even this public servant is not interested in the politics. For this reason, in the public authorities and institutions there are, in an overwhelming proportion, a permanent staff which is not replaced when the politics changes.

### **4. Politics and Policy**

Based on the above mentioned, it can be said the policies is one of the way in which the politics is implemented at the societal way, every sector of the society having associated a specific set of policies. The relationship between politics and policy could be synthetized as follows: a) the politics is inherent in the society; b) the policy is relatively independent from politics, that is, the policy can serve any politics, being an institutional tool to get specific and clear objectives; c) implementing policies could lead to the change of the politics, based on the results obtained, so, there is a feed-back from the policy to the politics.

A question arises here: there could be a politics of policy? My answer is negative. Indeed, a policy is a technical tool which get necessarily a result once it is implemented. So, a politics cannot choose a certain policy for achieve a given goal, but that only policy able to achieve the goal established.

### **5. About...Policics**

As it has argued above, Economics should become a political economics (or political economy) because it is inherently „contaminated“ with politics. The current Economics has to do with policy only, but not with politics. In fact, the economic sector of the society is built up based on politics, even that is done by using the policies as tools. With a terminological barbarism, I'd call such a conflated „animal“ as *policics*. So, the policics is none else than a policy impregnated by politics. I think, in fact, that exactly such an institution is working in our society, but is not yet recognized as such. All the social disciplines (with the economic theory in the first row) are policics and should be considered as such.