

WHO ARE ‘ WE’? EUROPEAN IDENTITY AND SPIRITUALITY

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ABSTRACT:

EVERY NOW AND THEN, EUROPEAN IDENTITY IS EVOKED IN PUBLIC DISCOURSES, PAPERS AND DEBATES, ALL TRYING TO DEFINE, TO ARTICULATE AND TO STRENGTHEN IT. HOW CAN WE EXPRESS THIS IDENTITY WHICH MUST TAKE ON A EUROPEAN DIMENSION ?

IN ORDER TO HAVE AN APPROACH AS COMPLEX AS POSSIBLE, IT SHOULD BE TAKEN INTO CONSIDERATION THE FUNDAMENTAL DIMENSIONS OF A POSSIBLE EUROPEAN IDENTITY, ACCORDING TO THE CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL EXPLICATIONS. THE ‘SPIRITUAL TIES’ AS THEY ARE MANIFESTED IN A COMMON ‘WORLD OF MEANINGS’ (A ‘UNIVERSE OF SYMBOLS AND RELEVANCIES’), AS THEY ALLOW TO ACHIEVE A CONSENSUAL ‘DEFINITION OF THE SITUATION’, AND INCLUDING THE THREE DIMENSIONS OF A SHARED ‘TODAY’, ‘PAST’, AND ‘FUTURE’. IF ONE’S IDENTITY IS A FULFILLMENT, THE SUM OF A PERSONAL HISTORY, THEN EUROPEAN IDENTITY IS MADE UP OF A HUGE AND VARIED HERITAGE. TO EXPRESS EUROPEAN IDENTITY THROUGH HERITAGE ONLY, HOWEVER RICH THIS MAY BE, WOULD BE TO LIMIT ONESELF TO CONSERVATISM WITHOUT A FUTURE. □ EUROPE NEEDS VISIONS WHICH RELATE TO THE FUTURE. OUR OWN IDENTITY IT’S GIVEN BY CULTURE, COMMON MEANINGS AND DIRECTIONS OF THE GROUP, CONTACT AND DISCOVERS WITHIN CERTAIN TERRITORY, AND DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES OF LIFE’S SPECTRUM.

IN THIS CONTEXT TWO SCENARIOS ARE LOOMING FOR THE FUTURE OF EUROPEAN IDENTITY, ONE WHEREBY WE ARE AT THE LIMIT OF EUROPEAN IDENTITY AND THAT THIS EUROPEAN PROJECT WILL NEVER SUCCEED OR ENCOUNTERING NEW FORCES WHICH WILL ENHANCE EUROPEAN IDENTITY.¹

KEY WORDS: CULTURE, DISCOURSE, IDEOLOGY, IDENTITY, EUROPEAN SPIRITUALITY

Europe's identity is given by the common values underlying a plurality of cultures, expressed in the use of 43 languages grouped into families (Roman, Germanic, Slavic, Finno-Ugric, Celtic, Greek), the use of three alphabets (Greek, Latin, Cyrillic) in a wide variety of laws and customs, the mentality, the various social and political structures.²

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¹ Neil Fligstein, *Who are the Europeans?*, in vol. *European Identity*, (Cambridge Univ. Press, New York, 2009), 154-156

² Enciclopedia Universală Britannica, vol. 5, Ed. Litera, Bucureşti, 2010 □

The main pillars of European spirituality construction are given by the basic values: 'truth', 'good', 'justice' and 'beauty'. Although the city model created in Europe since antiquity has been forgotten for two millenniums, it has been revived after the World War II, European spirit is rediscovered in the form of the current European construction designed to develop a viable system for its citizens bound by common culture and civilization spirit of its component parts, through a combination of common institutions and policies.

The common elements of the European space, such as experience, history and memory contribute at the construction of the European identity, together with cultural and economic background from local contexts, such as Monica Sassatelli calls 'landscape'. Therefore the European idea is characterized by diversity and the feeling of belonging to this identity.³ The European construction project it's the consequence of the integrating logic of history which brings together all of those that share the same values despite the historical evolution. The central element of the European spirituality gravitates around cultural roots that weight and are profound, as they are reminded and interpreted by several authors in specialized literature.

European identity appears here as being linked to the past, and the future is not a factor. The development of a European identity can play no part other than through a European consciousness, bringing in itself movement and evolution, a European consciousness which captures the national identities in their diversity and conceives them as having a common future. Identification processes have a historical character, in the sense that they add or remove features depending on the subject's history and the relations they maintain. Identity built in time implies a certain unity of the elements that define it, in such a way that allows the affirmation of differences and the diversity of so.

Being 'European' implies on one hand increasing communication and interaction between certain groups in Europe in the project of political integration within the Union market and, on the other hand, requires increasing the intensity of the interaction between these groups.

Throughout the globalization processes, the main topic of social-political disciplines includes revealing the specific features that differentiate us from the others, aiming in this way the identification of that International actors identity and our own definition. Our own identity it's given by culture, meaning and common directions of the human group, contact and discovers within certain territory, and the different experiences from the spectrum of life.

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The cultural process includes the formation and rate formation of social groups, one's identification experience, the effort of having fun improving social meanings, knowledge, pleasures and values.⁵ The modernity brings the human being at the complete personal development, confronting with economical financial, information and cultural changes. In this situation, of dealing these challenges, individual is trying to find is the root which defined him, the values customs the language, all of this guiding him.

The European identity has three fundamental dimensions which are offering essential he's of deciphering and understanding it. „present” can be understood by going back the History and together with the „past” experiences accumulation, the European „future” and perspectives can be projected.⁶ Identity built overtime is giving Unity to its elements, providing clarity between differences and diversity. The historical identification process

³Monica Sassatelli, *Becoming Europeans. Cultural Identity and Cultural Policy*, (ed. Palgrave, New York), 174-175

⁴ R. Williams, *Resources of hope: culture, democracy, socialism*, (Ed. Verso. London, 1989), 4.

⁵ John Fiske, *Power Plays, Power Works*, (Ed. Verso, London, 1993), 13

⁶ Bernard Lamizet, *Politique et identité*, Ed. Presses Univ. de Lyon, Lyon, 2002

allows both adding and eliminating features of the subject in connection with his history and the experiences that he has. The two possible scenarios of the European identity's future, reaching that European identity limit together with the European project failure, or the encounter of new forces which will enhance European identity. These two possibilities derived from Europe's characteristic of intensifying the interaction and communication among groups in this project of a political integration but also the enhancement of the interaction's intensity between these. ⁷

The main opinion in the conceptualization of collective identity in social sciences, political, cultural and historical talks about the group to which individuals feel they belong and with which they identify. Thus by translating this model to analyze the formation of national identity as a prerequisite national state, European identity is seen as his attachment to European developments in transnational arrangements. From this perspective, there are two different theoretical approaches to analyze the relationship between national identity and European identity emerging. Starting from concept of European Community, as a transnational state that covers the existing Member States, Europeanization is also an additional layer over the core of national identity. ⁸

This premise is emerging in terms of European identity that is secondary or additional, that is weaker compared to national identity, which is primary and strong. At the opposite end, European Union conceptualization as a system of governance that includes governance and absorbs elements of national governance, allegedly that trans- or post national European identity gains momentum replacing preexisting national identity.⁹ In this context we can easily see the difference between national identity and European identity, which is more and more visible. From a philosophical perspective the effort to become an individual or collective actor of social life and assuming certain characteristics that distinguish it from other individuals, identifying that this construction is recognized by others as having a social character gives a meaning to existence. Nature sociological clear identification of the existence of its manifestations consistent ownership and result from the spiritual experience and understanding of its elements.

Expressing this identity – a forward-looking European consciousness – implies the abolition of antagonism between national and European identities. European identity-consciousness is founded on national identities, and finds its expression in cooperation and interaction. First of all, it is the individual, the European citizen, who must both give and receive the reply, in the context of his relationship with himself and his environment. The citizen should be able to express this identity, which in turn must be developed together with the citizen. We need this European identity-consciousness in order to avoid wars among ourselves or with others, to pool our resources, and to join forces in the face of the challenges of our time, which transcend national and continental boundaries. □

A second important aspect in the process of defining 'our' identity is understanding the 'delimitation', knowing what is special about 'our thing' as compared to other people's things ('nostra res agitur'— not some 'res alienorum'). Only highlighting common European values make it possible to understand that the current European construction is not the materialization of a utopian project (even if this component has had centuries) but the

⁷ Neil Fligstein, *Who are the Europeans?*, in vol. *European Identity*, (Cambridge Univ. Press, New York, 2009), 154-156

⁸ Lepsius, R. (1998) 'Die Europäische Union. Ökonomisch – politische Integration und Kulturelle Pluralität', in R. Viehoff and R. Seghers (eds) *Kultur, Identität, Europa: Über die Schwierigkeiten und Möglichkeiten einer Konstruktion*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

⁹ Eder, K. (1998) 'Integration durch Kultur? Das Paradox der Suche nach einer europäischen Identität', in R. Viehoff and R. Seghers (eds) *Kultur, Identität, Europa: Über die Schwierigkeiten und Möglichkeiten einer Konstruktion*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

consequence of integrating the logic of history, which can bind in a unit all those that share it.¹⁰ It is well known the idea that the common values of European spirituality have their foundation in a series of cultural roots, whose weight and depth are interpreted differently from one author to another¹¹ European countries have a great deal in common. This appears, among other things, in the sharing of a set of values that distinguishes the European culture not only from other great cultures such as the Chinese or the Islamic ones, but even from that of North America. However, if there is unity in Europe, it is unity in diversity.

Ancient Greek culture gives us the fundament that the individual is cultivating his identity, appearance, his physical and intellectual characteristics but at the same time reminds of the sociality as a result of inter-individual society building through dialogue and enhancement of democracy, where the common good is a value achieved through organization and collective leadership. Greek cities have offered humanity the most important thing in the world: fearless freedom of thought, guided by the logic laws Aristotle has established. The entire process of building a complex and comprehensive personality, starts from the central value, 'common good', hence derives supreme human values which are guiding our entire life: 'truth', 'good', 'justice' and 'beauty'.

The ancient Roman culture takes over these human spirituality characteristics and strengthens them by adding the concepts of 'law' and 'rights' to the harmony of human traits. Thus the construction of social life it is happening through respect for property both in the domestic life and in external relations. This approach of 'mens sana in corpore sano' governs the human progress.¹² Subsequently, the search for the common good by man, through generosity, is Judeo-Christianity intake, the morality of the humans being defined by faith in God and by the love for others.¹³

The European spirituality has also been influenced by the barbaric roots, characterized by a desire for adventure, love culture, emphasized cult of heroes, vivacity of spirit and imagination, opposite characteristics of Roman and Germanic. The values inherited from our Christianized Germanic peoples will be the basis of federalism, social organization based on values such as oath, loyalty, honor.¹⁴

Rome's inheritance offers a cultural profile of identity to the medieval European space through its main components: work, health and illness, communication, social relationships, life and death. They will give Europeans the ability to maintain the authentic values despite contradictions and crisis situations. The progress and strengthen of the spiritual unity of Europe was achieved through several milestones events in its history, with the transition from antiquity to the Middle Ages and later towards modernity.

The European integration process has developed and facilitated movements in Western Europe since 1945 by mediate and encourage Member States' sovereignty. EU enlargement eastwards had similar effects in post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe. As a consequence the classical model of the state as a sovereign entity territorial policy has changed. International migration in recent decades has had significant effects both in Western Europe and in southern and central eastern area of Europe. The notion of cultural homogeneity as the basis of central policy of the state was changed by ethnic minorities and immigrant communities, these two processes of nations and transnational

¹⁰ Roul Girardet, *Mituri și mitologii politice*, (Ed. Institutului European, Iași, 1997), 143

¹¹ Viviane Obaton în: *La promotion de l'identité culturelle européenne depuis 1946*, (Europa, Institut européen de l'Univ. Genève), 3, 15-33

¹² Ioan Piso, *Istoria elenistică și istoria Romei*, curs U. B. B. , Cluj-Napoca, 2000

¹³ Hans Küng, *Cristianesimo. Esenzza e storia*, (Ed. BUR, Sagi, Milano, 1997)

¹⁴ Jean- Rodolphe de Salis, *L'esprit européen*, (Ed. De la Baconnière, Neuchatel, 1947)

European States change having effects also on the multicultural elements of their collective identity.

There are three main approaches in the European identity debate pointing to the cognitive perspective: fluidity and hybridity, salience and perception, and the manipulation of symbols. As the cognitive perspective stresses fluidity and a recurrent reconstruction of collective identity, European identity tends to be seen as a layer of multiple identities or as a component of a hybrid identity. Throughout various configurations the different components of multiple identities or layers can relate to each other. These various components of an individual's identity rather blend into one another instead of separating clearly.¹⁵ In cross-cutting identities, even if there are tense relations between groups identities, a member can still belong to two both of the identity groups.

In the citizens perception, European identity is slowly being related to share frames, categories and images. Therefore European social subjectivity and intersubjectivity is seen as the sphere of collective identity.¹⁶ Because of this, different citizens, as a result of their specific national self-perceptions and past experiences can have very different images and frames of the EU, but at the same time, express perception similarities of the European Union, which can also be interpreted as an imagined community.¹⁷ The 'soft' collective identity is a cognitive perspective that presents the European citizenship as a derivative of national identity or as promoting fluid and fragmented identity. In this scenario, European cultural and political diversity is seen as being undermining a solid sense of collective self and of social belonging failing to establish any sense of collective continuity and integration.

From another perspective, European citizenship is revealed as not having culturally stable grounds similar to a common language, an educational system, religion or history. What can give stability to the concept of European citizenship identity is the significance of cultural symbols, which could give the emergence of collective identity based not only on exclusion¹⁸.

Many people value this diversity highly, not only with regard to languages but also with respect to longstanding religious and ideological traditions, regional subcultures, and political and educational systems. Deciphering common elements in the collective conscience of the men and women of Europe and identifying those aspects which are shared to a lesser extent or not at all, could make an important contribution not only to a better mutual understanding but also to the resolution of conflict and the keeping of peace.

¹⁵Matthias L. Maier and Thomas Risse (eds), *Europeanization, Collective Identities and Public Discourses, Final Report*, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute, Florence;

¹⁶ Brigid Laffan, 'The European Union polity: a union of regulative, normative and cognitive pillars', *Journal of European Public Policy* 8, no. 5 (2001), 709–27;

¹⁷ Juan Díez Medrano and Paula Gutiérrez, 'Nested identities: national and European identity in Spain', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 24, no. 5 (2001), 753–78;

¹⁸ Gerard Delanty, *Citizenship in a Global Age: Society, Culture, Politics* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000), 114;

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