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## The Historical Approach to European Identity: The Concept of a Civilized Europe during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century

There can be no doubt that a profound and purposeful debate on European identity requires considering the history of Europe in general and that of European thinking in particular. For, every facet of European identity is based on either specific or common historical experience. Besides, the historical background helps the scientists to illustrate and to specify the many facets of

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European identity and provides them with important contextual information on this subject. Thus, for example, the fear of some Western European citizens of balkanisation of the continent can only be understood and analysed as a specific aspect of European identity by taking in consideration the historical background of such a stereotype.

The most important European identity which we are referring to nowadays is the European Union. This still suffers from a lack of European sense by its citizens<sup>1</sup>, corresponding with the absence of a really profound political and social debate on the historical background of European integration processes.

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<sup>1</sup> P. Sloterdijk *Falls Europa erwacht. Gedanken zum Programm einer Weltmacht am Ende des Zeitalters ihrer politischen Absence.* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002), p. 45; J. C. Ocana, "The History of the European Union: The European Citizenship", <http://www.historiasiglo20.org/europe/ciudadident.htm> (September 30, 2005) and H. Uhl, "Europa kommunizieren – Europa visualisieren", V. Öhner, A. Pribersky, W. Schmale, H. Uhl (eds.) *Europa-Bilder* (=Querschnitte, 18). (Innsbruck, Wien, München, Bozen: Studienverlag, 2005), p. 142.

As a result of this, many European scientists and politicians, taking in consideration the historical roots of the European Union, still focus strictly on the history of the continent throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century: According to this point of view, the negative historical roots influencing most the strategy and identity of the European Union are warfare and genocide<sup>2</sup> and, on the contrary, the pan-European movement starting from the early twenties.

However, our idea of Europe and European integration is not a product of the recent past only. The European ideas and conducts of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century were at least just as efficient. Thus, in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and the early 19<sup>th</sup> century the Western European concept of a civilized Europe, “the idea of development, of evolution, of progress [...]”<sup>3</sup>, became the most important signum and the standard of progressive European thinking.<sup>4</sup> Strongly influenced by the French Revolution in 1789, nearly all democratic and liberal European intellectuals of this period, defining civilization as “the development of all talents and forces of a human being in favor of the whole society, nor for only a part of it, neither for the individual”<sup>5</sup>, considered themselves part of a solidary brotherhood of Christian European societies in their individual and specific search for national and, in their common search, European identity. They did not define the European cultural zone as a contrary to the various national cultures, but they strongly believed in the political and social compatibility of these two reference points – a consideration which is more topical than ever, regarding the current debate about European identity into the EU.<sup>6</sup> In this way of thinking the struggle for national unity was connected with the vision of a common and, in the sense of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, federalistic European republic.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> L. Kirval *The Quest for Creation of European Identity with Divergent Political Cultures. The Place of Modern Turkey in Europe*. (Chicago: 17<sup>th</sup> MEHAT Conference, University of Chicago, 2002), p. 2 and J. M. Delgado-Moreira, “Cultural Citizenship and the Creation of European Identity”, *Electrical Journal of Sociology* Vol. 1002, No. 3 (March 2003), <http://www.sociology.org/content/vol1002.003/delgado.html> (September 3, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> H. Kaelble *Europäer über Europa. Die Entstehung des europäischen Selbstverständnisses im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*. (Frankfurt am Main/New York: Campus, 2001), p. 53.

<sup>4</sup> The conception of a civilized Europe was firstly used by the French physiocrate Abbé Nicolas Baudeau (1730-1792) in 1766. See P. den Boer, “Europe to 1914: The Making of an Idea”, K. Wilson, J. van der Dussen (eds.) *The History of the Idea of Europe (=What is Europe?, 1)*. (Milton Keynes: Open University, 2002), p. 64.

<sup>5</sup> F. L. Lindner, “Politisches Allerley”, F. Murhard (ed.) *Allgemeine Politische Annalen* Vol. 9, No. 1 (Stuttgart/Tübingen: Cotta 1823), p. 92.

<sup>6</sup> K. Biedenkopf, B. Geremek, K. Michalski, M. Rocard, “Was hält Europa zusammen”, *Transit. Europäische Revue* Vol. 28 (2004), p. 67.

<sup>7</sup> Differing from our understanding of this term, at this period *federalism* was defined as a federation, based on a common international law, which did not have to lead necessarily into a common federalistic state order.

The most impressive example for this European sense is the so-called Young Europe, founded in 1834 by German, Italian and Polish immigrants. This union had at least five national member committees (Junges Deutschland, Giovine Italia, Mlada Polska, Jeune Suisse, Jeune France), each of them working individually towards its own national interest, but acting together by the rules of a common law, the so-called *atto di fratellanza*. The main goal of this union, cancelled by Swiss authorities in 1836, was an international European community, built and based on various democratic and civilized European nations and republics.<sup>8</sup>

Like all European liberals and democrats, the Young Europe also made use of the measure of the so-called European civilization. Following this standard, societies and countries which did not seem to fit within this concept were considered to contradict civilization, in 19<sup>th</sup> century's terms, as barbaric and Asiatic. Nevertheless, these ideas were strictly dependent on an assumed contradiction between occident (i.e. Christian European civilization) and orient - in this sense Asiatic was much more a mental synonym for not belonging to a community of civilized societies than a geographic term. Even more, it was the direct successor of the disparaging word Nordic, used during the 18<sup>th</sup> century to describe the absence of civilized social and political structures.

The division of Europe - which at this period, according to the European self-comprehension, also represents the division of the whole world - into a civilized and uncivilized part<sup>9</sup> was very changeable and subjective, held together especially by a common opponent and national interests in conflicts and wars, where the enthusiastic internationalism of this period often collided with national egoism and utilitarianism. Thus, for example, there was a strong solidarity and friendship between Polish and German democrats, assumed by both sides, against the restorative Russia after the Russian cancellation of the Polish Revolution in November 1830. But this solidarity calmed down rapidly and even turned into the contrary after the March Revolution in Germany (1848), when both sides raised territorial claims. As a result of this, many Germans, fearing the so-called pan-Slavic expansion in Europe, considered Poland after 1848 no longer a part of the European civilization.

<sup>8</sup> For further informations relative to the Young Europe see T. Brendel *Zukunft Europa? Das Europabild und die Idee der internationalen Solidarität bei den deutschen Liberalen und Demokraten im Vormärz (1815-1848) (=Herausforderungen, 17)*. (Bochum: Winkler, 2005), pp. 317 - 366.

<sup>9</sup> At the moment, after the end of the Cold War, the global policy, especially of the superpower USA, is again very strongly depending on this division of the world into a civilized and an uncivilized world.

Following this strict division and the opinion of many liberal European intellectuals, in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century the civilized part of Europe was restricted to the so-called Inner Europe (Great Britain, France, the German Territories, Switzerland, the German-speaking parts of Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands and Italy).<sup>10</sup> Other nations and cultures, for example Poland, Spain or Russia<sup>11</sup>, were seen – each, of course, in its specific way – as at least half-civilized, with the potential of becoming a fully accepted ‘member’ of the exclusive Inner Europe circle.

Only the Ottoman Empire had been considered as different, anti-European and absolutely uncivilized since the Middle Ages. There was a centuries old “constructed religious/ethnic borderline between Europe and the Turkish Other”<sup>12</sup>, between occident and orient, though some philosophers of the Enlightenment emphasized that Islam on principle seemed to be compatible with the European culture.<sup>13</sup> For example, the French philosopher Voltaire (1694 – 1778), clearly one of the protagonists of the European Enlightenment, desired to annihilate the Turks. He held them, together with the plague, to be the greatest curse on earth. “It does not suffice to humiliate them,” he said, “they should be destroyed”. As his personal correspondence shows, he deeply regretted to see that “the Christian powers, instead of destroying the common enemy, are busy ruining each other.”<sup>14</sup>

And while the European public during the Greek War of Liberation (1821-1829) from the Ottoman regime praised Greece as the native place of European culture, it also defamed the Turkish defenders as heterodox Asiatic barbarians. This negative image was intensified even more by the evident degeneration of the Osmanic dynasty in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In this way, during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, the European identity was constructed against the Asiatic barbaric other in terms of the civilized Europe against the uncivilized Orient.

Sensibly, the parity of Europe and civilization, still assumed by a great number of European politics and political pedagogues, should not be a mea-

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Kaelble, p. 55.

<sup>11</sup> During the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was this constantly fear, the so-called *Russophobia*, among the European democrats and liberals that the conservative and restorative European great power Russia would assail Central Europe.

<sup>12</sup> M. af Malmborg, B. Strath (ed.) *The Meaning of Europe. Variety and Contention within and among Nations*. (Oxford/New York: Berg, 2002), p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> F. Murhard, “Europa und die Türken”, F. Murhard (ed.) *Allgemeine Politische Annalen*, Vol. 3, No. 10 (Stuttgart/Tübingen: Cotta, 1821), p. 130.

<sup>14</sup> H. Meyer *Voltaire on War and Peace. Studies in Voltaire and Eighteenth Century* (= *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 144). (Banbury: Voltaire Foundation, 1976), pp. 49, 82 – 83. See also T. Mastnak, “Islam and the Creation of European Identity”, *CSD Perspectives* Vol. 7, No. 4 (1994), p. 39.

sure of political thinking in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and especially in debates on Europe's future. Therefore, many modern historical scientists consider this assumed parity unhistorical and mythological.<sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless, it is obvious that the concept of a civilized Europe of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century has left many traces in our social and political life. It illustrates vividly the important fact that "Europe, seen as a cultural zone, is not defined by geo-

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graphic or national borderlines, but by itself – as an open space in principle"<sup>16</sup>. Thus, "there is no actual Europe, but only a Europe, as it appears into the thinking and wills of the Europeans"<sup>17</sup>.

Applied to the EU, this means that this community, based on the cultural principle of unity in diversity<sup>18</sup>, is open to all people and nations, affiliated to Europe and accepted by the community. Though, these candidates have to be willing to follow all political and civil social rules of the community and to declare themselves truly convinced and lasting for a trans-utilitarian fundamental European attitude.

Considering the European Union as our contemporary European identity, these rules draw a more or less invisible borderline between EU member-states and candidates on the one side, and the non-European members on the other side. Therefore, if a state or a nation will have access to the EU, its representatives often express their willing to join in the European family.<sup>19</sup>

This is a metaphor, which is very similar to the concept of a civilized European brotherhood in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>15</sup> G. Pecout (ed.) *Penser les frontières de l'Europe du XIX<sup>e</sup> au XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle. Élargissement et Union. Approches historiques, actes du colloque organisé les 27, 28 et 29 mars 2003 à Paris par l'Ecole Normale Supérieure avec la collaboration de l'Observatoire Géopolitique des Régions Européennes de l'Université de Marne-la-Vallée.* (Paris: Presses Univ. de France, 2004).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Biedenkopf, Geremek, Michalski, Rocard, p. 70.

<sup>17</sup> J. Isensee, "Nachwort. Europa – die politische Erfindung eines Erdteils", J. Isensee (ed.) *Europa als politische Idee und rechtliche Form (=Wissenschaftliche Abhandlungen und Reden zur Philosophie, Politik und Geistesgeschichte, 19).* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1994), p. 113.

<sup>18</sup> R. Hohls, I. Schröder, H. Siegrist (eds.) *Europa und die Europäer. Quellen und Essays zur modernen europäischen Geschichte. Festschrift für Hartmut Kaelble zum 65. Geburtstag.* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2005), p. 9.

<sup>19</sup> See for example S. A. Epaminondas, "Cyprus and the Sense of Belonging to the European Family", H. Badura (ed.) *Völkerverständnis und Erweiterung (=Schriftenreihe der Europäischen Akademie für Lebensforschung, Integration und Zivilgesellschaft, 1).* (Waidhofen/Thaya: EALIZ, 2005), p. 172.

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