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European Integration and European Identity: Towards a Politics of Differences?

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The question of the European identity constantly surfaces in debates about European integration. Locating such an identity is supposed to lend legitimacy to the project of a unified Europe with a viable "demos" or people who feel that they share a common European citizenship. A slightly different set of questions is: what kind of identity is already being built in public European spheres? How does this identity work in relation to other identities, national or other? Most importantly, what kind of an identity can Europe really afford? With the growing impact of EU legislation on every aspect of national economic life, and the threat it poses to particular national institutional arrangements for the fiscal and monetary policy, the welfare state and even foreign policy, it has become clear that the EU can no longer be viewed as an instrument of national governments, but, instead, has become a governing body in need of legitimacy. It is obvious that I will not be able to address all these questions. Instead, I will focus on some more programmatic reflections of our topic.

The concepts of European identity are manifold and span from historical and political to cultural criteria. As with other so-called "plastic words", the word 'identity' covers such a variety of things that it makes no sense to ask what it really means. If European integration or European Identity is the answer, what then is the question? Is European history more than an agglomeration of its national histories and do we speak about individual or collective identity? With Remi Brague I am very skeptical about every substantial European identity. European Identity is based on a politics of difference, where becoming European is a process, based on a vision and a longing

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for something different. This debate about identity is more-or-less a debate within intellectual circles. We know very little about the determinants of a citizen's sense of European identity. All we know is that nations differ in respect to their citizens' expectations towards the European project.

On the other hand, there is no doubt that collective identities refer to cultural memory and symbolic representations. They are a product of our current interest in our common historical experiences. This is so because neither geographically nor politically is Europe constituted as a clearly defined area or space. Historically, Europe has several roots, which form what can be called the identity of the political and cultural history of "Europe" due to their specific historical developments and influences. The most important roots are the Athens, Rome and, in a very specific and often even implicit way, Jerusalem. What we call Europe today has thus been constituted by two forces: a continuous representation of these roots in cultural memory, and an ongoing construction of difference with regard to a respective "other". European "universalism" – the major basis for the European "success story" outside Europe – is therefore based on very specific particularities. It becomes obvious today that we run into problems if we forget or lay aside the cultural preconditions and symbolic representations of some of our more "taken for granted" values. Democracy, equality, freedom, self-esteem and respect are nor self-evident. It is evident that modern democ-

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racy, as Alexis de Tocqueville has demonstrated, is not independent of our Christian tradition and Western rationality (including functioning bureaucracy) has a lot to do with the European history of nation states and independent city governments. To forget about our common trans-national and European history has direct consequences for our political and economic orientations today. It makes sense to enable children to orient themselves in their collective past. It has direct consequences in their ability and responsibility as citizens if they have never been taught the differences between Romanic and gothic churches. If symbolic representations of our collective memories run empty – and this is happening today – not only will we forget about our cultural heritage but we will also see that quite a lot of space and places, times and people, experiences and differences, sensibilities and feelings will disappear. It has direct consequences for our political communities if young people have no idea about what they are looking at when they enter a church.

Tradition is not something given in the past, but a process of construction in the present. It is more than obvious today that those processes follow pluralistic patterns.

However, pluralism is nothing new in our European experiences. What is different to the old pluralism is the fact that we – as modern Europeans – are not able or not willing any longer to see and to accept the basic "dogmatic" principles (belief systems) behind all these differences. Generally, we are not deeply interested in where our differences lie and our common interests (in material progress and civilizational standards) are sometimes (if not often) culturally worthless.

Another danger for the common European "identity" project stems from the fact that most of our definitions, conclusions and concepts are the product of reflections and assumptions of social critics and intellectuals. World-views, philosophies and even the so called common-sense assumptions have always been produced by a very specific and closed group of educated people. The difference today is that our "intelligentsia" is getting in trouble according to its democratic legitimacy. In modern mass societies we are all to be taken seriously as European citizens, even if there is nothing like a European "demos". However, there cannot be a group or institution or anything else legitimately to define itself as "more European than the others". On the other hand, every culture is in need of "representation". A representative "center" has been and still is the center of our civic culture for which it is 'self-evident' that some of its main values are taken for granted. Europe is not a community of neighbors who define themselves as peripheries (as it often seems to be the case in respect to our transatlantic relations). The relations of center and periphery within our common European project are vital for its reasonable future. This has not only (but, unfortunately, often) to do with economic development and the wealth of nations but it has also to do with the problem of a second language as a European "lingua franca". It is clear that English is not very sensitive in respect to its Irish, Scottish or Gaelic neighbors. It is also true that it is mostly used not as the language of Shakespeare and Thackeray but more or less as a common denominator of everyday communication (pidgin English). If we consider the "center-periphery-question" according to the English language as a dominant factor in our cultural self-representations, it might be of some interest to take also into account that there are no "people" on the continent who use English as their native language.

It might be that a further European integration fostering a distinctive European cultural identity can be seen as a move beyond modernity. But the question here is: what does modernity mean and are we fixed by dogmatic persuasion to see modernity as a uniform, expanding and allegedly universal

civilization? If we look closer, we will see that we are still fighting the battle between the last representatives of bourgeois culture (as representative culture) and the generations who speak about transcultural relations, believe in intercultural communications and are educated in supranational economics. There is much reason today to be quite pessimistic about the cultural competence of the younger generation but it is now mainly the older generation which offers courses in cultural management without any knowledge about "European culture". This is not to deny that the European identity is more than the possession of some so-called "classics" but culture has always been and always will be a dogmatic framework of unquestionable beliefs, traditions, wisdom, knowledge (not only "information") and the understanding of symbols, histories and spaces.

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As already mentioned, the concept of identity is not an essentialist, but a strategic and positional one. It has nothing to do with a stable, unchangeable core of the self, the bit of the self which remains always the same, identical with itself across times but it is also true that the European identity is based on a very specific

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history, on very special institutions and has to do with very specific ideas. There is no history of national states in Africa comparable to the European experience. Religious or civil wars comparable to ours are not to be found in Turkey and there is no "rational" music in China. Europeanization is thus not identical with Westernization. It has some common traditions and offspring but the differences are not to be overlooked. Both sociologically and historically, it is not correct to see secularism as the last word of European history. It is not true that there is no relationship between religion and democracy and it does not make any sense to speak about European identity and hail the globalization process and market principles at the same time, either. Culture does matter. European identity, if it is not an empty shell, has to do with boundaries, limitations, the relationship of centers and peripheries, with power and dominance, with barriers, beliefs and orthodoxies. As the great journalist and writer Gilbert Keith Chesterton used to say: who is not able to believe in something is condemned to believe in everything.

Deeds and Opinions

If we want to know more about everyday experiences of everyday people, we should be more interested in action than opinions. Of course, we can ask people the "identity" question – how do you feel about the EU; does "being European" now come in third, fourth or fifth behind your national identity, regional belonging, favorite football club, or preferred brand of trainers and of other identities that we slip in and out of – but the simple truth is that this extra question is quite simply redundant if you are interested in what people really do in the integrated Europe. Being European nowadays is just as much about shopping across borders, buying property abroad, handling a common currency, looking for work in a foreign city, taking holidays in new countries, joining cross-national associations and a thousand other actions facilitated by the European free movement accords. These ways of being European are also enjoyed by many who overtly profess themselves to be Euro-skeptic. If we think this way, we may discover social identities that are genuinely transnational.

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Apart from money and economy, European Identity has to do with culture and politics, as well. However, as Egon Friedell has put it: culture means a variety of problems. Indeed, European culture is a very fluid continuum of generational experience, nothing to be secured by fixed traditions, nothing to be fixed in empty catchphrases. If European Identity is to be taken seriously, it has to be more than a mere symbolic action and a compensation for political decision-making. When speaking about European Identity, we have to bear in mind that culture is not only an "accessoire" of politics but a specific modus within a variety of discourses.

Diversity in Unity: European Culture as a Variety of Problems

Identity is not only a mirror but it is also a wall, which empowers the group's self and differentiates it from others Europe is marked more by its diversity than by its coherence. The quest for European identity has always developed in times of crisis and war. What needs to be explored is whether national identities can be supplemented or transformed.

Nation-building has been a struggle for recognition. Although recognition is a precondition for identity formation, there is not a zero-sum struggle between a national and a European identity. People have always had multiple identities. Struggles for recognition are labelled politics of difference. To speak about European identity means therefore to take this politics of difference seriously.

Identity is a wall of separation. It is not only a mirror but it is also a wall, which empowers the group's self and differentiates it from others. No matter how high and how flexible this wall is, how democratic, how ethnic or even nationalist it looks, it is not to be seen in the concept of political identity, because it depends on particular developments and experiences. However, even a highly democratic identity is in need of walls and borders.

What is completely alien cannot be joined together. Between the elements to be integrated there must be links and connections, there have to be concordances, similarities and complementations. Such a shared "we"- feeling entails that those things which affect the others also concern me, both intellectually and emotionally. This provides a basis for the recognition of shared responsibility, mutual support and cooperation. Within these frames of reference, Europe is in transgression: not from A to B, but from an old well-known state of being to new conditions, still unknown in the West and the East. According to the Eastern side of the European hemisphere, we get some insights into how dramatic changes following transformation processes can be, but some Western countries still have no idea what life will look like after the necessary dramatic shifts within their own welfare systems.

Nations, Regions, and the New Metropolitan Corridors

Viewed against the increasingly deterritorialized global economy, regionalist movements, and the growing role of local governance, a particular vision of Europe has begun to take shape. In this vision, the territorial state system is being replaced by a less state-centered organization of political, economic and cultural space in Europe.

The word region derives from the word regere, which means to rule, or as the Americans like to say: all politics is local. The distinction between top-down regionalization and bottom-up regionalism raises the question of agency and the issue of power. The production of regions is the result of discursive action, or, better, networking. Regional discourse is important in the communication of nominal identity. Nevertheless, everybody knows that the concept of a Europe of Regions is an overstatement carrying a strong element of wishful thinking. Regionalization is networking but often enough the re-

gional imaginations echo ethnic or even separatist ghosts of the past. Loyalty to a community is not produced by passports but by the attractiveness of communities. We love our country so far as it is lovable.

In his famous thesis written in 1967, Istvan Deak points out that there were no dominant nationalities within the Habsburg monarchy, but dominant classes, institutions, interest groups and positions. This leads us to the insight that the dominant impact of nationalism for the 19th century is to be questioned. Nationalism is nothing to be taken for granted.

European identity is particularly possible as mediation, as a bridge between local or national identities. We need others to see ourselves but there are special rules to be learned that enable us to see each other in the right way.

The German historian Karl Schlögel has described these European identity formations as a product of the new metropolitan corridors and new networks.

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For him, the new heroes of European identity are the lorry drivers along the via Baltica, between Portugal and Poland, the shopping tourists in Krakow, all professional commuters between countries, the Ukrainian and Slovak construction workers or the Czech barkeeper in Mallorca. He is probably right in saying that conflicts and oppositions between the new metropolitan corridors and its borders will be more important in the future than the old and traditional frontiers between the nation states.

Schools and the Formation of European Awareness

It is interesting that the differences across member states in the fractions of their population that have lived or studied in another member state are closely correlated with some of the cross-national differences in an expressed sense of European identity.

So what does Europe stand for when you look at current educational material? As projected both in the textbooks and in the debates around them, "Europe" is first and foremost a diffuse idea contained in an equally diffuse discourse, with contingent boundaries that do not by any means overlap with the territorial confines of the European Union. What is missing is a debate why the European Union and also the European integration process is not identical with what we call Europe.

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No one should forget the importance of the school in the formation of European awareness. How else could it happen that Upper Bavarians and East Prussians, Swabians and Friesians regarded themselves as Germans despite all their differences and felt they belonged to the German nation while, conversely, the Savoyards, the Bretons, the natives of Lorraine and the coastal fishing people of the Gironde felt part of the "Grande Nation"? Indeed, the school was the school of the nation so why should it not be likewise for the nation of Europeans?

Today, the Erasmus and Marie Curie programs are very helpful in establishing a sense of shared community. However, here the differences in experiences are also worth more than standardizations. It doesn't make any sense if German students come to Turin or Marseille to study in English following the same programs based on the same introductory literature as at home.

Theories and programs about European identity can be addressed within a second, but European experiences need time. Everything has changed since 1990 and still the Germans have not yet realized that Berlin is just an hour's train ride away from Poland. Poland is far away in comparison to Djerba or Spain. This is totally different in Eastern Europe. Travel agencies are the most flourishing institutions. From the Western perspective, there is no Go East corresponding the Go West. What is needed is a deeper insight into the fact that the history of nations is a history of regions within the European context. If there is something like "European Identity", it has to do with European experiences within a plurality of circumstances. This reorganization of life horizons, however, has its own time.

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