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European Identity 2006

The European identity as a political goal had been inherent from the early post-war years in the thinking of Jean Monnet, Walter Hallstein and others. ... In ordinary life, the European identity has come to be associated with the various emblems and symbols by which the Commission has sought to influence people with a view to persuading them of the appeal (and the inevitability) of a federal Europe.¹

Introduction

A lot has been written about the concept of identity as a perception of self in relation to the others. A lot has been said and written about the European identity and a lot has been discussed about Turkey being a factor in the European identity crisis. However, not much has been articulated, yet. What has been avoided are usually the inconvenient facts which don't correspond with the anti-enlargement mood of the European public yet further enhanced by the vote-seeking politicians. These facts reveal that a homogeneous society of Europe is a chimera and that the European culture is a sterile category born and locked within the present EU borders.

The claim that the European identity is in crisis suggests that the European identity has been present as a given static category, immune to the outer influences and that it is set within clearly defined borders. However, identity is more a concept which falls within political jurisdiction rather than a result of *ius naturae* and the borders, rather than being stable and naturally delineated, are a construct of the process which always lies at the heart of the politics. In the end, [t]hey are political actors who, as part of some political project, see it in their interest to imagine a certain spatial and chronologi-

¹ <http://www.euro-know.org/dictionary/e.html#Europaidentity>. (June 7, 2006).

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cal identity for a region and to disseminate this imagination to a maximum number of the people'.²

Following the arguments of Iver B. Neumann that nation-building approaches apply to region-building, as well, the same must be true analogically for the European identity and the borders of the European Union. Therefore, it is tricky to explain the rules for the enlargement as a natural delineation process in which some states are organic parts of an archaic primordial European community some are not.

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Creating a common European people was even a harder task. As the peoples of the co-founding member states were driven towards the integration by different objectives³.

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Hence, in order to promote an existence of European politeia and to enhance a feeling of unity among the people the European Council gathered in 1984 in Fontainebleau and established an ad hoc committee. This committee under the lead of the Italian lawyer Pietro Adonnino launched a campaign called 'A people's Europe' which aimed at building and further fortifying the European identity.⁴ Consequently, almost two and a half thousand years after Plato introduced

the necessity of noble lie in his Republic, the metaphorical possession of a hypothetical Europe was given to people.⁵ This was strengthened by adopting symbols, which had been attributes only of the nation states so far, such as the European flag and anthem.

² I. B. Neumann *Regions in International Relations Theory: The Case for a Region-Building Approach*. Research Report No. 162 (Oslo: Norsk Utenrikspolitisk Institutt, 1992), p. 14.

³ Spanish economist Dr. Pedro Schwartz pointed out in 1996: 'The Germans want the Union to stop them from falling into Nazi ways. The French want to be cured of an inferiority complex. The Italians want to become a nation. The Spaniards want to bury Franco ... I sometimes think that the Common Market should have been founded not in Rome but in Vienna, on Dr Freud's couch.' See <http://www.euro-know.org/dictionary/e.html#Europaidentity>. (June 7, 2006).

⁴ R. Hill *We Europeans* (Brussels: Europublic, 2002), p 396.

⁵ Plato suggests through the Socrates' mouth that the verbal lie laying in words is 'useful against the enemies and those of one's so-called friends attempting to do something wrong against a community, in order to turn them away from it'. See C.D.C. Reeve, "Plato", D. Boucher, P. Kelly (eds.) *Political Thinkers: From Socrates to Present*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 62.

As for Turkey, its way towards the EU membership has often been described as different and unique. In fact, in relation to Turkey's accession the question whether Turkey has a European identity has become a centerpiece of the debates. At the same time, the European identity is considered being somewhat a 'higher phase of being'. Thus, Turkey's potential EU membership will also prove whether Turkey is hierarchically in the same boat with the other European states or not. Departing from the Copenhagen criteria of inclusion requirements to the Eurocentric hierarchical grading of compatibility with the civilization has yet another implication.

Although on one hand it is very hard to draw a clear distinction line between Turkey and the other European states, there is an obvious difference when it comes to religion. Whereas Turkey is a predominantly Muslim country, the other member states are Christian. Therefore, while too much emphasis on the uniqueness and incomparability of the European culture might serve as harbinger of stronger bonds between the European states with Christian majorities, it also sends a strong message to the Muslims all around the world.

Nevertheless, the stakes are high. Although the idea of the hierarchical distinction is extremely abstract, we saw very specific results of such an approach only 60 years ago. Even if we take no account of the Huntington's clash of civilizations it seems as if the old schism between monotheistic religions is on the agenda again.

European Projects in the 'European History'

It would be wrong to assume that the latest attempt to identify Europe and to create a feeling of amity among former enemies is at the same time also the first one. The modern European Union project, though being so far the most comprehensive, is only one of a series of Pan-European endeavors. Divided by the centuries, all the projects have shown some similarities; all of them were political projects and all of them emerged from security requirements.

The first European Union was created by the Romans when they, encouraged by the internally disintegrated quarrelling Celts, conquered Gaul, the present France. However, neither ancient Greeks nor ancient Romans felt any European identity. Both civilizations, which are considered to be corner stones for the European culture, had their centers in Eastern Mediterranean and their culture stemmed from what we now call the Orient. The Roman Empire was both more Southern and much more Eastern than what is today presented as Europe. It included the Middle East and a great part of Africa but didn't incorporate Northern Europe at all. On the contrary, the Romans

referred to the people living in the north of the Empire as barbarians⁶ and after Caesar Diocletian decided to split the Empire in 406 AD, the empire acquired the present Istanbul as its capital.

The second European Union project was the empire of Charlemagne of the beginning of the 9th century. With the rise of the Carolingian reign, the center of the European power was reallocated from the south towards the north but this time Europe didn't cover most of Spain and Britain. Hadn't the restored *imperium romanum* disintegrated so rapidly, perhaps Charlemagne would have been able to realize his great plan to link the Rhine with the Danube as early as in the 9th century.⁷

The third European Union project can be considered the most enlightened one. It was the so-called 'Open Europe' of the 12th and the early 13th centuries, the European Union based on modern values. The first medieval free city states were created, commerce opened up on the European scale and the richness of both classical and contemporary (particularly Arab and Jewish culture) civilizations was rediscovered. These principles were well displayed in the person of the Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick II of Hohenstaufen. A man, called 'the first modern man' or *stupor mundi* (miracle of the world) developed a great tolerance for three 'non-pagan' religions, Christian, Jewish and Muslim, which he officially demonstrated as the King of Jerusalem.⁸

The sad truth is that the Europeans were able to unite in the name of projects with common political and religious aims like crusades, as well. Too much openness was in the view of his Holiness Pope Innocent III tantamount to heresy thereof the internal Crusade (Albigensian Crusade) against open-minded, well-educated and very well-off Cathars of southern Europe was summoned.⁹ The Crusade resulted in practical cleansing of the Cathars all through Languedoc and finally metastasized into the Spanish Inquisition. The 'Open Europe' was over and the period of the coercive holy and just wars started. Though the catalyst was an outside enemy, Islam, during the

⁶ The expression 'barbarians' has its origin in Ancient Hellenes. The ancient Hellenes referred this way initially to the Persians whose language they didn't understand, later to all non-Greeks as to people who could make only an unintelligible 'bar-bar' noise. The designation didn't have at first negative connotation.

⁷ R. Hill *We Europeans*. (Brussels: Europublic, 2002), p. 47.

⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 49 – 51.

⁹ http://www.languedoc-france.info/1206_crusade.htm. (June 12, 2006).

¹⁰ The Jews of Toledo (Sephardic Jews) and later the *moriscos* (the Muslim converts to the Christian faith) expelled by the Catholic Monarchs from Spain found a new home in Ottoman Empire under the rule of Sultan Beyazid II. See R. Hill *We Europeans*. (Brussels: Europublic, 2002), p 53.

Crusades the Jews were expelled from England, France and Germany¹⁰ and the 4th Crusade ended up looting and raiding Orthodox Christian Constantinople by the Western Europeans. As a result, the gap between Catholics and orthodox increased as well as the distrust of Muslims to Christians.

Together with new discoveries, mainly in the form of gaining a large number of new colonies, Europe was gaining a greater feeling of superiority against the others. This was yet another credential to the already existing perception of Europe as the *respublica christiana*. When the thoughts of enlightenment found their way in the 18th century, the paradigm 'us versus the others' gained greater importance and while the term civilization Europe had usurped as a synonym for itself, barbarism has been assigned to the others.

In the 20th century, between the wars, the concept of "the others and us" was used in most of the projects for the future Europe launched in this period. A number of imaginative theoretical schemes for resolving cross-border European disputes and encouraging trade with some similarities to Europe's present structure were designed. Both Friedrich Naumann in his book 'Mitteleuropa' and T. G. Masaryk in the 'New Europe', though each seeing it from a different perspective following their political objectives, play with "including-excluding mechanisms" based on the superiority.

Although F. Naumann made the *Mitteleuropa* concept popular, he wasn't the first German thinker with such a political vision. What he envisaged was a loose confederation, the Oberstaat with a huge Central European common market and defense under natural German supremacy. The borders of this state, which he considered a historical necessity, would be between Germany and France and somewhere between Germany and Russia. He suggested a creation of a common Mitteleuropean identity where everyone would voluntarily speak German.¹¹

In a background of Masaryk's 'New Europe', there was a fight for an independent Czechoslovakia out of Austrian (and Hungarian) reach. For Masaryk a new Europe should lay in the zone between Germany and Russia and a new European order would have to be democratic in Wilsonian terms of cooperation, open diplomacy and disarmament. Although his primary aim was an independent Czechoslovakia, he envisaged the regional and future all-European cooperation. Under his chairmanship the Mid-European Democratic Union with representatives from twelve European nations was established in the USA in 1918. However, like many others, he never mentioned the colonial

¹¹ P. Bugge, "Essay 2: The Nation Supreme: The Idea of Europe 1914-1945", K. Willson, J. van der Dussen (eds.) *The History of the idea of Europe*. (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp 88 - 92.

system and extending the self-determination to other but European cultures, nor did he overcome the fixation to the supremacy of the Christian culture.¹²

The exception of transnational understanding, probably thanks to his family background (his mother was Japanese and his father an Austrian diplomat), could be found in a convinced activist for the creation of a Pan-European Union, Count Coudenhove-Kalergi. *PanEuropa* was, in his opinion, distinguished from the geographical and cultural Europe. Mainly, it would function as a guardian of peace and security and it would have to exclude both Britain and Russia but after democratic changes in Turkey in 1923, he welcomed Turkey in the political and cultural Europe.¹³

Nevertheless, the concept of a united Europe was frequently, very efficiently and unfortunately used also in the Nazi propaganda, both before and during the war. As for Naumann, for the German militarists the word *Europa* didn't mean more but a shroud for domination.

'Je suis mon passe'¹⁴

Knowing about European history and continuously expanding this knowledge, is a determining factor of integration and unity. Or, in other words, who is *homo europeus* should be seen through his roots. This might suggest that following the European narratives brings us to the understanding of the historical genesis of the European group.

However, L. N. Tolstoy once pointed out that '[h]istory would be an excellent thing if only it were true.' Indeed, all through the times we have been facing periods when the truth was falsified in order to serve the doctrine. Also building a European self-image has ignored many awkward facts and historical myths of common shared history have usually served as border markers, leaving some out while invoking a divine origin of the homogeneity of those already in.

Borrowing an image from Iver B. Neumann: "When an elite has formulated a political program, which hinges on the existence of some nation (here community), it is always possible, admittedly with more or less difficulty, to construct a prehistory for it, and thus embody it in time as well as in space. This is done by identifying, and thus making relevant to the identity of the human collective in question, a host of political ties, cultural similarities,

¹² T. G. Masaryk, *Nová Evropa*. (Prague: Gustav Dubsy, 1920).

¹³ P. Bugge, "Essay 2: The Nation Supreme: The Idea of Europe 1914-1945", K. Willson, J. van der Dussen (eds.) *The History of the idea of Europe*. (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 96 - 102.

¹⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre

economic transactional patterns etc. Of course such a political process will always be imposed on a geographical area which is already, in a number of respects, heterogeneous."¹⁵ Analogically, the EU political actors have been deciding which similarities and dissimilarities are politically relevant and which are not.

The popular thesis is that the European identity has its roots in ancient heritage: free thinking, individualism, humanity and democracy with their cradle in Ancient Greece and Rome and recently again Christianity. But history is not only what we remember but also what we are reminded of. Both Ancient Greece and Rome were Mediterranean civilizations with their centers in Asia Minor, nowadays Anatolia. The first federative Parliament in the world history, the ancient Lycian League that consisted of 23 city-states, is situated in southern Turkey. It was just the Lycian League's constitution, which was taken centuries later by the drafters of the US constitution, Madison and Hamilton, as an example of an early government.

Southwestern Europe was for centuries dominated by the Moors and Eastern and Southern Europe was for hundreds of years part of the Ottoman Empire. The eastern borders of Europe have never been clearly formulated and it is impossible to say (both geographically and culturally) where Europe ends. And as for Christendom, it was not especially European and was as often a source of schism than of unity.¹⁶

The identity of Europe is in its multicultural diversity. Europe has always been a mixture of cultural interests spilling over each other rather than a monolithic body.

The concept of Europe didn't exist for the patriarchs, prophets and the apostles and cannot be found in the Bible. However, the first book of Genesis talks about three sons of Noah, Shem, Ham and Japheth whose children and grandchildren populated the earth otherwise empty after the Flood. Shem settled in Asia, Ham in Africa and Japheth in Europe. These three geographical locations are believed to be populated nowadays by what are the descendents of Noah's sons respectively, making Japheth forefather of all Europeans. According to Flavius Josephus a place where Japheth and his seven sons settled were the mountains of Asia Minor (present Turkey) and westwards (present Europe) right across as far as Cadiz.¹⁷

¹⁵ I. B. Neumann *Regions in International Relations Theory: The Case for a Region-Building Approach*. Research Report No. 162 (Oslo: Norsk Utenrikspolitisk Institutt, 1992), p. 14

¹⁶ <http://www.euro-know.org/dictionary/e.html#Europaidentity>. (June 7, 2006).

¹⁷ P. de Boer, "Essay 1: Europe to 1914: the Making of an Idea", K. Willson, J. van der Dussen (eds.) *The History of the Idea of Europe*. (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 13 – 26.

If we were able to face our shared histories without an urge to justify past colonial and other adventures, we would, without any doubts, benefit from that. The identity of Europe is in its multicultural diversity. In the end, Europe has always been a mixture of cultural interests spilling over each other rather than a monolithic body.

It is really hard to draw the lines dividing civilizations. Both Byzantines and Islam have been shaping Europe's culture all throughout the centuries. The so-called Dark Ages of Europe were considerably enlightened technically and culturally by the Islamic science. It was the Islamic scholars who kept, preserved and transmitted the ancient heritage to Europe. The 'European natural heritage' is not as natural as we pretend it to be, either. For example, the plane trees that line the national routs of France arrived from the East as late as the 1700s. And the tulip, old symbol of the Ottomans, arrived from Turkey to Netherlands no earlier than in the mid-16th century.¹⁸

Turkey or Deformed Image

It turned out to be a reality that it is not a clearly defined Europe which serves as a criterion for the EU membership. On the contrary, it is the political entity of the European Union that classifies and labels certain countries as European. Undoubtedly, Turkey's EU membership process posed a question to the criteria for such a classification.

The European discourse on Turkey is nothing new, though. It started much earlier back in the 19th century. In 1853, 'New York Daily Tribune' published an article by Friedrich Engels on the future of the Ottoman Empire and its relation to other European powers, referred to throughout the 19th century as the 'Eastern Question'.¹⁹ What is new, however, is the increasingly dense discussion on the cultural issues, leaving political dimension behind.

The illogical fear of Turkey's accession to the EU and the reaction to it dominate both public and political discourses.²⁰ The hysterical fear of Turkey's fulfilling the European criteria and thus being confirmed European looks even more absurd within the context of the EU primary law. The Maastricht Treaty's objective that the EU should 'assert its identity on

¹⁸ R. Hill *We Europeans*. (Brussels: Europublic, 2002), p. 55.

¹⁹ A. Giannakopoulos, "What Is to Become of Turkey in Europe? European Identity and Turkey's EU Accession", *Perceptions, Journal of International Affairs* Vol. IX, No. 3 (2004).

²⁰ In an interview with Spanish daily El Pais, former Council of Europe Human Rights Commissioner Alvaro Gil-Robles stated that European fears of Turkey are illogical and high-

the international scene' and the European Constitution's reference to the universal values make the debate on the European culture and values obscure. There is no obvious reason for the assumption that values which are universal and at the same time European cannot be adopted and put into practice by Turkey.

Moreover, culture is a dynamic category open to the process of mutual influence of spillovers and interactions and locating it within strictly defined boundaries is a fundamentally artificial construct. Therefore, attempts to define a European culture with an absolute certainty bring the definition itself to *ad absurdum*. Throughout the years of a 'cultural war' in the arena of public discussion on the content of the European identity triggered by the option of Turkey's accession to the EU, Turkey and the EU have become unambiguously tied to each other. They have modified each other in this interactive process through the mediation of the value references and they will continue to do so.

In this light, it is hard to understand how and why Turkey's potential EU accession should represent a threat to the European identity and a statement such as '... that finally we have to tell the Turks that they don't belong to Europe...' doesn't bring us closer to such an understanding. All this is, of course, true unless the answer is Islam. Indeed, it is interesting to observe an attempt to make a reference to the Christian tradition as a unified European force in the preamble of the constitutional draft, especially as it was only in the course of the 15th century that Europe became to be linked with the word Christendom.

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Yet, a sole reference to Christianity does not represent an obstacle provided it remains faithful to its original mission – i.e. tolerance. What is, however, precarious, as Amin Maalouf points out in his famous book 'On

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lighted the fact that France once considered Spain a "danger" when Spain was preparing to become a member of the EU in the 1980s. See "European Fears of Turkey Illogical", TDN, October 2005, <http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?enewsid=26306>.

Identity', is the 'idea that on the one hand there is a religion – Christianity – destined for ever to act as a vector for modernism, freedom, tolerance and democracy, and on the other hand another religion – Islam – doomed from the outset to despotism and obscurantism. ...Such a notion throws a cloud over the future of a large part of the human race'.²¹

Islam

The existence of Islam made the West feel profoundly uneasy since its dawn. It needed an answer. In its early years, the misunderstandings and false interpretations didn't stem only from lack of knowledge among Christian scholars. It was the significant military threat that the Islamic forces posed and the advanced social and economic life that grew up within Islam. The fact that an urban society, sophisticated and powerful, which developed within the Islamic culture, was superior to the agricultural Christian West created nothing else but envy and embarrassment to Europeans.²² Moreover, the new religion posed a great challenge to the Christian monotheist tenet. Therefore, there was an imminent need in Christendom to find a credible response to Muslim doctrines and the person of Muhammad.

This was not an easy task. Had Christian scholars responded to Islam as to heresy (as they attempted to do initially), it wouldn't have had any independent revelation and would have come under the authority of the church. But since Christians concluded that Islam originated outside the Bible, none of the arguments about heresy worked. Medieval masters had to generate new arguments to ridicule Islam. They didn't have virtually any written sources on Islam and those who were writing about Islam relied almost entirely on the popular ridiculous stories heard and repeated. According to R.W. Southern, Guibert of Nogent, for instance, a writer of the history of the First Crusade, unable to prove the trustworthiness of his material covered the lack of knowledge this way: 'It is safe to speak evil of one whose malignity exceeds whatever ill can be spoken.'²³ This statement became precedence for writers who could say whatever they wanted and created about Islam as long as it was damning.

²¹ A. Maalouf *On Identity*. (London: The Harvill Press, 2000), p. 47.

²² R. Armour *Islam, Christianity and the West: A Troubled History*. (Maryknoll/New York: Orbis Books, 2003), pp. 50 – 52.

²³ *Ibid*, p. 52.

Turkey as a country with a predominantly Muslim demographic structure and the heir of the Ottoman Empire has been for a long time in the centre of projection of the prejudiced images. Martin Luther in his famous *On War against the Turks* written to Count Philip of Hesse appeals to the Christians: "... If the Turk's god, the devil, is not beaten first, there is reason to fear that the Turk will not be so easy to beat."²⁴

Stereotypes generally dwell on the most outrageous of the characteristics of a people. They ignore that the national temperaments, like individual human personalities, are dualistic by nature. The Turks have been portrayed as a barbarian archetype, a reverse image of the 'noble European' since the Middle Ages until now. The film *'Midnight Express'*, for which Oliver Stone officially apologized to Turkey for changing the real story in an exaggerated manner, as well as the popular comic series *'The Simpsons'* portraying Turks as child kidnappers, reflect an aspiration to preserve the Turks as the incompatible others.²⁵

Conclusion

Instead of spending a lot of energy on building a European identity on the prehistoric and middle ages political necessities, Europe should find an answer on how it intends to contribute to the cultural debate positively and how it wants to help to make the 'clash of civilizations' less likely.

Europe behaves in a neo-colonial fashion. Making the present boundaries result of the natural law while denying the very political character of their creation will certainly create drift and strengthen nationalism in the countries which are excluded from the 'naturally' and 'divinely' created civilization.

It might be wise to treat the accession of Turkey exclusively according to the Copenhagen accession criteria, which are the criteria of integration not exclusion.

²⁴ Ibid, p 118.

²⁵ 'Simpsons' is an animated comedy originally broadcasted on Fox's TV. At the present it is broadcasted on all popular TV channels all around the world. Cast members have become pop culture icon and their expressions have an impact on forming the common language. One of the words used in the series was added as an official word in the 2001 edition of the Oxford Dictionary. The series currently holds the Guinness Book of World Records titles for "Longest-running Primetime Animated Series" and "Most Celebrities featured in an Animation Series." For more see also <http://tv.yahoo.com/tvpdb?d=tvi&f=0&id=1807776558> (June 30 2006).

²⁶ I. B. Neumann *Regions in International Relations Theory: The Case for a Region-Building Approach*. Research Report No. 162 (Oslo: Norsk Utenrikspolitisk Institutt, 1992), p. 14.

The argument that '[t]he metaphorical family became more important than the family itself believing in its own divine nature'²⁶, seem to correspond with the present stance of the European Union quite closely. What is politically communicated as culturally relevant indeed proved more important for political organization than cultural similarities *per se*.²⁷ It seems that Europe

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is jealous of the European culture, as it has defined it and at the same time afraid to face the fact that the main 'other', 'the barbarian' which, for centuries, has perfectly served as a European identity builder is culturally so close that he is capable of reaching the same European standard.

It might be wise to treat the accession of Turkey exclusively according to the Copenhagen accession criteria, which are the criteria of integration not exclusion. Making religion a precondition and the European

identity result of the 'laws of nature' thrusts the whole Europe back to the Dark Ages or towards a creation of another Nation Supreme. Such a fiction should ring the alarm bells in all minds embracing the real European values.

What is required in the 3rd millennium is a self-confident Europe that does not need to create any new barbarians as a bad antipode in order to create a vision of a good European. What is needed is Europe, which does not want to call itself good retrospectively, after labeling the others as evil.

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²⁷ Ibid, p. 22.