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European Identity: Condition for Innovation?

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Introduction

European Identity is currently „in“, that's a fact. Together with the „Democratic Deficit“ it's the most influential topic in discussions concerning European Union (EU). It's a classical catchword of the European discourse, to stress the importance of a project for the European Identity building is a shortest route to money from the European funds. It's in the context of the Democratic Deficit where it's more and more often operated with the notion of European Identity as a *conditio sine qua non* for any longterm solution. And the Democratic Deficit is very closely connected to the innovation. In the political sense, that is. Aim of this paper is to explore the connection between the European Identity and predominantly political innovation. Main assumption is that emergence of a European Identity of a certain level is necessary before qualitatively higher degree of political union can take place, before any decent political innovation can occur. As for that discussion, it's important to keep in mind, that it's held primarily on the level of practical politics or law, not in the field of analytical social science. As far as social sciences are concerned, European Union is considered to be the topic of political science, mainly of the European Studies. One of the goals of this paper is to look upon this topic from the point of view of Sociological theory.

Basic Assumptions

Following section will deal with basic assumptions I have about the topic. According to constructivist paradigm, wide range of measures and policies are to some extent necessary to establishing of European identity (political, economical, social). European Economic Community was constituted as a tool for economic development of European countries; economic interests were its keystone. If it were not of its economical success, there would be no European Union now. All the same it is with political measures. European communities were primarily economical project aimed to assuring of food self sufficiency, establishing of common market, bolstering prosperity etc. for most of its history. There was no need for greater identification of peoples of Europe with it. Everything had changed in the 80's with progress of integration and finally with establishment of the European Union. Because it was decided that Maastricht Treaty will be subjected to plebiscite and it was eventually adopted (after great problems though), there had to be some feelings of belonging in people at that time yet, otherwise this treaty, which clearly exceeded anything looking like economic organization, won't be accepted in the first place. Common market was at that time finally established, no immediate economic advantages were expectable, something else than economic benefit had to take effect. To a certain extent, people became European at the very

moment they decided that European Union will be established between „High Contracting Parties“. Of course, for the need of this work, something else is considered to be „European identity“. What it is will be dealt with later. In the next part of this paper, to be precise. Part, where I'll try to demonstrate that sufficient economic measures are necessary, but are already in place and focus has to be on political and cultural measures.

Definitions

When talking about economic measures and policies, I have in mind those policies aiming to provision of economic stability and growth. Common Agricultural Policy or Common Market are only most obvious examples. These policies enabled contemporary European Union to become second most important economic entity in world. Here is definition clear. A little bit more complicated it is in case of political measures. Of course, from a certain point of view, every economic (as well as any other) policy is political measure, because it had to be subject of political debate and decision. But for the course of this work, such view is useless. Every result of political action initiated and/or executed by European Union institutions on the supranational level and which is not focused either on economy, citizen welfare or culture, may be considered political measure (Common Foreign and Security Policy, cooperation in judicial matters etc). As for social sphere, in this case, as was already said, I see it as a sum of measures seeking increase of welfare of citizens of member states in other than directly economic means and of cultural activities. When talking about culture, I mean the narrow approach to the notion. That which „...restricts culture to questions of art, the entertainment industries or the acquisition of learning.“ (Shore 2000: 22). From this point of view, Schengen Treaty would be social measure, because possibility of crossing borders without control is increasing citizen welfare. For the notion of European Union citizenship in the course of this work is not crucial its formal status (every citizen of any of member states now formally possess European citizenship), but is closer to second important notion, i.e. identity. European citizen is everyone who considers himself to be one. Now I'm using subjectivist approach to the notion of citizenship. Sociological concept of social construction of reality works here. If enough people behave like there is European identity characterized by common values, this identity will soon become social fact on its own.¹ As opposed to modern national citizenship or identity, I don't see this new European identity as exclusive and I don't think it is just „one or another“ choice. There is no reason why people can't perceive themselves as Europeans and be patriotic (in nationalist sense) in the same time just as they are now both citizens and local patriots.

¹ More to the topic of Social construction of reality e.g. Berger & Luckmann (1966)

History of the “European Identity”

Aside from the first interwar attempts to achieve federal “United States of Europe” and their short comeback after the end of the Second World War Europe got on the route of step-by-step sectoral integration (later theoretically captured in neofunctionalist theory). Following nearly forty years were dedicated to the phased creating of a common market and integration of economic policies (e.g Common agricultural policy). That's why this period is perceived as a phase of evolution, where there was no need or reason why to deal with questions like the Citizenship or the Identity. From a different point of view this might seem rather odd. Indeed it is truth that ambitions of the European Communities (which emerged in 1967 by merging of directorial bodies of ECSC, EURATOM and EEC) didn't go very far beyond the vision of the Common Market. On the other side one may say that for example foodstuff prices artificially kept high compared to the world markets (one of the results of the Common Agricultural Policy) will be enough to raise the questions who, why and in particular with what mandate is imposing such measures. Nevertheless it seems to be rightful to say that the economic success of the Communities, when combined with a “low profile” they kept towards the citizens, were enough to justify these measures. Mainly economical questions though they often had serious consequences for the citizens (like the fore mentioned Common Agricultural Policy or removing of tariffs on inter-community trade) were simply not that important for the citizens of the Member countries as from the point of view of the Institutions far less important matters, but with a high symbolic value (as clearly shows the later debate concerning EU symbols, controversies erupted after the popularization of the last reform attempt as the “EU Constitution” or recent Schengen area enlargement). Situation remained unchanged until the Eighties (as the beginning may be precisely considered the January of 1985, when the first Commission chaired by Jacques Delors entered the office) when there appeared the first initiatives marking the profound qualitative changes in the character of the European Integration. This process started by adoption of the Single European Act (1986) and ended with the emergence of the EU after the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty in 1993. At this moment many politicians already seen clearly the need for the democratic legitimization of these changes. First and logical target of most of “legitimacy seekers” was of course the European Parliament as the only EC/EU body elected directly by the citizens (since 1979). Vital problem of the European Parliament (apart from the fact that it lacks the legislative initiative which is usually considered one of the basic parliament powers) when it comes to the legitimacy is the character of the elections. From the first elections in 1979 the average voter attendance decreased from approx. 63 per cent to

approx. 46 per cent, while in some areas can be a lot lower. Already bad situation is only worsened by often disputable choosing of the candidates and the motives of the voters. All this results in this elections often being called (and perceived) as the second class elections which of course deals a severe blow to the legitimacy of the European Parliament or even the EU as a whole. Solution to this especially in the eyes of the European Technocrats from the Commission should become an emergence of a conscious European Citizen. At this moment the question of European Identity became truly important for the first time. It is through the prism of these efforts how the creating of the EC/EU Flag and Anthem should be understood as well as so called European Citizenship (“so called” definitely has to be used here as this Citizenship is basically nothing more then couple of rather particular rights with a spectacular name), projects like the Eurovision, support of the political parties on the European level etc. Same approach is still being applied by the European Union. Even such extremely economical issue like the Common Currency may be easily explained like an effort not only to boost up trade, but also back up the feelings of belonging among the Citizens of the EU.

EU Efforts

It is too soon to evaluate the measures aiming to support the emergence of the very own European political Demos. However it is possible to consider whether the eventual steps have any chance of success at all. Conviction that the nations are something natural, which was here from “the very beginning” and that it's only Nation (whatever that word means) which can become the base for the emerging of the State, is today advocated only by radical nationalists. The others (and especially in the academic sphere) are on a certain level supporting the idea that Nation or even better National Identity – Nationhood if we are to use the terms coined by Rogers Brubaker (2003) and aiming to the unmasking of the intellectual schemes – is a social construct, a sort of institutionalized form. Although Brubaker talks only about the issue of the “Nation” and the National Identity, there is no reason why his Ideas should not be valid even in different segment of the collective identities, that is “Supranational Identity” mainly the European one.² Another relevant question is whether this national (or supranational) identity has to be created by the social mechanism which remains latent, hidden to its contributors. Eisenstadt (2003: 363) thinks so. One could get an impression that the History teach otherwise. As an example may be used the National

² Here should be emphasized that this is not the attempt to put the European Identity on the same level where the European Nation States are. I am convinced that the EU is a sui generis body, which can't be tenably put into any of the categories established by the Political Science. It definitely is not a State, Confederacy or Federal state, but it is not a classic International Organization either. Any submission to the category of analysis is thus only imperfect and temporary.

Rebirth period in Europe and the emergence of many of the modern Political Nations (Italian, German or Czech to name a few). However it is necessary to say that all these cases were more or less the projects of the local intellectual or political elites, which used the suitable social conditions. Therefore it's possible to say that the mechanisms of a change remained to a certain extent hidden from a large portion of society.³ But it is necessary to emphasize “to a certain extent”. It seems so that the same line of reasoning adopted the elites of today's European Union. Question remains, whether it is possible to repeat such a process under the current conditions. And if so, whether the EU chooses the right methods.

When it comes to the conditions: they are of course different from the situation in nineteenth Century Europe. If nothing else, the level of a social integration between the member states of The European Union is far lower than in any example from the past. It is possible to say that the EU approaches to the issue of Collective Identity creation from the opposite direction. On the grounds of the political integration it is trying to build the social integration. For this integration it doesn't use the “typical” pillars like the Common Language (which is of course a lot more than a means of communication, in this context is its function of a mediator of a symbolic world even more important than usually), common historic experience or even myths.⁴ European Union acts as a distinctive body whose value lies in “Unity in Diversity”, accent on the values of Democracy, upholding of the Human Rights, Individualism, Free Market or Environmental Awareness. Although this a determination of a sort, it altogether lacks for the Europe in preceding centuries so typical practice of the negative determination towards both the inner and outer enemies, which became a forming element of the European Identity in the Fourteenth century and climaxed in defeat of the fascist ideologies in the first half of the Twentieth century (Borneman, Fowler 1997: 491). Of course there can be no mentioning about the connivance of such an extreme level of the negative determination, which looks for the scapegoat and dehumanizes “The Others”. It is a fact however that the negative determination of Self in the mirror of “The Others” who are different is an ordinary mechanism of an Identity construction. First and foremost by use of this mechanism the National Identities are constructed. On the other side, the efforts for the European Identity are based on the positive determination. That is truth mainly on a rhetorical level, where the European Union Officials thoroughly avoid any signs of defining the Europe as “non-America, Orient, Africa,...”. In

³ Of course it is possible to consider to what extent the elites were the real initiating Element of the entire process and whether they were not more of a “tool” of the social processes, which simply set such conditions where no other scenario was truly possible. However this thought is a little too deterministic and more importantly, it's not crucial for the discussed topic.

⁴ At least in the case of not emphasizing of the common history this is definitely a mistake. Unprecedented rapprochement of the former sworn enemies, lasting Peace and constructive Cooperation leading the EU to the position of the Economic Superpower are definitely something every European Citizen can be rightfully proud of.

the context of the historical experience are such efforts perfectly understandable. It would be hard to resist them with weight of the millions of victims caused by the high-pitched nationalism on the backs. Of course on the level of the practical politics signs of negative determination are unavoidable even now. Although it doesn't have to be demonstrated openly, in politics there are always different opinions. This is true especially on the field of the international (interregional, intercontinental) politics. It can be even speculated that the EU citizens understand the European Identity from this point of view. As an opposition against the outer pressures. Such an approach would explain a lot when it comes to their behaviour in the elections etc.

My personal experience (which of course has no claims on representativity) shows that most of people who prefer the European Identity over ethnical, regional or national, does so as an effort to dissociate with the thoughts or deeds of other wielders of that identity, who on the top of it often demonstrate it openly. Although it needn't be obvious, identity of those people is also determined negatively.

As was already mentioned, the European Union (or its elites) claims as their most acknowledged values the Individualism, accent on the Free Market and upholding of the Human Rights as well as other "postmodern" values. With the fore mentioned thought of positive and negative determination in mind (one typical for the European Identity and the other for the National Identities), another question comes to mind: to what extent all these values are really shared by the Citizens (though they might not be still considered something that connects the inhabitants across the national borders) and whether they are not more of a wishful thinking of the elites. If that isn't so (and the current political development indeed indicates that these notions are more and more important for the European Citizens), there is still need to legitimize this set of values as specifically European. Most logical answer to this question is the European Public Space. Jürgen Habermas (according to Nikodem 2006) says that the national public can emerge only when there are national Media, Topics and the Audience. There is no reason why the same should not be true in the the case of the European Union. It is possible to say then that some of the EU measures are going the right direction. Efforts to create really "European" Media may once fructify as emerging Communication Community which would comprise the Citizens of all the Member States. Biggest problem of this plan at the moment aren't complications in physical creating of the European Medias, but a certain perceived "Dullness" of the News concerning the European Union, which is due to the absence of the visible conflict in the everyday agenda and also due to the certain distance of the topics and their complexity. But these are indeed the problems which were supposed to be solved by the installation of the Common Medias and initiation of the emergence of the European Communication Community. Political (or "technical") dealing with these problems, for example

with public Commissioners elections or right of legislative initiative for the European Parliament solves nothing on its own, because the problem of the EU is not so much the political Democratic Deficit, as the Social. When applied to this situation, well known Thomas Theorem clearly states that it is not enough to change the political system, crucial is the stance of the Citizens towards this system, Understanding of it and Participation in it.

What was sketched right now might look like a vicious circle. And it would be so if there would be the focus only on the European Media and their influence. But these Medias are only one segment of what could be called the Symbolic Politics which comprise of many things, of which only few were already mentioned here. However it's crucial to realize that non of these measures may result in immediate changes, entire process is a run on the very long track.

Connection to the Political Innovation

Right now I've been focusing on the Identity and its problems, but now it's time to get back to the issue of the political innovation. One of the goals of the previous parts of this paper was to show how closely interconnected the innovation and the question of identity are. Issue of the so called "EU Constitution" was mentioned several times, but never to the details. There are more reasons why this document was eventually not adopted, but I'm convinced that the most important of them are very closely connected to the Identity. First of them is the "fear of the Superstate". During the process of approving questions like: "Why should we let someone in Brussels to interfere into our politics and dictate us policies we don't find beneficial for us?" were to be hear in the Media, on the Street and regrettably in the Parliaments as well on the daily basis. I'm convinced that nearly all those opinions had their roots either in the misunderstanding or a sheer ignorance of the contents and goals of the Treaty (at least those which were not a plain populism). The second "big reason" why the Treaty establishing the Constitution for Europe was not adopted was that the voters especially in the French Referendum sought a way to express their fear of the "Invasion" of the cheap workforce from the Central and Eastern European Countries. Or more generally to protest against the 2004 Enlargement. Especially the second reason may be explained in the dimensions of the lack of support for the idea of the European integration and for the project of the EU itself, both of them then as a result of lack of understanding the EU. Idea is that efforts to understand come from subjective importance of the project and this feeling comes hand-in-hand with identification.

When talking about Identity and Innovation, there is one more very important term very closely connected to this discussion and that is Legitimacy. I mentioned it before but I didn't really explained the nature of its connection. For the purpose of following argument, it can be said that

Legitimacy (meant is only the legitimacy of the Political Measures like the EU Directives) has two basic dimensions: First one is the “objective” legitimacy acquired in the elections, which can be roughly defined as the persuasive argument that the institutions issuing the directives are democratically elected by the people they are supposed to represent. But I dare to say that more important is the second dimension, subjective feelings that the institutions act in the best interest of the people. Such a feelings cannot be created entirely by the political means. Once again key to this is a work with the symbols, the Symbolic Politics.

Already mentioned Thomas Theorem is very useful to explain another important issue and that is why I consider the Identity to be a condition for the Innovation and not the other way around. It teaches us that for the emergence of a certain social fact (like the European Identity) are not as important the structural conditions or the “objective reality” as the practical behaviour of the people, based on their feelings and assumptions about the topic. To say it short and clear, when people act like there is some quality which may be called the European Identity, this quality will become real in consequences of their actions. What people think about the situation is more important than what the situation is. Therefore an action or a political innovation may help by creating the conditions, but itself it cannot create the sense of identity in the minds of the ordinary citizens. Of course, in the real world the relationship between the Identity and Innovation is at least partly dialectical but this is the main reason why I think that the Identity still forms the basics.

Conclusion

Aim of this paper was to explore the connection between the emergence of a European Identity and the Political Innovation in the sphere of the European Union and thus try not only think about the European Identity itself but also about its “consequences”. It seems so that the basic assumptions of the European Elites on the role of European Identity in the future of the EU are right. From this stem their efforts to promote the “European Idea” some of which also should be considered heading the right way (Euro, Schengen etc.). But it seems to me that the ability of the people to get used to things is constantly underestimated and what today's European Union really lacks are systematic and continuous Symbolic Politics. Efforts to raise the “EU awareness” in the form of education are definitely laudable, but more immediate, emotional element is missing.

An interesting parallel may be draw between the topic of the European Identity and the “European Dream” Jeremy Rifkin (2004) wrote about. Though often compared and set into the opposition to other collective (mainly the national of course) identities, the European Identity can't be and is not a “counter-identity”, it is not supposed to be exclusive and/or excluding, just as the

European Dream. European Dream in this sense is only one small dimension of the that dream, but I'm convinced it's the crucial one.

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