

***Course: Inclusion and Exclusion in Contemporary European Societies
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***Multiculturalism as pre-requisite for establishing
a new and necessary European identity***

Paper Outline

The aim of the paper is to shed some light on the problem of the emerging European identity, in the context of multicultural, enlarged European Union.

The paper argues for EU cultural policies that enhance plural, multiple, and dynamic identities by still fostering – in the EU context and beyond – a single European identity, based on common roots and expressed in the cultural heritage of Europe.

Finally, a parallel with the Western Balkans area and the former Yugoslavia as a multicultural society will be made.

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1. Multiculturalism and Cultural Identity in the Enlarged Europe

1.1 Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism is usually defined as cultural and ethnic diversity within a particular society or simply co-existence and interpellation of several different cultures in a community. In socio-political context of today it is mostly referred to as a cultural model opposed to unitary and conservative model.

The inclusive aspect of culture reflected in combination of different elements and influences illustrates that a culture itself is necessarily an open, inclusive and varied structure, rather than a hermetic one. This is particularly visible in the national cultures in Europe, each of which bore influences of different cultural traditions through history.

The problem of multiculturalism is a holistic one because it tangles different issues from social, political, but mostly cultural, civilization related sphere.

In the EU context today it is strongly linked to the notion and the complex problem of European cultural identity, seen in the newly created environment, marked by new circumstances in social and political sphere.

1.2 Enlarged Europe and Redefining European Cultural Identity

The problem of re-defining the European cultural identity is particularly topical in the European Union as a true multicultural society. And not only so – it is a multicultural society passing through a particular moment in its history.

The 2004 enlargement has brought the need to ponder not only upon its political, but also upon its cultural unity as a crucial factor of cohesion and the most integral part of European collective unity.

Since the early days, European unification has mostly been economic, but the new circumstances reveal even more that this is insufficient for the development of a European identity.

The 2004 enlargement has shifted the borders of the Union to the East and imposed the need of reshaping the cultural identity of the EU, but also restructuring national identities as well, in the key of further inclusion of cultural differences between ethnic groups in European societies.

Since the beginning of the last decade, enlargement was one of the main goals of the European Union's relations with the rest of Europe and it has shaped in many ways the Union's intention to expand its borders and its political and cultural influence to the whole continent.

Observed from the 'old' EU, the 2004 enlargement was a foreign policy tool and as such it determined the way that the Union will emerge in future. The process of enlargement is essential not only for the process of European political and economic integration, but also cultural integration.

Since the earliest days of the Union, it was clear that it would not remain a closed structure with a fixed number of members. Open membership and changing borders have proved to be two features that have confirmed the experimental nature of the European Union.

The EU Treaties themselves illustrate the open and inclusive nature of the European Union. They are a very rare example that an enlargement clause is incorporated in a text of constitutional character. In the Treaty of European Union (Treaty of

Maastricht) which came into force in 1993, Article 49 says that *any European State which respects the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the rule of law may apply to become a member of the Union*¹. The reason for this rather vague definition of a 'European state' in the Treaties seems to be quite future oriented in order to leave as much open space possible for future enlargements.

2. Identity – Notion and Process

The complexity of the term 'identity' requires pondering a while on the notion itself.

Identity is our difference in comparison to others. It is a 'double-way term' since it refers both to:

1) the way we perceive ourselves and 2) the way we are perceived by the others.

Though it is an abstract category, every person has an answer when his identity is in question. Identity is a multi-level term.² There are many kinds of identification – with a person, with a professional vocation, with a football club, and finally identification as a sense of belonging to a community – ethnic group, city nation, state...

A frequent overuse of the term 'identity' in the recent period in various areas, such as marketing, needs to be mentioned. For instance, on the Belgrade billboards, stands the advertisement of the Serbian telecom – 'Your phone number is your identity'. The phrase seems to reveal lack of sense of identity, lack of self-consciousness in other, really important fields.

Identities are always multiple in their nature. A single identity is always composed of *different levels of loyalty and identification*.³

In the context of the EU today, the 'double direction' of the process of developing a common cultural identity is reflected through fostering the values which have been existing through history on one hand and on developing others or fostering the same ones as an answer to others. In this regard, through the twentieth century Europe has developed several typically European streams of artistic expressions, so that nowadays we talk about the European film industry as something diverse from American or other film industries.

There is another aspect of the notion of identity which should be mentioned. An identity is not a 'static' but rather an 'active' phenomenon – a process. Thus, the identity is always an evolutionary, social construction, and as such it bears the risks of becoming a political myth, as was the case with intentional creation of artificial national history myths in the ex Yugoslav states.

3. The particularities of European identity

3.1 European Values as the Essence of European Identity

In which aspects are the particularities of European identity reflected?

If we analyze the European identity according to general objective principles, such as geographical and strategic ones, the European identity in the context of the EU is a

¹ Consolidated version of the Treaty on EU

² Skrba

³ MJ Wintle 2005

rather utopic goal. It even does not exist in the traditional sense of the term.⁴ As an abstract, cognitive category par excellence, identity is necessarily a ‘foggy term’ and bears all the risks of being such.

It has a psychological (irrational) component since it expresses our wish to be identified in a certain context, to be observed through a certain prism. In the context of the European citizens it refers to the will of belonging to a certain community and of ‘living together’ that comes from sharing the same European values and objectives. These values derive from common civilisational and cultural development of Europe through history.

Some of these values are:

- Individual liberty
- Human dignity
- Rule of law, civic participation and social justice

Many of these categories are often comprised in the term ‘civil society’. In the countries of Eastern Europe, during their way to the EU accession, these values promoted by the European Union through NGOs and other organisations represented the idea of belonging to European cultural identity and it is now the case with the Western Balkans states still to access the Union. European values and aspirations were and are crucial in building democratic societies in the countries passing through post-communist transitional period.

3.2 Enlargement and Diversity as Main Element of European Cultural Identity

For the elements mentioned above, the European identity is even more difficult to define than the notion itself. The reason for this lies in the fact that it is very difficult to identify which characteristics are those which constitute a *differentia specifica* of Europe as a whole.

As previously mentioned, in its geographical – or even, so to speak geometrical form, Europe is not a continent, neither it is such because of its demographic structure. Ethnicity or language do not define Europeans.

The past enlargement has brought new diversities in the Union. In cultural sense, its most important outcome regarding the new identity of the EU, but also of the European continent as a whole, is that the “Eastern Europe” as a category of distinctiveness within the old continent is over.

In the countries of Eastern Europe, the process of post-communist transition, ten years after the communist collapse, has found an outlet into the EU enlargement⁶. Thus, the European integration concludes the post-communist transition and opens a new phase, where the interactions between Western and Eastern Europe take a radically different development than in the past.

In the context of European cultural identity, the past enlargement brought the challenge of incorporating in the Union countries new diversities – not only different political but also cultural backgrounds, and on individual level, citizens having different belief systems.

⁴ Skrba 2004

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Bianchini 2005

Regarding the strategic (or geostrategic) aspect of its identity, the EU enlargement to the East in 2004 opened new perspectives. The break-up of Soviet Union and the resulting end of the Cold War had caused a tremendous change of the existing geopolitical order. It also marked the end of the old models for the balance of power on the world's political scene⁷. These changes enhanced the process of European integration and prepared the ground for the future enlargements of the Union.

3.3 Steps to be Made – Multiculturalism as a Pre-Requisite for Cultural Unity

The only way of developing a European cultural identity, is to come back and to foster the original European values, as elementary characteristics of European civilization. These can be built only with the support of citizens as individuals, through a conscious understanding of risks and particularities of the crisis in an international context..

The process of the latest EU represents a great challenge for the European Union. The accession of ten new Member States has greatly enhanced the Union's weight and influence and it is a moment for the EU to regain its leading role as a player in the international context, both in political and economic field.

Another challenge that European Union is currently facing is how to maintain a Union containing national identities and to include at the same time millions of third countries nationals that live within its frontiers and bring in their different, mostly non-European cultural backgrounds.

The role of education which will lead to including, rather than excluding differences is essential. And it is the greatest outcome of Conferences such as the one organized in Dubrovnik and dedicated to the relation between inclusion and exclusion in European societies. I think that the young generation shall be the driving force to keep the national and regional traditions alive, but also to protect them from the traditions when needed and give an active contribution to fostering a common European identity.

Great European universities, where the sense of Europe and respect for diversity and multiculturalism seems to be present more than anywhere, should take the leading role in diffusing a conscience which overcomes the horizons of culture.

The Treaty of Maastricht, with its clauses related to foreign policy and reference to common European citizenship, has offered a basis for enhancing cooperation in the field of international relations which aim at further expansion of the economic monetary union, enhancing its internationally established and mutually defined profile, able to affirm itself on the world scene and to be a leading actor on the international scene.

Raising the awareness of the general public concerning multicultural policies will ensure the ground for contemporary and critical cultural and artistic expressions.

EU cultural policies should enhance plural, multiple, and dynamic identities which is the only way to foster a single European identity in the EU context, based on common roots and streams of development, such as Renaissance and Enlightenment, expressed in the cultural heritage of Europe.

In order to fulfil the gap caused by the lack of political cohesion and converging views about the future of the Union, the only remaining solution is to reinforce and to

⁷ Andreatta (1998)

extend the *acquis communautaire*, which still shows how essential and irrevocable the unity of Europe is.

Multiculturalism is a key factor leading towards eliminating the gap between national, majoritarian groups on one side and ethnic groups on the other. In this regard, the differences referring to groups distinguished by race, ethnicity, culture, class, gender, sexual orientation, physical or mental ability, age, national origin are to be considered an added value rather than a deficiency.

4. Western Balkans Region as a Multicultural Environment

To conclude, I would like to draw a parallel with the Western Balkan region and particularly the ex-Yugoslav region, from where I come from.

As the European Union, the Western Balkans is also a multicultural environment. A combination of different cultures, existence of different languages can prove to be a very successful project, as was the case with ex-Yugoslavia, which represented a 'mini-European Union'. But it can also result in a conflict, which we unfortunately witnessed in the nineties.

My view is that the first step towards entering the Union is a cultural re-unification on some levels (academic exchange and co-operation between literary editors, for a start) and fostering the multicultural model within the states and within the region. This should be followed by further involvement of the community in the public debate on the EU issues in the context of culture.

The stay in Dubrovnik and the discussion with colleagues from both EU and non-EU countries have convinced me that, nevertheless political divisions and differences, this is one cultural space, especially observed from abroad and I think that there is both need and hope for a cohesion in cultural sense.

On the other hand, expanding knowledge about the need to nourish the sense of a single European identity will have the effect of increasing the level of interest for the collaboration with European institutions and active participation in European projects.

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