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## European Cultural Identity

### I. Introduction

In 49', shortly after the Second World War, Juliette Greco, singing at that time at the night club Taboo, walked with her lover Miles Davis, the famous Jazz trumpet player, along the borders of the Seine in Paris. Paris was the best saved European capital thanks to the decision of a German general against the will of Hitler. That was not the case in Berlin and therefore it was not Marlene Dietrich walking with Yves Montand along the Brandenburger Tor. Denis de Rougemont, famous for his book on '*Amour dans L'occident*' and who created also the European association of music festivals, wrote at the same moment a demoralizing report on the destruction of Berlin and the horrible situation of women and children there.

We must remember these pictures to understand why the European Community was created. After two devastating world wars during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Europe collapsed after 2000 years as the most powerful continent of the world. Europe instead became the battlefield of the cold war between the Soviet Union and the United States of America. The center of power was transferred to Washington and Moscow. The German philosopher Sloterdijk wrote in his book '*When Europe will awake*' that we have to remember this before we criticize the European institutions. We needed them as crutches for our convalescence after Europe had broken all its bones, destroying as well

with the extermination of 6.000.000 Jewish people and Gypsies a great part of our cultural soul, as George Steiner wrote in his reflections on Europe.

Therefore it was absolutely visionary when some of our best politicians created in 1951 the European Coal and Steel Community because Europe needed a basic economic treaty to avoid another war between France and Germany. It would have been completely wrong to start in that moment with a cultural treaty, and Jean Monet is wrongly quoted in that context. The wounds and injuries on both sides were too enormous and with people dying of starvation, there was no place for cultural reflections. Nevertheless it was interesting to see how the Germans found force again rebuilding their theaters and how in Paris these world wars have inspired the existentialist movement, where Sartre learned from the German Heidegger and where the Jeunesse Dorée around Boris Vian adored Duke Ellington, which was also the start of the Americanization of Europe.

Seeing now the picture of the signature of the Rome Treaty on March 25 in 1957 appears therefore as one of the most moving and unforgettable event in Europe's history which should be printed in all historical books and on all digital networks and it means also that seeing this picture, my message today can only be a positive one. We Europeans should have the courage to say as did Martin Luther King, yes, we have a dream and the Euroscepticals who like to talk about a nightmare, should remember that a practical realization of great visions needs time. Fifty years in human history represents nothing. We have forgotten that 100 years after the declaration of the human rights in 1789, saying that all human beings should be treated equally, women in Europe still had to fight for a hundred years before they could vote for the parliament.

On the contrary, we achieved enormous goals in these last 50 years and I believe that we needed the actual crisis to oblige us to go further with the building of the European community. What is fascinating and must give hope today is that the intellectual elite in Europe became from skeptical observers, active defenders of the European Union, as did the German philosopher Jürgen Habermass the Austrian <sup>MENASSE</sup> ~~menace~~ as well as Cohn-Bendit who changed from Saulus in Paulus.

The political and economic world doesn't notice this enough and therefore it is time to use the cultural potential in all European countries to educate the population on the fact that we all belong to one great cultural community expressed in what we call the European identity, and that this identity is not an invention but very concrete.

Before going in detail on that I must address two other issues: nationalism and the fundament of all social order.

## II. Nationalism

Friedrich Schiller, the famous Sturm und Drang poet who wrote the Ode an die Freude, used by Beethoven for the finale of his ninth symphony, was among the first to create the feeling of a 'nation', as he did in the last scene of his play Wilhelm Tell. The people are embraced by the mountains, the sun rises and they feel as a nation. It was with the French revolution that the nation became the representation of the will of the people through a democratically chosen parliament and with the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century all features of the nation will be developed: The flag replaces the coat of arms and the national hymn starting with la Marseillaise, becomes the lyrical expression of this solidary feeling. Napoleon will use this national conscience to conquer Europe, but out of this conquest other countries will develop their national feeling. As Tolstoy describes it in his *War and Peace*, it is only with Napoleons attack on Russia that national culture arose with Dostoyevsky, Mussorgsky and others.

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century nationalism was an avant-garde movement who destroyed the privileges of a feudal aristocracy.

In Germany numerous duchies and earldoms were destroyed in favour of the creation of a German nation and the same happened in Italy. Verdi and Wagner would be their heroes. To understand the avant-garde character of the national movement one must read Georg Büchner, the German writer of Danton's death and Woyzeck, and his reports on the horrible social situation in the feudal Germany as for example in the duchy of Hesse; and knowing the fact that Ernst Richter I, king of Hannover and cousin of queen Victoria, dismissed in 1837 seven professors of the university in Gottingen, among them the brothers Grimm, because they signed a letter protesting against the

abolishment of the first constitution, we can understand the revolutionary spirit of nationalism.

Nationalism was historically one of the most important movements in European modern history; it destroyed feudalism and created the transition to our parliamentary democracies.

This positive force which united Italy, Germany, Great-Britain and later Spain, was unfortunately abused by a new European imperialistic movement, in the same way Napoleon did. The succession wars of absolute monarchs of the past became the fight of nations to dominate Europe and led to the most disastrous wars our continent has known between 1870 and 1945. The fathers of the European Union understood that a fragile balance between the different European nations couldn't do it anymore, and that the European continent needed for the future a union of the existing European nations. As a consequence we have to consider nationalism nowadays as a reactionary movement whose leaders don't want to understand that the movement of nationalism was useful for the time being, but that a changing world needs new visions. Nowadays nationalists defend as did the aristocrats at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, privileges which are in opposition with the greater common destiny of the European people. The time of L'état nation is over. To find solutions for our new situation we need new state structures and if we will not understand this the same way Greek city states didn't, a new Alexander the Great will come to teach us the better.

### III The social order

A second issue we have to talk about is how we should guaranty an equilibrium in our social order because if we talk now for about one decade of a major crisis, the reason is that our social system is completely out of order. This order is based on a fragile balance between the three systems of this order: the economic system, which regulates the production and exchange of goods, the political system which regulates the relationship between the individuals as well as between these individuals and the institutions we created for this purpose, and finally the cultural system which is the expression of the relation of human beings with nature, whose content is the result of human creativity which has its most important expressions in art and science. We also have to understand that these three systems are not independent but have permanent interferences between each other; the economic system has political and cultural aspects, culture is part also of the economic system and politics have cultural and economic goals.

The reasons for our actual disorder are evident: inside each part of the system we lost control of the most elementary rules. In the economic system the defenders of neo-liberalism pretend that only the market should dictate production and exchange. On top of that money became not only a medium but we thought we should also create money through money as we do in casinos. We know what happened with the cows which are vegetarians, that have eaten meat: it led to the mad-cow disease. Nevertheless I want to make clear that I don't belong to the part of intellectual class which condemns as a whole all aspects of neo-liberalism, I understand very well that someone can be fascinated, as was Michel Foucault in his last lesson for the college the France, by some of the ideas of Isaiah Berlin or the Viennese Friedrich Hayek.

After the disastrous experience of communist economic planning we may understand that someone prefers the idea of pluralism rather than the purpose of a common goal as it was developed since Rousseau and Kant. But if I agree that the globalization of the world economy obliges us to find more refined solutions as a so called common human goal, I don't believe that the market alone should rule the economic system. That is as much a monopolistic system as Rousseau's common goal. If the market should dictate everything in the economic system, how do we react then to the production of arms and an entertainment system, exploiting violence when we see the disaster in Newtown?

But there is more. If only the market would dictate the economic system, this market will create necessities which are maybe not necessary for a civilization. All of us could make a list of items we really don't need. It was the market who created the needs. That is to say that within the economic system the virtue of solidarity might be as important as the virtue of pluralism. Therefore I was very impressed with the interview of a great banker, Herman Wijffels who explained in *De Tijd* that in the future it might be important that we reflect on the necessity of the possession of goods. That it might be as useful to hire a car as to possess a car, and this of course needs a **cultural** discussion on possession.

The disorder in the political system became obvious with the government of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. As soon as you pretend as a politician, misunderstanding in my opinion the basics of neo-liberalism, that the less state, the better it is for a society, you reduce the importance of a politician with the consequence that the electors might think that they voted and pay for

people you don't need. Next conclusion might be that politicians are considered as money makers for services you don't need and thus have to be corrupt. On top of that the media world has exploited this idea and when only the market dictates the economic system, ethic considerations don't play a role anymore as the Murdoch press has proven very clearly. The reality is that we need our political institutions to secure the social order through a balance between economic and cultural values.

The cultural system suffers from the fact that within the economic and political systems, culture is not only considered as an appendix but also because of a permanent confusion between culture and art. Art is part, as religion or science of the cultural system, but in most cases art works are protests against the cultural landscape.

A civilization shapes itself through a cultured system and that means also that it is also in the cultural system that we have to find solutions for the disorder in the economic and political system.

#### IV European Identity

Having said all this it will be clear that we have to integrate a reflection and communication on the cultural aspect of the European civilization to find solutions for our political and economical problems in Europe. We have failed in our communication on our cultural European identity because the conscience of this identity within the European population could convince them that a political European integration is the logical historical consequence of this identity.



Out of the knowledge of this identity it will be clear that the état nation was a historical and important moment but exactly only a moment in history as was before the tribe and later the feudal system.

For reasons I don't understand, many people and even most of the politicians have enormous problems to explain what it means 'European Identity'. We hear always some vague words as 'dynamic' or 'enterprising' and this is very depressing as the content is quite clear.

## 1. Geography

- Let's start with the geography of our continent: no one has so many coasts, which explains already our sense for discovery and why Europe was the continent of colonization. When you can see from every European country the sea and the boundary-less skyline, you want to go beyond this horizon. This sense of discovering with as result the conquest of all other continents for the best and the worst is a first basic element of European Identity.

- This is also explained in the mythological tale on Europe. The virgin Europe is abducted by the god Zeus changing himself in a white bull from the coast of the Middle East, to the isle of Crete. Here again we feel the dialectic between land and sea. The tale also explains that our DNA has to do with Egypt and the great cultures between the Mediterranean and Mesopotamia. But there is more. The tale of the bull who is one of the most powerful animals, a real killer who never eats what he has killed and symbol of fertility next to the innocence of the virgin who dreams of the bull wherefore she's banished by her father tells us a lot

on European erotic feelings. In other cultures the bull is replaced by a dragon or an ape and that's a different story.

This cult of the bull continues to live in our tales on the Minotaur, found an expression in the roman cult of Mithra. This cult –important in Roman military- was oppressed by Christian civilization, but integrated by the church as the symbol of the evangelist Luke. The cult of the bull lives further in the Spanish bullfighting. Reading Ernest Hemingway, Jonathan Little or seeing Picasso's paintings on this matter explains a lot of our European identity.

-Staying with our geography, Europe is the only continent where it is rather normal to walk from one side to the other, from Bergen in Norway to Lisbon in Portugal. It's quite impossible to do the same through Dead valley, the Australian desert, the Mongolian steppes or Brazil's Amazon. That is also the reason why in European music one of the most common tempos is called 'andante' from walking, andar. It means that walking through the European continent is typical for European culture. *The voyage en Italie* through the Alps was part of European education as obvious in Nietzsche's *Drang nach dem Süden*, experienced by Goethe and Stendhal and audible in Berlioz' *Harold en Italie*. Since over a thousand years millions of pilgrims went on the road to Santiago de Compostela. The mountains in Europe are not frontiers, but places of exchange and Hannibal with his elephants would have reacted differently in front of the Himalaya or the Andes. Originally the Pyrenees were a place of commerce and encounter. They became a frontier when Iberia locked itself up. Peer Gynt walks from the Norwegian fjords to the Delta of the Nile and Lord Byron from England

to Greece. Theophile Gauthier, Mérimée and Rilke wrote the most beautiful poems about their travelling through Spain. The European music did not only create the Andante tempo, but created in a lot of marvelous pieces this fascination for walking: Schubert's Winterreise and Wanderer fantasie, or Liszt's Années de Pèlerinage.

## 2. Faust and Don Juan

Another signal for Europe's cultural identity are the stories of Faust and Don Juan. Since the Greeks and their mythologies that are still present in so many novels and in our theater, Europe only developed two new mythologies at the beginning of modern times in the 16<sup>th</sup> century: Faust and Don Juan. They were so important that they became the masterpieces of two of the greatest artists in Europe, Goethe and Mozart.

Faust created within a protestant environment in the North of Europe is the myth, which tells us about the European man who has put himself in the center of the universe as did Galilee and Descartes. He decides to explore the whole cosmos. Goethe's Faust builds a city on the sea like Venice, and if we have walked on the moon in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this was a so-called Faustian undertaking. Other cultures would never think of flying to the moon as she's considered as a goddess and not as a planet. Faust, who had made a pact with the devil to rediscover youth and become even more knowledge, loses his soul to him in the moment he says: "verweile doch, du bist so schön", "stay, don't move anymore, it is so beautiful". The reason is that the Faustian man always wants to go further; his alter ego Mephistopheles denies everything to oblige Faust to search for the next. This Faustian spirit explains everything in European history. The belief in permanent progress is a Faustian principle.

Don Juan was created in the catholic European environment of the South. The myth represents the revolt against the doctrine imposed by

Catholic Church since Augustine that sex is sinful, relating it to the original sin, as in fact the original sin was the will to know between good and bad. Don Juan is the tale about the destructive and creative force of Eros, and thus also about life and death.

3. Talking about religion, Europe is the continent of the three Abrahamic religions, which all were imported from the Middle East. Since the Celts Europe didn't invent a single religion as did so many other continents. It indicates also that Europe is a typical secular continent. Here the emperor or king was never god himself like in Egypt, Japan or China. It explains also why we have known the battle of the investitures and why the emperor had to walk to Canossa. It is true that Catholicism became since Konstantin and Clovis the official state religion but the pope had always to deal with the king.

This secular character of Europe made the great philosophical development since Plato and Aristotle possible. In other cultures the creation of the world is explained if not through religion through mythologies and philosophy is rather the development of ethic rules. In Europe philosophy became the search of what we can know and how we can know. Kant was only possible out of Europe's typical cultural identity.

4. Going specifically in the arts world, we will discover that there doesn't exist a great art movement in Europe which only belonged to one nation or country. German Romanticism came through Madame de Stael et Chateaubriand to France. The movement of Frank Masons from England through France to Germany. Baroque art as symbol of the contra reformation through the Jesuits in whole Europe and of course you will find surrealism or expressionism in all European countries.

Literature about women's emancipation in Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is a European and not a national question: Flaubert's Madame Bovary in France, Ibsens Hedda Gabler in Norway, Tolstoy's Anna Karenina in Russia.

The technique in oil painting by Jan Van Eyck was brought to Bellini in Italy, and the portray painting of the so-called Flemish primitives conquered as well all of Europe.

Pierrot was not only a figure of Italian comedia del arte but became subject of the most prestigious painting from the French Watteau to the Spanish Picasso. But there is more. The so-called typical 'national' artworks have mostly a rather European inspiration than a national.

Wagner's opera would not exist without the Nordic epics and the Celtic stories from Ireland. Most people think that the fairy tales of the brothers Grimm are typical for the German spirit, but these stories were told to the Grimm brothers by girls of Huguenot families who fled from France and were inspired by the fairy tales of Perrault and if you would think that the famous story of Wilhelm Tell and his apple is typical Swiss I have to disappoint you, it comes from a Danish tale. I could go on for

hours to explain that European identity is not something invented, but really existing once you start to look into the history of European art. Of course each country has a specific colour, but the fluctuation is European.

One last great example. Classical music is one of the greatest achievements in European art. This was only possible through the invention of notation. Other cultures –the Indian for example- have much more complex rhythmical figures and the pygmies an astonishing polyphonic system, but for 100 of years this harmonic and rhythmical system stayed the way it was. The European notation created a very fast evolution in music making with an enormous diversity from polyphony to monody, from counterpoint to the sonata form, from tonal to dodecaphonic and modal systems. This *musique savant* was not limited to one European nation, but was made by all of them. Also did the so-called national opera and this national opera was played everywhere. Verdi wrote a new opera for St-Petersburg, Wagner's Lohengrin was a hit in Venice and the Russians Mussorgsky and Tchaikovsky heroes in Paris.

I could go on for hours, but let's finish with some picturesque details: in Europe we don't give numbers to our streets, but historical names and event. The difference between an American bar and the European café is obvious. From Café Landmann in Vienna, Falstaff in Brussels, Circulo de Bellas Artes in Madrid, to Les Deux Magots in Paris, you go there for reading newspapers or talk with friends; in the American bar where the

light is dimmed you look rather for a sentimental than a rational encounter.

### Conclusion

Let's come to a conclusion. Talking about European Cultural Identity, I didn't want to give a privileged statute to this identity but communicate that this identity is a reality and not an invention of the European Parliament or Commission.

As the political integration of the European nations has to be the next step in the building of the European Community and as the national reflex makes the decisions, to be taken, obviously very difficult, there is a lot of work to do in communicating about our European cultural identity.

Young people who know the advantages of the Erasmus program, who can travel from Oslo to Lissabon without showing their passport and who can work in every European country without a specific working permit and move their belongings without making up great and long lists as I did, going to the Salzburg Festival, should be conscient that this is thanks to the European Community.

On top of that we have of course to make clear that the European integration doesn't destroy at all the local colors of the different nations or lets rather say regions. That could happen more quickly without the European Community trough the globalization of the market.

We have also to make clear that the nationalists, who defend their national privileges against the European Community, represent nations,



who also were the result of a rich variety of regions. In France there was a time where they spoke as well the langue d'oc as the langue d'oïl; the Bavarians of Munich are still offended when you mix them up with the Prussians of Berlin. But there was also a time when the young Frederic II of Hohenstaufen, born in Sicily and living in Italy and Sicily, never would have thought he was an Italian; he saw himself as member of the holy German Roman Empire.

This all means that we have to educate the new generation in the knowledge that the European Federation is the logical evolution of a state structure for the European Continent within the necessities of our world at the beginning of the 21th century but also that the many cultural differences of the European regions will have a chance to express themselves within a European Federation. In the same context we should make clear that all attempts for separatism are born out of personal political reasons rather than cultural arguments and are the expression of late feudalism in the context of our cultural and economic situation at the beginning of this century.

Mozart travelled through whole Europe – Germany, France, England, Belgium, Netherlands, Czech, Slovakia, and Italy and that for 3.800 days in his too short life. He spoke fluently German, French, Italian and studied English. He cultivated the ideals of the Franc Macons and the solidarity as well of Christian church and was an adept of the declaration of human rights. His operas are the highest expression of this art as they combined the complexity of the symphonic German language with the

beauty of the Italian belcanto and he signed his scores with his French name Amadé. He is one of the many artists who could guide us.

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