EUROPEAN IDENTITY: SOMETHING NEW ON THE HORIZON?

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1 Cf. Hedetoft, U.: National Identities and European integration »from bellow«: bringing people back. In: Journal of European Integration XVIII (1994/1), p. 28, Reif, K.: Cultural Convergence and Cultural Identity as Factors in European Identity. In Garcia, Soledad (Ed.): Europe's Fragmented Identities. London: Pinter 1993.

2 For the purposes of this paper we perceive identity from its spatial perspective. Geographers, regional and other spatial scientists describe particular parts of the territory as regions. Regions are perceived as complexes of socio-economic and natural elements, processes and their interactions. Spatial rank differentiation expresses the relations between regions at various qualitative levels. But the common denominator of above mentioned research approaches is that they describe real elements and processes that are both qualitatively and quantitatively measurable. This paper brings seemingly vague idea of territorial identities. One cannot omit that people belonging to particular region are bound to the territory by interests, emotions and feelings. In that case we can delimitate the territory according to seemingly hidden layer of (common) interests and emotional ties. This concept does not hide its finality, but comparing to the cultural identity it is much concrete as particular area has finite borders that meet (or share) the borders of another region, nation or continent. In my opinion there are the possibilities of measuring the interests, feelings and emotions related to the territory. This would be worth to make the empirical research in order to verify whether there is for instance the correlation between the number of the members of Parliament at the state level originating from certain region and the amount of investments directed to their region considering the total socio-economic weight of the region. In comparison with geographical approaches that are often artificially created we concentrate on inherent, inborn characteristics.

3 A Charter of European Identity. In: http://www.eurplace.org.

Why has there been an enlarged interest in European identity among politicians, sociologists and economists since the late 1980s? The issue of identity is becoming a particularly important one for integration in Europe, given that economic and to a large extent political integration have been achieved. Growing proportion of individuals, especially younger people, feel as »Europeans«. It is empirically well documented that Europeans have increasingly multiple territorial identities, i.e. simultaneous identities to a variety of territorial communities.[1] This paper examines the growing extent of consciousness of European territorial identity[2] and tries to uncover the underlying factors of this development.

A Brief Historical Sketch of the European Integration

Europe in its diversity witnessed a lot of conflicts in the past. Nations were divided not only by language and religion, but also by rivalry and security interests. The idea of European integration remained a mere theory. Then World War II changed Europe. The effects of the conflict converted the idea of integration into a necessity. Common needs and interests of European countries reflected political, economic and safety circumstances after the conflict.

> And the opportunity for a fundamentally new form of politics was grasped in Europe. The first step was when six countries founded the European Coal and Steel Community in which basic industries important for the conduct of war were placed under a common authority. From this beginning came the European Economic Community, and eventually the European Union, in a process which led to peace between the member states and higher standard of living than any previous generation in Europe had experienced. The division of Europe, however, remained an open sore till at last the system which had dominated the East for half a century collapsed, partly as a result of its own inner contradictions but also because it permitted neither a free economy nor individual responsibility or enterprise.[3]

The fall of Iron Curtain generated new expectations about the future of Europe.

One of the most controversial issues in the debate about the future of the European Union is the question of identity of its member states and individuals. While optimists point towards some indicators of a growing community that should complement the emerging polity, sceptics avow that a truly integrated European culture and identity is a mirage. Succinctly, the issue is enormously complicated and consequently it is exposed to many diverse standpoints.

While »external« elements, such as economic and political integration run rather well, it is generally felt that an »internal« connecting link is missing at present. If we comprehend the territorial identity as the search for the meaning of the individual/group in relation to the self and to the society from a geographical/spatial perspective, it is not surprising that the question of European identity has arisen in a new light.

Quest for the Common European Denominator

Exclusive identities have been an inseparable part of the European history. They have been rather forceful in their creation and very violent in their expression. The division of the world into mutually exclusive in-groups and out-groups based just on exclusive identities has created a vital background of nationalism. This contributed to the generally accepted all-or-nothing conceptions of identity. It was claimed that while identities in general are multiple and diverse, territorial identities consist just of one layer. In other words, if one feels German or British, he or she cannot identify themselves as Europeans at the same time.

To facilitate the conditions for the spreading of over-arching European identity seems to be a desirable supplement not only to the traditionally exclusive identities but also to the current integration processes. Not surprisingly, European administration focused on enhancing the common European identity as well as on the support of multiple territorial identities. Obviously, the stimulation of European identity does not mean to omit or even abolish the other identities.

4 Santer, J.: President of the European Commission. Keynote address to World Telecommunications Forum. Geneva 1995. In: http://www.itu.int.

5 Decision of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States of 12/19/95. In: http://europa.eu.int.

6 Commission Work Program for 1993/1994. In: http://europa.eu.int.

7 European Union Institution Libraries (1995). In: http://europa.eu.int.

Multiple territorial identities are geographically described as »nested identities«. Thus an individual can be a Londoner and English, but also a Briton and a European. This spatial rank differentiation is a lucid concept because a particular territory has finite borders that meet (or share) the borders of another region, nation or continent. Compared with the cultural identity, it is a more concrete concept and therefore less difficult to define clearly.

Official documents of the *European Union* give us an ample evidence of the need of consciousness of European culture and identity. There are several typical territorial contexts for the use of the word »identity« in the treaties that regulate the *European Union*. First, there exists the need for identity at the level of the Union. Such identity has to be perceived as clear and distinct from both inside and outside. Secondly, there is the need to respect existing national identities of the member states as well as particular regional or even urban or rural identities. In other words, the effort to strengthen various spatial ranks of identity is apparent. This conception is in compliance with already mentioned multiple territorial identities.

Jacques Santer, President of the *European Commission* stated in 1995 that a European identity is necessary for the *European Union* to avoid »fragmentation, chaos and conflict of every kind (military, social, economic and political) and to help achieve cohesion, solidarity, subsidiarity, concert and cooperation. Practically all potential sources of European identity are welcome: political and ideological beliefs, economic theory, culture, history, geography, ethics, common destiny, etc. But they all have to be effective. European identity has to crystallize.«[4]

Article F of the *Maastricht Treaty* draws the attention to the fact that the »Union shall respect the national identities of its member states«. The other texts suggest that a European identity should not force out the lower layers of the territorial identities. There should be sufficient room for particular identities in the framework of a complex spatial hierarchy.

Many legal or economic harmonisations, which could be defended as a matter of justice or equal opportunities are stressed in their consequence of strengthening the European identity. For instance, the *Decision of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States* of 12/19/95 on protection for citizens of the European Union by diplomatic and consular representations announces:

> Whereas such common protection arrangements will strengthen the identity of the Union as perceived in third countries; bearing in mind that the introduction of common protection arrangements for citizens of the Union in third countries will also strengthen the idea of European solidarity as perceived by the citizens in question [...][5]

The *European Commission* explained the presence of a policy on tourism in the *European Union Treaty* as follows: »[T]ourism contributes to promoting a European identity«. The *Commission Work Program* for 1993/1994 addresses the continuation of an »active audiovisual policy designed to promote more extensive cultural exchanges which will accentuate the European identity«.[6] It is intriguing that the idea of a European audiovisual policy to lay the foundations of European identity is deeply rooted in the Union's intentions since the *European Act* from 1986. The text on providing access to *European Union Institution Libraries* (1995) emphasizes it as »an important contribution [...] to fostering the spirit of European cohesion and identity in a way which will strengthen the sense of a common European identity amongst all the citizens of the Union«.[7]

When it comes to reflect directly on what a European identity is, the official texts are usually very cautious. The official reports on external relations or reviewing of applications of new members offer a good deal of information in this regard. This gives us indirect evidence that a gradual qualitative development of European identity is an inherent part of the European integration. European identity is still in a premature state, however it is emerging naturally.

Again, it is appropriate to cite several paragraphs from the *Charter of European Identity* that draw a more accurate picture of the European identity:

> [...] and on the basis of practical and credible policies, we hold the following items to be essential to the growth, within the framework of the European Union, of a European identity:
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> • a succinct and easily understandable constitution of the European Union setting out its federal structure. A binding catalogue of common fundamental and human rights and guaranteed social rights. The constitution would be presented to the citizens for ratification;

8 A Charter of European Identity. 41st Congress of Europa-Union Deutschland. Lübeck 1995. In: http://www.eurplace.org
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- further extension of citizenship rights;
- a common economic, social and environmental policy whose overall aim must be to provide work for all and to protect our planet against further environmental pollution;
- a common cultural and education policy to foster a sense of European identity in the European Union and its member states. Promoting unity in diversity and common values for all citizens.
- being a European is not a question of birth, but of education;
- the promotion of multi-lingualism. All Europeans should learn foreign languages as early as possible. European citizens must be able to understand each other;
- a declaration of the political goals to which the European Union aspires. Without damaging its many-sided heritage the European Union must follow common policies in world affairs.

Freedom, peace, the dignity of mankind, equality and social justice are our greatest goods. To protect and further develop these aims, Europe needs a morally acceptable political structure and policies which strengthen the sense of common purpose while establishing the credibility of the European Union and making its citizens proud to be Europeans. When that point has been reached, then a stronger, more European identity will also exist.[8]

The number of questions concerning the specification of the notion of a European identity grows dramatically. For the purposes of this paper we can perceive drawing on the European identity also as the gradual qualitative change of the behaviour of the European entity. Formerly the European states or individuals became active mostly in case of the emergent external incentives or dangers that could influence the space within the borders of their interests. Stronger European identity means also the activity that stems from the inside of the European space.

Surprising Support of Globalisation

9 Cf. Sassen, S.: The global city: New York, London, Tokyo. Princeton/NJ: Princeton UP 1991; Castells, M.: High technology and urban dynamics in the United States. In: The metropolis era, Vol. 1. Beverly Hills: Sage 1993.

10 Cf. Soros, G.: The crisis of global capitalism (Open Society Endangered). London: Little, Brown & Co. 1998.

11 The development of global processes might seem inevitable: a predictable form of technical or cultural evolution. On the other hand some authors stress that in practice this evolution has been strongly influenced by the economic and political agenda of advanced industrial countries. After all, this fact is not so surprising. However, this gives us a more complex and objective picture of reality.

In the previous paragraphs we have discussed some intended aspects of the creation of a European identity. They took place in a very unusual historical period and context. We cannot omit the idiographical character of the current process of the European unification as such. But what is intriguing even more is the relation of the creation of European identity to the process of globalisation.
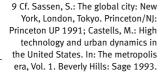
The European continent currently undergoes a double transformation: First, there is a specific process of European unification directed by the European administration. Second, Europe is strongly influenced by the spontaneous process of globalisation. Both above mentioned processes relate substantially to the European identity.

The massive impact of globalisation forces us to re-evaluate traditional approaches to everyday life. Global processes have far-reaching social, economic and cultural implications. Until now they could not be carefully investigated because there is a wide consent that the globalisation is at its very beginning. Moreover, the transformations of recent years have taken different forms in different places.

However, globalisation can generally be comprehended as a dominant trend that changes the organisation of society on the world level. From the economic perspective, it is a process of change from national to global scale of integration of production, exchange and consumption. This process was enabled mainly by the technological informational revolution that provided the basic infrastructure for the formation of global economy.[9] Politically this gained sufficient room with the end of the cold war.

The concept of »time-space compression« describes increasing movement, communication and widening of social contacts in space and the human perception of such changes. Growing spatial mobility and overcoming spatial barriers are enabled by technological progress regarding production, transport, communication and information technologies. According to Soros (1998) the globalisation is not complete, because it includes only the economy, but not the democratic decision-making.[10] Nevertheless, in the literature there is a relatively strong accord that the process is natural, unavoidable, and into a certain extent predictable and optimistic scenario assumes also its qualitative development.[11]

This process involves various players – firms, institutions and organisations, households and individuals. In principle, they can be involved in globalisation in two ways:

I.   Activities of some players can actively contribute to the formation of the process of globalisation. The typical example is when a transnational company directs its activities into a certain area; this has extensive socio-economic implications (from changes in the composition of jobs and consequent impacts on the individuals, to the connection of the territory with the global environment). Of course, the number of the processes that can more or less directly form the process of globalisation is quite limited. Another aspect has to be mentioned: globalisation processes induced by those players create global external environment in which such players operate. This group is relatively small and relatively powerful.

II.   Most players, as well as their behaviour, are influenced by globalisation.

This concept draws us on the forms of the relation between globalisation changing global settings and territorial identity.

Regarding the topic of this paper the attention should be focused on those elements of globalisation that influence the spatial dimension of identity. »Interconnectedness« is the key notion that describes the relations in the contemporary world. As already stated, places become »closer« to each other because time and space tend to compress due to the advances of technology and mass media: the most distant places are easy to access and the world seems smaller. It is impossible to overlook such symbols of modern era as intercontinental flights or the internet.

As an individual becomes more and more involved in the process of increasing »mutuality« of the world and finds him or herself submerged in a great number of various dialogues and debates, he or she is exposed to the widest variety of opinions and viewpoints, often contradictory and moreover usualy hardly reconcilable. The intensity, quantity and complexity of social, economic, cultural and other factors and relations in daily reality have a tangible influence on the human spatial identities.

In history the overall number of the already mentioned »disturbing forces« coming from the environment was quite limited (at least in comparison with contemporary dynamism). This implies that the drawing on the individual's territorial identity was not so difficult as nowadays. From the territorial perspective there existed mostly exclusive identitites. Or, in other words there was the space for nationalism with all negative consequences.

With the globalisation drive the concept of identity has undergone some significant changes in its theories. Identity can no more be fixed and this contradicts with the way identity was perceived before the debates on globalisation became so widespread. Recent discussions about the concept of identity, especially in the literature on the rise of nationalism, emphasise that in contemporary conditions most people experience multiple identities. Which of these is predominant at any moment depends on the context in which an individual is acting and thinking, but each identity exists alongside the others.

The number of above mentioned situations is growing as there is increasing intensity, quantity and complexity of social, economic and other relations in everyday reality. Subsequently, individuals find themselves within the European context in various situations more and more. Various surveys show that people increasingly feel as »Europeans«. Parallely, one can contemplate an impressive appearance of multiple territorial identities.

We can hardly find any parallel with the European integration in history. This idiographical process could be described at its beginning only by external characteristics, such as economic or political integration. An internal connecting link in the form of a rising European identity was revealed partly as a consequence of the danger of the growth of nationalistic tendencies and partly naturally, as a qualitatively higher stage of European integration. Official efforts of European administration have found a striking ally in form of globalisation. Succinctly, the European continent currently undergoes the double transformation that fosters the rise and further advancement of European identity and is a fine mixture of intention and spontaneity: European integration and globalisation. This situation creates challenge for various scholars as an amazingly small amount of research has been done on combined effects of those two phenomena.

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