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Elusive Common Dreams

The Perils and Hopes of a European Identity

Western Europe lives like an isolated family without any feelings for the post-communist states on the same continent, says the Slovene poet and essayist Ales Debeljak. He tries to formulate a defence for a broader conception of Europe and seeks a European "master narrative" that makes the creation of a real European identity possible.

It is a hot summer afternoon and the crowds of tourists are seeking shelter in the shade of the glistening streets of the Umbrian town of Assisi. I am pushing a stroller with a thirsty one-year old baby in front of me, my five-year old girl wants a sandwich and my three-year old son would like to see the dragon on the door hook of the San Francesco Hotel from close. So our family takes a turn to the hotel lobby; perspiring, in khaki shorts, with swollen bags of diapers and picture books, chattering chaotically, we make our way past the solemn modernist paintings on the walls, the bored receptionist and the temptingly luxurious armchairs. Surprisingly gentle music can be heard from the invisible loudspeakers. Although we only pass the lobby and settle on the terrace I am suddenly overwhelmed by a recurring experience. What overcomes me is that same feeling of uneasiness I have regularly experienced in the big hotels of Western Europe and the United States. It is a feeling of uneasiness and vague trepidation that the porter will mercilessly throw me out if I only take one wrong step – which will fatally reveal that I am not familiar with the code of communication and with the spontaneous self-confidence that marks people who know their rightful place in the world. While it may not be immediately obvious that I am an "Easterner", "a Slav" or someone from "the Balkans" and my physiognomy may not say much about my ethnic origin, the insecure movement across the parquet floor nevertheless exposes me. The political economy of insecurity manifests itself in the most minuscule gestures and facial expressions. In my cautious approach, it is not only the experience of socialist poverty which accompanied my student hitch-hiking trips to Western Europe, but, above all, a bitter experience of the hidden non-recognisable identity – which is not the same as being unnoticed. No, this is due to a lack of context and a network of symbolic, cultural and mental signs that could allow the identification of the region I come from. I have a feeling that I owe something to somebody and that it is not my place to be at the parlour table where I could be idly flipping through the pages of today's issue of *l'Espresso* and the *International Herald Tribune*. Instead, my place – for which I was supposed to be grateful – is at best somewhere outside, on the limits of the acceptable public space, on the terrace, not exactly on the street yet certainly not in the comfort of air-conditioned luxury. This has been reserved for the chosen ones. And I sense that this is not only my personal experience that whispers in my ear, but also the historical –and surely

problematic– collective narrative of the region and nation to which I belong.

My American wife is not hampered by these mental obstacles. In principle, all hotels the world over are the same: they serve travellers and meet their needs for food, drinks, safety, familiarity of the language and shelter, perhaps even enjoyable company. Granted, my feeling of frustrating unease may have arisen from personal psychological idiosyncrasies. I will be hard–pressed, however, to believe that this feeling is not hinged, too, on the legacy of communism as a collective environment of customs, styles of behaviour and sediments of social–moral division that had set a privileged nomenclature apart from the anonymous "working class". Moreover, I am increasingly certain that my insecurity is rooted in the no less important fact that the very name of my country, in the hotel lobby in particular and in everyday discussions of people from the street in general, still elicits incomprehensive looks at best and suspicious or even scornful ones at the worst. Slovenia and – without much exaggeration – all of East and Central Europe as a category of everyday public language in the "developed democracies" does not belong into the dictionary of recognisable topography and even less so into the acceptable and accepted form of social recommendation. Since Slovenia is not linguistically domesticated, it cannot expect to be civilised. It is still too unknown, foreign, different.

Both, other social legacy of communism and cultural heritage of "the Other Europe" – as the current post–communist world was once so aptly called by Czeslaw Milosz – still represent the uncertain disturbance or the incomprehensible murmur in the languages of respectable European society. Europe itself – as a civilisational habitus – is exactly the framework in which the countries of the eastern part of the continent project their political, cognitive and emotional aspirations. They measure the depth of their collective pain on its terms, yet they are not its self–evident and integral part. We, who come from the region of blurred spots on the maps, from the birth places of tribal consciousness and fanatic hatred, eastern backwardness and Byzantine corruption, primitive passions and gripping mythical stories – we are, above all, a disturbing figure wherever we turn up.

Maastricht before Sarajevo

No wonder. West Europe is to an overwhelming degree engaged in the art of navel–gazing. It is dealing with itself. Not long ago, Europe made it *urbi et orbi* known that it shamelessly, indeed grotesquely, prefers to give pride of place to Maastricht rather than Sarajevo. West Europe chose to place key emphasis on internal integration rather than on the largest geopolitical earthquake on the continent in the last half of the century. Even though this could be a retrospective rationalisation, I am sure that such a selection of priorities is not a coincidence or a sheer "technicality". In my opinion, this is the result of reasoning within a politically flawed and strategically limited frame. In keeping with the EU's own genesis, this perspective – which in general represents that of Western Europe at large– has a specific kind of logic. Today, this very logic has become highly problematic.

Maastricht is a metaphor for EU's placing its own integration process in front – as if this process were the goal itself and not the means of a higher form of political order. As such, it functions in accordance with that specific vision of the future which accepts only with considerable difficulties the reality of East and Central Europe, the Balkans and the Baltics; which suspiciously observes all these strange languages, new small countries ("Who'd be able to name them

all!", exclaimed Hans Magnus Enzensberger in the early 1990s), funny songs and incomprehensible customs, fanatic sparkles in the eyes and fatalistic pleasure in non-consequential discussions, atavistic impulses and general confusion. In this context, Maastricht suggests the following: the EU considers it necessary – against the backdrop of burning villages and towns in the Balkans – primarily to deal with its own administrative matters, i.e. cleaning its own house according to the pre-established and rigidly fixed order regardless of what is going on outside of the house itself. One of course tries to understand this rationally, but cannot accept it morally. This is after all akin to difficulties in accepting that business must go on as usual even if there's a sick person in the family. Family members have the ability to express emphatic solidarity and at least in principle identify with those who belong to its folds; the emphatic solidarity extends to the same clan, group, community. Anthropological theories tell us that the differentiating traits between the groups are arbitrary only in their nature though they are not arbitrary in the structural location of ties that provide the common code by which the family members recognise each other. Common sense suggests that our obligations to help others differ, depending on our relationships – relationships between family members, friends and fellow citizens.

Common sense cannot be altered over night. It may very well have been a decade since communism crumbled as a political system, yet that has been a decade of public euphoria. That euphoria is increasingly being replaced by a sceptical and more often than not outright negative attitude toward peoples, habits, expectations and mores of former communist lands. Such a decade is decidedly not a sufficiently long period to allow for a radical, more inclusive reorientation of the West European focus.

Us and them

Western Europe has increasingly been able to usurp the historical idea of Europe as a whole by way of political institutions of the Cold War and cultural mechanisms of the production of meaning in the last fifty years. A network of procedures by which the metaphysical mandate has been designed to show the truth and standards of appropriate conduct, has referred to the heritage of Enlightenment and to the professional ethics of responsibility when discussing political co-operation, economic and legal integration. However, it tacitly enhanced the exclusive nature of the European idea. This attitude could – since the time of Crusades – be seen in the persistently negative relations with Muslims as a stereotype for all that is "foreign", for all that does not belong to European civilisation, as Tomas Mastnak brilliantly demonstrated in his book *Christendom and Muslims*. I do not intend to speak here about the special case of Islam in Europe, which is certainly one of the key reasons for the passivity of Western Europe in solving the Balkan crisis and in the almost completely accomplished genocide over the Bosniacs. The Muslims are but a painfully evident metaphor for something that is – without being self-evident and without large conceptual problems – not easily integrated into the symbolic context of the European habitus that is spontaneously recognisable in Western European public. The Muslims are just a provisional, though not mistaken, example for a foreign element which is represented (to different degrees of acceptability) by post-communist lands at the end of the millennium. The predominant form of language, which allows for this exclusivity is not fixed. Regardless of different historical configurations, it derives instead from the fact that modern "Europeanism" as a *forma mentis* was shaped in the period of the Cold War.

Therefore the parameters of selections, which govern the main, if not all, spheres of life in Western Europe, are essentially still marked by the binary assumption of "us" versus "them", as David Kideckel argues in his *Us and Them: Concepts of East and West in the East European Transition*. I do not claim that we are dealing with one kind of public rhetoric only. The plurality of views take place within the supposed framework which is more or less widely accepted among both the elites and the general public. It is assimilated into the horizon of expectations and is part and parcel of interpretative models that account only with difficulty for the changing European map in the geopolitical sense as well as in the sense of cognitive mapping. This cognitive mapping does not cease to reach for well-worn and persistent stereotypes and clichés. And what is more persistent than the stereotype of East Europe as the "Other Europe", as a place of shabby characters and corrupt psychopaths or potentially dangerous beggars with a disregard for rules of decency and law-abiding conduct?

Indeed, it would not be excessively radical to argue that before it has attained any positive unified substance in economic, political, cultural and social terms, Europe as a mental space has already been articulated negatively, by the publicly and institutionally perceived need to contain the common enemy on the other side of the Iron Curtain. The homogenisation of Western Europe could only take place *per negationem*: not by definition of what it is, but on the basis of determining the boundary and by defining what it is not. The physicality of the boundary between "the free world" and "the empire of the red star" has strengthened and legitimised the fearful asymmetry of Europe by its walls, barbed wires, mine fields and trigger-happy guards. In such a context, the mental structure of European identity remained determined by the "foreign" element, by the damaged and the damaging. Moreover, even the positive substance that eventually came to be construed throughout the last fifty years in Western Europe has been put into the service of boundary-maintenance.

Philosophical thoughts, images of cultural creativity and the production of meaning did not suffice when a devastated Western Europe needed to get back on its own feet and to acquire a considerable degree of consolidation after the Second World War. The representation of "Europeanism" had to be based in the impersonal logic of self-propelling principles that have the capacity to provide at first sight a dividing line at the most tangible, direct and therefore the most accessible level. The gospel of the accumulation of capital, that is to say, the procedures of trade and business conduct in the chapters of the Marshall Plan and the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC), both formulated a few years after the end of the Second World War, played a major unifying role in Western Europe. They came to be accepted as repositories of formative, binding and functionally significant values. Having built more on the developed tradition of industrial capitalism than on the achievements of social democracy, these values have been assimilated in the daily habits of peoples. They have thus set up the general standard against which all attempts at shifting the social, moral, aesthetic and ideological boundaries are cast as deviant or subversive – as abnormal.

Western Europe as a carrier of these norms and standards has begun to translate them into a series of institutions and procedures that were to guarantee their life and the life of those people that honour and uphold them. The European Union, while by no means the only transnational body on the old continent, surely deserves to be seen as the pre-eminent project wherein the aspirations to ensure European commonality are embedded. It is through

the EU that Western European countries participate in the formidable task: in the apparently neutral and bureaucratic methods by which standard conduct and norms of conceptual and imaginative appropriation of experience are increasingly transposed into the growing body of formal regulations and procedural rules. These regulations are invested with the belief that they guarantee not only a particular way of doing business and conducting political, economic and social affairs, within and between the member states, but also provide a transcendental meaning for the norms and values they support. In this regard, the triumph of capitalism and democracy after the "velvet revolution" in 1989 was seen as the confirmation of the universal status these norms and values seemingly possess.

However, ten years after the "velvet revolution" and after the violent break up of Yugoslavia, it has become clear that non-reflected "co-ordination" between the "European" symbolic, moral, political and social values on the one hand and the "European" capitalism on the other can no longer be maintained by the line of least resistance. The Pandora's box that was opened after the collapse of the Berlin Wall cannot be closed again. While fanatic nationalism arises in the east part of the continent, and on the basis of old – although not necessarily generally recognisable – ethnic traditions many new countries are born, Western Europe continues to turn a blind eye to the return of a suppressed history, since it insists on the position that the period of the "spring of nations" has been left far behind. It seems that the painful history of the nineteenth century with the unification of the German Länder (lands), the patching-up of Italian provinces ("We have Italy, now we need Italians", exclaimed Massimo D'Azeglio notoriously) and brutal ethnic homogenisation of the French state is nowadays completely forgotten. If these past nationalist movements had been integrated into the symbolic horizon of Europe more clearly, it would not be so easy either to get the impression that nationalism of big countries is legitimate, while in small and new countries the alarm bells have to ring immediately. The nationalist history of Western Europe had to be suppressed inevitably, if the process of integration was to begin at all. The former nationalist nations thus became enthusiastic Europeans under the cover of economic prosperity and a politically strong consensus on the inevitable progress of the "common market". It was in an effort to facilitate precisely this progress, that Winston Churchill based the reconstruction of the European family of which they became members, on a prospective partnership between France and Germany in his famous 1946 speech at Zurich University.

France and Germany, which today represent the leading force of European integration and investment in a strong Europe – though for different reasons – have more or less buried their nationalist animosities by facing the demons of their own totalitarian history (Vichy, the Third Reich). Today, their visions of a future EU structure differ, since they are based on their own particular history (the republican tradition of a strong state in France and a tradition of constitutional checks that were designed to make another Holocaust impossible), which does not, however, prevent us from discerning a common denominator of their essential European efforts: they focus on the nationalism of the fat purse. I don't want to be misunderstood here. I hasten to say that there is no doubt that a historical reconciliation between these countries represents a significant achievement of political deliberation worthy of profound respect; but it would be wrong not to recognise the primacy of the economic logic as the basis of reconciliation between two traditional adversaries. It was precisely the economic integration of Western Europe that was truly essential to Jean Monnet's original idea. Political motivation in guaranteeing a lasting peace between the traditionally hostile countries is

possible only if a potential war is not only conceptually incomprehensible, but "materially impractical". The European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), the mother of today's EU, established in 1951 in Paris by the "original six" (Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands), became the first truly supra-national organisation "with teeth" in post-war Europe. The master narrative, on which the legitimacy of the post-war Europe is based, was formed in such a way as to prevent renewed catastrophic breakouts of imperial chauvinism and ethnic grandomania, the scars of which needed a long time to heal. Economic funds should be used within the project, process and progress towards unification for achieving a political goal. This political goal is a renunciation of force in the resolution of disputes among the members of the Union.

The creation of the European "community of peace" is therefore predicated on a pragmatic consideration which demands to be teleologically justified. Telos of peace as the supreme value provides an *irrefutable language of necessity* that is embedded in the foundations of the European unification. Due to the effective resistance to external globalisation, such a unification is inevitable if it is to ensure the liberalisation of the intra-European market, to establish habits of institutional co-operation and foster the reduction of mutual cultural and societal suspicion. Economic integration will provide a feeling of mutual dependency among peoples, thus preventing that the necessary conditions for the psychology of fear may occur and will thus hopefully eliminate the breeding ground for a recurrence of the catastrophe because of which Warsaw and Berlin, Budapest and Petrograd were destroyed fifty years ago. The factors which impede global trade and a constant flow of capital are to be abolished, the international conflicts are to end: this is the mantra which is not necessarily heard every day; it works, however, as an obvious assumption of each discourse expressing the intention of "Europeanism". The less you hear it, the more it actually works.

The worldly visions of the EU

The technocratic-expert language of the EU therefore does not propose a comprehensive, albeit utopian vision that might give people a direction and meaning beyond the mundane. It derives from the conviction that all visions are corrupted, therefore conditions for free trade have to be ensured, and the rest will follow. In this case (and this case alone), Europe has done well as an amalgamation of irreconcilable differences. Recall Pascal's dictum that what is most important for the rise of belief is the exterior form, i.e. the form of prayer which has to be repeated ritually from day to day, and then the religious sentiment will occur automatically. This dictum, *mutatis mutandis*, was linked in the workings of the EU expert language to the today's perverted Cartesianism: "I shop, therefore I am". At a time when one ostensibly revolutionary idea after another bit the dust, producing immense suffering in its wake, many experts continue to recite the mantra of the "invisible hand of the market". At a time when vast inequities in wealth and opportunity, the relentless degradation of the environment, and the proliferation of outlets for a satisfaction of consumerist pleasures that all but displaced a sense of responsible civic citizenship, great numbers of self-styled political realists continue to entertain the exclusionist illusions of Western Europe and the EU as the one and only site of relevance.

Instead of radically reconsidering the changed cultural, moral, political and economic terrain of the continent after the tumultuous collapse of communist *ancien regime*, the EU engine – alas – continued rambling along the tracks that

were laid out long before the possibilities of a reality beyond a divided Europe could be conceived. Technologically advanced, economically dynamic and fastly integrating within its own half of the continent, the EU miserably failed to recognise the historic opportunity. "We fiddled when Sarajevo burned", Timothy Garton Ash pointedly laments in his book *History of the Present*. That "we" is, of course, Western Europe. What was that missed opportunity? Above all, it was the opportunity for the EU to liberate itself from the heritage of the Cold War. Instead, it continued the polarisation by other means: instead of seeing the enemy, the EU perceived the countries that had got rid of the communist straight-jacket as poor relatives with incomprehensibly great ambitions and a childish wish of imitation. To the extent that the Cold War was fought on the ground of competing ideological claims and belief-systems, that is, in thinly veiled metaphysical terms, the EU has remained a willing prisoner of its own received wisdom. In this respect, it could do nothing but to see itself as the location for a specific civilisation that is the ultimate horizon of universal aspirations: a civilisation of superior values and ultimate guarantee of their future.

For the political elites of the post-communist countries, crowding in the waiting room of this contradictory club, this very understanding of the EU as representing superior standards, norms and values in all fields of life has undoubtedly possessed a great power of mobilisation. However, it was not a question of selective rational deliberation but a comprehensive idea that presents the EU as a promise of happiness and alleviation of all tensions – like Arcadia from which peoples in the east were expelled when communism began; after 1989 they would simply return to their "natural" habitat. It is thus no coincidence that this "return to Europe" represented one of the very few clearly identifiable calls in the Central and Eastern Europe of the nineties. This slogan was sincerely felt as genuine in different public circles and it enjoyed wide support not only between the post-communist elites, who (regardless of their left or right provenance), however, quickly found out that symbolism doesn't get you very far. In the countries in which communism taught only absolute dichotomies, "Europe" simply meant the embodiment of beauty, truth and justice. "Europe" in the public discourse of Eastern and Central Europe was easily raised onto the pedestal of a metaphysical idea – beyond any doubt.

Thus, Europe is a privilege. However, no privilege can survive its practical universalisation. From this specific point of view it is not surprising – though it is unacceptable for me – that the contemporary debates about which privilege we really are talking about, in fact omit a traditionally overlooked part of Europe. The entire post-communist world is present in the debates only through their absence. Let me put it more clearly: the post-communist world does not actively participate in the debates, i.e. it is divorced from the possibility of substantially influencing the outcome of negotiations on the emerging European political, cultural and economic identity in the twenty-first century. Regardless of the internal differences in the achieved forms of democratic order and market efficiency, the regime of human rights and established institutions of the rule of law which is demonstrated today by aspirant countries, it is safe to say that the smallest common denominator between them is a consent about the reduction of complex processes of integration. This is the reduction to the instrumental-pragmatic dimension. The adoption of the huge corpus of the "acquis communautaire" and its integration into individual national legislation in the post-communist countries is generally understood as a formal and technical obligation and less as a central political mechanism of rearranging the fundamental relations not only between the state and civil society, but also between the state and the existing

cultural, ethnic and historical identifications.

In this light, we have to consider the possibilities for the construction of a common template for an inclusive European identity that will have a wide public appeal. Here, too, West European preconceived notions and excessive reliance on integrating effects of "economics" alone undermine more than invite a construction of a viable and shared master narrative. Moreover, the hegemony of the economic nature of the EU continues exactly to the extent to which the comprehensive and rationally organised attempts for the EU to formulate a "common mental framework" are marked by failure. Joint projects such as, for example, the cultural capitals of Europe that foster mutual understanding between European nations, Erasmus and Tempus scholarships designed to encourage the circulation of scientific research, international human rights workshops, and support for building of the democratic mind in the public at large – all these and many other applicable and welcome forms of European co-operation will hang in the vacuum of particularist engagement, if they are not going to be anchored in the common grand narrative. What do I mean by that? I have in mind a substantial and imaginative framework of general identification, that material for "common dreams" which could give all the citizens of Europe a certain minimum of existential meaning and emotional density by which we recognise the adherence and commitment to something which transcends us as individual persons with particular identities. Let us make no bones about it: I do admit that such construction is utopian. It is hinged on the search for balance between the ethnic or cultural tradition on the one hand and on the loyalty to supra-national, over-arching cultural habitus on the other. Yet I can't bring myself to believing that "a reciprocity of horizontal transactions" – as Karl Deutsch described integration that gives each member equal access and a say in the affairs of the whole – can be established without mutual acceptance of a common, publicly shared sphere within which the reciprocity can be conducted.

However, my own experience and consideration of the genesis of national identifications as the strongest modern form of collective allegiance speak about the fact that "Europeanism" cannot be an effective unifying idea unless it wilfully and systematically reaches into the heritage of all European nations. As such, "Europeanism" would have to meet several demanding standards such as inter-generation continuity, perpetuated by a common cultural amalgamation of distinct ethnic traditions, reinforced by a shared memory and the expectation of a common future, as Dominique Moisi suggested in her essay "Dreaming of Europe". In other words, "Europeanism" would have to provide a symbolic order wherein a centripetal force might have the capacity to diminish – though by no means abolish – centrifugal forces of primary identifications one feels as a Pole, German, Catalan, Croatian, Scott or Italian. The emotional charge in these building blocks of "Europeanism" in *statu nascendi*, is here of course undeniable. Varieties of totalitarian nationalist abuse, to which the mobilising power of collective emotional ties in nineteenth century West Europe and in twentieth century East and Central Europe have often been subjected, need not disqualify them from equation. In fact, the dominant political currents in the European "age of extremes" reveal copious evidence in support of the claim that primary national identifications based on shared self-perception of ethnic, cultural and linguistic heritage, have certainly become winners in the competition for popular allegiance, reducing to mere options those identifications that are based on social class or lofty ideals of abstract cosmopolitanism.

Low priority identity

"Europeanism" is thus nothing but an "invented tradition" (Eric Hobsbawn) which contains weak hopes that its far-reaching and inclusive agenda might appeal to a majority of individuals and peoples in Europe. So far, alas, precious few efforts have been made to construct such common, master narrative. In part because Europe lacks a common natural language and because it abounds in different national, ethnic and cultural traditions, "Europeanism" does not figure very highly on anyone's list of priorities. Moreover, it would not be an exaggeration to claim that systemic and institutional integration of the European continent increasingly parts ways with cultural integration. It is thus with an understandable sense of regret that I state the obvious: to date the EU has not succeeded in building a satisfactory series of images, values and ideals which do not concern only our immediate existence and its difficulties and joys. "Europeanism" as an orderly constellation of aspirations, values, images, attitudes, convictions and concepts that, when successfully welded together, provides sources of individual inspiration and grants meaning to collective behaviour – such a "Europeanism" is not yet on the horizon. Yet, I am convinced that it needs to be contemplated and consequently imagined together lest we, rich West Europeans and poor Central and East Europeans alike, find ourselves in an undesirable situation. We will share the institutions and agencies for unharnessed financial and labour transactions but our respective cultural spheres will have remained condemned to a life of mutual tolerance, which is to say, mutually encouraged passivity and lack of active interest in each other's immediate experience, as Will Kymlicka suggests in his book *Multicultural Citizenship*. Without a broad social consensus on legitimate and thus publicly generally accepted presence of a grand narrative, in which the Europeans recognise themselves exactly as Europeans and not exclusively as Poles, Germans, Lithuanians or Croatians, the experiments according to its constructions have to resort to abstract postulates. Therefore it is not unusual in this context that the "common mental framework", in which the rich experience of the European cultural diversity would be symbolically integrated and re-modelled, has greater difficulties as regards its form and substance than the "common market". John Stuart Mill in his *Considerations on Representative Government* states this need in a classical formulation: "Among a people without fellow feelings, especially if they read and speak different languages, the united public opinion necessary to the working of representative government cannot exist".

Supra-national identifications presuppose the recognition of the necessity of multiple loyalties. Insofar as diversity of cultures has traditionally been a key element of Europe's greatness, this very diversity should be reinforced and celebrated. Forging new European identity as a complex and hybrid "invented tradition" calls for recognition of ineluctably multiple identities of which "Europeanism" may possibly be designed. There is of course an element of wishful thinking here: multi-layered identities should allow for simultaneous celebration of local, national and continental elements. It should not be impossible to be at the same time a Catalan, Spanish and European. Fundamental allegiances need not be exclusionist allegiances.

Alas, the current strategies of ongoing negotiation on the shape and character of "Europeanism" are to a large degree guided by a profound distrust of particular and national identifications. This distrust may rationally be understandable, but it is epistemologically unacceptable in the globalising world in which "Europeanism" is but a particular identity itself. That is why it is impossible to fashion any kind of common ground of shared European identity if one is forced to eschew the fecund local, particular markers. If one shies away from the troublesome dialectics of particular and general, the only

sustained answer will have necessarily remained abstract and ultimately non-committal. If one wilfully avoids engaging the relevance of cultural habits and values of different nationalities of Europe, one's "Europeanism" will end up looking hollow, simulated and non-substantive. Neither the appeal of the European Commission nor the universal civic and ethnically blind nature of Europe's supra-national institutions possesses the power to inspire citizens since they are too hollow to mobilise socially and too immaterial to spark spontaneous affection.

A land with no history, no destiny

When I tried to calm my small children on the terrace of the San Francis Hotel, I vaguely deliberated on the topic, as much is one able to do so at all on a hot August afternoon. If my deliberations were disjointed and fragmented, the moment of truth was nonetheless near. As the dignified and reserved waiter brought the check, the "Europeanism" showed itself in its full, miserable and abstract nature. When I tried to pay with a bunch of new, hardly used Euro-bills, unfairly testing the concept of a common monetary unit before its official introduction on January 1, 2002, the waiter turned them down politely but firmly, like he undoubtedly learned to turn down suspicious cheques and bogus credit cards. More valuable than my annoyance was the realisation that there is really something virtual and simulated to Euro bills. Euro bills are – if we look at them from close – completely unidentifiable. Brutally said: they are like "Europeanism" from above.

What visually distinguishes the five-Euro note is a picture of a vaguely ancient aqueduct that could have been erected anywhere in the Roman Empire. The ten-Euro bill indeed proudly shows a Roman portal and a bridge and 200-Euro bill, which I didn't even offer to the waiter, bears only a less-than-clear image of a glass door and some kind of a viaduct. Unlike national currencies, Euro is too timid to show a face and too reticent to suggest a biography, to give the pride of a place to a story. Not a single human being appears on these crisp banknotes. They are as incapable of inspiring recognition of *de te fabula narratur* as they are ideas to which we cannot, or only with a strenuous effort of historical scholarship, attribute tangible, familiar, sensual quality. In vain one searches the faces of these notes for portraits of Erasmus, Shakespeare, Michelangelo, Mickiewicz, Velasquez, Newton, Goethe, Andris. The ancient pillars and columns suggest ruined empires, turned into nostalgia for connection and community that disappeared in sands of irrecoverable past. It is irrecoverable because it has no foundations and no recognisable landscapes either. This imagery visually represents a no-man's land without historical memory. Money is a kind of collective ID card that tells people they belong to a nation's imaginary community. What can therefore be sorrowfully inferred from these banknotes is this: post-Maastricht Europe is a land that has no founding event, no destiny, no battle of independence – and, in fact, no independence if one considers the reluctant American security guarantees for the European experiment.

From this point of view it is therefore not unusual if I believe that the weakest point of Europe is that it cannot provide enough transnational ideas which would function integratively and at the same time would not rely solely on the economic laws of the free market, financial transactions, etc. This failure bothers me in regard to more than just the fragmentary cultural conditions of "Europeanism". I have in mind more sinister effects. In such a vacuum of integrative work of the common imagination many sprouts of political populism flourish, since they are adept at using the simple and

easy-to-understand metaphors of "full boat" and "fortress Europe" as for example Le Pen in France and Haider in Austria have done. These metaphors have one task in particular: to disguise economic interests with ethnic slogans and cover globalisation effects of the distribution of wealth and the erosion of the important European tradition, condensed in the mechanisms of a welfare state, with rhetorical appeals to exclusive concern for one's own ethnic community. Since the political elite cannot deal in a critical manner with transnational corporations, upon which the environment of their survival is being increasingly dependant, looking for a scapegoat in foreigners, emigrants, and masses from the east (to say nothing of the third world) is the simplest way of solving the problem. The enlightened part of the public still recognises the outbursts of "smiling fascism" as an aberration and as an unacceptable way of political behaviour. The key issue, however, lies elsewhere. It lies in the fact that forms of chauvinistic populism are indeed not reducible to the level of deviation from the norm, but are a constituent part of integration which exclusively takes care of the freedom of the market which, in turn, ushers in a corporate homogenisation of everyday life.

In this context it is even more painfully noticeable that the awareness of the need for a comprehensive, inclusive and pluralistic grand narrative is only very vaguely articulated. This vagueness is, of course, intimately linked to the willed, rational and deliberative construction of such grand European narrative. I have no illusions whatsoever about the "natural", "everlasting" and "stable" nature of founding narratives which are always a temporary result of the ongoing negotiations on the question of constitutive elements and their constellation. It is essential, however, that we reach a consensus on the fact that the construction of Europeanism has to be based on the entire field of cultural and ethnic traditions.

A myth falling apart

The Third Balkan War exploded the myth of universal European idea, however nascent it may have been. As the misperceptions and consequent mismanagement of the admittedly difficult developments in the Balkans demonstrated, the feet of European unity are made of clay. It is the hollow idols rather than the universal ideals of Europeans that are worshipped according to their need and selection and with regard to circumstances and potential profit. The wider population in the member states themselves generally did not accept these ideals as universal. The victims of ethnic grandomania, in particular Bosnian Muslims, who looked up to the European ideals of tolerance and coexistence insisting on "Never again!", were made brutally aware of the essential relativity of "European" values.

The real priority of the EU lies elsewhere, primarily in protecting the developed western part of Europe, and deepening its integration, while concomitantly guarding against the destabilising effects of geopolitical changes in the eastern part of the continent in general and in the Balkans in particular. "Never again!" as a guarantee against the oblivion of a catastrophic tectonic change seems – in an anguished migration over the past half century – to have come to be limited to selected parts of the continent, to Western Europe alone. The mobilising power of moral consideration was thus severely crippled. It gave way to a haphazard strategy that turns "throwing money at the problem" into its core organising principle.

From this viewpoint it ceases to be surprising that in the post-communist countries waiting to enter the club of the selected as well as in the EU member

states themselves, any form of doubt in the self-evident economic revelation and historical necessity of the EU is proclaimed as a dangerous step in the wrong direction. Eurosceptic attitudes in public language at the beginning of twenty-first century are not popular anywhere. How could it be? It faces the non-reflective, but well-promoted form of conviction based on the presumption that each criticism of the specific integration process of the EU comes from nationalistic, thus stuffy provincial lips and "actually" automatically reveals, too, criticism of the European way of thinking, rational debate and the styles of searching for common good.

The growing accumulation of ideas that feed on non-articulated, often completely emotional aversion to the EU as the latest standard of public behaviour on the European continent is mind-bogglingly confusing and certainly not self-evident. This agglomerate of counter-ideas and half-baked positions is not derived from a single source. Moreover, there is often a conflict among them, too. Yet, with a certain degree of heuristic caution one could identify four main sources of "Euroscepticism". The first creates various forms of aversion to negative consequences of integration and diminished significance of state boundaries (crime, the Mafia), the second is inspired by the concern for its own ethnic identity (xenophobia) while the third gains its power from the warnings about non-democratic constitution of the EU and its executive bodies. The fourth source is linked to the failures in forming the "common mental framework".

The first two sources of euroscepticism are linked to traditionalist anti-European trends. As such, they are of no interest to the present discussion. The last two tendencies are closely linked to each other. In my opinion, the future of Europe depends on their co-ordination. They are, therefore, of paramount importance. These two tendencies – let's call them progressive eurosceptical tendencies – can be described briefly in the following way: first, the application of a European standard itself is arbitrary. In other words, if the EU as a state entity would be at the same level as aspirant countries in their process of integration into the EU, the EU itself would not qualify because of its democratic deficit. The next form of euroscepticism, with which I am mostly concerned here, results from the belief that the EU is an economic and security community. Yet, it failed to develop "fellow feelings", common "habits of the heart" oriented towards common realisation of common dreams. Europe at the mental level requires elements that link the past as a support for collective memory with the future as the projection of common dreams.

From part to whole

A word of caution is needed here, however. Europeanism as an attitude may help us in the effort to find egalitarian, democratic and vibrant communities that render individual life secure and meaningful, but Europeanism as the requirement "from above", as *pro forma* cosmopolitanism, is more likely to rob us of our concreteness and our lived immediacy, unlocking a potential that may ultimately benefit the less wholesome aspects of yearning for the community and identity. If anything, European twentieth century gave us the power, as is evident with hindsight, to recognise a huge potential of primary identifications. It makes no sense to attempt to dismiss them with a liberal disdain. Our attachments, after all, start parochially and only then grow outward. To bypass them in favour of an unmediated "European" identity is to risk ending up nowhere – feeling at home neither at home nor in the world. The old cliché has it that those who love humankind in general often cannot

abide individual women and men in particular, as Moliere taught us in his *Misanthrope*. It would be prudent to kindle affection for the general in revelling in the particular. Claims to national or ethnic identities are not irrelevant, as many would want us to believe. The question is rather how and on what grounds to weight these claims and, with respect to each, what responsibility is needed to acknowledge them. Reflection concerning those choices is crucial. If the children of Europe are being taught about the world "from part to whole", even as they are made familiar with the larger framework early on, they will have the basis from which to explore all they can learn about the world and, in turn, find ways of shifting back and forth between concentric circles, as Sissela Bok suggests in her essay "From Part to Whole".

In the context of difficulties which impede the construction of "Europeanism" as an outer rim of concentric circles for the identification of European peoples and individuals, one can do worse than pointing out to the Yugoslav lesson. Yugoslavism was *mutatis mutandis* such a "common framework". It was based on the ideological projection of the Communist Party about the need to overcome particular national identifications and on the mythology of "brotherhood and unity". As such, Yugoslavism tried to systematically suppress ethnic particularities. It turned out, alas, that in this long-lasting and richly orchestrated process "from above" the imposition of Yugoslavism also broke down the political structures of a country in which this was happening. In addition to the endemic corruption of the Yugoslav "soft" communist system and the cult of Tito's personality – when individual constituent republics gained the right to autonomously conduct their cultural affairs – historical reasons for the collapse of the promising supra-national identification have to be located in this mechanism of gradual separation and, above all, in the increasing and evident appetites for the domination of the largest nation over the other, less numerous nations, as Andrew Wachtel suggested in his book *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation: Literature and Cultural politics in Yugoslavia*. The failed experiment of creating a synthetic Yugoslav culture, which would not favour elements drawn from the tradition of the most numerous nation (the Serbs) in the former federation, has contributed largely to the situation in which the increasingly manipulated ethnic tensions did not have any stronghold but those offered by individual republics' policies. I am convinced that we have to refresh our suppressed and unpopular memory of Yugoslavism as a potentially strong, although ineptly abused wax that could have held disparate ethnic traditions together. Nevertheless, it did manage to hold together the wings of south Slavic traditions as long as it was still possible to agree on a common goal, i.e. until the early seventies. When the ambitious Icarus flew too high, the wax quickly melted in the heat of nationalist self-sufficiency.

The European case is admittedly more complex, since the cultural level deals with a resistance to Americanisation on the one hand and with internal conflicts between the visions of a competitive clash between the French and German versions and small nations on the other. In the light of the Yugoslav lesson, however, the attempts to force English or German first as the language of practical business and than gradually – one may assume – as the language of all other public spheres – notwithstanding simultaneous apologies that this would be cheaper and easier for business – I cannot be inspired with the high hope for "Europeanism" as a genuinely shared and inclusive master narrative. The demands for consideration of cultural specificities, including the use of language in my ears ring unpleasantly. I need only to think of the half-forgotten Yugoslav political rhetoric according to which an individual was immediately accused of nationalism if, for example, Slovene or

Macedonian delegates wanted to exercise the constitutional right to speak in their mother's language in the Federal Yugoslav Parliament (where officially all languages of nations and nationalities were equal). In other words, this right was understood as practical, while in practice it proved illusory. If nationalism of large nations in the recent past and today is something normal; if it represents a general light in which other lights are seen as particular ones, then it is no wonder that Europeanism which would only derive its building-blocks from cultural heritage of the numerous and well-established European nations (e.g. English, German, French), does not inspire me with fervent hope for a fairer and freer Europe.

The dangers of EU integration from this point of view are particularly well revealed in the cultural sphere. As stated above, the EU has not been created as a community of values or memory, but as an economic structure. Economic pressure in the service of unification uses the argument that any support of language differences and cultural specifics would lead to Balkanisation and further conflict of nationalist exclusion. This is often considered as the first condition for establishing European identity.

The dilemma the EU faces at the moment is this: how does one maintain former inequality and at the same time demonstrate that one supports the programme of equality? Let us be reminded once again that the EU is an organisation mainly designed for big transnational corporations which are of course disturbed by state borders. The global market was not created by decisions of the majority of a democratic population, but by a belief that big companies can grow faster without restrictions (customs, taxes, etc.). In this regard, the idea depends on globalisation within the framework of which people make efforts to remove obstacles to do business. State boundaries, moral concepts, cultural traditions, specific daily rituals, frames of mind, i.e. anything that impedes economic development is by definition seen as worrisome.

I know, of course, that cultural differences will not disappear overnight. I am not a prophet of the dissolution of ethnic particularities and of the consequent promotion of European "melting pot", since I am aware that a more limited area does and will exist for regional identities and local traditions. However, I cannot get rid of the feeling that cultural diversity in Europe is acquiring folklorist features (tourism, marketing of the heritage). If this is the only strategy of survival among small European nations and, in particular, in the post-communist countries, it is a bad political option, since it is invariably defensive.

In such diversity, conditions of forming intercultural competence, not only tolerance of differences, should be seen. In contrast to tolerance, this often evocative concept in the contemporary dictionary of "European" ideas, multicultural competence represents active curiosity and the effort to learn of less familiar cultures, efforts which do not plunge individuals and nations into closing themselves off within their own borders. Instead, multicultural competence strengthens self-reflexive and self-evaluating habits. Concentric circles of multiple identities in the construction of "Europeanism" have to ensue from mutual respect and not from hierarchical scale. The moment when the rhetoric of the number and size of individual European nations takes over as a criterion for participation in the construction of a common cultural and mental framework, the awareness of cultural diversity will be lost. With regard to other large geopolitical systems cultural diversity is Europe's greatest comparative advantage.

If we allow that only the "critical mass" of individual nations will be taken into account as valid contribution to the common master narrative, we will soon find ourselves in a situation in which our lives will be lived by principles of two progressively divided tracks. Official, public, economic and political lives will be practised in one of the two or three officially used European languages of large European nations, while the domestic, private, emotional life of individuals and ethnic groups will be conducted in local languages of small countries, condemned to eventually dry up and disappear altogether. This bifurcation actually encourages "museumisation", folklorisation and the spread of cultural tourism. While such tendencies might appear in principle as representative of a generous gesture, they foster, in fact, the conditions for insular and egotistical voyeurism which has little to do with necessary multicultural competence.

It seems that there is a good possibility that small pastoral, exotic, rural languages will – due to easier and more efficient integration, which practices exclusive standards of "economics" not of inclusive "Europeanism" – in a paradoxical way confirm Marx's arrogant definition of "non-historical nations". I am of course fully aware that diversity of European cultures, languages and ethnic traditions is extremely expensive to maintain, but I also know that it is vital for that form of a common narrative about allegiance in which the European nations will find it possible that, in the words of a Slovenian Romantic poet, France Preseren, "all men free no more shall foes, but neighbours be".

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