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### **Euro-Centrism vs. International Thinking**

If European people are asked to answer the question, “Which of your different identities has the highest rank in your personal sense: the local, the national or the European?”, a high percentage rate would definitely still report to the two former and only a minority would define themselves primarily as an European citizen. This is no surprise. On the one hand, one defines its identity through that origin, with which he or she has the strongest relation. On the other hand it is extremely difficult for a huge and often aloof entity like the European Union to develop a common European identity that evokes those impressions and sentiments that people combine with their familiar environment.

Thus, one of the major challenges for the European Union is more than ever to transfer the European spirit – the idea of a peaceful, prosperous and powerful Europe – to the hearts of the people in the member states. Furthermore, it has to create a trans-national awareness of the continent’s main problems.

The development of a common European thinking, which is meant to overcome the harmful effects of nationalism, is claimed by the pro-European political elites all the time. But is it really enough to build up a European identity, in order to consider the major problems and challenges of the world from a European and western centred point of view? Does there not exist the jeopardy of a newly emerging variety of nationalism, a so called Euro-nationalism? A simplified reduction of the challenges to a European-centred perspective would result in an exclusion of significant dimensions of global problems and would, thus, hinder the most convenient solutions for them.

If we do not look beyond our own nose and simply focus on our own – in this case European – interests, we will fail to see problems including, for example, politico-military conflicts, poverty, development, migration, terrorism and environmental matters from more than one perspective.

It is not difficult to find examples in the current strategy of the EU of too much European-centred policy proposals and implementations. You need only look at the European Union’s foreign policy and its “partnership” agreements with other regions of the world such as the Mediterranean countries (“Barcelona process” since 1995) or Latin America (negotiations about an association agreement with the MERCOSUR since 2000). In these example, you can easily get the impression that the so called “partnerships” are rather one-sided and that the EU does not take the unequal starting positions enough into consideration. It concentrates too much on its own economic objectives.

The main reason that leads to this conclusion are that the EU, as a dominant global economic player, pushes its partner countries to fast liberalisations of their economies. As a result sensitive markets are subsidised and protected (for example the agricultural sector) where the Mediterranean and Latin American countries would have good chances to produce competitive products for import to the EU area. The agreements do not provide enough appropriate instruments and aid measures which should be granted to countries and regions continuing a

development process. Furthermore, the relations cannot be well balanced as long as asymmetries between the partners are not recognised sufficiently. In addition, the partnership programmes are formally multileveled (political, economic and cultural dimensions) but, in reality, the main focus remains on economic matters.

Another example can be found in the migration policy, especially relating to the recent issue of African people trying to enter the “paradise Europe” via Italy (Lampedusa) or Spain (Ceuta, Mellila and the Canary Islands). Most of the refugees are stuck in reception camps and finally deported. If the European Union mainly concentrates itself on the construction of a fortress around its external borders and disregards the importance of considering the social and cultural dimension and of tackling the problems at their root, there will not be a long-term solution to come. Apart from not having the right to seclude our prosperous continent from other disadvantaged and/or poorly governed countries, we – for our own security and wealth - cannot ignore what is going on in neighbouring regions like in Sudan or Congo. Occurrences in those hot spots will have an increasing impact on Europe.

From my perspective, the EU’s current endeavours for international development are too much self-interested. Furthermore, debates (for example the quarrels about the raise of foreign aid and about the EU’s future budget last autumn) do not contribute to the solution of global problems.

The EU has already demonstrated how to accomplish successful development assistance: Certainly, up to now, the enlargement process with the concept of carrot (financial aid) and stick (pressure on reforms) can be considered as a great story of success. In this case, the EU has shown more “international thinking” than ever, because, especially with the huge enlargement of ten East and Middle European countries, it has succeeded in creating a zone of peace and democracy and relatively successful market economies in places where – twenty years ago – the Iron Curtain still existed.

In addition, the EU’s compensation mechanism, the cohesion and the structural funds to support underdeveloped regions within the union, represent good examples for other political or economic integration schemes like MERCOSUR or the Andean community (Latin America).

The development of an international identity requires among other things the depositing of one’s own small-mindedness and the acceptance that all people around the world have the right to live in dignity. It is indispensable that the political, economic, social, cultural and ecological global threats and challenges are seen in a wider context because it is not true that we can’t solve the problems – for sure, we could manage them and only then if we do want it.

The EU has the responsibility and commitment to promote the development of disadvantaged regions in the world, especially from those around its own borders. It has to watch out for appropriate strategies and measures for countries that cannot become members of the community. To reach this aim, the Union’s foreign policy beyond the own continent has to become more honest, effective, realistic and coherent.

Within the continent, especially with regards to Turkey, it would not only be extremely unfair but also dangerous if no clear, comprehensible and worthwhile European perspective is considered for this country, mainly because of current political considerations like tiredness of enlargement and growing euro-scepticism. The same thing is essential for countries like Ukraine, Georgia or even Belarus. There need not necessarily be a prospect for full membership because that should primarily depend on the still undecided depth of integration Europe wants to reach in the future. However, the Union’s global credibility and power can only emerge if its foreign policy can be

regarded as balanced and coherent. In this respect the implementation of the constitutional treaty and the creation of a European Foreign Minister would also be crucial steps forward.

In addition to the awareness of global threats and challenges, international thinking also demands the appreciation and acceptance of cultural plurality all around the world. As the recent debate about the “Mohamed cartoons” has shown, a comparatively bagatelle is able to create significant riots and conflicts between cultures if people do not respect each other’s) traditions and cultural peculiarities.

As well, in administering development aid, we must be sure not to negate other people’s culture, life or economic activity. We should rather strengthen their own special economic and cultural potential and accompany them so that they may improve their living conditions. Otherwise, a sort of neo-colonialism would emerge.

From my personal perspective, the creation of a European identity is a good starting point to get an improved and broader awareness for the diverse dimensions of global threats and challenges. This might lead to a too much European centred perception. Thus, a global thinking should substitute the too much self-interested, narrow perspectives of European and national identities. We can only save face and protect ourselves, if we are permanently working on better and worthier living conditions for all people around the globe and if we, at the same time, confine ourselves for the good of all.