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Euro-Centrism vs. International Thinking

The idea of a united Europe is generally believed to be something positive, especially as it represents values like democracy and tolerance. The practical construct resulting from this idea, the former European Economic Community (EEC), has been created in reaction to the moral, political and economic destruction Europe went through during the Second World War and therefore embodies the “concept of a long-lasting peace (Wallström, 2004). As the EEC has developed from a unity based on economical cooperation into the European Union (EU), a political construct with growing influence on national politics, the question arises whether it is legitimate at all (Obradovic, 1996, p.191). This lack of legitimacy is resolved, in part, by creating a European identity with the European Commission (EC) as its main persecutor (Shore, 2000, p.40). Considering the fact that even a nation, a much smaller and homogenous building than the whole of Europe, is created by nationalists and therefore is, an “imagined community” (Paasi, 1996, p.11), the question arises whether the attempt to create a European identity can be called an ideology. “Europeanism”, as referred to this ideology in the following, tries to instil a European identity; therefore, it resembles nationalism as far as the building of a political construct on an ideology is concerned. It might also be an advanced form of nationalism as “nationalism is a kind of chameleon which adapts its colours to changing situations just as it likes” (Alter, 1994, p.119).

What is even more important is that this attempt to build up a form of emotional attachment for the EU confirms and even fosters the Euro-centric viewpoint in daily European politics. This paper argues that EU institutions, especially the Commission, deliberately downplay international thinking by re-invoking Euro-centrism as a tool to attain more political legitimacy in the form of public approval.

The European Union (EU), claiming to be a democratic construct, seeks legitimacy in front of the public. Consequently, it needs the public to identify with the values and traditions considered to be of a unique European kind in order to gain acceptance for the policy that is practised and conduct the practice of “reproduction of itself” (Paasi, 1996, p.41). According to the anthropologist Chris Shore, who wrote a book about EU’s cultural policy, the “invention of a European tradition” was introduced by the European Commission after a disappointing turn out in the European Parliament’s (EP’s) election in 1984 (Shore, 2000, p.41). The poor political participation clearly reflected the missing identification of the masses with the idea of a unified European and made the missing legitimacy obvious.

The measures that are taken in order to install a European feeling in people are of a distinct character and resemble the ones used by nationalists that were trying to legitimise the evolution of nation states. As Shore states, the EC mainly makes use of strong symbols, for example a European flag, anthem and passport, which was already used by nineteenth century nation-states

in order to gain legitimacy (Shore, 2000, p.50). Apart from giving the impression of an established tradition, these symbols also convey certain values that are seen as representing the unified Europe. As stated by the EC, the European flag is “the symbol *par excellence* of European identity and European unification”, with the number 12 representing Christianity, “perfection” or parts of European history, such as the Roman Empire (p.47). The choice of Beethoven’s “Ode to Joy” as official European anthem is also highly significant considering the text written by Friedrich Schiller in 1785. The poem clearly conveys the classic idea of united brotherhood and a positively perceived unity between people. As Europe cannot rely on a common history as nation-states could, there is a lack of a shared “lieux de mémoire” (Hymans, 2004, p.19), common memories that are crucial in order to create a feeling of belonging together within a community. Due to this lack of common memory, culture is seen, as displayed in the choice of the anthem, as the major commonality binding European states. Even though the symbols, used in nineteenth century nation states building and in Europe, nowadays have got a different basis, their function is the same. They are invented in order to represent values and stand for the “lieu de mémoire” through which a community identifies itself.

Apart from these more psychological means of instilling identity, the European Commission also proceeds in the field of actual political actions. Starting with the Declaration on the European Identity in 1973, the Commission imposes to “promote European awareness and to undertake joint action in various cultural areas” (Shore, 2000, p.45) as formulated in the Solemn Declaration on European Union (p.44). A special emphasis is thus put on cultural policy. Jacques Delors, President of the Commission from 1985 to 1994, even states, “We have to build a powerful European culture industry that will enable us to be in control of both the medium and its content” (p.45 ff). This policy is applied in various fields, such as education, media, science and sports. “Introducing the European dimension into education,” as the Commission puts it (p.56), can be seen as a very efficient as well as already successfully applied tool in influencing people’s way of thinking. Already Rousseau states that, “it is education that must give souls a national formation, and direct their opinions and taste” (Paasi, 1996, p.56).

The distribution of the idea of a European Unity through mass media such as television and films, controlled by the “Office of Communications” (Shore, 2000, p.56), gives the impression of Europe as a brand being commercialised according to the rules of public relations (p.55); moreover, it makes use of the privilege that has been, up to the twentieth century, limited to nation states, namely the control over media (Paasi, 1996, p.42). The declaration of the “European Year of Education through Sports 2004,” involving major sport events such as the Olympic Games in Athens under the trade mark “Europe,” can also be seen in this context.

What is the actual idea that the European Commission tries to instil onto European people and in what way does this contradict international thinking? There are two main features of Europeanism that can be seen as contradicting international thinking, if not even rendering it impossible. The first one is the necessity of the “dichotomy of Self and Other” (Delanty, 1995, p.47) in the process of identification. According to Schlesinger, “[t]he establishment of similarity simultaneously causes variance” (Schlesinger, 1999, p.461), which means that in order to make people identify with something you have to provide something they can identify against to achieve “negative integration” (Alter, 1994, p.12). The European others have been, up to the fall of the Iron Curtain, the “protagonists of the ideological Cold War” (Smith, 1997, p.173). Nowadays the definition of the other is less clear, ranging from the Third World, (p.192) to the “almost European other” (Wiener & Diez, 2004, p.210) meaning immigrants and “Euro-Islam within” (p.210).

The second feature that is made use of is the “invention of a European tradition” (Shore, 2000, p.41). “What makes a nation *is* the past” (Shore, 2000, p.41) can be easily transferred onto the

European scale. Europe is claimed to have a long tradition and a common history ranging from the Ancient times and is, according to Walter Hallstein, first President of the Commission of the EEC, “no creation. It is a rediscovery” (Nugent, Paterson, Wright, 2003, p.9) Moreover it is perceived as a “moral success story” (Shore, 2000, p. 57), embodying major advancements such as the Enlightenment or the scientific revolution, and denying less popular events in European history, like colonization, in a rather selective narrative. This leads to the view on Europe as a “super-nation state founded on European chauvinism” (p.50).

Taking into account these findings, one can state that the idea of establishing Europeanism is build up on a Euro-centric view of the world and therefore makes international thinking within the EU highly unlikely. This is probably due to the fact that, according to a member of the Committee for a People’s Europe, which has been set up by the Commission, the aim of the European Commission was to “create some sort of supra-nationality” (Shore, 2000, p.51). According to Peter Alter one of the most renowned scholars in the field of nationalism, the “fortress Europe can look like nationalism, but in a new guise” (Alter, 1994, p.119).

Apart from the question if this effort is going to be successful and whether a European identity, which is so much more complex than a national one, can be created with nationalistic means, it is also doubtful whether nationalistic thinking can just be used as means to an ends. Is it possible to separate nationalism and thus Europeanism into the presumably positive side of identity building and the negative side, the one that consists of exclusion, racism and the feeling of being superior to others? Nationalism is seen as the most successful ideology in the world, for it is compatible to any other ideology (Alter, 1994, p.1) and easy to instil onto people as it provides a feeling of pride and self-confidence. Is it not naïve to believe that this ideology can be controlled, after what history has shown us in the twentieth century? The European Commission might underestimate the momentum of this ideology.

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