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EUROPEAN IDENTITY VS. NATIONAL IDENTITY

ABSTRACT

The discussions regarding the significance and relevance of the identity represent an inevitable segment of the current sociological, anthropological and philosophical debates. On the other hand, the concept of the European identity formation is one the most relevant topic in the scientific and political sphere. There are several approaches or several aspects from which the European identity can be analyzed and defined as such. One of the existing definitions states that the European identity dwells on the idea of a cultural family. According to another definition, the European identity is founded on the idea of United Europe. Very often, European identity is equated with "universal values", such as individualism, social cohesion and tolerance. Defined in such manner, European identity is transferred to the sphere of politics and it is given a political dimension i.e. it becomes a political identity.

This paper examines comparatively the patterns and basis of European identity formation and national identity formation, using an approach based primarily on nationalist theory with special emphasis on cultural aspects. In other words, for the purposes of this paper the nationalist theory is the one that is providing a framework for the analysis of European identity formation. The paper is focusing also on the sustainability of European vs. national identity.

Key words: European identity, National identity

INTRODUCTION

Identity, as one of the most sensitive issues of current political, cultural, philosophical, sociological and anthropological debates, could be defined as a sense of belonging that enables the people to understand and categorize the world where they live in. Identity is a dynamic process of creating, changing and harmonization, determined by various internal and external factors.

The identity is considered to be a biosocial category. From a biological or sociological perspective, it is impossible to find two totally identical or totally different persons. Each person poses some features that make him/her similar or identical to some other person, or features that make him/her different from another. The dialectical nature of identity refers to the fact that it identifies and differs at the same time, bearing in mind that certain individual or group is identical with some other/s only if the given individual/group is different from another one at the very same time. So, the Us/Other dichotomy becomes a constitutive element of the identity.

The identity of each person encompasses both individual and collective dimension. Belonging to a certain group, based on some common features that simultaneously make the given group different from another, is defined as a collective identity. There are three main typologies of collective identity: social, cultural and political identity. Social identity refers to the relation between the individual and the social structures. Cultural identity relates to history and heritage. Political identity outlines the relationship between the citizens of a state and/ or nation. According to Schneider (Schneider, 1999: 9), citizenship rights and duties provide the foundations of political identity. This division, however, does not preclude a close relationship between these three forms of identity. They are normally interrelated, particularly in the case of national identity. In this respect, the nation is supposed to embody all three forms of identity. The nation is clearly a political actor that strives for recognition. However, it is also supposed to provide the foundations of a society that is based on a shared culture and heritage (Guerrian, 2002: 137).

European identity represents a new form of political identity. There are several approaches in defining and analyzing the European identity. According to some scholars European identity cannot be expected to follow the pattern of national identity, simply because the EU is not a nation-state but a new genre of political institution born out of a new socio-political and economic environment shaped by globalization (Guibernau, 2011: 36). On the other hand, theories of nations and nationalism are well suited to illuminate these questions for two reasons. They can give us some idea of what the integrative factors are, because they try to explain

why certain human groups become nations. At the same time they can shed light on the barriers to integration, because they present causes for the rise of nationalist movements, who more often than not originated in opposition to integration attempts on part of the government (Bakke, 1995: 2)

This paper examines comparatively the patterns and basis of national and European identity formation, using an approach based primarily on nationalist theory with special emphasis on cultural aspects. In other words, for the purposes of this paper the nationalist theory is the one that is providing a framework for the examination of European identity and its sustainability compared with the national identity.

DEFINING NATIONAL IDENTITY THROUGH CULTURAL ASPECTS

There is neither a simple nor a unique definition concerning the issue of national identity. For Anthony Smith (Smith, 1991: 14), national identity is fundamentally multi-dimensional; it can never be reduced to a single element, even by particular factions of nationalists, nor can be easily or swiftly induced in a population by artificial means:

"…national' identity involves some sort of political community, however tenuous. A political community in turn implies at least some common institutions and a single code of rights and duties for all the members of the community. It also suggests a definite social space, a fairly well demarcated and bounded territory, with which the members identify and to which they feel they belong."

Nonetheless, Smith mentions some other markers, in particular common beliefs that contribute to the formation of the national identity. They include the idea that nations are territorially bounded units of populations and that they must have their own homeland; that their members share a common mass culture and common historical myths and memories; that members have reciprocal legal rights and duties under a common legal system; and that nations possess a common divisions of labour and system of production with mobility across the territory for members (Smith, 1991: 13).

Culture, perceived as a set of elements used by the group for the purpose of self-identification, becomes an indispensable segment of the current discussions pertaining to nation. A great number of eminent scholars dealing with the study of nation underline the role and relevance of culture in the process of nation formation.

Why Culture. Culture is one of the fundamental areas of social existence and an immanent factor of identity and development of each and every state. It is an

exceptionally specific and heterogeneous sphere that comprises all the material and spiritual values which have derived from the process of thinking and the human intervention in the environment and the society.

A man is considered a cultural being due to the impact of culture in structuring his/her inner and external world. The culture had influenced the formation of the thinking process, which enabled him/her to think rationally, to judge about meaningful and valuable issues and, finally, to make decisions about the way people live their own life. It had an important role in the construction of human emotions, subconscious and unconscious dimensions of the individual. There would be no culture without man. Yet, no man would exist without culture.

Claiming that culture has an influential role in the construction of human identity, it is considered as a process of adopting a certain cultural tradition whose distinctive peculiarities derive from the cultural history of the community. Thus, depending on the cultural tradition of the community, the man experiences and lives through matters in a different way compared to others, as well as the expression of their reactions differs in identical situations.

Under the influence of different cultures, people began to come out with different feelings concerning identical issues. For example, those coming from different cultural backgrounds, experience differently and differently manifest the sense of self-awareness, consciousness, guilt and repentance. Some of them have much more pronounced sense of tradition, belonging, and loyalty to their ancestors and attachment to their own cultural heritage while the sense for the same values of the others is very poor. Subsequently, the issue of skin color, gender, sexuality, life, death, etc. have very different significance and meaning in different societies.

As Parekh argues, the skin color in some environments has a metaphysical significance and plays a role in defining the status and power in the society, while in other environments, it is absolutely irrelevant. Somewhere the sexuality issue is treated as a purely physical function, while at some other environments, the sexuality is attached not only with a cosmic significance, but also it is seen as a divine activity due to the bringing of a new life, and therefore it is covered with mystique and taboos. Even the inevitable things such as death, are experienced differently in different environments. Somewhere it causes a feeling of human weakness in relation to the nature, however somewhere it is welcomed with a sense of joy because of the belief that it is achievement of liberation from this earthly world of grief.

Through the culture we experience our own identification. The culture gives us a sense of belonging. The role of identifiers, particularly language and religion, are of significant importance in building a sense of belonging to a particular group. Therefore, in given historical circumstances, language and religion – used as an

instrument of identity policy - become a basis for determining the intra-group similarities and inter-group differences.

When culture is associated with the concept of nation it is also granted a geographical and political space. The boundaries of the Other therefore become social, political and geographical. Culture and community become one at same. The main implications of this shift are to create unity within imaginary community (Guerrina, 2002: 143)

For a great number of contemporary scholars the concept of the imagined community coined by anthropologist Benedict Anderson was a starting point in their studies and analyses of the origin and existence of nations. In his work "Imagined Communities" Benedict Anderson defines nation as an imagined community because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. The nation is imagined as limited because even the largest of them - encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings - has finite, if elastic boundaries, beyond which lie other nations (Anderson, 1998:19-21).

Eric Hobsbawm considers tradition, memories, myths and legends as a common fiction, thus providing the basis for nurturing the collective ego of certain social groups that subsequently a nation is built upon. He believes that the existence of cultural elites is of particular importance to the creation of works in all fields of culture and pertaining to building the national identity. Nonetheless, he regards literature and language as exceptionally significant, due to the fact that they contribute to the nation to distinguish and experience itself as a distinct entity.

Ernest Gellner (2006: 6), at the very beginning of his work "Nations and Nationalism", ascertains the difficulty in defining the notion of nation and pinpoints two, in his own words, provisional definitions:

1. Two men are of the same nation if and only if they share the same culture, where culture in turn means a system of ideas and signs and associations and ways of behaving and communicating.
2. Two men are of the same nation if and only if they recognize each other as belonging to the same nation. In other words, nations make the men; nations are the artefacts of men's convictions and loyalties and solidarities. A mere category of persons (say, occupants of a given territory, or speakers of a given language, for example) becomes a nation if and when the members of the category firmly recognize certain mutual rights and duties to each other in virtue of their shared membership of it.

Each of these two provisional definitions, the cultural and the voluntaristic, has some merit, pointing out an element which is of real importance in the

understanding of the notion of nation. Gellner highlights willingness and culture as crucial elements in formation of nations.

Dominique Schnapper, assimilitating Gellner's views, believes that the sense of belonging, as one of the preconditions for formation of nations, derives from a rather long shared history, which according to her, in most cases is either fully or partially coined. When it comes to building of collective identity (in this case national identity) she believes that the adoption of the abstract rights, such as human rights and observance of the state, is insufficient compared to the interiorization of the national tradition, which she regards as a genuine instigator of political mobilization.

According to Pool (1999: 13), the nation is a specific cultural object and our national culture provides a moment of self-recognition through which we both confirm our individual existence and become conscious of ourselves as having a collective existence:

".....It exists in and through the language we speak, the public symbols we acknowledge, the history and literature we were taught in school, the music we listen to, the currency we use, the sporting activities we enjoy, and the news bulletins on the television. These cultural artifacts enable us to recognize that our way of life has an objective external existence, and constitute the social environment which we recognize as ours and in which we are "at home."

EUROPEAN IDENTITY

European identity as a new form of political identity, derived from the novel political institution created out of the free will of sovereign nation states members of the European Union. Namely, the idea of Europe that has literally emerged from the ashes of the Second World War is enshrined within the guiding principles of the European treaties. This idea is founded on the principle of the establishment of economic and political cooperation for the mere purpose of fostering the security and stability in the European region. Simultaneously, the idea of Europe assumes recognition of some kind of common, or so-called universal values, such as: Greco-Roman tradition, Judeo-Christian ethics, Renaissance humanism and individualism, Enlightenment rationalism and science, civil right tradition, democracy, rule of law and human rights. These ideals, which have come to symbolize the guiding principles of the idea of Europe, comprise the core of the European identity.

The former Secretary-General of NATO, Daniel Tarshchys, provided the following definition on European identity:

"... a very strong commitment to the individual, a commitment to social cohesion and solidarity, a state that is neither too strong nor too weak, respect for human rights, tolerance, these are some basic principles. The rule of law of course, the idea that government must be bound by the legal principles and the people must be treated equally."

(BBC World Service, 1998)

Subsequently, the European identity was equated with universal values such as individualism, social cohesion and tolerance, by means of which this category (i.e. European identity) was transferred to sphere of politics. In other words, it was given a political dimension.

Taking into consideration the multi-dimensional nature of identity, the European identity, although categorized as a political one, does not preclude the existence of the other two forms of identity: cultural and social. Even the proponents of the approach according to which the European identity can not be assessed through the lenses of the national identity formation pattern, can not ignore the fact that effort has been made to stress and discursively construct a common culturally defined European identity in a similar way as national identities have been constructed (Jacobs, Mier, 13-34).

European Commission has made an effort to find a new approach in defining a common cultural identity by understanding the political values and beliefs as basis of common culture:

(5) If citizens give their full support to, and participate fully in, European integration, greater emphasis should be placed on their common cultural values and roots as a key element of their identity and their membership of a society founded on freedom, democracy, tolerance and solidarity; a better balance should be achieved between the economic and cultural aspects of the Community, so that these aspects can complement and sustain each other.

(Decision establishing Culture 2002, 1)

The creators of European identity equated cultural values with the political ones, thus equating the anthropological and sociological interpretation of the concept of culture with political culture which is purely political concept. For the further promotion of common cultural identity, several symbols were used such as: European flag, European anthem, European day and the European currency.

Although for the purpose of defining a common cultural identity the political values were taken as a basis, the myth creation, which was not exception for the idea of Europe, became an inevitable part of the European identity:

".....Contemporary ideas of Europe have inherited from ancient, medieval

and early modern Europe the assumption that Europe is and has always been the centre of civilisation. The Greco-Roman tradition has been portrayed as the root of European civilisation and association of the Christian faith with the European continent has presumed that Europe is, and has always been, the centre of "the Faith". This process creates the mythology on which the idea of Europe is constructed. The assumption that Greek civilisation established the foundations of western and European civilisation is still felt strongly today. It is rare to encounter in-depth analyse of the pre-Greek civilisation in isolation, thus perpetuating the myth created by the Greeks themselves that Greece was the centre of civilisation and that the rest of the ancient world was dominated by barbarianism."

(Guerrina, 2002: 64)

According to this approach European identity is based on the idea of common cultural heritage and common historical experience such as: Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian. tradition. On the other hand, many scholars claim that European identity, as a political identity, should not be based on any particular culture, religion, past history, language or a set of allegedly superior "Western values". This approach in defining the construction of European identity raises some interesting questions. For example: is it possible to neglect or deny someone's particular culture having in mind that there is no human nature unrelated to culture, or in other words, no human being was created without the influence of culture; Is it possible to ignore or deny the importance of language in construction of someone's cultural and overall identity having in mind its multi-meaningful function - as a means of social communication but also as an instrument that provides continuity of cultural tradition.

Is it possible to ignore and neglect religion as one of the most important and inseparable elements of the human identity in general; What about the Muslim population living in the EU member-states; What about Turkey's accession in EU; Whether religion operates as an inclusion/exclusion mechanism in contemporary Europe and whether, for example, the opposition to Turkey's accession expressed by some EU member-states derives from its Muslim allegiance rather than from the economic and geopolitical concerns often openly invoked by these countries. This is a highly sensitive and controversial issue (Guibernau, 2011: 34). Is it possible to ignore and neglect a history when many of European countries have spent centuries (and particularly the last one) killing each other, so the notion of a shared history has a sinister connotation (Castells.3).

These concerns and dilemmas question the sustainability of European identity. According to Bakke (1995: 8), Europeans must have something in common apart from living in Europe: in Gellner's scheme, a shared high culture and increased

cross-border mobility would be helpful in making one "nation" out of the Europeans; Anderson's emphasis is on communication networks; going along with A.D. Smith means to focus on the ethnic or historical foundations of a European identity; and finally, drawing on Hobsbawm, we would concentrate on whether the means of inventing European traditions are available.

EUROPEAN IDENTITY VS. NATIONAL IDENTITY

Smith is pointing out that culture has a crucial role in determining the nature of the relationship between national and European identities. Comparing to the deeply rooted values such as culture, language, religion and cultural heritage, Europe's common values, such as humanism, individualism, civil right, democracy and the rule of law are inadequate and insufficient in providing solidarity within a group.

Can we imagine an emergence of a European nationalism powerful enough to mobilize masses in the name of Europe; it would be problematic to find a common causes and interests uniting Europeans and prompting them to sacrifice their own lives in the name of the EU. So far, the nation-states retains the emotional attachment of its citizens and when it becomes alien to them or too wide and distant, individuals turn to regional, ethnic, local, and other forms of identity tying them to more sizeable communities that the EU (Guibernau, 2011: 41).

Exactly as Jovic (2003: 63-64) points out to the lack of the cultural aspect as one of the key arguments for the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Namely, starting from the definition of the nation as a political but also a cultural community, often created on the basis of a common language and/or religion, proponents of cultural argument, almost entirely connect the occurrence and disappearance of the nation to the cultural sphere, to the ideas and their realization. According to the same author, intellectual and cultural elites had the most important or at least very important role in the formation and dissolution of the Yugoslav state. Cultural argument claims that non-attractiveness of the Yugoslav idea (formulated by the cultural elites in 19th century) was the main reason for the breakup of Yugoslavia. Yugoslavs were Yugoslavs only in situations when/while sharing narratives about Yugoslavhood, the Yugoslav idea. Then, when they stopped to see themselves as part of that narrative, when they stopped believing in it, when it ceased to be credible and convincing, the Yugoslav nation disappeared.

Nations and nation-states are not going to fade away. In fact, they are going to grow and become important sources of collective identity, more than ever, as new, formerly oppressed nations, come into the open (Catalunya, Euzkadi, Galicia, Scotland, Wales, Wallonie, Flanders etc), and as strong nationalist movements

assert their rights in the public opinion against the submission of the nation to the European state (Castell, 3).

On the other hand, many examples point out to the fact that there is no united voice between member-states of the EU in some particular areas such as: international relations, foreign policy, security, and monetary policy. For instance: the recognition of Kosovo, the admission of Palestine in UNESCO, the military presence in Iraq and Afghanistan and the assistance for the financial crisis in Greece.

The nation-states within EU continue to establish a sharp distinction between "communitarian" and "domestic" affairs in terms of policy and decision-making. For instance, recognition of national and ethnic minorities as well as devolution models are considered as "internal affairs" and remain in the hands of each particular nation-state(Guibernau, 2011: 36).

CONCLUSION

There are many elements that give priority and advantage to the national identity in terms of European identity. Some of them are history and culture as fundamental aspects of the tissue of everyday life. They provide us a sense of belonging to a particular group, telling us who we are, where we are coming from and where we are going to. Denial or marginalizing the histories and cultures that differ from those of particular group, has profound effects on the subjectivity and the identity in any society. Taking into consideration the Us/Other dichotomy as a constitutive element of identity (in this case European identity), language, religion, memories and cultural myths emphasise division rather than unity. The lack of cultural aspects makes European identity weaker than national identities. In other words, European identity fails in reaching a common sense of belonging, whereas the national identities accomplish this task in a very successful manner. In this respect, European identity, as merely political identity and an abstract concept, poses no threat to national identities in the foreseeable future. On the other hand, the creators of European identity should reconsider the future and the ultimate goal of this purely political concept, its prospects, durability and sustainability.

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