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European Identity: Diversity in Union

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Abstract: This paper discusses the dynamics of identity within the European Union. The authors describe the necessary preconditions for the development of European Identity; including the value of freedom, equal rights and a re-conceptualization of the concept of solidarity in the context of citizenship. Highlighted are how debates about immigrant rights, the rise of neo-racist movements, and the role of political parties create a sociopolitical context for the reassertion of nation-state power, giving rise to neo-national and neo-communitarian sentiments. In contrast, the construction of European Identity requires the development of intercultural competencies and shared framings of common interests.

Keywords: citizenship, identity, interculturalism, nationalism

Current discussions within the European Union about the possibility of achieving a singular European identity largely are stalled in a debate between unqualified multiculturalism and absolute monoculturalism.[1] In our opinion, continuing to frame the debate as a stark choice between these two views is a mistake because it institutionalizes an unproductive dichotomy. On the one hand, monoculturalists hold that a European identity already exists because it is presupposed in the structures and institutions of the European Union. Those holding this view argue that Europeans already share core cultural values represented by the European Union and that these values are the essence of European identity. That is, subscribing to these values is necessary and sufficient for European Union citizens to construct a common identity.

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On the other hand, multiculturalists assert that diversity is a reality within the European Union, and that as a result many cultural identities already exist, perhaps uneasily, within the European Union. These identities are the frameworks within which people experience daily life and the frameworks that motivate community action. Multiculturalists further assert that the core cultural values of these several identities are profoundly different from one another, thus making the groups that coalesce around them incompatible.

Following these moral and ideological values to their logical conclusions, monoculturalism promotes a eurocentrist view, while multiculturalism rejects any common rule in which particular cultural preferences are included because it may disrespect cultural values other communities held. When this dichotomy is taken for granted, it forces a choice between the two sides, each of which can be made to appear equally plausible when based in underestimated cultural, religious, or historical traits. Citizens are then coerced into choosing an identity either as Europeans or as members of a smaller community.

In this article we seek to make manifest the devastating impact of such binary thinking (of which the dichotomy between the monocultural and multicultural views of European identity are just one instance). We begin by acknowledging that within the large economic and political entity of the European Union there is distinct diversity in languages, religions, cultures, and histories. Yet, we think that it is important to try to figure out what are the best ways to ensure a durable and prosperous existence for an entity such as the European Union. We think this requires the development of a framework that creates a linkage between citizenship in the European Union (a legal status) and a European identity (a felt social identification). Popular movements and electoral evidence from across Europe suggest that the former (legal status) is not sufficient to create the latter (identification with an over-arching community).

What then are the necessary preconditions for the creation of a European identity within the European Union? We propose first that it is possible, notwithstanding the diversity within the European Union and the resulting particularisms, that there are some specific rules, values, or agreements to which all European Union citizens would subscribe and that might form the minimum set of such cultural materials that would be the basis of European identity. Secondly, we claim that the diversity of that entity must be taken into account to a large extent.

Any normative project for constructing European identity must work for the entire European Union, while at the same time coming to terms with the diversity that exists within the Union. In this way, we hope to combine the emphases of both monoculturalism and multiculturalism without being forced to make a binary choice. Put another way, we seek to discover the necessary preconditions of the whole for the (political) entity to subsist, and then we turn to the question of how the constituent (cultural-political) entities can learn to marshal themselves optimally in relation to this whole. To answer the first question we try to identify how people actually think about and enact citizenship. The answer to the second question is sought along the lines of learning

procedures and attitudes that focus on the status of the European Union as a social and political space within which people are in constant negotiation about their rights, obligations, and identities.

FOCUS ON CITIZENSHIP

Over time the social status of the free and sovereign citizen has grown into greater prominence, and much social theory has developed about this status. In thinking about this circumstance (a new social status and the social theoretical consideration of it, what we call the project of citizenship), we follow the historical analysis of authors such as Touraine who point out that the present era has radically broken the bondages of the past and has freed citizens in a genuine way for the first time.[2] Citizens' old obligations to churches, kings, and nobility came under attack with the American and the French revolutions at the end of the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, they continued in a modified way in the period of nationalistic and ideological supremacy through World War II.

It was only in the 1960s that the citizen had a position of extended and engaging freedom and could organize individual and social life in a substantial way. These material and political developments allow people to think in fresh ways about the project of citizenship. We adopt Taylor's reasoning on this point: groups and communities adopt and develop "social imaginaries" in order to interpret and implement social agreements.[3] While the ascription of the growth of freedom to a historical era may thus seem to deal with the past, in fact it allows contemporary groups and communities to engage themselves in a societal project on the basis of the symbolic and political entailments of that historical image. Within that frame of thinking, we suggest that the social imaginary of freedom is expanding in the present era to become a core idea in the organization of society.

Throughout the same period of two to three centuries, there has been embedding of societal institutions in increasingly complex structures of regulations and laws, what we call the "juridification" of society. This juridification yields a legalistic mentality in political personnel. It may well be that this juridification has gone a step too far and is producing a "democratic deficit" as a by-product: the juridical construal of one's societal and political identity makes community problems more technical and "learned," but it also alienates the common citizen from the process of democratic decision-making. In our view, people are legally (juridically) born in citizenship, but socially and politically they must grow and be educated about the rights, obligations, and values of that citizenship.[4]

Over the past few centuries in Europe, citizenship has been phrased in terms of collective identity through nationality. This was created and implemented on the basis of a supposed common culture. Whether or not this chain of relationships still obtains in the context of the European Union is not the point: it has been the basis for political education in nation-states for a few

centuries, and hence served as the "cultural ideological" framework for citizenship in education and social structuring. It is within that framework that citizens are taught about their society and have been educated to become participants in a democratic society.

In his intriguing analysis of "social imaginaries,"[3] Taylor shows that this participation has been growing since the seventeenth century, both in the sense of including an increasing number of groups in society and the involvement of more and more areas of social and cultural interaction. In our perspective, this trend suggests that on the European level, citizens should be educated in and toward dialogue, and in the intercultural context of the present European Union, and that this education should emphasize capacities that will allow citizens to take maximal advantage of the social and political space created by the Union and within which people can negotiate their rights, obligations, and identities.

THE PRESENT SOCIOPOLITICAL SITUATION

Since World War II, the nationalistic wars between the European states have been played down or avoided successfully, at least within the political construct of what is now called the European Union. Broader than the European Union itself, the Council of Europe makes every effort to expand this tradition of peaceful relationship between countries to 41 states. This includes five states with predominantly Muslim populations, such as Turkey. It is worthwhile to investigate what is happening here.

We suggest that some post-national systems are developing in the world. The European Union is probably the most advanced of these systems. In these systems, old relationships between nationality-based citizenship and cultural roots no longer obtain, or they must be reinvented and given new meaning within the new system. To do this it is necessary, we think, to explore from the bottom up the subset of values, rights, and obligations that are recognized throughout the European Union. This would enable us to judge what European identity might be recognizable throughout Europe. The next step would be to determine what common values and agreements can be discerned and how they can be negotiated as a basic societal platform for the functioning of the European Union as a political and social space.[5]

The European Union space is an economic and a juridical construct. In addition, there are pan-European institutions such as the European Parliament and the European Commission that pass decrees and bylaws. The political benefit of the European Union is that old nationalistic antagonisms no longer lead to interstate wars. The economic advantage could be that a very substantial internal market is realized, and hence, the globalization of economies and finance might thus be achieved successfully. It will become clear in the future whether or not that will be the case. Beyond that, the general claim is that Europe (in the format of the European Union) is one of the largest

democratic political and social spaces in the world. Issues in some areas of sociocultural life suggest that these potentials may not be achieved. Among these are political parties, immigrants' rights, neoracist movements, and nationalism.

POLITICAL PARTIES

There is growing electoral success of anti-democratic, neo-communitarian political parties in a number of countries. These parties reject the universalizing, democratic project of the European Union. This can be seen in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Northern Italy, and Germany, as well as in the surprising 2002 elections in The Netherlands and France. It is true that there has been great success through juridical and organizational means in maintaining peaceful relations between nations over the past decades. Nonetheless, it is sobering to see an ever-growing counter-movement in several member states of the European Union since the 1970s, with part of this movement adopting strong exclusionist positions and rejecting the humanistic and democratic perspective for which Europe stands.

IMMIGRANTS' RIGHTS

There are no European Union-wide policies for dealing with immigrants that systematically guarantee their human rights. The result is that member states have different ways of administering papers for "newcomers" and refugees. Because different national rules govern immigrants, substantial opportunities for criminal activity are created. All members of the European Union have not signed the Schengen Agreement, which is an agreement between a subset of states within the European Union to cooperate in police work and in the prosecution of international criminals across national borders. Moreover, the agreement itself is not optimal in terms of human rights.

Refugees and new immigrants are drawn to the European Union because of its manifest economic prosperity, which is advertised through press releases on economic progress and through the media images broadcast around the world. Refugees flee to the European Union in the face of raging wars and other conflicts, and also because of bleak economic prospects in their countries of origin. That these "push factors" show no signs of abating suggests that people will continue trying to enter the European Union, either through legal immigration (for example, by taking advantage of the German "green card" policy developed in 2001) or through the ever-growing illegal refugee traffic. This results in national programs for dealing with refugees and immigrants with quite different requirements and sanctions in most of the countries. (There is some degree of uniformity in the programs of the Schengen countries.) Countries contest each

other over these issues, and produce different policies. For example, Germany reduced the right of political refugees and at the same time searched for a delineated new cohort of high-tech immigrants from Asia. The more-or-less mild "hunt" for illegal immigrants and refugees now is a high priority of national governments throughout Europe, yet no genuine and uniform European Union policy exists that would develop competencies to deal with the resulting diversity.

NEORACIST MOVEMENTS

There is a growth of neoracist movements in the European Union, and no adequate way to combat them has come from democratic political parties, from states, or from European institutions. The extreme rightist parties focus almost exclusively on the badly digested influx of "others" and hence direct the public discourse to accept versions of the "fortress Europe" ideology that excludes those others. Refugees are treated as potential criminals or enemies, or as victims. Extreme rightist parties, through the redefinition of the old communitarian ideology of "our people first," have been developing a Europe-wide policy program over the past decade, emanating from the French study center GRECE. This picks up basic elements of Italian fascism of the 1930s and adds to it other discriminating discourses, including "culture as race."

Certainly, different trends can be seen within these developments (from anti-universalism to neo-paganism, for example). Nonetheless, there is a common focus that feeds on anxieties about globalization and blames all evil effects on "foreigners to our culture." The result is ever greater success in terms of power and election results for these extremist parties since World War II. Strikingly, this development can be seen in some of the smaller, more prosperous regional (not necessarily national) areas of Europe, including regions of Denmark, Sweden, Carinth (in Austria), Northern Italy, Belgium, southern France, and cities in The Netherlands that have substantial votes for extremist parties.

NATIONALISM

Our experience suggests that people commonly see national mandates rather than European positions as more important. Time and again, representatives elected on a European ticket resign to take up ministerial responsibilities in their nation-states. Some open clashes between the chair of the council (the body of nation-state ministers who make the decisions on all important matters in regular high-level meetings) and the European Commission (the body with the executive power of the European Union) showed that prime ministers and presidents of the member states explicitly assert their decision power over and above the European rulership.

A true, socially motivating European identity with some status is not developing within this context. The European Union is perceived increasingly as a boring institution with more rules and more bureaucracy than as a blessing. At the top level, a superstate with its bureaucracy often is seen to be ruling against the interests of nation-states (or so they feel), and at the bottom level, citizens and their local politicians are becoming less powerful. The European Parliament has limited power now, but the Commission and the Council of Ministers, which hold real decision power, are not democratically accountable. Citizens see that there is a deficit in democracy and become alienated from the European Union, often seeing themselves as the "others." Hence, they do not identify themselves as European citizens.

NECESSARY PRECONDITIONS FOR EUROPEAN IDENTITY

How can Europeans construct the European Union so that it survives as a durable structure that will guarantee a democratic society of equal opportunities to its citizens? This is the million Euro question! We suggest that it is useful to begin by thinking about what might be the necessary preconditions for such a durable structure.

We advocate starting from the fact that existing diversity within Europe (in the format of the European Union), acknowledging that this was the also true historically, and that these facts must be taken into consideration when suggesting what its durable organization might entail. In addition, however, the European Union must function as a unified and uniform structure. To enter the Union, a state must comply with a series of rules with far-reaching implications on the legal, societal, economic, and political reorganization of that state. Hence, unity and diversity will need to be combined and balanced for individual citizens, groups, and communities within the European Union.

Our preliminary view is that the following minimal conditions must be met to form the common ground for a political space like the European Union to persist equal rights, value of freedom, and redefined notions of brotherhood or solidarity.

EQUAL RIGHTS

All citizens have the same rights as individual human beings. This legal rule should be translated into a societal rule of conduct such that all who participate in the European Union structure strive for the concrete implementation of the value expressed in this right, namely, that all persons are born equal and hence should be treated as equal in rights of life. The next step would be for European Union members to agree that any individual, group, or community that systematically blocks another from this right is "indecent" and should be sanctioned as a violator of a right expressing a basic value.[6] In other words,

unity rules supreme in such matters, and any religious, cultural, or other particularism must be in agreement with this basic value or become obsolete. This means that no one group or community can, on the basis of its cultural, religious, or any other prerogatives, deny any individual or group basic human rights in a continuous or structural way.

Hence, "our community first" is out of the question, as well as "minority culture above everything else" in perspective. On this conception, such views are indecent to the extent that they violate this basic agreement. Indeed, both would qualify as instances of "cultural fundamentalism" and hence would jeopardize the prospect of a durable European Union.[7] Presently, this basic agreement about the equal value of individuals is enshrined as a juridical construct in the policy, acts, and decrees of the European Union, but it has not achieved widespread penetration in the social consciousness of Europe.

VALUE OF FREEDOM

We think that a second value that must be part of the common core of European citizenship is the value of freedom. The French political scientist Touraine suggests that we are entering what he calls the "positive freedom" stage, a period during which freedom is extended to more people and engaged by them more extensively in some parts of the world, including Europe.[8] In contrast, negative freedom consists of freedom from bondage, such as that from the church, from nobility, from the state, and from capitalist groups. The growth of extended freedom after World War II urged citizens to deploy in a maximal and optimal way their personal values and prospects.

In a society of more than one person and even on a global level, however, this presents us with the obligation to develop personal ambitions and strife while taking into account equal rights and opportunities for others. In practice within the European Union, this means citizens will need to explore how their private plans can be realized while respecting the developmental possibilities of all others within the European Union and within the world at large. Increasingly, this also has come to mean the chances of a good life for children of future generations and eventually for animals as well. The notion of positive freedom certainly is a common value of the European Union. We see it as an important "social imaginary"[3] in Taylor's terms, but it is clear that there is substantial political thinking still to be done.

REDEFINED NOTIONS OF BROTHERHOOD OR SOLIDARITY

Advocating equality and freedom in an area that is diverse implies that one should be conscious and capable of dealing with diversity. Citizens who are unconscious of diversity or incapable of dealing with it will

frustrate others and themselves, although they will do so partly unwillingly. We think that the capability of dealing with differences in a durable manner, based on equality and freedom, can be fostered by helping people develop their capacity for intercultural negotiation. Although we agree that solidarity can be identified as a value that is said to be shared by all citizens of the European Union, this value often conflicts with the two former ones.

Hence, we propose a pragmatic approach: Citizens should explore how intercultural negotiations, in the context of equality and freedom increase their prospects for maintaining stable relationships. In our view, the fact that the population is getting more and more mixed makes the development of intercultural negotiation skills increasingly important. There should be structured and regular opportunities, from the earliest educational settings for adult learning, for people to learn intercultural negotiation skills and to consolidate and continuously improve these skills.

So far, we have suggested that European institutions, agreements, and laws should give priority to two basic values: freedom of agents to choose how they wish to live and to implement that choice and the equal rights of all individuals.

At the same time, we appreciate that social and cultural diversity is a historic feature of the European experience. This diversity exists in many dimensions, including gender, religion, culture, history, language, lifestyle, and economic and political activities. In the past, the denial of diversity has led to extreme and violent conflicts, such as religious wars, linguistic battles, nation-state wars, and so on. It has been a primary target of the European Union to dissuade and avoid such conflicts after World War II. This entails everyone recognizing and respecting diversity.

The combination of these premises yields the required structural preconditions for the existence of the European Union as a social, political, and economic space. The capacity to live with and respect diversity can be reconciled with the values of freedom and equality only by conceptualizing the European Union as a space for intercultural negotiation. Hence, its citizens should be able to negotiate and should be equipped through education and cultural-societal projects to that end. This will allow them to deal with the factual diversity in which they are living.

It would be interesting to apply this structural analysis of preconditions to "failures" of intercultural coexistence, such as policies that criminalize refugees or the rise in Europe of neo-communitarian sentiments, for example. We think that the present frame of analysis can show in each case which premise or premises of the three preconditions discussed above was frustrated or violated. If that is true, then this frame of analysis allows us to understand somewhat what happens in the minds of so-called neoracists and to study how the project of unity and diversity within the European Union space can be enhanced.

SOME SOLUTIONS

The notion of European identity ought to be one that endorses at least the three values of equal opportunities for all, freedom for all, and respect of diversity by all. We recognize that these three values exist in something of a creative tension, and that European Union citizens must have capacities in intercultural negotiation in order to make this tension work for constructive, rather than destructive, ends. But, the capacity for intercultural negotiation is not an innate gift; rather, it is something that must be learned. Without such capacities, a person might be thought of as an unfinished citizen. We further suggest that a person who has not fully actualized his or her European Union citizenship in this sense will have great difficulty adopting European identity. To fully endorse the three core values, a "partially" developed person must be socialized or culturalized to become able to deal with disparity or potential conflict between universal rights and respect for diversity.

The focus on learning processes and on the citizen as a learning subject allows us to frame the situation in an unusual, but potentially powerful way. Citizens should be equipped with conflict resolution strategies and techniques acquired through education and socialization procedures. As reviews of educational curricula show, however, these procedures and techniques currently embed within them somewhat monocultural and bourgeois-social presumptions and are also gender-insensitive to some degree. During the time when Europe might have been seen as less diverse than it is now, especially prior to World War II, these presumptions may not have resulted in conflict. During the past 50 years, however, decolonization has brought to Europe massive inflows of refugees from a wide variety of cultural areas. In the face of this diversity, the strategies and techniques that served in the past have proven increasingly inadequate or inefficient. Problems and conflicts seem to accrue, and typical citizens become conscious of these failures and feel powerlessness to cope in a satisfactory way with the diversified world surrounding them. This is particularly true in the old cities of Europe, where urban or metropolitan political perspective that promises to solve problems of violence, insecurity, and material deterioration is lacking. So, as a result of being incapable of coping adequately with the changing situation, citizens feel under attack. In reaction, they are prone to find comfort by turning to reductionist and unrealistic perspectives on reality.

The often fictionalized world, for which the old conflict resolution strategies and techniques are believed to be adequate, is separated ideologically from the real and diversified world, where inaptitude of the citizen is rampant. As a result, cultural fundamentalism and hatred against diversity emerges. This ideological line can be found in the discourse of the far right. One example of an ideology puts people in political offices and yields practices of "cleansing" and of reduction of diversity, especially against other cultures and religions, but also against women. The short period of power for Front

National in French southern cities in particular and for Haider's FPO (Austrian Freedom Party) have shown this trend to be true.

It is our view that people in a diversified world should be equipped with the conflict resolution strategies and techniques necessary for a culturally diverse context. This would allow a person who can combine universal rights and respect for diversity satisfactorily to function as a citizen. It is on this basis that a European identity can form. We have some encouraging results at the individual and group levels, notably in intercultural education and in group-level intercultural negotiation. There is grassroots work in classes and schools, unions, sociocultural centers, and cultural centers that implies that research (in a more ethnographic way) and training can help successfully implement such a program.

We do not claim that embracing the three values discussed above in combination with appropriate intercultural negotiation skills will completely address the problem of establishing European identity. However, implementing intercultural negotiation strategies in school curricula and encouraging intercultural communication and interaction in the social and cultural field surely is an important first step. Such a program will equip people with new strategies and techniques that can help them feel more effective in coping with diversity and, in turn, make them less fearful of engaging in collaboration in a diversified world. Thus they will perceive European Union citizenship as an empowering status rather than a diminishing status.

Since human beings are not born as full-grown social and cultural subjects, socialization and enculturation processes are of the essence for developing people who have a sense of effective citizenship and European identity. We propose that intercultural education and negotiation should be part of education and training at all levels (from primary schools through university training and beyond) to produce citizens who are able to cope with diversity while staying loyal to the universalistic values of the European (and for that matter, western) tradition. Presently, we see a lack of commitment in the larger nation-states of the European Union to promote such campaigns, even though in 1988 the Council of Ministers of Education declared the implementation of intercultural education. We also witness a lax attitude vis-à-vis hate speech and racial talk, which may in fact dissuade people from engaging in the political project outlined above. One would rather blame the "other" for one's difficulties than engage in changing one's own attitudes.

During the past decade, the assertion of the old political power of the nation-state and the rise of more local neo-national and neocommunitarian sentiments have frustrated the growth of European identity. If these trends continue, it is our opinion that European Union citizens will continue to be torn between inadequate nationalistic or monocultural identity and the sociocultural reality that demands intercultural competencies and the development of a common European identity that acknowledges their common interests and values. In our view, within the European Union the nation-state is hampering

the emancipation of the citizens and is standing in the way of constructing a European identity. All citizens of the European Union have a common interest in being able to live in a balanced political environment and at the same time adequately cope with the real diversity in Europe and with the universalistic values of freedom and equality that form the basis of European citizenship. Thus, all citizens have an interest in being educated and socialized by efficient strategies and techniques, such as intercultural education and intercultural negotiation skills, for making constructive use of these tensions.

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