SIX

KRZYSZTOF POMIAN

European Identity: Historical Fact and Political Problem[7]

Imagine we are invited to answer two questions: is it possible to speak of a Chinese identity, formed in history, which makes China different from the rest of the world? Can the Chinese find an inspiration in this for their future? For an average Chinese person, an affirmative answer to both questions would be so self-evident as to obviate the need to ask them. For an average European looking at China from the outside, the answers would be no less obvious. But the same European would be much more hesitant if posed the questions with respect to Europe. Where does this difference between Chinese and European identity arise? The answer is easily given. A Chinese person is accustomed to thinking of China as a unified cultural and political entity; as an empire. Europeans, on the other hand, think in terms of plurality: a plurality of idioms, cultural regions, religions, and within religions, confessions. Not to mention, of course, the plurality of nations.

The latter has imposed itself so powerfully and for so long on the European imagination that for Europeans, Europe as a reality other than a sum of nations is problematic. It seems self-evident that to be a Dutchman or a Pole is to have a common language, a particular education, traditions, prejudices, habits, customs, and so on. But what it means to be a European is by no means obvious. That is why asking after "European identity" is futile without first showing that one can speak meaningfully of Europe not only as a continent, or as a Union, but also as a cultural and historical formation that is complementary to and superimposed upon nations.

1.

The easiest way to do that is to compare Europe with its neighbours. Such an operation, which is tantamount to looking at Europe from the outside, draws atten-

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tion to features that distinguish Europe as an inhabited space from Muslim North Africa, the Middle East, and China (assuming we agree, for the time being, to extend Europe to the eastern frontiers of Russia). Let us start with those features that can be perceived by the senses. The most striking is probably the presence of crosses: on buildings, in cemeteries, sometimes also at crossroads and roadsides. The second feature is the plans of cities and architecture, particularly of public buildings; if we leave aside the international style fashionable since the 1930s, the most widespread style is what we call "neoclassical". The third is the alphabet, which is different from Chinese ideography as well as from the Arabic and other alphabets. There are three major types of this writing, but it is manifest that they belong to the same family. The fourth is the density of images in the public space and in dwelling places of ordinary persons. The fifth is the great number of images that represent human figures, including naked male and female bodies. The sixth is the ringing of bells. The seventh is the presence of Greek, Roman, and mediaeval remains, either as buildings or as ruins or as objects preserved in museums. Some of these features are specific to Europe; some are present elsewhere too. But their coexistence creates a unique visual and aural landscape, which outside Europe can only be found in areas inhabited by Europeans.

This inventory is certainly open-ended. And it is very general so as to encompass all cultural areas of Europe, in particular the western and the eastern ones, where the form of churches differs (in the East they have onion-shaped domes), as does the appearance of priests, the alphabets used, the vernacular architecture, and the amount of images of naked bodies (much less in the East). It concentrates on what is dominant, obvious, and present almost everywhere on European territory; hence it deliberately neglects the millennial presence in Europe of the Jewish minority and the results of globalization, which in the last four decades has installed in Europe significant Muslim, Chinese, Hindu, and Sikh populations. And it is intended to have only statistical validity: in some places, distinctive features of the European cultural space are concentrated and prominent; elsewhere they are weak and rarefied. An attempt at cartography would almost certainly show that their density is the greatest in certain regions of Western Europe.

Let us now move from perceptible differences to those that become visible only when European society is compared with its neighbours. First, we discover that Europe has its own way of organizing time, beginning with the week – Sunday being an official holiday – but extending to the year, with its feasts and holidays. The former, in particular Christmas and Easter, are common to Western and to Eastern Europe, although celebrated on different dates because the religious calendars do not coincide. Holidays are specific to each country, but each has a national holiday or a Victory Day. Second, Europe possesses its own cultural references. If we try to establish which titles, names, events, and places are referred to with the greatest frequency in European writings, the visual arts, religious and civil ceremonies, political discourse and so on, we arrive at the conclusion that, apart from those disseminated by Christianity on all continents, almost all are either ignored outside Europe or known only to small and learned minorities. However, besides Christian and also Jewish references, Europeans often appeal to ancient Greece

and ancient Rome; the Latin Middle Ages are more frequently evoked in the West, while the East more often turns towards Byzantium. Modern art, literature, science, political doctrines, and legal norms are common to all parts of Europe. It is true that some of these cultural references are now propagated throughout the world. But if we were to treat them statistically and project the results on a map, it is almost certain that the cluster would have the greatest density in Europe.

The third distinctive feature of Europe is its secularity, by which I mean the separation of politics and religion and of citizenship from adherence to a religion or a confession. The fourth is the status of women: European laws recognize only monogamous marriages; women are not compelled to cover their faces, and they have always played an essential role in European culture and politics. The fifth component of European specificity is the absence of dietary restrictions, another legacy of Christianity different to Judaism and Islam. More difficult to describe briefly are habits manifest in everyday life and materialized in the furniture of European homes and offices. All this applies, albeit to a variable extent, to countries born following the European expansion between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries: to the US, Canada, Latin America, Australia, and New Zealand. For brevity's sake, I will disregard their differences and treat them as projections of Europe outside Europe proper.

I stress once more that this is an open-ended inventory. But it is enough to answer in the affirmative the question of whether there are features peculiar to Europe that distinguish it from the rest of the world. If we agree on that, we must seek an explanation for the simultaneous presence in Europe of, on the one hand, the diversity of languages, religions and confessions, signs and symbols, states and nations, and, on the other hand, the unity attested to by the presence of characteristics shared by different groups of Europeans, albeit to a variable degree, differentiating them as a whole from their Muslim or Chinese neighbours. If we wish to avoid futile speculation and to remain on an empirical basis obtained through rational methods, then the explanation we need both for Europe's unity and diversity can come only through the study of European history.

2.

Present-day Europe, with all its peculiarities, is the outcome of a very long process. I am inclined to locate its starting point somewhere around the middle of the first millennium before Christ. At that time, the Greeks began to colonize the shores of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, and entered into closer contact with Celts, who occupied the centre of the continent, roughly speaking along the Danube and the Rhine in the north and, in the south, present-day France, then Gaul, northern Italy, and northern Spain. The consequence was Celtic expeditions to lands inhabited by Greeks and the slow transformation of Celtic societies. This, in turn, indirectly provoked the movement to the south of the northern and eastern neighbours of Celts; let us call them Barbarians without any pejorative connotation. Moreover, the influence of Great Greece in southern Italy on its neighbours provided an

impulse to the growth and the expansion of the small Latin-speaking tribe concentrated around Rome. In the course of several centuries, the Romans came to dominate first their Etruscan and later their Greek neighbours, and started the conquest of the Mediterranean, of northern Italy, and of Transalpine Gaul. After five more centuries of war and colonization, the initial tripartite division of the continent, with Barbarians to the north, Celts in the centre, and Greeks and Romans to the south, gave way around the first century after Christ to a new, binary division: the Roman Empire to the south, the Barbarians to the north, the two being separated by the fortified frontier extended from the North Sea to the Black Sea, roughly along the Rhine and the Danube. The division into *Romanitas* and *Barbaricum* survives to this day in the west of the continent in the form of Romance and Germanic linguistic families, while Celtic languages were either erased or marginalized. It also seems to have had an important religious and cultural significance: the sixteenth-century Reformation, with its strongholds in the former *Barbaricum*, never succeeded in rooting itself in the former *Romanitas*, except in some very limited areas. Before coming to these late developments, however, we must evoke another linguistic and cultural divide within the Roman Empire: that between the Latin West and the Greek East. For a long time it did not create any trouble. But in the fourth century, in response to increasing pressure from the Barbarians on all sides, two military and administrative regions were established that eventually became two empires: the Latin and the Greek, with capitals in Rome and in Constantinople respectively. This occurred in a completely new religious climate created by the spread of Christianity, from the fourth century the official religion of the Empire. The two political capitals, the old and the new, also became religious capitals, respectively the seat of the Pope and the Patriarch, Constantinople having much greater weight as the seat of the emperor.

The separation of the Latin West from the Greek East deepened from the fifth century on, and the former empire, conquered by Barbarians who established themselves on its territory, eventually disappeared. The only authority that remained from the imperial past was that of the Pope in Rome; initially weak and limited, the papacy slowly transformed into a real power over the city, over the adjacent territories, and even over Christianized Barbarian kings. In the process, the Pope became completely independent from the emperor of Constantinople. Even more important were ecclesiological, liturgical, and dogmatic divergences that emerged between the two centres of Christianity. They resulted, it seems, more from misunderstandings caused by the slow drift apart of languages and of cultures than from a deliberate policy that sought to isolate Latin from Greek Christendom and to antagonize the one with respect to the other. But the final effect was exactly that. Since the eleventh century, Catholics and Orthodox Christians considered one another reciprocally as schismatics, the latter's hostility towards the former aggravated by the infamous Fourth Crusade at the beginning of the thirteenth century.

By that time, the continent was almost completely Christianized and divided into two spheres of influence, that of Rome and that of Constantinople, with the line running from the White Sea to the Adriatic still present as an important cultural and religious frontier. Originating east of Finland, the border follows the eastern

frontier of the Baltic countries, crosses Belarus, Ukraine, and Romania, and ends between Croatia and Serbia. It did not alter in the course of ten centuries. Indeed, its astonishing stability, despite all the attempts to move it in one or another direction, must be stressed.

The two spheres of influence differed not only in the manner in which they practiced the Christian faith, but also in cultural matters. While the iconoclasm in the Orthodox area had a long-term effect, Catholics became rather iconolaters. Vernacular languages were recognized and cultivated in the Orthodox area earlier than in the Catholic one: an alphabet was created adapted to their phonetics, translations from the Greek were numerous, and all this resulted in a precocious development of literature and of historiography. And finally there was a difference with respect to Antiquity, which in Byzantium was represented by original Greek models in the visual arts as well as in philosophy, science, poetry, and prose, while the West had access principally to later Latin imitations and a few translations from the Greek into Latin.

Moreover, the East and West differed with respect to the power invested in the emperor by Byzantine political doctrine, whose influence on spiritual matters was greater than that conferred to the emperor or to kings in the West. Lastly, the Byzantine Empire considered itself the unique legitimate heir of the Roman Empire, and hence its equal; Latin Christian elites, on the other hand, had a strong feeling of cultural inferiority with respect to the ancient Romans and to the Byzantine Empire, and did what they could to match them. Hence the *renovatio imperii Romani*, renaissances in visual arts and literature, translations from the twelfth century of scientific and philosophical works from Arabic and Greek, the entrance of Aristotle onto the university curricula in the thirteenth century, and growing interest in Antiquity with a culmination in the renaissance of the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries, which spread from Italy to all the countries of the Latin West.

The beginning of the thirteenth century witnessed two events that radically and for a very long period modified the relationship between Eastern and Western Christendom. The first was the aforementioned Fourth Crusade, which sacked Constantinople and for some decades replaced the Byzantine Empire with the Latin Empire of the Orient, thus paving the way for the Ottoman conquest. The second, some twenty years later, was the invasion of Christian lands by the Mongols. By the time their westwards advance was stopped by the death of their ruler, they had already destroyed the Rus of Kiev and established their domination over all the territory east of the Dnieper. They preserved it for almost three centuries; its effects lasted even longer.

Even when it became independent and made the transition to tsardom, the principality of Muscovy, established under the Mongolian umbrella, remained isolated from the West – with the exception of only occasional contact, mostly on the battlefield. Until the end of the seventeenth century, roughly speaking for half a millennium, the entire northern part of the territory of Orthodoxy lived in a different epoch to Latin Christendom. A similar change occurred in the south some two centuries later, after the Ottoman conquest of former Byzantine territories in the Balkans was itself ended by the fall of Constantinople and the disappearance of the

Byzantine Empire. In this area too, isolation from Latin Christendom and later from Europe lasted roughly half a millennium, until the middle of the nineteenth century.

For Latin Christendom, this was a time full of innovation, not only in technology developed by "borrowing" from the outside – the compass, paper, gunpowder, the printing press – but also in politics, social organization, economics, and culture: municipal self-government, universities, representative assemblies. Particularly important for the question I am trying to answer is the spread of these innovations over all the territory of Latin Christendom, even if they were more dense and more deeply rooted in its western core than on its eastern margins, where Catholics encountered Orthodoxy and later also Islam. Internal differences notwithstanding, between the twelfth and the early sixteenth century, Latin Christendom attained a very high level of religious and hence cultural unification. Everywhere, the clergy (compelled to be celibate) was organized in a hierarchy with a bishop as the head of his diocese and the Pope as the head of all Catholics. Everywhere, the priests celebrated the same liturgy. Everywhere, the same religious orders were active. Everywhere, the learned used Latin and referred to the same set of authorities – the Vulgate, the Church Fathers, Aristotle and his Arab commentators, Roman law, the great masters of scholastic theology – and everywhere, teaching institutions, schools, and universities followed the same curricula. In the visual arts, sculpture, tapestry, and miniatures were inspired by similar models, and the architecture we call "Gothic" was practised everywhere, to the extent that its distribution in space marks the boundaries of Latin Christendom.

Moreover, everywhere sovereign states and national consciousness began to form, albeit in slightly different ways and at different speeds. In each country, the sovereign state was put to the service of dynastic aspirations and territorial ambitions, with the result that war was almost permanent. Every sovereign state resisted the attempts of the Empire and later the Church to pacify Latin Christendom and to unify it under the authority of the emperor, and later the Pope, in order to realize the true Christian Republic. In this, the sovereign state had the backing of fractions of the clergy, of the nobility, lawyers, and merchants. These centrifugal forces became particularly influential during the great schism in the West between a pope in Avignon and a pope in Rome. For the first time, attempts at the nationalization of Christianity were undertaken in England, France, and Bohemia, where national churches were established. After two universal councils put an end to the disorder at the head of the Church, things seemed to return to a normality characterized by tension between sovereign states and papacy, which could sometimes degenerate into an open conflict but which usually ended in compromise.

3.

The Reformation initiated by Luther seemed at first to be following the traditional path. However, propagated by the printing presses, it spread in a couple of years across the German-speaking realm and Scandinavia, aroused similar movements in Switzerland and France, provoked the split between England and the papacy,

and entered the Netherlands, Scotland, Poland, and Transylvania. From the 1520s, Latin Christendom was plagued with religious wars: extremely violent and barbaric civil wars and no less violent and barbaric wars between Protestant and Catholic states. Interspersed with periods of truce, they lasted until the first decade of the eighteenth century. Yet already by the middle of the seventeenth century it was obvious to any lucid observer that Latin Christendom belonged to the past. Henceforth there were two coalitions: that of the Catholic counter-reformation, led by the papacy and by the Habsburgs, and that of the Protestant countries, first backed by France and in the final act of the conflict financed by England and the Netherlands and directed against France.

We now arrive at the crucial moment: the birth of Europe from the spirit of the Enlightenment. During the ultimate round of religious wars at the end of the seventeenth century, there emerged a new supra-confessional and supranational community, superimposed upon the plurality of confessions and sovereign states, and – in contradistinction to the old *Christianitas* – based not on common faith but on the common culture instilled in learned elites both by Catholic colleges and Protestant gymnasia. Their alumni spoke the same language (Latin, and to an increasing extent French) and were familiar with Christian tradition, albeit understood in many different ways, and with the classical authors and the historical and artistic monuments left by classical Antiquity. In their search for new rules for the coexistence of forces on the continent, these lay elites could appeal only to this common heritage.

To elaborate the law of war and peace, they therefore looked for precedents in the history of Israel as told in the Old Testament and in the history of Rome. In other words: because they could no longer refer to a shared revelation, they tried to make explicit what for them was the law of nature. They implemented the new law through congresses convened in order to end wars, as well as through learned treatises usually written by authors active as jurists and/or diplomats. The *ius gentium* that resulted from these activities gave a new meaning to the name Europe. Henceforth it denoted the community of states that profess respect for the rules of the law of nations, even if they violate it in the selfish pursuit of their interests.

But Europe was more than the *ius gentium*. It was also the balance of power maintained through skilful diplomacy, which was able to organize a coalition stronger than any single state and thus either to preserve the peace or to win the war. It was, moreover, a frame of reference invoked by individuals and states as a common homeland of sorts. And it was an ideal community of people who shared a deep knowledge of and an admiration for the classics in letters and in visual arts, and who considered themselves to be guided by the rules of reason both in their historical or scientific research and their personal behaviour. Such a community – the *respublica litteraria*, *République des Lettres*, or Republic of Learning – imposed upon its members definite rules that together formed an ethics based not on revelation but on *lumen naturale*, and in this respect similar to the law of nations. Sovereign states and Europe as a whole are therefore complementary products of the same process of secularization.

Implemented by Christianity, the first cultural unification of the European continent resulted, in the Latin regions, in the formation of *Christianitas*. The second cultural unification of what we are entitled now to call Europe moved forward under the banner of the Enlightenment. It culminated in the French revolution and the Napoleonic attempt at the creation of a European empire with the same administrative divisions, the same Civil Code, the same system of weights and measures, the same organization of education, the same museums, and so on. It did not last long, but several of its achievements are still with us. However the second cultural unification also culminated in the Industrial Revolution, launched in Great Britain at the beginning of the eighteenth century, which spread throughout the continent in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It modified social hierarchies, replacing orders with classes and organizing their conflict around the opposed interests of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. It turned upside down the relationship between the countryside and the city. It changed drastically the environment in which people lived, their work and their leisure, peace and war. And it completed the centuries-long process whereby collective religious beliefs were replaced by ones that received the misleading name of ideology and which, unlike religion, were oriented not towards the other world and eternity but toward this world and the future.

The combined impact of both revolutions, increased by the dynamics of radicalizing ideologies, in turn revolutionized relations between elites and masses. In every country, the opposition between the cosmopolitan (i.e., European) culture of the elites and the local culture of the masses – the first secularized, the second permeated by religion; the first open to innovation, the second attached to tradition – was accentuated by the Enlightenment before being dissolved in the new national cultures. The very idea of a national culture dates from this period; previously, culture was by definition universal. Eventually, after more than a century of struggle, the nationalization of culture brought about the nationalization – that is the democratization – of politics, and the entrance of the masses into it through the exercise of universal suffrage and the agency of mass political parties.

The growing importance of nations affected interstate relations, which only then became truly international. This resulted in the redrawing of the political map of Europe, where the number of independent states – almost all of them national states – first diminished (between 1815 and 1870 following the unification of Germany and of Italy), and later increased: between 1870 and 1990, the number of independent states increased from 20 to 41. Most of these new states appeared in Central and in Eastern Europe as a result of the dismemberment of former empires – Habsburg, German, Tsarist, and Ottoman – after a lost war or as an effect of the peaceful collapse of the Soviet Union. Moreover, from the 1870s onwards, the growing importance of nations and national ideologies contributed to the creation of a climate of permanent tension between states confronted with the separatist movements inside their borders and with neighbours' claims to parts of their territory.

In a climate of arms races and colonial rivalry, of coalitions intended to maintain the European balance of power actually working to destroy it, a mere spark

was enough to provoke an enormous explosion. This happened in 1914 with effects that lasted until 1990: four years of trenches; the Bolshevik revolution in Russia; the peace treaty of Versailles, contested by Germany and by the new Soviet power; the fascist takeover in Italy; the Great Crash of 1929; the accession of Hitler and his Nazis to total power in Germany; the Second World War with the extermination of European Jewry; the Iron Curtain and the Stalinist totalitarianism forcefully imposed on almost all countries of central and eastern Europe; the Cold War; and the long decay of the Soviet system until its final collapse.

None of the horrors of the twentieth century succeeded, however, in erasing the results of the second cultural unification of Europe. On the contrary, this was extended and deepened by the development of rail networks, motorways, new means of communication, by the spread of industry, the growth of cities, by the advances of literacy… in short, by the greater uniformity of living conditions and the material environment. Moreover, among the lasting results of the second cultural unification was the idea of Europe as a cultural reality, shared since the eighteenth century by a significant part of the elites of a majority of European nations. These elites became more and more convinced that this cultural reality had to be completed by an economic and even a political one. After the First World War, some attempts in this direction were undertaken by influential politicians, writers, and intellectuals. However in the climate of violent ideological conflict, mistrust among states, and economic crisis, all failed.

Attempts were renewed after the Second World War, and this time they were successful. The decades of the economic and political integration of Western Europe made possible first a peaceful transition from dictatorship to democracy in Greece, Portugal and Spain, and later the completely unexpected, peaceful dismantling of the communist regimes in the countries of the Soviet bloc. Europe is now unified as never before. The wide gap between the economic levels of Western European countries and many Central European countries and all Eastern European countries will not be quickly closed. But there is no more of an ideological divide between liberal and authoritarian countries, as before 1914, or between democracies and totalitarian states, as after the First World War. And there is no more the divide between market economies and so-called planned economies. It is true that new divisions are appearing, the most important being between members of the European Union and countries that would like to enter but do not satisfy the requirements. However violent conflict seems an unlikely outcome.

4.

This excursion into the past explains, I hope, both the diversity and the unity of Europe. It explains Europe's distinctive features, and therefore its differences from Muslim and Chinese regions, which most of the time had a history of their own. It has probably been apparent that I have spoken of differences and have tried to avoid the word "identity". With differences, we are dealing with facts; we know how to justify our contention that there is a difference between, say, Europe and

China. Identity is another matter. The word comes from a specialized language, where it is used in its strict Leibnizian sense: *eadem sunt quorum unum potest substitui alteri salva veritate*. Outside the field of mathematics and logic, however, we never meet identities, only greater or lesser similarities. Nevertheless, the word "identity" has entered the language of social scientists, historians, journalists, and even politicians. Why has it made such a career in the last twenty years or so? What are people speaking about when they use it? What do they mean when they explain that they must preserve their identity against the threats to which they believe it is vulnerable? Looking at the uses of the word "identity" in present-day language, we notice immediately that it is connected with the idea of stability. Identity refers to something that is not ephemeral, to something that preserves its distinctive characteristics despite the passage of time. Understood in this manner, it is roughly equivalent to what Braudel called *la longue durée*. But identity is also connected to at least two other words that have also become highly fashionable in the last twenty years. These words are: memory and heritage. This fact seems to point out to a strong connection of identity with the past. And indeed there is such a connection. When we speak about identity, we speak about something that we received from our predecessors. In this sense, all the differences between Europe and its neighbours I listed at the beginning of this discussion may be considered components of the European identity. Used with such a descriptive meaning, the word "identity" has a legitimate place in the vocabulary of a historian. I am entitled therefore to answer directly the first of our initial questions: yes, one can speak about a European identity, formed in history, which makes Europe different from the rest of the world.

But what about the second question: can Europeans find in their identity inspiration for the future? As the wording of the question indicates, when we speak about identity we also speak about something that we shall leave to our descendants. In particular, when we are anxious about our identity, we are concerned not so much with what we have already inherited, but with what our descendants will inherit from us. Not so much with what we are *ourselves*, but with what they will *become*. Even if we do not expect them to be our clones, we would like them to be in some important respect similar to us: we would like a continuity to be preserved between us and them. It follows that identity in common parlance refers less to our relation with the past than to our relation with the future. But the past is obviously somehow included in this relation. So, to be precise, one can say that in common parlance identity refers to our relation with the future through the agency of the past.

There was a time when our relations with the future did not necessarily pass through the agency of the past. Today, however, even when we programme heavy investments profitable only after a long time, we have to care about the past insofar as we have to safeguard the environment, which is nothing other than the past materialized. And when we are making projects or undertaking actions that may affect the life of human beings for years to come, we adopt – willingly or not – an attitude with respect to the past. This takes place on two levels. The first is that of the socialization of the family, where parents inculcate in their children their language

and also gestures, expressions, attitudes, beliefs, and prejudices, of which they are often unaware. In doing so, they transmit to them an immaterial and a material heritage, or rather what they have themselves chosen from it, deliberately or not. Heritage is never transmitted in immutable form. Each successive generation adds something and relinquishes something it believes irrelevant, uninteresting, antiquated. All this happens spontaneously, in everyday life, without people being aware that what they are doing is tantamount to what in academic language would be called the preservation of identity.

There is also another level at which people specify their relation with the future through the agency of the past. It is that of politics: the teaching in schools of the mother tongue, history, literature, art, religion, or ethics, according to syllabi developed in ministries and other offices; the maintenance of the country's language, its landscapes, monuments, museums, archives, libraries and all the other components of its material heritage; the preservation of traditions the majority of people are attached to, and the instillation of respect for the laws and customs they consider, rightly or wrongly, to be essential for securing social cohesion, in particular for building the bridge between themselves and generations to follow. All measures that influence education, collective memory, and the image people have of themselves that they wish to hand down to their successors together form the politics of identity, even if this is not its official name. Such a politics, unlike what happens at the family level, must be made the object of public deliberation and be implemented through democratic decisions.

And so it is in European countries. Nevertheless, what characterizes the present-day situation is the spread among a growing number of people in Europe of the feeling of the divergence between the two levels on which identity is reproduced. In other words, what people are doing when they educate their children seems to them to be different from – or even bluntly opposed to – what state institutions are doing when they shape the future of the country and that of Europe. If this diagnosis is correct, it is easy to understand the heatedness of debates over identity. But it is rarely observed that these are beyond the competence of the historian.

A historian can say what the identity of Europe is in the descriptive sense of the term, as a cluster of stable distinctive features. And he or she can add that the majority of Europeans answer our second initial question in the affirmative, insofar as they try to find inspiration for their future in what they believe European identity to be. On this point, there seems to be wide agreement, despite the dissenting voices of some who would like to get rid of European identity whatever its content. The real controversy, however, lies elsewhere. It concerns identity not in its descriptive but in its prescriptive sense. The debated question is: given who we are, what of our past and our present is worth preserving? What are we ready to abandon, and what are we attached to so strongly that under no circumstances will we allow ourselves to be deprived of it? To what extent must the future be patterned according to our expectations, rooted in the past, and to what extent are we ready to leave the shaping of it to forces we do not control, and which seem to be causing a growing estrangement from our familiar ideas about how that future

should look? These questions, in many different forms, are being debated across Europe today. All of them must be addressed not to historians but to politicians, and in the last instance to the European citizenry, which as ultimate decision-maker must provide an answer. European identity is a historical fact. More and more, it is also becoming a political problem.

P.S.[8]

Europe is the product of the struggle of opposed forces: of Christianity and of paganism, of *Respublica Christiana* and of sovereign states, of dreams of peace and of the reality of war, of Reformation and of *ius gentium*, of the Enlightenment's cosmopolitanism and of aggressive nationalisms, of the European Union and of anti-European populisms. In this struggle, sometimes the integrative forces, sometimes their opponents have had the upper hand. In other words European history alternates between periods when the trend towards unification dominates over forces of division, and periods of dominance of the latter over the former, which manifests itself in long cycles of continental if not global wars. Such a history is peculiar to Europe. It is inbuilt in its landscapes, its institutions, its way of life, and in the often unconscious reactions and reflexes of Europeans. It distinguishes Europe from other civilizations. And it constitutes the European identity such as it is at present; and it will certainly evolve in the future.

We are living now in the third period of unification. Is the Brexit a symptom of its end or will the European Union survive it and become even stronger than before? I dare not answer. It's obvious, however, that we can no longer accept an optimistic vision of European integration like the one expressed in my paper. "Europe, I wrote there, is now unified as never before. […] There is no more an ideological divide between liberal and authoritarian countries, as before 1914, or between democracies and totalitarian states as after the First World War". This seemed true fifteen years ago when this paper was written.

It is not true today. The divide between the liberal and the so-called "illiberal democracy", which is a new name of authoritarianism, opposes not only the European Union to Russia on the one side – and to China on the other side. It opposes also, inside the European Union itself, Hungary and Poland, perhaps also the Czech Republic and Slovakia, to the rest insofar as they try to implement soft versions of the Russian model. The term "illiberal democracy" does not seem to be used in the official discourses of the Polish Law and Justice party. But its ideology, openly Catholic from before the Second Vatican Council, nationalist, patriarchal, and authoritarian, is obviously opposed to political liberalism starting with the freedom of conscience. It is opposed therefore to the fundamental values of the European Union, which for speakers of this party is nothing other than "the civilization of death".

[8] Added at the ALLEA Conference in Warsaw on October 11, 2019.

One could expect that everybody agrees about the existence of a European identity and that the only controversy about it concerns its content. Actually it's the very existence of a European identity that is highly controversial. It is challenged by all nationalisms for which nations represent the supreme level of organization of human societies and which because of that consider the European project as a destructive utopia or as a tool or an arm used by some nations, especially the Germans and French, in order to justify their dominance over the European continent. And it is challenged also by the cosmopolitanism convinced that the only legitimate collective identity is the one common to all human beings and opposed therefore to the very idea of European identity insofar as it introduces into humankind a division between Europeans and the other. Both these ideologies have important political sequels. For nationalisms, 'Europe' is only a geographical term. The only social reality is a plurality of nations, any one of which pursues its own interests and is therefore in conflict with any other; only temporary alliances may interrupt this war of all against all. For cosmopolitanism, Europe as a union of nations is at best only a step towards the integration of the world into one republic with one world government or, at worst, an obstacle on the way towards this ultimate goal. From this perspective Europe must open its frontiers and abandon all attempts at preserving its singularity; it must try to dissolve itself, so to say, in an undifferentiated humankind.

Both these ideologies are detrimental for the European Union and for the attempts at pushing its integration ahead. But they cannot be put on an equal footing. Nationalism spreads among masses. It awakes powerful emotions able to send great crowds into the streets, to organize people into a political party, to convince them to vote according to commandments of its leaders, and even to seize power in its country so as to become a really destructive force inside the European Union. Cosmopolitanism is not that dangerous. It influences mostly elites and it exerts its negative effects indirectly insofar as it pushes politicians to abolish the control of frontiers, to promote the opening of markets without reciprocity, to destroy barriers which protect working people against unemployment and the worsening of living standards. In so doing cosmopolitanism contributes however to strengthen popular fears and therefore to create a breeding ground for nationalism despite the latter being allegedly its enemy. For all these reasons cosmopolitanism must be criticized and the politics it inspires must be opposed and refused. But nationalisms must be fought relentlessly if only we wish to preserve the European Union against the danger of disintegration.