

We do have a chance to exploit the potential of history for exposing Europe's unity rather than its diversity, but we need to take this chance by skilfully referring to everything what is common in the identity of Europeans.

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European Identity Building: Some Remarks on Historical and Contemporary Tensions

Identity building is a long-term process. In the case of European identity building the problems and constraints result not only from history but also from contemporary challenges. There is a very complex mix of historical and present challenges, and this is very well understandable after reading Krzysztof Pomian's contribution. His piece shows the whole historical complexity of the interrelations between similarities and differences in Europe. It looks as if it had been written recently – however, the paper was written more than ten years ago! In my opinion it is a very convincing argument that history really does matter and that it is – in a sense – our contemporary problem, mixed with other more explicitly present-day challenges for European identity.

As new European tensions are emerging and old ones re-emerging, it can be sometimes heard that it is the “newly” admitted countries that are the main source of these tensions since they lack long-term democratic training. This is to some extent the peculiar trend in the post-communist transformation which after almost three decades of implementation of the liberal democratic model seems to be turning back, or at least questioning some institutional elements of the model. Such concepts as “hybrid regimes” are emerging to explain the current model. It should be noticed, however, that this would be a peculiar form of hybrid regime. Usually the term has been used to explain the institutional model of some post-soviet countries which have not yet achieved full democracy after abandoning the communist

regime. However, in the case of some CEE countries (for example Poland and Hungary) there seems to be another story: they have already reached and almost completed implementation of the democratic model and then they seem to deviate from it in some respects (mostly in the political dimension, leaving market transition untouched). Anyway it looks like the end of the “end of history” model. It shows that there is no unidirectional mode of transition to democracy and that some elements of autocracy can come back. This definitely adds to the general uncertainty concerning the European identity building process.

However these are not the only sources of this uncertainty. Some elements of the crisis of the democratic model can be seen in the traditional “Western” countries. Additionally there are empirical data showing that there were already differences between the countries of the West, for example in the feeling of political alienation where respondents from Spain, Greece, Italy (and the Czech Republic) reported the highest levels of this alienation while the lowest were in Scandinavian countries, with CEE countries located somewhere in between (Rychard 2009: 224). As we see, historical differences are still in play.

The CEE countries learned the lesson that the moment at which the model of European integration is a clear goal to be reached, and the only uncertainty concerns the speed with which it can be reached, has already passed. Now the very model is less clear and this is a new phenomenon generating its own uncertainty. Thus the very notion of “European identity” is becoming less clear.

In my opinion, three scenarios for the future are possible. The first one could be a potential **European fragmentation**. This would be based mostly on traditional historical differences, mainly between the “East” and “West” of Europe with the addition of differentiation inside the traditional “West”. This would be the most pessimistic scenario, although not the most likely to happen, I think. The second one would be the scenario opposite to enlargement which could be the result of disillusionment among some European leaders with the results of recent enlargement (which took place mostly in 2004) as this might be blamed as the source of the current obstacles to European identity building. This could be a scenario of **European downsizing**. In a period of uncertainty one of the coping strategies to reduce such uncertainty could be a turning back to the “old days”, to the well-remembered, known model of “Western Europe” as the core of the identity. This would be based on the following principles: find a *modus vivendi* with Russia, forget about Ukraine and leave CEE’s EU members on the peripheries, even if still formally as EU members. Then try to build a new identity with France and Germany representing the core. Brexit could only help this scenario to materialize. In a sense this would reflect the memory of “good, old 60s”. This could happen not as a result of one, fundamental, strategic decision, on the contrary – rather as the result of the absence of such decisions and strategy. This indecision process would be typical for institutional changes. These are relatively rarely the result of radical decisions, mostly they emerge as the consequence of a long-term cumulative process of “small” decisions and indecisions which, as institutional theory says, create “path dependency”. Then it might be very difficult to deviate from this path and to overcome the small, cumulative legacies of the past choices.

I believe there is still a room for the third option, which I would call the scenario of **European re-integration**. This should be based on new ideas allowing European citizens to play more pro-active roles. Where could it come from and is it realistic? Let us recall the history of the last 30 years. There are European countries able to abandon the oppressive system of communism in 1989 in a peaceful way. This is still one of the most important phenomena of the history of the 20th century and should not be forgotten. In some of these countries this was based on new types of social movement (Solidarność in Poland, Sąjūdis in Lithuania, Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia). Despite the important differences among them, the movements were based on fresh ideas and imagined European identity. Although these visions of the future were definitely stereotypical and simplifying, they played a fundamental role in the abandoning of the old regime and in the building of the new systems. There is a paradox that some of the CEE countries which are now blamed for being an obstacle to the European integration model were building their democracies based on the strong belief in this very integration! I think this scenario is not a utopian one. There are strong structural trends in some of these European countries which could facilitate the process of European re-integration. If we take Poland as an example, we see over the last 30 years a clear process of modernization, of improvement of the economic system and quality of life, with growing levels of education, a secularization process and a still very strong pro-European orientation of the society.

A new type of identity is definitely needed for this scenario to materialize. This could reduce the current uncertainty. Of course, this is a matter of institutional choices and decisions. But before institutions should come ideas. Although as Professor Antonio Loprieno noted in his welcoming address on the end of ideology, this should not mean the end of ideas. Ideas are needed. And after all, institutions are based on ideas since they are also about the norms. There are no unavoidable historical trends (although path dependency plays its role). Even present day phenomena of the questioning of the elements of the liberal democratic model, and of the serious nature of the changes in some CEE countries should not lead us to think that the depth of the current counter-transformational changes reflect an unavoidable historical necessity. On the contrary: we should remember that in many instances these attempts to reverse the course of democratic transition are the result of electoral victories by a very low margin. So, the future is not pre-determined. Its final institutional outcome depends on many contingencies. And among them the memory of building democratic and market institutions, and long-term structural processes creating societies supporting Europe could be helpful in building the new European identity.

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