



Building up European Solidarity, a view from the East*

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Abstract

The cultural dimension or, multicultural models to be more precise, will represent the real foundation capable of ensuring Europe's leadership in facing future challenges. Actually, the success of the European Union in the political competition of the third century will largely depend on its ability to restructure and to extend by including cultures and experiences of Central and South-Eastern Europe. Multiculturalism can and must be lived as a sign of respect for diversity, as an acceptance of pluralism in traditions, as solidarity governed by permanent observation of national and European laws on human rights and individual freedom. Modernity, consecrating individual triumph, was too often understood as dissolution of organic ties within the community. Yet, considering the indisputable positive aspects of the modernization process, we will have to and we will know better than to ignore the natural desire of the human being to live and grow surrounded by people with common beliefs and values. We will be able to overcome the effects of a society increasingly based on excessive consumption and harsh competition in order to understand that we will not move into post-modernity with what we have, but with what we are. Ultimately, the real subject that should benefit from this multiculturalism is neither groups nor the minority, rather the individual, the citizen able to worthily articulate the identity of the community to which he belongs, with the national values and universal values that unite us all.

1. The Oldest European Experiment

When we talk about the history and traditions of Southeast Europe, what is to be stressed the most is the uniqueness of it as a site of the oldest European experiment from the continent's history. Since the beginning of the fifth millennium B.C., the Balkans region has created a special status through its autonomous start in the neolithic civilization, a status of cultural creativity, that never ceased to illustrate and to develop, eventually becoming the core of the European identity.

This concentric movement, reverberated from Southern Greece towards the North and farther through the Balkans towards the center of the continent, the innovations brought by this young civilization, as well as the commercial and cultural exchanges that began from North towards South in the fourth millennium B.C., have transformed the peninsula into a center of influence of a much broader area. The vast migration of Indo-European tribes, which eventually modified the entire ethno-linguistic map of the continent, did not alter the

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Balkan influence. On the contrary, this *two waves* movement gave birth to a specific cultural context and also formed the historical roots of Europe as a whole.

By this profound process of intercultural exchanges, a model of creativity and communication, Southeast Europe became the most important area of cultural innovations in the Mediterranean world. Here were invented tools and concepts, myths and principles, and also methods to circulate them as far as possible, within the ends of the continent for which she also invented a name: *Europa*. The core values of Greek civilization have formed the core of the European culture from the archaic era, until the Roman Empire managed to also build a political-state unity of broad inclusion.

“Are we capable of learning something from the lessons of the past?”

2. The Rift of the West- and East-European Civilizations can be mended

The experience of the vivid and creative solidarity of our common history must bear its fruits now, when we are offered the chance to redefine European space. The rupture between Western civilization and the civilization in the Eastern half of our continent can be solved through communication, and the Mediterranean and Balkan experience can contribute to this process.

Are we capable of learning something from the lessons of the past? If so, we should make use of the chance to gain advantage from the Southeastern European experience and all that is the best and more favorable about it, to establish the European identity of our continent.

The “citizen of the world” notion, *kosmopolites*, has two converging roots, that of the ancient Greco-Roman Stoic philosophy, and that of the universal religions, starting with the Christian one. This notion had a formative influence on the great European thinkers, as well as on the American Founding Fathers. In today’s multicultural and multinational world, many of our most pressing problems require a dialogue. Its basic precondition is that we should be able to recognize the worth of human life wherever it occurs, without denying our national, ethnic, religious and professional faiths.

Not only ancient democracies, but also modern ones, have been or are prone to hasty decisions, and to substituting a deeper judgment for invectives. That is why democracy needs citizens who can think for themselves rather than simply obeying authority. Scientific education produces sophisticated scientists and technicians, but only humanities, which may seem non-productive, can create people capable of keeping the democratic spirit alive. Citizens who cultivate their knowledge will consider themselves not only citizens of some local regions or communities, but also human beings bound to all other human beings by ties of recognition and concern.

3. Towards a Europe Free of Centers and Margins

A new approach of the European heritage tries to build a knowledge and defense system that would no longer take into account power hierarchies and traditional preferences. We not only discover the heritage of smaller countries, what we could call now, from a cultural point of view, a *second Europe*, but also great local cultural values, some even little known in their own countries, which can therefore be called a *third Europe*.

“The cultural dimension or, multicultural models to be more precise, will represent the real foundation capable of ensuring Europe’s leadership in facing future challenges.”

I firmly believe that the cultural dimension or, multicultural models to be more precise, will represent the real foundation capable of ensuring Europe’s leadership in facing future challenges. Actually, the success of the European Union in the political competition of the third century will largely depend on its ability to restructure and to extend by including cultures and experiences whose historical subject is the people of Central and South-East Europe. I am thinking both of the great cultural traditions in this region, Central-European or Slavo-Byzantine tradition, and of the recent experiences of resistance against totalitarianism, of the spiritual aspirations of the people forced to live in closed societies, alienated from the rest of the world and almost forgotten by the other world.

Modernity, consecrating individual triumph, was too often understood as a dissolution of organic ties within the community. Yet, I am convinced that taking the indisputable positive aspects of the modernization process, we will have to and we will know better than to ignore the natural desire of the human being to live and grow amidst the community to which he belongs. I also believe that we will be able to overcome the effects of a society increasingly based on excessive consumption and harsh competition in order to understand that we will not move into post-modernity with what we have, but with what we are.

4. Challenges of Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism can represent a last shield against the drift of globalization to standardization and cultural assimilation. Especially through mass-media, audio-visual productions, and also through more insidious means, of electronic information networks, a system of inducing preferences and conducts was created and is currently developing, leading towards a standardization of behaviours to the most intimate level of private life.

Today, the world seems to be dominated by a mass culture of planetary dimensions that tends to strengthen the supremacy of audio-visual communication until it sees the elimination of the written word. And exactly this type of globalization is the reason that must determine a different type of engagement. Or, there is the risk that we will eventually believe that we must all speak the same language, wear the same clothes, say that the cultural heritage of mankind is no longer useful, that all that matters is action and money. And that, in no circumstances should we waste our time thinking or meditating. The tendency to ignore values, both traditional and modern, as well as promoting counter-models will form people of the same image, but with the risk of devaluating man himself.

The return to tradition, the continuous rediscovery of the profound essence of ancient peoples, as the European peoples, and, on the other hand, the recognition and affirmation of individual autonomy are essential points of our evolution to the future. As a matter of fact, the issue of this double condition is the key to success for multiculturalism. Europe’s realignment

to cultural traditions will thereby prove that the past can be successfully capitalized, that tradition and modernity can cooperate in a positive relationship.

5. Pluralism and Solidarity

The most remarkable evidence of the strengths of a politically well-managed multiculturalism is offered by the European construction process that sought to harness history's good lessons and to learn from Europe's drama and suffering from the Second World War, a drama that was largely caused by violent assertion of a superiority of race and ethnicity. Since then, Europeans have understood that they must offer to nations another unifying landmark and another dimension that would allow people to act as true citizens that have faith in single political religion, in human rights and democratic freedoms guaranteed by law.

“Multiculturalism can and must be lived as a sign of respect for diversity”

And yet, multiculturalism is not without dangers, dangers that actually fall in a similar logic, even if it is in contrary terms, with the one generating the deviations of globalization. The first and most serious danger is to be anchored solely in the life and values of a single community, apart from other communities and ignoring the role of the rule of law meant to ensure coherence and unity of society. From this self-isolation, arrogant and defiant, to brutal and aggressive assertion of autonomous rights of minority groups there is only one step. Extremely dangerous, including the risk of perpetuating conflicts from one generation to another.

Multiculturalism can and must be lived as a sign of respect for diversity, as an acceptance of pluralism in identity traditions, as solidarity governed by permanent observation of national and European laws on human rights and individual freedom.

I firmly believe that, ultimately, the real subject that should benefit from multiculturalism is neither groups nor the minority, but rather the individual, the citizen able to worthily articulate the identity of the community to which he belongs, with the national values and universal values that unite us all.

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