"IT IS NOT ONLY THE ECONOMY, STUPID" – THE IMPORTANCE OF NATIONAL AND EUROPEAN IDENTITY FOR THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

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Abstract:
The European Union has always been a political project, using the economy as instrument to reach the political goals. Therefore, a European identity is of utmost importance for the success of the European integration process. European identity is not the contrary of a national identity but the result of the combination of national identities. The French philosopher François Jullien recommends replacing identity differentiation, which is always exclusive as well as inclusive, with the concept of distance. According to this concept, differences in cultures are certainly taken into account, but they are not used for exclusion, but to construct a greater common whole.

Keywords
European integration, European identity, national identity

The economy as an instrument of politics

The European Union is a misconception. This is true at least for many people who are engaged with it – or who indeed do not engage sufficiently with it. The misconception lies in the fact that the EU is considered to be primarily an economic union. The single market is regarded as the centrepiece of European integration. This is at the same time correct and incorrect.

From the start, the European Union has been a political project. The economy was and still is an instrument used to attain political goals.

When on 9th May 1950, the day on which the European institutions are now celebrated, the French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman put forward the idea of the European Coal and Steel Community, he said, among other things, that:

"World peace cannot be safeguarded without the making of creative efforts proportionate to the dangers which threaten it.

The contribution which an organized and living Europe can bring to civilization is indispensable to the maintenance of peaceful relations. ...

Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create a de facto solidarity. The coming together of the nations of Europe requires the elimination of the age-old opposition of France and Germany." (The Schuman Declaration, 1950).

To refer to this does not mean to deny the economic importance of the EU. Naturally, the single market is of great importance to all EU citizens, and is incidentally still the largest in the world in terms of its value. However, it does not constitute the core of European integration. This is demonstrated by a brief mental exercise: is a single market without the European Union – a common market in which the four basic freedoms apply, but in which each state otherwise pursues its own model – imaginable? Indeed it is – and there are even some within the EU who support such an idea, according to the principle of "Let us trade, work and invest freely, but otherwise, leave us alone".

When in March 2017 the European Commission presented its white paper with five scenarios, one of these consisted of focusing on the single market. There is a reason to doubt that this was meant particularly seriously by Jean-Claude Juncker. This scenario is likely to have been intended as a cautionary one, designed to lead those considering it to the conclusion that an EU that consists solely of a single market would in fact no longer be a European Union.

All the important strategic courses of action taken by the EU have been of a political nature, as was already made very clear in the preamble to the treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) of 1951. Here, the following is stated:

"RESOLVED to substitute for historic rivalries a fusion of their essential interests; to establish, by creating an economic community, the foundation of a broad and independent community among peoples long divided by bloody conflicts; and to lay the bases of institutions capable of

giving direction to their future common destiny…" (Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community, 1951)

The ECSC did not emerge from thin air, and was also not created as the result of an exuberance of friendly feelings between Germany and France. Other attempts to integrate Europe, or more precisely, Western Europe, had already failed by that point in time. The OEEC of 1947, which did not meet American expectations as a nucleus of European integration; the Brussels Pact of 1948, which was intended to unite Western Europe without and even against Germany; the largely unknown Fritalux free trade zone of 1949, which had similar aims in the economic arena but which never came to existence; and the Council of Europe of 1949, which could not agree on any real-life competencies, and which still lacks them today.

The focus of the ECSC was not therefore on coal and steel, important as they were at that time for rebuilding Europe, but on securing peace after two devastating wars and on gradually extinguishing the hereditary enmity between Germany and France.

All other steps towards integration pursued this logic. The next stage was the Treaty of Rome of 1957, in which the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC) were founded.

"The founding of the EEC was a political decision. The renewed initiatives … reflected the view that alone and in isolation, the ECSC could not continue to play a significant role in terms of integration policy. In light of the dual suppression of the Hungarian uprising in October and November 1956, the expanded core integration was not only related to the potential Soviet threat, but was also to be understood as a type of defensive stance against ongoing attempts at foreign influence and against the background of successful assertion of power against individual nation state resistance" (Gehler, 2018).

Two major, interconnected projects had previously, in 1954, come to nothing: the European Defence Community and the European Political Community.

The impulse for integration in the Treaties of Rome was incidentally intended to come above all from the EAEC. At that time, atomic power was still unquestioningly accepted as the solution to energy problems and as the basis of ongoing economic growth. The EEC, which to a certain extent formed the core of today's single market, was by contrast treated as a 'by-catch', with which the partners were to be mutually compensated for potential disadvantages arising from the EAEC treaty.

The EEC was also regarded critically in Germany. The extremely popular economics minister at the time, the "father of the economic miracle" Ludwig Erhard, openly criticised the EEC concept from an economic perspective and for political reasons was unequivocally rebuked for doing so by Federal Chancellor Konrad Adenauer.

As we now know, things turned out differently. While the EEC evolved into today's economic union, the EAEC would never play an important role.

The next significant step in European development was the southward expansion during the 1980s. While there had already been one round of expansion previously, which revolved primarily around the United Kingdom, this was to a greater extent the incorporation of Great Britain at a late stage, which due to British reticence on the one hand and French rejection on the other had not been possible until then.

The southward expansion to include Greece in 1981 and Spain and Portugal in 1986 was not primarily conducted in order to pursue economic goals. The level of development in all three countries was extremely moderate, and they did not strengthen the European Community economically. In addition, their agriculture was regarded as an annoying competitor in the common agricultural market. The reason for including them lay in the stabilisation of Southern Europe after all three countries had succeeded in liberating themselves from the grip of their dictators.

The eastward expansion of the EU in 2004 and 2007 pursued this logic in just the same way, as did the acceptance of Croatia, which was intended to serve as an example for the other countries among the so-called "Western Balkans". The often-cited theory that the established EU states simply wanted to secure new markets through these expansion rounds makes no sense. These countries had already been very strong on these markets for a long time without EU membership, and would also have remained so.

The European Community evolved not out of love and trust, but hate and mistrust. What Frenchman could have been expected to love a German in 1950? The basic principle according to which European integration could function at all was that one country did not dominate over another one – least of all, Germany over its European partners. This precondition was fulfilled by a balance that existed to a large extent between (West) Germany and France, and later also Great Britain, although it began to falter with the prospect of German reunification. This resulted in the currency union, with which Germany's most important means to power, the Deutschmark, was chained to a common currency.

At that time, the economic prerequisites of such a currency union, namely the presentation of an "optimum currency area" (Mundell 1961), had not been provided, and they still remain to be achieved today. In 1991, the currency union was agreed in the Maastricht Treaty, which came into force in 1993 and which introduced the common currency in 1999. However, the starting gun was fired at a meeting of the heads of state and government of the European Community on 8/9 December 1989 – four weeks following the fall of the Berlin Wall (European Council, 1989). In the past, the possibility had already been considered of interlinking the currencies of the EC states, but now, for purely political reasons, the wind was in the sails of this project.

The EU before a new start

For a long time, the European integration project hasn't been questioned. The economy and the currency fulfilled their purpose of acting as the glue that bonded the European Union together as long as the economy continued to improve. However, the financial crisis from 2007, which also became the euro crisis, the dispute over debts, debt sustainability and the salvaging of one euro state by the others, and the dramatic social consequences of the stability of the euro in several Member States, all left this bond in a fragile condition. This already occurred years before the refugee crisis divided Europe and exposed new rifts between the Member States.

Currently, the European Union is attempting to start anew. New projects and structures are being discussed (European Council, European Parliament, 2017). The aforementioned white paper by the European Commission and the keynote speech by French president Macron provided important impulses for this development (Macron, 2017).

It is becoming clear that it is no longer possible for the EU to "carry on as before". It must change, and it must reflect on its fundamental ideational principles. Europeans must develop or strengthen a sense of commonality that will help it survive through the current difficulties. Now, at the latest, it becomes evident that a European identity is not simply a matter for leisurely consideration, but is a fundamental necessity in order to securely anchor the European project in the 21st century.

Identity and solidarity

In fact, the question of identity is more substantial than just a topic of dinner-table discussion: it is a prerequisite for solidarity, in the private and the national sphere. One offers help to those with whom one feels connected. By regarding the other individual as a part of the collective whole, one is also prepared to take action to support them – assuming that they would also be willing to do the same.

The European Union is a solidarity community in its entire approach. It is built on the principle of mutual assistance, as is the case on a daily basis within the scope of structural or agricultural policy. If this solidarity crumbles, the EU itself will do the same. It is not simply a cash machine that issues more money for the 28 Member States than the amount that they pay in.

Solidarity is the glue of the European Union, and a common European identity is the raw material from which this glue is made.

Identity is similar to love. Everyone experiences it and feels what it is, while at the same time, it is difficult to define. Identity is not something that simply is. It is constructed – and according to a very simple principle: we are who we are because we are different from the others. Identity therefore has an aspect of inclusion that is based on commonalities, and one of separation that relates to differences.

The result of this is twofold. On the one hand, a commonality must not only be present; it must also be felt, since otherwise, it cannot be used for the identity construct. It is therefore not enough to objectively have something in common, be it the same design of spectacle frames or a certain kind of passport; this shared asset or feature must also be perceived as being relevant and distinctive. On the other hand, this also means that in order to forge an identity, there must be an outside world from which one differs in one's identity. The "we" is simultaneously inclusive and exclusive.

It is common knowledge that each and every one of us has multiple facets. It is possible to be a woman, a Catholic, a politician, a cyclist, a mother and a chess player all at the same time. Each of these features is a reason to feel either similar or different, in ways that are of importance in some situations and irrelevant in others. It is only when one of these features is assigned a quality that a similarity becomes a sense of commonality.

While identity may be very easy to construct within one's direct living environment, the situation becomes more complicated when it comes to identities that cover a broader scope. Germans are cyclists and car drivers,

men and women, left and right, pious and irreligious, rich and poor. What does it mean, therefore, to be "German"?

Commonalities are used to construct German identity that overarches individual identities.

Language is of course a focal element that we have in common, followed by a common history. Here, too, questions arise. It is of no small significance, for example, whether since 1949 a person has lived in the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) or the German Democratic Republic (East Germany), or whether they experienced life in the GDR in a residential complex for members of the Politbureau or in prison.

The next element is German culture, to take Goethe, Schiller, Heine, Hegel or Kant as an example – but who is familiar with them, and how high is the percentage of Germans who are not?

The challenges manifest in forging a German identity become all the more complex when it comes to European identity. The electoral slogan of the EU is: "United in diversity". One could say, rather polemically, that what unites us is that we have nothing in common. Here, too, European history is invoked, although until the middle of the last century, this history consisted above all of attempts at mutual annihilation. Does Auschwitz really create a common identity between Germany and Poland? There is no common language in Europe, if we set aside the "broken English" that remains widely used. Ways of living already vary widely between Northern and Southern Italy, quite apart from those between Denmark and Romania, or Malta and Estonia.

What, therefore, is the substance of European identity? This is a question that we do in fact rarely ask. At home, it doesn't emerge as a problem issue, while when we are in China, for example, it seems so natural to us that we are Europeans and the others are not. Suddenly, all kinds of things occur to us that make "us Europeans" different from the Chinese and which from the Chinese perspective are highly similar: our food and our way of eating, or our understanding of individual and societal rights, working conditions or culture.

However, caution is necessary here. Identity is not the same as having identical ways of living. Does eating rye bread mean that all Germans share an identity, or that cucumber salad has the same effect on Bulgarians? The most likely answer is "no".

While European identity is highly nebulous, therefore, individuals' identity as EU citizens becomes more clearly visible. Here – regardless of all the discussions as to whether or not Georgia and Turkey are a part of Europe – it is at least entirely clear who belongs, and in this regard, there are

a series of commonalities that we share. These include the European judicial area, which is also symbolised by the uniform EU passport.

Different intensity levels of identity

Different identities are forged not only on the basis of substance, but also intensity. As well as the all-encompassing human identity in which "we" includes anyone able to conceive of a "we", and which, therefore, it is assumed, excludes plants and animals, Cathleen Kantner has developed two additional identity levels. She contrasts the "we" of society ("commercium") with the "we" of the community ("communio") (Kantner 2006). While the societal "we" is held together by a common organisation and common interests, the members of the community "we" also share a common ethical base and from this, generate the will to implement common projects.

For the "normal operation" of the EU, the identity of the *commercium* is sufficient, i.e. the feeling of being in the same boat and as a result to facilitate one's own progress.

The *commercium identity* is the basis for the trust that citizens (must) have in their institutions and their partners, which is in turn the necessary basis for an ongoing identity. Each individual wants to be able to rely on the fact that the others are (also) abiding by the rules. To take a banal example, if you buy an ice-cream in Bulgaria, you want to be able to rely on the fact that the ice-cream parlour is abiding by the same EU food regulations and is inspected by the authorities in the same way as in Germany. This trust in turn reinforces the sense of commonality that Kantner has described as the *commercium identity*.

These observations apply to normal times, in which we are not living, however. Cathleen Kantner points out that in times of major crises or significant changes, a higher intensity of identity, the *community identity* ("communio") is required.

This *community identity* does not emerge from the shared boat in which we sit, and which involves a common legal framework – all the less so in that it is often not perceived as such. How many people are aware of the fact that the green stickers on the windscreens of German cars that permit the driver to drive in inner city areas are the product of EU regulations? And who feels a common identity with the Bulgarians due to the fact that they, too, are subject to the same regulations? Commonality does not exist where it is not felt.

Yet, where are the commonalities beyond the legal framework, in a community that is Orthodox, Catholic, Lutheran, Jewish and Muslim, in

which 24 official languages, and many more unofficial ones, are spoken, where the types of food eaten vary widely, in which the different peoples look back on very different historical narratives, where there are rich and poor regions, conurbations and village settlements?

Distance instead of exclusion

We do not make progress with the concept of a European identity by persisting with this identity as a form of exclusion. In an insightful essay with the provocative title "There is no cultural identity" (Jullien, 2018), the French philosopher François Jullien recommends replacing identity differentiation, which is always exclusive as well as inclusive, with the concept of distance. According to this concept, differences in cultures are certainly taken into account, but they are not used for exclusion, but to construct a greater common whole.

"What really makes Europe special is of course the fact that it is at the same time Christian *and* laicist (and more). It has developed *at a distance apart* between the two: at the great distance between common sense and religion, faith and enlightenment. In a *between* that is not a compromise, not a simple half-way house, but a tensioning, so that both currents stimulate each other" (Jullien, 2018, p. 51).

Often, European identity is regarded as being in opposition to national identity. However, here, the fact is overlooked that national identity not only does not stand in the way of a European identity, but is even the basis for it. Only someone who is aware of their own identity can enter a common sense of belonging and feel comfortable there. The goal cannot therefore be to "de-Bulgarise" or "de-Germanise" people in order to Europeanise them, but rather quite the opposite: the European Union can only exist as a consolidation of states and people who feel comfortable with themselves and who therefore voluntarily enter into a supranational context in order to shape their common future. German, Bulgarian, Polish and French culture, to name just a few examples, are not in opposition to European culture, but are components of it.

European identity is not created, and does not continue to exist, by setting national cultures apart from each other or by denying differences, but to a far greater extent by assessing the differences and setting them in relation to each other. Europe is not a "melting pot", in which differences are merged together, but – to stay with this analogy – is rather like a soup tureen to

which different ingredients are added that together create a delicious whole, which no single ingredient alone would be able to produce.

National identity does not therefore stand in contrast with a European identity, but is instead a prerequisite for it. If we pursue the soup analogy, anyone who denies or relativises their national identity removes an important ingredient from the tureen. National identity does not have to be dissolved for the benefit of a European one, but must be included as a part of European identity.

The "will to power" may sound ugly to European ears, but it is a prerequisite for being able to influence international politics. Those who decline to use it can rub out Article 21 of the Treaty on European Union, which sets out the goals of external action by the EU in ambitious terms. However, those who take it seriously – and at stake here are peace, democracy, environmental protection and the fight against poverty – require a sense of commonality in order to be able to act. A European identity is the basis for this sense of connectedness.

A sense of national identity and national chauvinism are not the same. Identity means self-assurance, while chauvinism is arrogance, which is the precise opposite of self-assurance. Arrogance is based on insecurity and a sense of inferiority – qualities that one attempts to conceal through swaggering behaviour. The same is true of politics, as it is in private life.

Identity and the shaping of policy

This is the broad outline of the task of civic education. On the one hand, it must enable people to become involved in political discussions, and to define and articulate their interests. Secondly, European civic education must contribute to enabling citizens to see not only the trees but also the wood, in other words, the structures within which international and global activity occurs. And to take this image further: to recognise different trees, but in a forest that can be affected overall by drought, soil erosion, pollution or deforestation. This is where the analogy ends, since trees cannot take action, while the citizens of the European Union certainly can. Then, the commonalities come to bear that are in turn the basis for the willingness to act collectively. Karl Marx one said, when criticising Hegel's philosophy of law, that the theory becomes material violence when it is taken up by the masses (Marx 1972: 385). This also applies to European identity. The opponents of the European Union, who wish to destroy it from inside or outside, have

recognised precisely this principle. That is why they choose to emphasise on special national features and prejudices in the attempt to persuade their audience that a German has nothing – nothing at all – in common with an Italian, or an Austrian with a Pole. European civic education can demonstrate that this is not true, not least not by looking predominantly at similarities, but by measuring the distance between the cultures and at the same time making the framework clear in which this measurement is being conducted.

Naturally, a European identity is no replacement for the economic and political success of the EU. The European Union must not only reinforce its promise of well-being in relation to its citizens, but must also fulfil it. High unemployment rates, among young people in particular, a deepening rift between rich and poor, and failing legal systems that leave citizens exposed to threats, all endanger the European project. This can also not be compensated by a European identity. If everyone has the feeling of being on the "road to ruin", this is also a commonality, but not one that can be turned into a productive force for shaping the future.

However, conversely, a European identity, the feeling that we have much in common and can also work together to shape the future, precisely because we bring cultural diversity from our national identities into the project, is an important prerequisite for tackling problems by the horns and finding compromises with which everyone can not only live, but also live better.

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