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The Europe of Cultures

Some Thoughts on Europe after the Nation State

Preliminary remarks:

Dresden is not just any German city, but in some ways a magnifying glass for issues and problems that concern the whole of Europe.

How can a new and productive relationship between nation states and the European Union be created?

What is the role of culture in this uneasy process?

What can people working in culture and in the politics of culture achieve?

Can culture rescue Europe?

I see these as crucial questions when it comes to our future in Europe and our European future.

It is right and it is important that you are spending three days here looking at the theme of Europe and culture. For this, you all deserve the greatest respect – if you permit me to say so, as there are not that many people who are looking for these new paths towards a shared Europe. If you see a chance for us to develop a new Europe by means of culture, then I share your hope and I would like to explain how I came to be so optimistic.

Prologue:

Let me begin with some literature. Towards the end of the First World War Hermann Hesse was asking himself what the future humankind would look like. In his story "The European," he addressed this question with a reinterpretation of the Biblical story of Noah's Ark.

In Hesse's story the "great patriarch" Noah not only rescues the animals from the floods, but also people of every kind, including the "last European." Hesse writes: "The patriarch smiled benevolently. His work was done, and he had rescued one of every species of earthly beings."

There ensues a dialogue between animals and humans, in which each tells of their special abilities, all except for the European, who has nothing convincing to offer. "My gift is the intellect," the European says. "Show it," the others call out. "There is nothing to show. [...] What makes me special is my intelligence." [...] "Intelligence? Then show us your intelligence." [...] "There is nothing to see. [...] I can imagine and reshape the whole world in my brain."

Then Noah asks: "What is the good of that, recreating the world, which God has already made?" The animals applaud. The patriarch concludes: "Children, [...] you have a lot to forgive these white men, as it is they who once again have devastated our poor world up to the point of a last judgement. But see, God has sent a sign telling us what He intends to do with the white man. You all [...] have brought your dear wives to begin a new life on earth as soon as you can—you have brought your negress, you your Indian woman, and you your Eskimo wife. Only the man from Europe is alone. For a long time this made me sad, but now I believe I know why. This man is sent to us as a warning."

The European – a warning that is as topical today as it was back in 1917, when Hesse wrote his story. Again we may have the impression that Europe is moving towards a "last judgement," with increasing right-wing populism, overt right-wing nationalism, new self-confessed autocrats, protectionism against everything that is not "our own," limitations to and even the abolition of freedom of opinion, isolationist and exit movements, anti-Euro sentiment, financial problems and problems in economic policy for states and the banks that are allegedly essential to the survival of the system, extreme social inequality, an increasing number of refugees and asylum seekers that are seen as threat, the fear of Islamist terrorism and the fear of a loss of social standing – the EU and Europe are indeed in a problematic state. As in Hesse's story, "Europeans" right now do not seem to be in a position to constructively determine their own future. Instead we seem to be preparing our own demise and to be offering a terrible example to the whole of humanity.

Nation and State:

The fact that Europe is becoming weaker in relation to the world powers shows us that we cannot continue to fail to find solutions to key issues, as we have been doing for too many years, and that we cannot live without a justification for the existence of the Union that creates a common identity.

We must note that Europe has not succeeded in explaining its undoubted great benefits to its people in such a way that they see the idea of the European Union as more important than the interests-based politics of their own states, and that they see Europe not just as an administrator, but a shaper of the future. That they appreciate freedom, security, relative affluence, social security for the elderly, infrastructure, the health system, and education more than they bemoan normative rules on the shape of cucumbers (if they ever did).

So far, people do not believe that Brussels can guarantee security. They rather trust their own states to protect them against the EU, as states compete with each other in order to gain as many benefits as possible for their citizens. This is why the EU is a place where everyone's main aim is to promote their own interests. The nation state is seen as the best guarantee for the future. So far the EU makes no sustainable sense.

But what is a nation state? That a nation is identical with a state is not only unlikely, it is very rarely the case, as nations are formed through spaces of knowledge and identity, spaces of language and history, rituals, traditions, and specific characteristics. They are more what we call "home." Nation has much in common with region. Nations do not end at state borders. The nation is also a legal construct, whereby the nation is everyone in a legal space. And the nation is also, as Marcel Mauss says, "institutionalized solidarity." Nation, home, identity – these are volatile concepts. I use the idea of the nation here as a working concept in order to ascertain that Europe's real "glue" is that which is not the state.

The state is the regulatory administrative unit. We need regulatory authorities and a functioning societal organisation. The state guarantees the division of powers and media freedom as the fourth estate, at least in democracies. This means the rule of law, protection, freedom of opinion, and provision for needs. But the state does not create people's identities.

We have states and we have nations, meaning states in which nations live. In Spain a few years ago a new constitution was drafted, but not passed, speaking of a state with four nations.

If the concept of the nation basically has more to do with the region and with identity than with the state, then the Europe of the people is a Europe of the regions, of cultural, linguistic and knowledge spaces, spaces of communication and cultural heritage. It is not a Europe of states. A Europe that is really a union will be post-nationalist.

But what might new models of European cooperation beyond the concept of the nation state look like?

Guy Verhofstadt, head of the liberal group in the European parliament called in "Europe's Last Chance" (2017) for much closer links within the EU. Drawing on Giuseppe Mazzini, the Italian freedom fighter of the nineteenth century, Verhofstadt wishes to declare the "United States of Europe."

Dieter Grimm, former German constitutional judge, recommends the expansion of public space in Europe in his book "Ich bin ein Freund der Verfassung" (I Am a Friend of the Constitution) (2017), also adopting a Eurocentric position.

Thomas Piketty sees things similarly, publishing the brochure "Pour un traité de démocratisation de l'Europe" with three colleagues in 2017, suggesting that the Eurozone be strengthened.

Ulrich Beck favours the model of a "post-imperial empire."

Only Emmanuel Macron has set out a broader vision for Europe, in his Strasbourg address. Since the Renaissance, since Kant's dream of perpetual peace that led to the idea of the United Nations, liberal politics has been searching for "universal peace." In his new proposals for the future of the European Union, Macron sees this idea as not far-reaching enough. We need to draw on Churchill's 1946 Zurich

speech to the academic youth. It is a matter of the whole “European family,” and not about mulling over the state of the 19 or the 27, or however many it is. We need to rethink the Europe of 47. Macron argues that we need a Europe that includes all these countries. This is the only way to continue to live in peace sustainably. This Europe must not be based on contracts, as is the EU.

If the states of the EU are bound to contracts and laws, then we also need to address customs and habits, culture and values. This was what mattered for thinkers like Václav Havel and Umberto Eco, Bronislaw Geremek and György Konrád, when they thought about Europe. They wanted an “organic” Europe.

In November 2017, in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, Jeremy Adler, professor of German at King’s College London, suggested founding a network of European academies. He argued the need for a new intellectually independent academy uniting the leading thinkers of all the countries, artists and scientists, so as to share ideas, set standards, and to promote intellectual activity. Examples are the highly significant Academia della Crusca, founded in 1853 in Firenze, and the national cohesion provided by the Académie Française, founded in 1635, or the Royal Society, founded in London in 1660.

This new academy must be based in Greece, the birthplace of the sciences. It could lead to lively exchange, better cohesion, and then to the development of a European identity, argues Jeremy Adler.

I would like to more closely address the ideas of two proponents of models for a new Europe whose publications have led to quite some public debate.

Ulrike Guérot, professor in Krems, published a book entitled “Warum Europa eine Republik werden muss! Eine politische Utopie” (“Why Europe Must Become a Republic! A Political Utopia”). She writes: “We must come up with a new idea for Europe.” The utopia that she outlines goes as follows: “The citizens of the European regions and cities build a quite new Europe: decentral, regional, post-national, parliamentary, democratic, sustainable, and social. A political and institutional system.” The post-national democracy in Europe sketched out here would be a network of European regions and cities, over which the protecting roof of a European republic would arch, and under that arch all European citizens would be politically equal. Guérot speaks of a “coherent European unity project beyond the nation states, oriented on the history of European cultures and ideas.”

Austrian Robert Menasse, winner of the last German Book Prize, published a book “Der europäische Landbote. Die Wut der Bürger und der Friede Europas” – (“The European Courier. The Anger of Citizens and Europe’s Peace”). He wrote: “Either the Europe of the nation states will fall away, or the project of overcoming the nation states will fall away. [...] Either Europe will be more and bigger, but peacefully this time, the avant-garde for the world, or Europe will once and for all prove to the world that key lessons from history cannot be learned, and that there is no human way to turn attractive utopias into the realm of reality.”

Menasse is not advocating a super state, and not any new centralism. He is calling for a constitution for a free and peaceful Europe of the regions, a “continent without nations, a free association of regions, not a super-state centralism, but lived democratic subsidiarity, with a centre in which real institutions of community work on sensible frameworks and guarantee the legality – is it worth fighting for this? How does this compare to a commitment to defend the democracy that was once given to us?”

According to Menasse, we need to invent a new democracy, a democracy that is not linked to the idea of the nation state. Of course, a post-nation-state democracy cannot have the same form as a nation state. “Our democracies to date and our concepts of them, our experiences with democracies, our expectations of them and our standards concerning them – these were all national democracies. Of course a post-national Europe must be a democratic Europe, but the form of its democracy is different.”

Menasse sees regional identity as the root of European identity

- and the basis is historical – the continuation and securing of the European project for peace
- and it is for the future – only a united Europe after the nation state can secure the future for us all.

Post-national-state in Europe – we must not fall victim to illusions – first and foremost means:

- Many states, such as the former Soviet Union states, are still undergoing the process of nation-building.
- The concept of the nation must be defended against false uses of the idea of the cultural nation, from which a lead culture for migrants is derived.
- We must acknowledge that the EU will not suddenly become a working post-nation-state entity.

Culture and Europe

There is no European culture – there are the cultures of Europe. There is a shared European cultural and historical framework, consisting of Roman law, Greek philosophy, the Christian and Jewish religions, the values of the Enlightenment, and general declarations of human rights. This is our shared cultural heritage.

This unifying canon of values and the diversity in unity form the core of our coexistence – culture is the core of our coexistence. We are a Europe of cultures.

Europe and its states have a chance for the future if we can create a true union – a cultural union. This would mean the end of some rights of subsidiarity, but also create a new sense of purpose and identity. This is the chance for a new narrative and an emotionally and rationally founded context of justification – a narrative of

how we came to be what we are, and why this is fortuitous and can take us forwards into the future.

Narratives cannot be wilfully invented; they develop in their own ways, leading to the assertion of meaning, such as the slogan “No more war” in Germany after the Second World War, or “Nuclear power, no thanks” after Fukushima, or (in Germany) “We can manage” in the light of the large numbers of refugees – we will help immediately. A new European narrative will emerge from the nations, but not be in the nation, and it will emerge from culture.

The Europe of Cultures

Protagonists in the field of culture, scientists, practitioners, politicians, the media and institutions all note in many different ways that the loss of an awareness of unifying cultural foundations to the European idea is one of the main causes of our helplessness when faced with a plethora of problems, and one of the motifs for what has become a fashionable opposition to the EU. Nationalist and conservative governments and parties appropriate culture as the core of their nationalism and use the idea of a defined lead culture to posit the threat of “multiculturalism.”

- How can culture contribute to bringing the concept of a European community of values alive again?
- How strong is a shared cultural foundation on which European politics might build?
- What can culture offer to counter the distance of European institutions to citizens?
- When is culture not a form of national refuge, but the embodiment of the principle of openness and networking?

We saw in the late years of the Weimar Republic that the world of culture did not oppose right-wing nationalism and national socialism decisively enough, and that culture was turned into a manipulative propaganda tool. When we ask whether culture can be a key building block of a new Europe, by establishing public, ethical and political resistance against increasing nationalism, then we are assuming that culture can have a bridging function between different European identities, and that this can lead to the development of a new narrative of community.

Culture is an ideal value that can build bridges between people with different ethnic, religious and social backgrounds. It fortifies intercultural and inter-religious dialogue. This is also emphasised in a 2016 joint statement by the European Commission and the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, on a future EU strategy for international cultural relations. The states of Europe and their cultures have shared roots, they say, and a shared cultural heritage that unites them in diversity. Cultural relations are the fundamental force behind social cohesion in Europe, from our sustainable economic development to processes of democratisation – and they also work to prevent conflicts. The aim must be to utilize culture in Europe to create and to

protect the spaces where culturally diverse narratives can coexist, where histories and images can be read differently, and yet where they all can be accepted and understood.

This strategy defines guiding principles for the action of the EU, names the major fields where cultural cooperation between partner countries can take place, and appeals for a concerted strategic approach to cultural relations. Laying down guiding principles aims to make sure that the EU's foreign affairs policy and action contribute to the promotion of cultural diversity, human rights, and intercultural dialogue.

1. Culture should be better used as a driving force for sustainable social and economic development (particularly in the creative industries and their potential for rural development and job creation).
2. The role of culture and of intercultural dialogue as a key for the sustainable consolidation of peace and reconciliation should be strengthened.
3. Collaboration and cooperation for the protection of our cultural heritage should be sustainably reinforced. This includes the preservation and the development of cultural heritage for tourism and economic development in crisis regions (such as Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan) by means of knowledge transfer and grants.

A deeper awareness of the significance of Europe can be attained primarily by means of Europe's culture, which has existed throughout the centuries independently of state borders and political and military conflicts. The unity of Europe does not derive from its sameness, but from the ways in which it diversity is seen. There cannot be one single Europe; instead it is the ways in which we guarantee our basic ideas and values that distinguishes us Europeans from societies based on religious authorities, and from authoritarian and dictatorial states and tribal societies.

While preserving autonomy and recognising aesthetic freedoms, a European cultural policy must also make pragmatic suggestions for a cultural contribution to a process of European unification – in the sense of the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, which defines culture as an economic good and yet also emphasizes its aesthetic autonomy. Pure competition, as in all other areas of the economy, cannot be the way forward for culture, which needs different criteria for measuring its effects, success, significance, future, and meaning. If we wish to see the cognitive and emotional dimension of plurality, tolerance, freedom and democracy, which are basic cultural achievements and success, as the core motives behind political, social, and economic prosperity, then this must be accompanied by well-founded scholarly reflection and also by comprehensive cultural education.

“Cultural politicians today must take into account – within the scope of their national responsibilities – that Europe requires the cultural input of the entire European cultural landscape. We are used to the ministers of the economy, the interior, and perhaps also of agriculture seeing themselves as the indispensable and

responsible ministers when it comes to shaping Europe," Volker Hassemer wrote in the *Tagesspiegel* newspaper on 1 February 2018. "But culture is the primary way of illustrating why we see ourselves as Europeans, and it is culture that makes us able to present ourselves as recognisable to the world."

A shared national identity for every functioning democracy is essential, and I see no reason why this shared identity cannot also be conceived as a European identity. The European states have many differences, for sure, including cultural differences, but I do not think that these differences are so large that we cannot build a shared identity around key values like freedom, solidarity and human rights.

It is one of Europe's great strengths to appreciate and to protect Europe's diversity. The cultures of Europe are something that we Europeans can be proud of, precisely because of their diversity. I myself am proud of the cultural heritage that this continent has produced. Whether it is Marie Curie or van Gogh, Homer or Hildegard von Bingen, Virginia Woolf, Cervantes or Shakespeare, Beethoven or Clara Schumann – art, philosophy, music, science and literature from the continent of Europe have shaped our lives and the identities of us all. Cultural diversity is not just a value in itself – it is real and has the potential to create a real Europe based on culture – a Europe of cultures.

Thank you very much!