

NETWORKING EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

NECE Workshop: The Impacts of National Identities for European Integration as a Focus of Citizenship Education

INPUT PAPER

Introductory Remarks to Session 2: The Culture of Memory in Europe – the Foundation for the Integration of Europe

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Objective of this presentation: to elaborate on the general problematic of the workshop from a theoretical point of view as to the particular situation in Western in comparison to Eastern Europe. The focus is put on how the three concepts of identity, European integration and citizenship education are related with each other.

1. EU integration as a culture of memory?

Starting point: a double tendency, i.e. the role of 'working through the past' (T.W. Adorno 1959¹) as a social and political practice of increasing importance since the end of WWII in Europe, both at national as at supranational level.

A) A national phenomena

Most of the Western European countries have to face the political challenge of dealing with historical legacies:

- Germany: WWII, the Shoa and the dictatorship in the former GDR
- Spain: The reemerging memory of the civil war
- Italy: Fascism, collaboration and the myth of resistance
- France: Collaboration during WWII, Algerian war, colonization and slavery

¹ T.W. Adorno, *Critical Models. Interventions and Catchwords*, (New York: Columbia UP, 1998), at 89-103.

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B) European integration as the result of a specific relationship to the past

From the very beginning, the integration of Europe represents the remedy to centuries of imperialism, war and other kinds of inter-state conflicts, and is shown as the only possible alternative to Europe's self-destruction and decay.

Two examples:

a) The preamble of the draft treaty on constitution for Europe

"BELIEVING that Europe, reunited after bitter experiences, intends to continue along the path of civilisation, progress and prosperity, for the good of all its inhabitants, including the weakest and most deprived; that it wishes to remain a continent open to culture, learning and social progress; and that it wishes to deepen the democratic and transparent nature of its public life, and to strive for peace, justice and solidarity throughout the world"

CONVINCED that, while remaining proud of their own national identities and history, the peoples of Europe are determined to transcend their former divisions and, united ever more closely, to forge a common destiny"

b) The negative reactions to PM Jaroslaw Kaczynski's bellicose rhetoric at the EU-summit in April 2007 in the context on the debate on the double majority voting formula for the future repartition of voting rights in the Council between EU member states.

"We are only demanding that we get back what was taken from us. If Poland had not had to live through the year of 1939-45, Poland would be today at the demographics of a country of 66 millions"

Reason: The coming in terms with the past has become a core principle of EU integration:

"European integration shows that we have learnt the painful lessons of a history marked by bloody conflict. Today we live together as was never possible before. [...] With European unification a dream of earlier generations has become a reality. Our history reminds us that we must protect this for the good of future generations."
Declaration on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the signature of the Treaties of Rome, Berlin, 25 March 2007.

Result: The emergence of an 'Acquis historique communautaire' as a semi-legal core of norms and standards, that is the core values of European integration expressed in the leading narratives of the history of European integration which have, with time, been crystallised into a corpus of guiding principles and soft norms implicitly intended to conduct the politics of the Union. They are all related to the official interpretation of the past and build together the historically based objectives of European unification, which can be defined as followed: Preserving peace and stability; Protecting democracy, human rights and freedom; Overcoming divisions.

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2. The problem: Split collective memories in Europe after Eastern enlargement

Thesis: The dark shadows of the past(s) represent a new invisible yet omnipresent wall dividing Europe through prejudices, misunderstandings, dissensions competing and conflicting memories and mutual accusations.

Compared to the Western European member states, the new accession countries from Central and Eastern Europe have a rather different relationship to their national past, to national sovereignty (both positively perceived as a reaction to Soviet imperialism) and to the concept of integration (negative perceived because of the imposed integration within the Warsaw Pact and the COMECON). These great disparities result from:

- Divergences regarding interpretation of common historical experiences
- Different historical experiences during the last 50 years
- Discrepancy in the familiarity and understanding with integration

Consequences: a situation of asynchrony and cognitive dissonances with huge differences of perspective and points of view regarding the attitude toward and understanding of key events and phenomena such as WW II and its consequences, the uniqueness of the holocaust, how to evaluate communism, the relationship between national identity and minorities, etc.

The question here is not only how much past do we have in common in Europe, but how to come to a pacified and mutually acceptable analysis of shared and un-shared memories that still bear a potential for conflicts.

3. Citizenship, identities and coming to term with the past

The puzzle: how to set up the fundamentals of a European political community based on a community of values:

- Mutual trust between citizens and nations
- Passive and active support to integration
- Acceptation of EU institutions and policies and loyalty

Objective: The emergence of a common political identity, the glue that allows us to live together in a united Europe.

The conditions for the emergence of a European we-ness feeling: Here it is helpful to draw back on Habermas famous concept. Constitutional patriotism does not assume that citizens will identify with abstract constitutional principles. *Verfassungspatriotismus* is a conscious affirmation of political principles as citizens experience them in the context of their national histories.² Hence, even if the emergence of a political identity in Europe is turned toward the future, a lot of attention should be paid to the past, that often is still “undigested and doesn’t go through” (Rousso/Conan 1996)

² J. Habermas, 'Vorporpolitische Grundlagen des demokratischen Rechtsstaates?', in: *id.*, *Zwischen Naturalismus und Religion*, Frankfurt aM: Suhrkamp 2005, pp. 106-118, Quoted in Joerges 2006.

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A European concept of citizenship which seeks to achieve a deepened integration through some forms of intentional 'identity politics' would then be fundamentally misconceived. European citizens are not expected to forget their histories and cultural traditions. They cannot escape from them, anyway, they should develop them further, and they should learn to live with this variety. According to Habermas: 'By and large, national public spheres are still culturally isolated from one another....In the future however, a common political culture could differentiate itself from the various *national* cultures'. Against this background, what is at stake is hence to find mechanisms that contribute to develop this common political culture.

4. Citizenship education as a contribution to building a European collective identity

In this regard, trans-national citizenship and civic education can play a key role.

Reminder: the different levels of identity: personal, individual and collective

Existing means: Knowledge enhancement and awareness training ("true commissions", joint history textbooks, exhibitions...)

- The role of historiography (post-kantian versus neo-romantic historiography)
- Dangers of an instrumentalisation of the past

Problem: the lack of a European public sphere

Objective should be to encourage and achieve a Europeanisation of the collective memories in Europe.

Pitfalls and changes of the duty to remember: how to learn from the past or the difficulty to agree on what can challenge our identity, how to make partly conflicting memories of the past compatible with each other.

Solution: taboo-less confrontation with our own history and the history of the other member states, trying to understand the consequences of past events and to overcome divisions.

Significance of the present context: Following Joseph Weiler's remark, one can state that the constitutional debate in Europe is not simply about explicating the theory and values which undermine the existing constitutional order, but of redefining its meaning for a new generation and a new epoch.³⁵

³⁵ J. H. H. WEILER, THE CONSTITUTION OF EUROPE 9 (1999).

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Academic literature on this topic

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