



## **Citizenship Education Facing Nationalism and Populism in Europe**

### **Strategies - Competencies – Practices**

## **East-West concepts of nationalism in light of EU integration**

**Fabrice Larat**

**National School of Administration (Strasbourg)**

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**[www.nece.eu](http://www.nece.eu)**

When debating about the virtues of nationalism in the light of EU-integration, a line of demarcation seems to run through Europe between citizens of Western countries on the one hand and those from Central and Eastern European countries on the other. This particularly holds true in combination with interpretation of the past as part of national and of what could be our common European identity. Collective memories in Europe after the eastern enlargement are split up and by far not always consensual. The dark shadows of Europe's pasts that are the memories of wars, military occupation, genocides and totalitarianism obviously represent a new kind of invisible but omnipresent wall dividing the continent. This historical curtain is made up of misunderstandings, prejudices, and competing and conflicting memories that together lead to dissension, and sometimes to mutual accusations between EU member states.

At the same time, the EU itself can be understood as the result of a process aiming at overcoming this kind of tensions. In the EC and EU Treaties, and especially in their Preambles, different narratives that link the unification of Europe with the history of the old continent can be found. Besides giving indications of the objectives and goals of the process of integration, they strive to highlight elements of continuity between the current situation and events from the past, as well as to root the new initiatives in a long and fertile tradition.

The core values of European integration expressed in the leading narratives of the history of European integration 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. The narratives on European history contained in the accumulated Preambles - together with their inter-textual environment - codify what is presented as a shared belief in the historical purpose of the common system of governance that is now the EU. Due to the combination of moral commitment *vis-à-vis* these objectives as result of the responsibility of Europe towards its past, and the legal character of the treaties in which the fundamental principles of the Union are expressed, the normative framework which comes out in the preambles of the treaties can be considered, according to Fabrice Larat as building an "*Acquis historique communautaire*".

Yet, the content of what this *acquis historique communautaire* is or should be is also a subject of dissension. According to Marek Cichocki, with the accession of countries from East-Central Europe to the EU, the grand narrative of a uniquely Western Heritage of European integration must change and today's EU, and especially the old members have to take into account the experiences of the new members states. Such a criticism shall be taken very seriously, since, as Stefan Auer argues, the ongoing contest about European identity is ultimately a contest about the actual purpose of European integration.

In a multi-national entity like the EU with some supra-national competences, we can assume that the stability of the political community in the making is better served by constructing a polity-based identity which looks towards the common future than by referring to exclusive national identities that are based on competing and partly mutually opposed historical memories. Even if we believe that European people share a community of destiny, it remains to clarify how much national feeling - and which kind of it – the new community can support, without developing centrifugal forces that could lead to major conflicts within the Union.

All this raises a series of important questions which should be discussed in this panel:

- Which forms of nationalism are compatible with the guiding principles of EU integration as developed so far?
- Is there – and do we need – a sovereign and legitimate interpretative power for Europe's history? In case we need some, who shall do it, from which perspective and according to which values?

Does the necessity for the EU member states to come to terms with their own past implies a kind of "droit de regard" on the history of the other EU member states?