

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

“The Politics of Memory in Europe: The Foundation for a European Integration”

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No future, only past

‘In the beginning there was no future, only the recent past’ (Leonard 2005). In 1945, the great French poet, Paul Valéry described the European predicament: ‘We hope vaguely, we dread precisely’ (Leonard 2005). What people vaguely hoped for was peace, what they dreaded was obviously the devastation of two great wars.

From the very beginning, the project of European unity was based on a particular understanding of European history. While nations usually celebrate glorious events in their history, what was meant to bring Europeans together was the unique experience of a catastrophe: the Second World War, surely the most horrific event in human history. In other words, the peoples of Europe were united more in what they rejected, rather than what they aspired for. They were determined to make it impossible for anyone to make another war in Europe. Never again war, never again Nazism, these were the founding myths of the project of European unity (Judt 2005).¹

¹ One of the lessons of the failed settlement after the WWI (Versailles) was that punitive measures often backfire. That mistake was not to be repeated. To be sure, Germany was punished after the war; its sovereignty was limited and the whole country divided (as was the rest of Europe). At the same time, conditions were created that were conducive to the development of a viable liberal democratic state underpinned by a strong economy. The rest, as they say, is history: the success of West-German economic and political reconstruction benefited (West)Germany and the whole of Europe. This truly was a win-win situation.

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No past, only future

And let there be no doubt, this project was remarkably successful. Whatever problems the European Union currently faces, no-one can seriously challenge its success as a peace project. The process of Franco-German reconciliation turned these two arch-enemies into reliable partners which have for a long time constituted the engine of European integration. In fact, all this is so much taken for granted these days, that at times it seems that today there is no past, only the future: the future of the constitution, the future enlargements, the future of further economic and political integration, and so forth. Fifty year after its inception, Europe today is pre-occupied with its future rather than the past.

The wisdom of Basil Fawlty

We no longer need to talk about past wars. Even the British are over it! For decades now, there has been an understanding in Europe that was unforgettably enacted by John Cleese in *Fawlty Towers*: 'Don't mention the war!' (1975). This unwritten rule may have been violated now and then,² but the construction of European unity was predicated on the understanding that the acrimonies of the past could be best overcome by a future orientated project of political and economic integration. Not that the Germans were asked to forget about Nazism. However, at least by the 1970s (by the time that the famous *Fawlty Towers* episode appeared), it was clear that German society had sufficient will to deal with its troubled past *from within* (Vergangenheitsbewältigung, Historikerstreit etc.).

Neither can one say that the official EU history does not refer to war. The fiftieth anniversary of the Treaty of Rome was full of speeches and visual propaganda that contrasted the achievements of the post-war reconstruction after the devastations of the war.³ The devastating experience of wars is all too often invoked in the EU debates. Whether it was the introduction of the common currency, or the constitutional treaty – the European electorates were warned that if they were to fail to endorse these projects, Europe might plunge into war again.

Europe divided

Yet, this is just one half of the story. What I have presented so far is the story of *West-European* unification. Tallinn is a very good place to remind ourselves that the situation in Central and Eastern Europe has been very different. Firstly, the Second World War, or to be more specific, its consequences, only finished in 1989 (or, in fact, 1991 in case of the USSR and the Baltic states). Secondly, even though it's been almost two decades since the end of communism, Russia has not even started dealing with (and/or acknowledging) its past. If anything, Putin's Russia seems all too keen to celebrate the past glory of the Soviet Union (Mendelson and Gerber 2006; Laqueur 2007).

Not surprisingly, the nations of Central and Eastern Europe are more sensitive to these developments than their Western counterparts. Yet surely, the issue is relevant to Europe at large. As the project of European unification now spans the whole continent, the premise 'never again war', 'never again Nazism', must entail also the rejection of communism. At one level, this is nothing new. The project of European unification was from the outset also directed against communism (from within and from without).

Yet there is one aspect of the Second World War that had very little impact on Western Europe, but had profound consequences for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. It is the fact that the fight against Nazism required the alliance with Stalin's Russia. The price of this awkward alliance was that just as Nazism was defeated, Stalinism was given a new lease of life and a significantly expanded territory. The post-war

² A textbook example was the embarrassing position of Thatcher and her supporters in 1989/1990.

³ Though curiously, the preamble to the now defunct draft European constitution did not make any meaningful references to European history, apart from vague notion of the peoples of Europe 'determined to transcend their ancient divisions'.

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division of Europe was one of the enduring legacies of Stalin's war against Hitler (Auer 2005). While Western Europe has experienced the 'Golden Age' (Hobsbawm 1994), particularly in the first three decades after the war,⁴ the nations of Central and Eastern Europe were firmly incorporated into the Soviet empire.

The Politics of Memory: East and West

One does not need to accept Donald Rumsfeld notion of the division between the 'old and new Europe', to accept that the politics of memory in Western and Eastern Europe differ. This is not surprising. In fact, all nations have their own image of Europe that has been shaped by their own particular historical experiences. Europe has always meant many different things to many different peoples, and the success of European unification is predicated on the capacity of the flexible institutional framework to accommodate these competing visions. But it is clear that Europe after the two last rounds of enlargements has become even more heterogeneous. The unification of Europe East and West brings about a number of new challenges. Just as West European nations share a number of experiences, so do the nations behind the former Iron curtain. The historic trajectories of France and Poland, Austria and Czechoslovakia, West and East Germany, Finland and Estonia were radically different.

Citizenship education for a united Europe

For Europe to succeed more will be needed than the implementation of the common market and the extensive body of European legislation and regulation, the so-called *acquis communautaire*. As Fabrice Larat astutely observed, we also need an *acquis historique* (Larat 2005).

What does it mean for citizenship education? How can we foster allegiances to national communities *and* to Europe? I strongly believe that European identity (if there is such a thing) can only develop as an expansion of national identity. But the later has to be conceived in a way that is conducive to the European project. Clearly, European nations can only make sense of their own history in the context of European history. And there are a number of challenges that are specific to the division of Europe between East and West.

Just as people in Central and Eastern Europe need to learn more about the Treaty of Rome and the Treaty of Maastricht, their counterparts in the West will need to learn more not just about the crimes of Nazism, but also about Stalinism. They need to learn about the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact of 1939, the Katyn's massacres of March 1940, about the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 (Davies 2003).⁵ And then the milestones of the fight against communism, such as the 1953 uprising in East Germany, 1956 rebellion in Poland and the uprising in Hungary (Auer 2006), the 1968 Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia, 1980/81 rise of Solidarity movement in Poland, and finally the years 1989/91, when the Velvet Revolutions in Central Europe (Auer 2004a) were followed by the Singing Revolutions in the Baltic states.

Citizenship education and addressing the culture of memory in Eastern Europe

Where is Eastern Europe?

If Europe is equated with the West, then the term Eastern Europe implies that the peoples who used behind the iron curtain were somehow less European. At any rate, even a simple look at the map of Europe makes it clear that the term was never just a geographical description. Prague is further in the West than Vienna. Not surprisingly, 'East Europeans' never liked that description much (Kundera 1984). The term implied that Czechs, Poles, Hungarians, or Estonians were less committed to Western political values than were, say,

⁴ Hobsbawm presents a rather biased account of European post-war history, by downplaying the impact of communism as an ideology and the repressive political practice. Yet there is one way in which his account is accurate: It reflects accurately deceptions of a large proportion of Western intelligentsia who were somewhat blind to the suffering of the peoples in Central and Eastern Europe. The kind of deceptions that intellectuals from Central and Eastern Europe have found so difficult to challenge!

⁵ This is not to be confused with the better known Ghetto uprising in 1943.

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Belgians, French, or Italians. These assumptions even informed serious academic enquiries. Their most popular articulation was the theory of two types of nationalism that postulated that West European nations were civic by definition, while the nations in Eastern Europe were bound to be ethnic, that is illiberal and xenophobic (Kohn 1945; Schopflin 1993).

I argued some time ago that this misconception was unhelpful (Auer 2000). Instead of differentiating between civic and ethnic nationalism, between typically western and eastern nation, I suggested it would be more useful to see how different kinds of nationalist discourses competed for dominance in both Western and Eastern Europe (Auer 2004b).

Return of ethnocentric nationalism in Eastern Europe?

Let me consider just two countries that I know reasonably well:

Poland (Radio Marija, openly anti-Western and more specifically anti-German rhetoric; populist posturing in relation to the EU; two different ways of dealing with the communist past Geremek and Michnik versus the brothers Kaczynski).

Slovakia (extreme nationalist party in the governing coalition, populist posturing against the Hungarian minority and the Roma, relation to the EU?)

It is interesting to note that even extreme nationalists are still mostly at least nominally committed to Europe, which gives the European Union some power over their policies.

Do we need to educate people towards the virtues of a constitutional patriotism (Habermas 1995, 2001), or a cosmopolitan citizenship (Beck 2006)? I have some doubts whether this path is realistic, or even desirable.

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