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EUROPE IN THE AGE  
OF GLOBALISATION



## PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

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Europe in the age of globalisation – this would be the outcome of a conference involving all the enlightened spirits of our continent, but also of other continents affected by European history and dependent upon it.

However, who is not affected by European history?

Interestingly, the maps of Europe have been turned by 90 degrees in recent surveys of European history. In contrast to common usage, Scandinavia is not the North Pole of Europe. Europe is shown as a peninsula, as an extension of Asia, with England and Spain, as fingers of a hand, stretching out into the Atlantic.

Looking from the East to the West, Europe is a complicated arrangement of states, located in a very complex arrangement of minor peninsulas, at the edge of the gigantic Asian landmass. It is no wonder that the Mongolians decided to conquer “the rest of the world” in the midst of the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

Let us now return to the world-view of the Ancients, as well as the Middle Ages. From a European point of view, the Mediterranean was the axis of the world. This was not only European ethnocentrism, but also the world-view of adjacent nations. Until the 16<sup>th</sup> century, European identity was defined by an internal border: Christianity and feudalism, whereas the outer border was defined by the struggle against the Islamic forces. As Fernand Braudel taught us: The combat over the Mediterranean Sea was replaced by the conquest of new Continents in the West. So Europe was left to its devastating wars, which resulted in a delicate balance-of-powers policy, unable to suppress nationalistic forces inside, or the over-stretched imperialistic aspirations toward other continents. These forces were, of course, not imposed upon Europe; these were indigenous forces, brought forth by the long-lived political and religious controversies from the beginning. The great Austrian historian, Friedrich Heer did not call Europe the “Mother of Revolutions” in vain.

## CONSIDERATIONS AT THE END OF THE OLD MILLENNIUM AND AT THE BEGINNING OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM

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The 20<sup>th</sup> century was in many ways an age of catastrophes for Europe. Eric Hobsbawm writes in "The Age of Extremes": "The decades from the outbreak of the First World War to the aftermath of the Second, was an Age of Catastrophe for this society. For forty years, even intelligent conservatives would not take bets on its survival... It was shaken by two world wars, followed by two waves of global rebellion and revolution, which brought to power a system that claimed to be a historically predestined alternative to bourgeois and capitalistic society."<sup>1</sup>

## FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT THE EUROPEAN STATE OF MIND AND EUROPEAN CITIZENS, INCLUDING THOSE WHO ARE SOCIOLOGICALLY AND PHILOSOPHICALLY TRAINED

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There is no doubt among European citizens, that the actual state-of-affairs is beneficial to an overwhelming majority of people: An invisible prosperity is taken for granted. European integration is widening and deepening. Despite many drawbacks and disappointments, the course of measures to ensure this unification has been accepted. However, one should not underestimate the controversies.

There is an interest among the well-established nations to open up the European community to nations eager to get rid of their Communist past. Although they are still incompatible to the forces of the common market and have unsolved minority issues, which affect the integrity of a nation-state, there is, above all, insecurity about the boundaries between the so-called "Social Welfare States" and the free-flowing forces of modern capitalism. There is a promise that these forces can benefit the masses in a better way than a protective system - in the long run, at least.

However, who can foresee insecurities for this length of time? A thoughtful article in the *Economist* quotes the French Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin: "Yes to the market economy; no to the market society." He continues: "Continental Europe, under the leadership of a majority of centre-left governments, is not clinging unthinkingly to old ways. The political boiler plate is deceptive. In fact, something more subtle is taking place: the gentle, growing, if sometimes reluctant, recognition by Europe's left that reform of the social model they did so much to develop is necessary."<sup>2</sup>

I am quoting this insightful and interesting article for one reason: Is it not the task of the social philosopher, to observe long-term developments and to discover the transformational forces, which bind together the fate of individuals and collective bodies, then dare to make a prognosis about both of them, taking care not to make judgments based on a momentary point of view.

Many social philosophers have spent a great part of their lifetime analyzing and interpreting the failures of their colleagues: the so-called concept of “Social Engineering”, and many other related concepts have attempted to reduce the human being to an agent of a perfect society or to a bundle of instincts, bound together by the drive of survival. However, any social philosopher has to clarify what are “enlightened interests” to the subjects of his/her inquiry as well as to him/herself. In my opinion, the individual – common citizens as well as social philosophers – have to reflect on how to combine their daily interests that safeguard survival in this society. Reflection should also be on projects leading to a better understanding of their life cycles and promoting their life chances as well as that of their companions that lead to a deeper interest in “society”. While doing this, they will use the accumulated wisdom of their experience, that is, in the words of Austrian sociologist, Alfred Schutz their “stock-of-knowledge”.

Let us pay homage to the prominent teacher Hans-Georg Gadamer, who celebrated his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday this year. In an attempt to understand our traditions, a merging of horizons (“Horizontverschmelzung”) takes place. It is not an idealistic concept, trying to unite different points of views, but a result of a never-ending quest for truth. I think that the background of social thinking on the continent, combined with the hermeneutical approach of Hans-Georg Gadamer and the integrative theory of Anthony Giddens in Great Britain is a sound basis to pose the following question:

What is the hermeneutical basis to pose the right questions for Europe's future identity?

## MY THESIS IS THIS

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All the bitter experiences of European history have been in vain, if Europe is henceforward regarded as a playground for international capitalism and as a mere conglomerate of economic resources and options, linked to the human potential of a workforce, which only follows the directives of an ever-growing market. It is insufficient to stress the influence of the system of state-guaranteed so-

cial security to preserve a sense of European identity. It is inadequate to subsidize certain cultural activities in a protectionist way so that they do not become victims of cheap mass-media politics. It is not enough to bemoan the fragile role of intellectuals in our society.

All European experiences must be reflected upon: Not only in terms of their **adaptive function, but also in terms of their transformational power.**

All those who reflect upon Europe's millennium agree, that a re-writing of European history must start with an analysis of components, which – taken together – form a history. By detecting its hidden forces, a future course can be deciphered. Thus, our aim is not wholly different from all the others who, by analyzing the past dared to make projections of the near future, if not of the distant one. This sense of transcendence can be seen as illegitimately trespassing the boundaries and limitations of human intelligence. On the other hand, it can be seen as an “unending quest” – not just to ensure a legitimate struggle for survival, but also to reach out for visions – for a better understanding of all humankind, true to all idealistic traditions as well as religious ones.

I think that we have to reflect upon the actual situation in light of the European catastrophes. This entails viewing our society with a need to detect its transformational potential and to develop a vision, which can subsequently develop its identity.

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF A COHERENT EUROPEAN IDENTITY UNDER THESE AUSPICES

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The great European traditions – Liberalism, Socialism and Christianity must be redefined within the context of globalisation and its challenges. The easiest way, if not trivial, to redefine them would be in terms of liberalism. Essentially, liberalism that promotes free trade and is enhanced by the spirit of competition seems to be a way that would lead to the unification of humankind. I doubt that this program can enhance benefits for all, if those benefits are not supported by a concept of mutual help. I think that the liberal classics should be re-read: They do not recommend the program of “Enrichissez-vous”, but are keen to promote a balance between common and individual interests.

The role of the state has been over-emphasised by the Marxist tradition. “Social Engineering” became the guiding principle of Stalinism, which led to an alienation of humanity, surpassed in modern history only by the atroci-

ties of the Nazi regime. An enlightened socialism certainly knows about the need to secure life and knows something about the pursuit of happiness as it seeks a balance between them.

Why is this balance so insecure?

First, I will attempt to give a simple answer, but my thesis does not rest on this.

In my opinion, the insecurity of European consciousness is due to its Christian heritage. The Judeo-Christian heritage demands openness toward history – a history, which cannot be foreseen. The shape of history is a result of the will of God and the work of human beings – provided that the will of God can be understood and translated into terms of government. This deep insecurity has led to a “fear of freedom” (Erich Fromm), so that Christians were all too eager to understand the government in sacral terms. This “sacralisation” has remained virulent in different forms of secularisation. As a driving force, Christianity is present in the aforementioned movements, often in a secularised form, sometimes in coalition with them. The impact of Christianity is the conviction, that person is left with total responsibility to this world, which he/she can transform for better or worse, according to his/her destiny. To shape this destiny, they need guidance. The institutional form of this guidance is a projection of their aspirations and wishes, be it the market or the state or a political party.

Institutional Christianity has undergone the same learning process as liberal and socialist movements. It should have understood its “structural sins” – and it has hopefully learned from them. The present Pope reminded the public that Christianity is “the soul of Europe”. I subscribe to this statement. “Soul” in the Biblical tradition means the vitality of an organism. In our context it means transformational power. Christianity in European history certainly was and is a power, which transformed society – not only through adaptive virtues, but also through its ability to use this adaptiveness for further developments. Like Liberalism and the Marxist tradition, Christianity has the same problem: while simultaneously readjusting claims of responsibilities and redefining its goals to make a contribution to social development.

Like liberals and socialists, Christians have become victims of a misinterpretation with regard to their origin. They committed the fatal error of confounding the final realisation of the Kingdom of God with the present state of affairs.

Like a shadow, this fatal error has followed the progress of Christianity throughout the centuries. However, equally important is the protest against it, which gave birth to numerous reform movements. Each of them generated a new culture and each of them sought coalitions with social and cultural movements.

Hopefully, the process of European integration will strengthen the dialogue-oriented members of the big European churches – and vice versa – as ecumenism can contribute to a better understanding of the European spirit.

The secular European society – in itself a product of secularisation – needs a body which represents its collective memory. Churches are certainly not the only witnesses of a history, which must be constantly re-interpreted to become an agent of the future. However, churches are in one respect of utmost importance to the European spirit: no church member can steal away its history – a history of trial and error, of shaping concepts as well as mutilating concepts of human dignity.

Ecumenism cannot be a unifying concept, if it denies the differences between various religious experiences (these are worldly experiences as well). Ecumenism can only be productive, if the appreciation of different religious identities is seen as an enrichment of one's own life-world. Historian, Friedrich Heer, noted the bridge-building function of intellectuals from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, that is, men and women, who, while staying loyal to their own tradition, developed a culture of attentiveness and respect for their opponents in otherwise hostile camps (“Die dritte Kraft – The Third Power”). Hopefully, the time has come to make these voices heard and understood in European society. It goes without saying that this attitude is a farewell to any sort of Eurocentrism. Moreover, it is a sign of resistance to all the forms of religious and political fanaticism, which threaten our world.

## TO RE-DEFINE EUROPEAN IDENTITY

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We must reconsider the history of success and failure. Europe can be a model of enlightened pluralism. This pluralism cannot be maintained by a laissez-faire attitude or by an ideology of consumerism. Pluralism, in this sense, is the fruit of a constant endeavour to understand oneself by using the world-view of the other, even that of the opponent, so as not to become a foe. This experience teaches us, how hostilities and adversities can be transformed into modes of co-operation, not by embracing the opponent, but by inventing rules of communication. Consider how



religious differences can be made fruitful to each other. Consider how continental and Anglo-Saxon attitudes of philosophizing can provoke each other and overlap and how different life forms can enrich each other in daily life. Thus, the European model without an imperialistic attitude can contribute to a world society. However, this can only be achieved if there is an awareness of its origin and history. Values cannot be super-imposed on any society. A community of values means a community of constant exchange and development of values. The assumption (or postulation) of such a community is in itself a supreme value.

Norbert Leser  
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Globalisation**

<sup>1</sup> Eric Hobsbawm: *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914-1991*. London, 1994, p.7.

<sup>2</sup> The Economist. London, Feb. 12<sup>th</sup> 2000.

## FOOTNOTES