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SECOND CONVENTION OF EUROPEAN STUDENTS

WORKING GROUP **:EUROPEAN IDENTITY**

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A new methodology in the research of a European identity

The concept of identity such as community of belongings can be defined by three interacting elements:

- The birth, which creates a link among people or even can be related to geographical areas;
- The culture, which educates persons and groups through intellectual and emotive experiences;
- The acceptance of common values, which creates a community of values.

European identity cannot be a civic identity; it is not bound to the European integration history and to the evolution of European institutions. European identity is territorial, expresses itself by ethnical-cultural, linguistic, geographical and traditional elements of different origin. Waiting for this moment, the impulse to the integration could not arise from the people of different States. The understanding of this helps us to comprehend the limit of our common feeling toward Europe and of the searching for a common "luggage" hardly historicized. European cultural identity is mostly taken by the books, the geography (i.e. the nearness and distance within the continent), a series of relationship (Europe and we), collaborations among institutions (about the solution of some extra- national questions), and tourism (the importance and the beauty of European greatest cities).

We think that the institutions, the organizations and the cultural practices allow a community to activate the mechanism of social and collective identification. For this reason, we reject the struggle to individuate a minimum common base in the historical past of European people through which developing a sense of belonging to the EU.

Dealing with European history is different from dealing with European Union history. Searching the roots of European identity in the history of the continent is a methodological mistake, for this reason we suggest that an authentic examination of the European identity should have a starting-point in the first official step of the integration: the Schumann Declaration of 1950.

The original treaties and their following developments provide a reserve of common values, for the building of European identity. Only a Constitution includes this cultural and civil values could permit the birth and the growth of a Europe such as a Community of values, life and destiny.

This process, still too recent, will give its better outcomes in the long period.

Maybe our children will be able to deal with it.

An analysis of the concept of identity applied to Europe through history and theories.

There is a common repertoire, which involves the whole humanity composed by a number of symbols, metaphors and historical memories all mobilized for this new European experience. These elements allow what is required to be found: a collective identity or what sociologists call a social construction of reality.

Our historical past about nation-building has provided us with the necessary experience to understand these processes and gain a reflexive distance.

A fashionable dichotomy is that which evoke the opposition between identity as correspondence and difference. It reminds us of a paradox that any identity is the identification of something through separating it from the rest. It derives that any identity is marking a difference.

Three aspects define an identity:

The first is the normative definition of inclusion and exclusion. It follows then a quality, which is added to what is included: the desire and the need of his inclusion. Finally we find a symbolic expression of what is emotionally and normatively shared.

A European identity has to compete with national efforts in constructing a collective territorial identity. Nowadays, however, all the labors of formulating a European identity seem the natural prosecution of the national tradition.

Howard Becker referred to identity as "doing things together", but it presupposed a common knowledge of the world that we call culture. The culture presupposes that consensus can be transformed into dissensus and that the shared knowledge has to be verified and eventually reorganized in order to be acceptable as a shared knowledge. In such cultural contest the coordination of behavioral schemata requires specific rules and values, which consent the transformation of dissension into consensus. What is shared is emphasized, stressed and even overstressed. A first form of overstressing consists of an ideological closure, which is followed by a formulation of higher values. A second form regards a symbolic order, which is applied to the shared culture. Religion could represent an element of stability and of neutralization of the dissensus as deviation from a "correct" credo. However this hides a

fundamental uncertainty: what orthodox and heterodox mean for "aspects that had to be taken as shared cultural world"?

The solution to this dilemma consists in accepting each consensus as the possible impulsion of a dissension, in other words we have to be aware of the dissension as propulsion that could avoid the impossible, the consensus.

From Durkeim to Parsons and Habermas the aspect of consensus was emphasized by privileging theories of integration. While from Marx to Dahrendorf and Touraine it was privileged the aspect of dissension and theories based on conflict rather than on integration.

An alternative interpretation was given thinking about a society deprived of the culture. The so- thought society would be a system of interaction that maximized behaviors. Cultural factors as ideological constructions or moral convictions are no more than over-structures. This is almost known as the economic theory of the social action and is based on an essential supposition: there aren't values or norms, which don't presuppose an interest.

Nevertheless a critic is moved: social actors can act by following norms and values even independently by a specific interest. Social actors do it because these are norms shared and valid even independently by self-interests.

But why norms and values are shared? This happens because they are rooted into ritual, symbol and credence. This determines a precarious consensus: firstly because the cultural system is based on contradictions and incongruence, secondly the gathering of consensus serves as a medium for the maintenance of conflicts into the social order.

Culture is an element that brings people together: this problem is particularly felt in the reconstruction of a society. Cultural factors become central in the reconstruction of an ultra-national integration. A fake consensus is the central presupposition through which the European identity take vigor. Economic theories emphasize the lucrative character of a European association; every state gets returns to his local interests.

An alternative theory is that the constitution of a society in Europe requires much culture in order to go beyond the social order of nation states. However some questions are emerging about how much of culture is necessary to generate this transnational social order and how much of the existing national cultural heritage could be used in a satisfying way? Other than these empirical questions, we can find a radical exigency: to change the cultural processes related to percentages of consensus and dissension, which are overestimated.

In a post-modern cognition the European identity appears like the translation of the national symbolism into an international one. The search of a European identity seems an effort to create a common answer different from the relations established among citizens. These interests have not only a material nature but also an ideal one useful to define social

relations. The solution to this further paradox stays in the radicalization of the idea of social integration through communication: a social order can't be reached without people raising their voices and fighting to be heard.

Maximalist's theories make analogies between the European and the national identity. The European identity defines itself on the distance to other neighboring cultures as the Muslim's communities.

By the other side, minimalist's conceptions make of boundaries legal forms of inclusion and exclusion, creating flexibility in the juridical definition but then these definitions are posed under the universal principle of the rule of law. Europe wills became a legal community ready to define who has to be included in the process of social community. Social charters, the Schengen agreement, agrarian policies are all attempts to build a common space of action in which guarantees for a free communication and for a free circle of commodities, persons and services are institutionally recognized and given. Moreover all the meanings of this emerging legal community are left to a professional management of the meaning instead of intellectuals.

Finally Europe cans candidates itself to the reconstruction of a model of post-modern identity through the use of principles such as reflexivity and contingency. We find an authentic culture in the everyday plebiscite. Identity becomes a politic priority, losing part of it enchant. This would lead to the search of a European identity that disenchant itself in the course of the research from the idea of collective identity itself.