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### **Nation – State – Identity. Differences in Understanding between the Old and the New Member States of the European Union**

Although European integration is a project based, first of all, on economic and political processes, the importance of its cultural dimension has recently been underlined with an increasing frequency. This dimension might be of special importance to the forming of bonds between the citizens of Member States as well as to the construction of European identity. The latter has, by now, come to be characterised as the awareness of a common cultural heritage, in all its diversity, combined with the acceptance of a democratic system. It is not clear if one should attempt to create the more precise definition of European identity, or if and how should one try to construct it. Should it become one more dimension of a personal identity, complementing the national and regional ones? Should it be constructed by the European Union institutions or emerge on a grass root level among individuals as well as small social groups?

It may be argued that these difficult questions, much like all other aspects of European integration, have become even more complicated since the last year's EU enlargement. Among the new Member States, the most important group seems to be constituted by the eight countries of Central-Eastern Europe: Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. They are commonly perceived as distinct from the old Member States in terms of political tradition, economic development, and history. Until recently isolated from Western Europe by the Iron Curtain and termed "the Second World", they belonged to the Soviet sphere of influence and, as such, were often excluded from the reflections on Europe as a whole.

As far as the field of culture and the questions of identity are concerned, their distinctness is also pretty clear. In the old Member states the will to

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eliminate the nationalist ambitions, widely perceived as the source of the tragedies of the two world wars, gave impulse to processes of economic and political integration. Hoping to reduce the dangerous potential of nation-states, “founding fathers” of the united Europe decided to anchor cultural integration in the concepts of European regions and democratic citizenship. Nationalism in Europe seems to have been further undermined by globalisation, which is believed to strengthen the importance of international institutions against that of nation-states as well as to favour the model of mutable and multidimensional individual’s identity. Notwithstanding, this characteristic can be valid only for the old Member States and their societies. The new Member States have recently (after 1989) undergone the vigorous and enthusiastic resurgence of nation-states, the revival of national past and the re-emergence of national issues, mostly “frozen” at the 1939-stage. These were caused by the collapse of the communism and the dissolution of the Soviet Union that meant, among others, the victory of the small nations of Central-Eastern Europe over the oppressing supranational empire.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, the difference between the old and the new Member States can be pertinently summed up by Shlomo Avineri’s remark of 1996: “*While Western attention has been focused on the developments towards democracy and the market, a serious understanding of the power of nationalism in these societies (post-communist – A.Ch.) is one key to their present development and their future course*”.<sup>2</sup>

This understanding is even more important due to the fact that the ideology of nationalism operates in three realms, political, social and cultural, often failing to recognise boundaries between them, since nationalism is “*a form of historicist culture and civic education*”.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the aim of this article is to make a few points that might, in this respect, help comprehending the difference in historical tradition between Central-Eastern and Western Europe, the new and the old Member States.

## 1. Different history and collective memory

As we could have remarked this year, the European Union enlargement by the states of Central-Eastern Europe brought the debates concerning history and collective memory into focus. This tendency was especially highlighted by the occasion of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Allied victory over Nazi Germany, which

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<sup>1</sup> S.Avineri, *Nationalism in post-communist societies*, “European Review”, no. 2/1996, p.256, 260-261.

<sup>2</sup> Ibidem, p.262.

<sup>3</sup> A.D.Smith, *National Identity*, Reno, Las Vegas, London 1993, p.91-99.

resulted in a special resolution by the European Parliament. The whole case begun when the news reported that the presidents of Lithuania and Estonia had refused to attend the Victory Day celebrations organised in Moscow. Their decisions were widely commented on, especially in Poland and Latvia, where they gave rise to public debates on the attendance of these countries' presidents at the festivities in Red Square. The anniversary have clearly proven that while the Western European states and societies can agree to the Russian version of World War II history, to the citizens of the new Member States the end of the war stands also for the fall under the Soviet occupation and isolation from the rest of the continent. Moreover, inhabitants of this part of Europe associate the outbreak of the war not only with the Nazis' aggression on Poland but also with the beginning of the Soviet seizure of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. Additionally, the general memory of World War II evokes sentiments of betrayal by the Allies signing the treaties of Munich, Teheran, Yalta and Potsdam. Such a specific version of war memory, that could not have been officially revealed before 1989, first resonated in Europe this year (it is worth mentioning that among the old Member States it can be, to some extent, shared by Finland only).

When searching for a genesis of such differences in history and memory between two parts of Europe, that are now becoming united, one can look far back into the past. Nevertheless, for the needs of this article, it is enough to stress that at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the most of the nation-states constituting the now old Member States already existed (some of them aspiring to the rank of colonial empires), the new Member States where not to be found on the map of Europe. All their territories belonged to such old multiethnic states as Habsburg, Romanov and Ottoman empires or to the Second German Empire. Only after World War I and the Treaty of Versailles were the new nation-states created, among others: Czechoslovakia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. They were given only twenty years of unquestioned independence before disappearing again in a monolithic communist block. It is precisely for this reason why in these countries the memory of World War I is also different than in Western Europe, especially in England, France and Germany. To the former, the tragic events of the war resulted in the collapse of the old empires and the dawn of a long awaited independence. Hence, it is not surprising that in Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, the Independence Days are celebrated on anniversaries of their respective independence declarations of 1918.

The latest EU enlargement might also serve to remind that contemporary Europe was created not only by modern democratic states but also by multiethnic empires in which political allegiance was based on the identification with a ruling dynasty and which did not aim at developing a civic society. This is especially true for Habsburg, Romanov and Ottoman empires, whose activities

in Central-Eastern Europe have recently been compared to colonising practices (so far, in Europe only the Irish case has been studied in such terms).<sup>4</sup> The postcolonial approach would introduce the possibility to analyse European diversity on one more dimension, drawing a division line between the states that are the heirs to colonisers of all continents – most of the old Member States, and those who were subjected to colonisation. Similar categories could be applied to the Third Reich's foreign policy during World War II who approached countries located to the East as the territories for German colonisation, while pretending to keep up the "European" culture and civilisation standards to the West. Categories introduced by the postcolonial studies could also be applied to the Soviet politics in Central-Eastern Europe.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the acceptance of Cyprus and Hungary into the EU, as well as the efforts of Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, and Turkey to join will (sooner or later) make it necessary to rethink the heritage of the Ottoman empire.

Not only did the year 1989 bring Central-Eastern Europe undisputed sovereignty but also an ideological decolonisation of memories that had been confiscated, destroyed or manipulated by the communist regime.<sup>6</sup> The people were given a chance to reunite with their traditional, long-term memory. In the context of a systemic change, the redefinition of national identity became necessary. The process of redefinition is of crucial importance since the old narratives were constructed by the state and, for at least forty years, monopolised the official collective memory. Such a redefinition requires "working through" all elements of national history (especially post-1939) and inevitably leads to successive debates on past, memory, and identity. In most of the discussed countries, the intellectual elites have made attempts at constructing a modern national identity based on a common civic culture, with most of the society, the so called "masses", tending to cling desperately to the traditional form of national identity preserved from the pre-communist era, frequently related to their religious identity (for example in Poland).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> For an interesting discussion of the subject, see: C.Cavanagh, *Postkolonialna Polska (Postcolonial Poland)*, "Teksty Drugie", no. 2-3/2003, p.60-71; I.Fiut, *Polonizacja? Kolonizacja? (Polonisation? Colonisation?)*, "Teksty Drugie", no. 6/2003, p.150-156.

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>6</sup> P.Nora, *Czas pamięci*, "Res Publica Nowa", no. 7/2001, p.41. The English version of the article: P.Nora, *Reasons for the Current Upsurge in Memory*, at: <http://www.eurozine.com/article/2002-04-19-nora-en.html>

<sup>7</sup> See inspiring remarks on the Polish national identity in: S.Kapralski, *Oświęcim: konflikt pamięci czy kryzys tożsamości? (Auschwitz: Conflict of Memories or Crisis of Identities?)*, "Przegląd Socjologiczny", no. 2/2000, p.141-166.

## 2. Nationalism studies

Writings devoted to the question of nationalism reflect the above differences in political, historical, cultural and intellectual past between Western and Central-Eastern Europe, the old and the new Member States, in a very interesting way. Western scholars tend to assume that state played a decisive role in constructing modern nation, while in Central-Eastern Europe the importance of national community and its culture, often outliving state institutions, is underlined.

### *Western European scholars*

The key role of state in constructing modern nation was underlined by such authors as John Breuilly or Anthony Giddens. The famous phrase formulated by Eric Hobsbawm: “*a nation as an invented tradition*” characterises state politics aiming at construction of a nation.<sup>8</sup> Hobsbawm himself illustrated it with the examples of the Third French Republic and the Second German Empire who achieved this goal by means of strategies such as: development of primary education, invention of public ceremonies and mass production of public monuments.<sup>9</sup>

On the side of the followers of the “Western”, state-oriented version of nationalism one should also count such a promoter of European integration as Denis de Rougement, who criticised the “Europe of nations” created by the nineteenth-century nation-states. Abusing their power and their institutions, nation-states oppressed such true “national personalities” of Europe, as: Alsations, Bretons, Catalonians or Scots. Thus, activities of nation-states led to the construction of modern state-nations and the development of integral nationalisms, constituting an important obstacle to common European consciousness, European citizenship and, eventually, European integration.<sup>10</sup>

This mode of reasoning is connected with an intellectual tradition distinguishing two models of nationalism, “Western”, state related, and “Eastern”, in which intelligentsia mobilises masses with the use of national culture. A basic, although quite schematic and widely criticised, outline of the two models was drawn by Hans Kohn in his book of 1945, *The Idea of Nationalism*.<sup>11</sup> Kohn linked “Western” nationalism with the political development of the Western European societies, the emergence of a modern nation-state, and the concepts of

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<sup>8</sup> E.Hobsbawm, *Introduction: Inventing Tradition* in: *The Invention of Tradition*, eds. E.Hobsbawm, T.Ranger, Cambridge, New York, Melbourne 1983, p.1-14.

<sup>9</sup> E.Hobsbawm, *Mass Producing Traditions: Europe 1870-1914* in: *The Invention of Tradition*, eds. E.Hobsbawm, T.Ranger, Cambridge, New York, Melbourne 1983, p.263-307.

<sup>10</sup> D. de Rougement, *Lettre ouverte aux Européens*, Paris 1970.

<sup>11</sup> H.Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism*, New York 1945.

enlightened rationalism, notably individual liberty. The other type of nationalism is characteristic for Central-Eastern Europe (plus Germany) and Asia, *i.e.* societies at a backward stage of political and social development. "Eastern" nationalism was formulated against the existing state pattern, therefore it found its first manifestations in the field of culture and spread initially among scholars and artists. It always imitated the "Western" model of nationalism, although the awareness of this fact wounded the pride of its creators, mobilising them to oppose the "alien" example.

Dependent upon, and opposed to, influences from without, this new nationalism, not rooted in a political and social reality, lacked self assurance; its inferiority complex was often compensated by over-emphasis and overconfidence, their own nationalism appearing to nationalists in Germany, Russia, or India as something infinitely deeper than the nationalism of the West, and therefore richer in problems and potentialities.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, nationalism of Central-Eastern Europe created national mythology, idealised the past and the future of a fatherland.

A much more sophisticated examination was introduced by A.D. Smith in his *National Identity*. The two models of nationalism he analysed are a civic-territorial ("Western") nationalism and an ethnic-genealogical nationalism typical for Eastern Europe and postcolonial societies. In the civic-territorial model, aristocratic elites use strong state and its bureaucratic institutions to incorporate the lower social strata into the nation; this is parallel to the process of modernisation and results in creating a democratic civic society. In the other, ethnic-genealogical model, intelligentsia mobilizes the lower social strata using cultural resources and applies ideals of the French revolution against the oppressing imperial state to bring on a new political order. In this case sovereign culture-community becomes the sole legitimate source of political authority.<sup>13</sup>

### ***Scholars from Central-Eastern Europe***

As it has already been mentioned, due to specific historical experience in Central-Eastern Europe a nation is first of all defined as a community of culture. Therefore, the complex theory of modern nations created by the Polish-American sociologists Florian Znaniecki is especially worth presenting here. The author, being a Pole born under partitions when the Polish state did not exist in any form, could not agree with the scholars emphasising the importance of a state. The main thesis of his book *Modern Nations* states: "(...) *a solidary human collectivity of hundreds of thousands, even millions, of people who share*

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<sup>12</sup> Quoted after: H.Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism* in: *Nationalism*, eds. J.Hutchison, A.D.Smith, Oxford, New York 1997, p.164-165.

<sup>13</sup> A.D.Smith, *National Identity*, Reno, Las Vegas, London 1993, p.8-12, 123-131.

*the same culture can exist for a long time without a common political government (...)*<sup>14</sup>

The modern national society emerged for the first time in Europe at the very beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Defining modern nation as “a national culture society”, Znaniecki proposed a universal model of nation formation, development and integration processes. A national culture society grows from a small social nucleus constituted by individual leaders from different fields of cultural activity who create national culture through the synthesis of traditional regional cultures: “*As the national culture grows, these leaders, their followers and sponsors who participate in its growth form an increasingly coherent intellectual community activated by the ideal of a culturally united and socially solidary national society, which should include all the people whose folk cultures are presumed to be essentially alike and who are supposed to share the same historical background.*”<sup>15</sup>

Individual leaders believe that masses sharing the same culture belong to the same nation. Consequently, they aim at spreading a social solidarity based on a common national culture and, to achieve this goal, resort to propaganda as well as education. At first masses fail to share their belief, since they know only the solidarity arising from common folk culture, religion or class, and from political subordination. Only under the influence of individual leaders and their actions, they do become “nationalised”.

Among intellectual leaders advocating national culture society Znaniecki counts: men of letters, historians, ethnographers and national ideologists (mainly philosophers of values, poets or historians). National ideologists think about future and formulate ideals to be realised by their society, most important of them being: ideal of national unification, national progress, national mission, and national independence. Znaniecki also characterises social roles of creative leaders such as artist, musicians, and scientists, who add to the development of national culture. Furthermore, he points out the importance of economic leaders. It is worth observing that in his interpretation political divisions and a foreign rule are analysed as main obstacles to achieving the ideals formulated by national ideologists, with statesmen and governmental groups mentioned only as possible patrons of individual leaders and promoters of the national culture development. Political divisions, the power of state and its institutions, statesmen, are all of little importance and cannot decide about the future of a national culture society. Although state authorities can take advantage of a powerful tool such as public education in national culture, the society can successfully resist them creating an alternative system of private education and

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<sup>14</sup> F.Znaniecki, *Modern Nations*, Urbana 1952, p.ix.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p.24-25.

self-education. In this way Znaniecki reveals the enormous strength of a national culture society, which can survive through long periods of state nationalism it recognises as foreign, and emphasises limits of state potential to create a modern nation.

Another interesting example of writing on nations constructed against state rather than by a state, that I would like to quote here, is a book *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe* by Miroslav Hroch,<sup>16</sup> a Czech scholar. He is applying a comparative method to search for general interconnections and laws governing the nation-forming process, discussed as the social process which was a part of the transition from “*the feudal society of Estates to the capitalist society of the citizens*”.<sup>17</sup> Hroch is not interested in the emergence of state-nations but in the formation of small European nations. The latter are the nations that, at the time when they were formed, constituted just ethnic groups which did not possess “their own” ruling class and lacked continuous tradition of high culture expressed in literary languages of their own. Moreover, they “*were in subjection to a ruling nation for such a long period that the relation of subjection took on a structural character for both parties*”.<sup>18</sup> According to the above definition of small nations, the author ignores the division into “Eastern”-“Western” nationalisms popular in the Western European literature and considers nations of Central-Eastern Europe: Czechs, Estonians, Lithuanians, and Slovaks, as well as these of Western Europe: Danes in Schleswig, Finns, Flemish (in his other studies such small nations as Basques, Catalans, Galician, Irish, Norwegians, Scots and Welsh are also to be found).

All these nations followed the model of nationalism that has traditionally been attributed to Eastern Europe, Asia and postcolonial societies. The national awakening always begins with the period of scholarly interest, which leads to the period of patriotic agitation and, finally, to the rise of mass national movement. The whole process is started by intelligentsia, with bourgeoisie and peasantry joining it at the last, mass stage. In this way, Hroch proved that the “Eastern” model of nationalism is in fact the nationalism of stateless nations, no matter what their geographical location in Europe is. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century small nations under the rule of strong Western European nation-states were pushed down to the level of an ethnic group and incorporated into state-nations, while most of the nations of Central-Eastern Europe gained independent nation-states after the collapse of the old empires.

At this point it may be inspiring to refer back to de Rougement, his preference for small nations, true “national personalities” of Europe, and his

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<sup>16</sup> M.Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe*, Cambridge, New York 1985.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p.8.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p.9.



critique of nation-states. According to him, European integration would tend to weaken nation-states and promote European regions, reflecting pre-modern national divisions. It is worth pointing that de Rougement limited his considerations to Western Europe only. Hroch counts the nations praised by de Rougement among small nations much like the nations of Central-Eastern Europe or discusses them as “the relicts of people” (the “remnants” of old ethnic units as Bretons). Therefore, a study of the two authors may become a starting point for an effort to compare small nation-states of Central-Eastern Europe with Western European regions. Could it therefore be argued whether European nations similar in terms of size and stage of development gained nation-states or were pushed to the level of autonomous groups and regions depended on their geographic location?

### **3. Summary**

The two traditions of reasoning and writing about nationalism, interconnections between state and nation, and the formation of modern nations reflect historical differences between two parts of Europe, Western and Central-Eastern, which nowadays constitute the old and the new Member States of the European Union.

According to the old Member States’ tradition, strong, modern states constructed modern state-nations while developing democratic systems and civil societies. This was achieved already in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, parallel to the increase of imperial ambitions that led to the outbreaks of the two world wars. Therefore, the idea of European integration is strongly connected with efforts to weaken nationalisms, strengthen concepts of citizenship and the model of multiple dimensions identity. From this point of view, nationalisms of Central-Eastern Europe may seem to be those of belated nations constructing their mythology and presumed cultural power (as formulated by Kohn) but unable to create stable nation-states. After World War I, due to the collapse of centuries-old, reliable empires, the small nations of Central-Eastern Europe managed to build, just for a while, their own small nation-states that re-emerged as fully sovereign states only after 1989, revealing their outdated and dangerous nationalisms.

Meanwhile, from the perspective of Central-Eastern Europe, a nation as a national culture society is of key importance. Its creators: artists, intellectuals, intelligentsia, can spontaneously mobilise masses and construct a modern nation against state and its institutions. State does not have the power to build nation but it is brought into existence and legitimised by it. Discontinuity in a state’s functioning and existence, although inconvenient, cannot cause a fall of the nation that independently preserves its culture, tradition, history and memory. Difficult political history of this part of Europe, troubles in constructing and

sustaining stable development of states, enforced border shifts and changes of political systems caused especially strong attachment to fully sovereign nation-states and traditional national identities, even after 1989, in the age of globalisation. Hence, endless discussions on questions of history and memory. According to this understanding of nation, Western European state-nations may appear as artificial constructs of bureaucratic states, devoid of any powerful “binding agent”. Therefore, they cannot constitute a “true” national community and seem to be losing their power.

After the latest EU enlargement, both traditions have become equally “European”, both should be taken into account and both will influence future politics of the Union and its Member States, the modes of reasoning and actions of politicians and citizens. Their co-existence does not necessarily mean hindering the Union by the reinforcement of diversity. Since the two traditions complement each other, they allow to a multisided, more complete insight into emerging problems. Coming back to the question of national (and maybe also European?) identity formation, the two traditions help to grasp the importance of state and its institutions as well as to understand that the power of national culture and the mobilisation of learned elites are equally important. Together, the two traditions help to remember that European history was created by powerful state-nations as well as by small nations, by modern democratic states who attempted to create a civic society already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as well as by traditional multiethnic empires.

The questions of European future, integration processes and European identity have to remain open. When will the old Member States fully accept equality of the two traditions? How can the feeling of European identity emerge in strong national societies of Central-Eastern Europe? Does it already exist there and, if yes, what form has it taken? Will these societies follow the Western European pattern of weakening nationalism and multiple identity related to processes of modernisation and globalisation? Is the redefinition of national identity started in 1989 capable of reconciling tradition with modernity, concerning its European dimension? Or will it rather result in a new form of an integral nationalism? Up to now, the tradition of this part of Europe seems to have demonstrated that activities of intellectuals, artists and intelligentsia may be more efficient than any institutional action. Does it mean that the EU’s cultural policy should be diversified to meet the needs of the old and the new Member States? After all, it is also possible that the difference in historical and cultural traditions of the two parts of Europe characterised in this article is just passing away, and the passing might be even accelerated by the integration processes.