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THE FLEXIBILITY OF EUROPEAN IDENTITIES

EAST-WEST AND NORTH-SOUTH JUXTAPOSITIONS IN PAST AND PRESENT

ABSTRACT Europe suffers from an existential identity crisis, which may seem unmatched in its history. However, this essay argues that hesitance and discussion about the European identity and borders, internal as well as external, have always existed. The first part elaborates on Europe's most classic internal division, between East and West, and demonstrates that this juxtaposition was invented in the 18th century without any historical foundations. The second part discusses the European identity of a number of peripheral regions in the West: Portugal, Sicily, Ireland, and Scandinavia. It shows that all of these regions have traditionally turned their back to Europe and did only recently acknowledge a European identity. The third part looks for some explanations for these evolutions and also reflects on the consequences for today. It highlights that Greece, the most troublesome country in the current Eurozone crisis, has only in the nineteenth century been acknowledged as the cradle of Europe and that this recognition has favoured Greek expansion under a European banner, up to (the southern part of) Cyprus. Greece and Cyprus, however, have significantly diverged from European developments: being orthodox and Ottoman for centuries, they were excluded from Renaissance and industrialization. This discrepancy reveals that European identities are utmost flexible and will undoubtedly develop further in the future.

Keywords: Europe, identities, East-West, North-South

Europe is suffering from an existential crisis. The financial problems have disclosed the institutional inconsistencies of the past treaties, both within the Eurozone and beyond. As a result, political disorientation and the democratic deficit are increasing. This has eventually led to a fundamental identity crisis. Europe does not know anymore what it stands for and where it is heading to. Not even a decade after its largest expansion ever, it was questioning its borders and even considering excluding member states from the Eurozone.

This identity crisis may seem unmatched in European history. However, this essay will argue that hesitance and discussion about European identities and borders have always existed. It will do so by exploring the extent to which certain countries and regions were associated with Europe, both within these regions and in the rest of the continent (rather than by defining elements and factors that European identities were constructed upon). In this way, it will show that Europe's internal and external borders have been extremely flexible. Nevertheless, public opinion has always accepted them and often even considered them as deeply rooted and age-old, while as a matter of fact, they are much younger and dependent on geopolitical evolutions.

First, we will discuss the ostensible fault line that is most referred to: the one between East and West. Relying on secondary literature, predominantly from the 1990s, we will demonstrate that in the middle ages and the early modern period, Eastern Europe was not regarded as a different part of Europe. Only in the second half of the eighteenth century did Western Europe homogenize and marginalize the eastern part of the continent.

A second and more extensive section will focus on peripheral regions in Western Europe and analyze how they have identified with Europe. We will dwell on various examples, drawing a crescent from the south to the north: Sicily, Portugal, Ireland, and Scandinavia. In spite of the fact that their Europeanness is never questioned nowadays, they have only recently fully associated themselves with Europe. In the past, they tended to distance themselves from Europe rather than connect to it, often to different degrees – Portugal being the most extreme example. All of these cases were elaborated upon in a Dutch-language volume that I edited. This article is the first presentation of the major conclusions of the volume in a foreign language.

A third and last section will further reflect on these findings. On the one hand, we will explain why the eastern part of Europe has always emphasized its belonging to Europe and why the western periphery tried to decouple from it. On the other hand, we will highlight the relevance for present-day developments in Europe by discussing when and why Greece and Cyprus were included into Europe. Again, European identities will prove to be extremely flexible.

This essay is based on numerous examples. Since it is impossible to be comprehensive, they seem to be chosen at random or, conversely, to be selected deliberately in order to strengthen a certain argument. Yet, this is only on the surface. On the one hand, we refer to the most dominant narratives for the most important periods. On the other hand, this arbitrariness is typical of such debates. After all, Europe is a nation, albeit

a transnational one. Accordingly, it is also subject to the theories of Gellner (constructivism), Anderson (imagined communities) and Hobsbawm (invented traditions).

EASTERN EUROPE

One of the most inspiring books on the perception of Eastern Europe was written in the early 1990s by Larry Wolff.¹ The American scholar argued that Western Europe invented Eastern Europe in the eighteenth century as a homogeneous and backward region. Enlightened philosophers in France and Britain wanted to put themselves in the leading and pioneering part of Europe and the world, and therefore created a new juxtaposition.

Prior to the eighteenth century, Eastern Europe did not exist. The continent was divided by a fault line dividing the northern part from the southern one. The latter always considered itself better developed. It was the cradle of the first European civilizations and empires, from Crete to Rome. During the Renaissance, Italy gave a rebirth to the superior culture of antiquity, which had been lost during the dark Middle Ages. Simultaneously, Portugal and Spain embarked on the voyages of discovery and the colonization of the New World.

Northern Europe, by contrast, was always backward. Barbaric tribes, who were responsible for the fall of Rome and the cultural setback and political divisions in the subsequent centuries, populated the region. The South looked down on their innovations and labeled the splendid medieval cathedrals as gothic and linked them in this way with the barbarians. During the early modern era, too, Northern Europe was an epigone. Its culture paled in the light of Italian artists and its wealth was based on piracy.

However, things gradually changed in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The discovery of America moved the hub of European trade from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic. The conquest of Spanish islands in the Caribbean by Britain (Jamaica), France (St. Domingue, today Haiti) and the Netherlands (Guyana and the Dutch Antilles) allowed these new countries to take a share in the massive profits. The core of European development shifted to the North again. But now, the North was determined not to be perceived as a region of secondary importance.

This is the reason why, according to Larry Wolff, it invented Eastern Europe. Western opinion-makers drew a new fault line on the European map, dividing not the north from the south, but the west from the east. Accordingly, it grouped itself together with the superior southern Europe and introduced a new concept – civilization – that united them and contrasted them with the East. The latter was not easy: Prague lay more westwards than Vienna and Eastern Europe was also inhabited by Romanic and Greek people. However, mental mapping is flexible. Mozart made a fool of the Czech language and d'Alembert turned Hungarian into a Slavic language. In this way, Eastern

¹ L. Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe. The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*, Stanford 1994.

Europe was imagined as a homogeneous area, which had always been more uncivilized than its western counterpart. As a matter of fact, Western Europe's position towards Eastern Europe resembled what Edward Said later called orientalism regarding Europe's relation with the Orient.

This obviously was a huge falsification of history. Eastern Europe was neither homogeneous nor backward. Southeastern Europe belonged to the Greek sphere of influence and the Roman empire in antiquity and was the core of Europe at certain moments, for instance under Alexander the Great (4th century BC) or under Justinian the Great (6th century AD). Under the Ottomans (from the 14th century onwards) it was more isolated, but Northeastern Europe then became a key player in European history. Buda under Matthias Corvinus and Cracow under the last Jagiellonians were central, not peripheral, in the Renaissance. Poland actively participated in the Enlightenment, being the first European country to establish a ministry of education and to issue a liberal constitution (May 1791, months before the French constitution of September).

Neither was Western Europe homogeneous or better developed. The Southern Netherlands (huge parts of contemporary Belgium), for instance, rose against the reforms of the Austrian emperor Josef II, launching a conservative, and not a liberal rising (the Brabant Revolution). The region was far less affected by Renaissance architecture. It produced a number of authoritative humanists, such as Desiderius Erasmus and Justus Lipsius. But so did Poland, for instance with Johannes Dantiscus and Nicolaus Copernicus. All in all, it is clear that the contrast between East and West lacked historical roots.

Nonetheless, the invention of Eastern Europe was a great success. On the one hand, it caught up with a classic division between East and West that stretches back to the beginning of European history and has been popular all the way since. Greeks fought several bloody wars with the Persians until Alexander the Great crushed Persepolis. Romans divided their empire and created a split that is still visible today. The Great Schism within Christianity (1054) ended centuries of tensions between the two patriarchal cities of Rome and Constantinople, after the three other ones – Antioch, Alexandria, and Jerusalem – had been conquered by Islam. All in all, it seemed that Europe had always competed with the East. All perils came from there: Huns, Magyars, Tatars, and Turks. As a result, it was not so difficult to turn the external eastern border into an internal boundary.

On the other hand, the division of Europe between a civilized West and a backward East seemed to be confirmed by the facts. In the late eighteenth century, Western Europe was on the threshold of modernization. In the nineteenth century, its countries developed into industrialized nation-states and its capitals into colonial metropolises. This seemed to contrast highly with Eastern Europe, a largely rural area consisting of vast and multi-ethnic empires dating from the ancient régime. In the interwar period, most Western countries elaborated their democratic system, while the Eastern Europe states proved immature and fell back on totalitarian regimes. After the Second World War, the West remained democratic while the East became communist. All of this contributed to an easy acceptance of the East-West division.

Of course, this juxtaposition existed only on the surface. Huge parts of Western Europe failed to industrialize and faced tremendous emigration – for instance Ireland and Italy. Some spots in Eastern Europe were very modern. Łódź was the Manchester of tsarist Russia and Budapest constructed the first metro of the European continent. In the interwar period, Masaryk succeeded in keeping Czechoslovakia democratic while Mussolini turned Italy into a fascist state. Nevertheless, the East-West juxtaposition was rooted in the collective memory.

Many Eastern Europeans have fought these stereotypes, though. They were only successful in the 1980s, on the eve of the fall of Iron Curtain. In 1984, the Czechoslovakian author Milan Kundera wrote an essay in which he gave birth to a new region: Central Europe. He was not the first to launch the concept. In the late nineteenth century, Germans defined *Mitteleuropa* as the part of Europe that fell under the cultural hemisphere of Germany. *Mitteleuropa* lost momentum after the German defeat in the First World War. It was taken over again by Hitler but lost all of its credits after 1945 for its associations with Lebensraum. Kundera gave a new interpretation and considered Central Europe the part of Europe that mentally and culturally belonged to the West, but was mistakenly, by the fate of history, under the political and economic control of the East. Along with Czechoslovakia, Central Europe included Hungary and Poland. Writers from these countries, such as the Hungarian philosopher György Konrád and the Polish essayist Adam Michnik, entirely endorsed these views. Western sympathizers, such as Timothy Garton Ash² and Norman Davies³ helped in spreading their ideas across the world in the late 1980s and the early 1990s. After 1989, Europe seemed to consist of three parts. The civilized West had not changed. Nor had the uncivilized East. Now, however, there was also an in-between Europe.

Other thinkers went even further. Krzysztof Pomian, a Polish historian based in Paris, proposed the alternative concept of axes. Initially, Europe had been divided by a horizontal axis, in which the north was influenced by the south: barbarians by Rome and pagans by Christians. The Reformation turned the movement around and from the seventeenth century onwards the North affected the South with its scientific developments, philosophy, and industry. France was the single exception, and this may have been the foreshadowing of a new vertical axis that had existed for a longer time and was about to divide the Christian world even more explicitly. In the nineteenth century, Great Britain and France were the transmitters and the eastern powers the receivers of political, economic and scientific innovations. Only after 1900, Pomian argues, did this movement also change direction. The Vienna *Sezession*, the Russian painting and ballet, and the Central European *avant-garde* conquered the West. Pomian concludes that the western look must now be focused to what is arriving from Central and Eastern Europe.⁴

² T.G. Ash, 'Does Central Europe Exist?', *The New York Review of Books*, 9 October 1986; idem, 'The Puzzle of Central Europe', *The New York Review of Books*, 18 March 1999.

³ N. Davies, R. Moorhouse, *Microcosm. Portrait of a Central European City*, London 2003.

⁴ K. Pomian, *L'Europe et ses nations*, Paris 1990.

Pomian's book was translated into several languages, but his ideas have never really rooted. Kundera's Central Europe also lost much of its glow. It appeared non-existent when institutional constructions that came out of this identity, such as the Visegrad group or the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA), proved only strategies to speed up the integration process with Western Europe. It also met fierce criticism, inter alia in Southeastern Europe, which was excluded from Central Europe. Initially, the Balkans were awarded old clichés dating from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and representing them as a wild region and an explosive mixture of cultures and religions. The return of these stereotypes may have seemed logical given the wars in former Yugoslavia, but were nevertheless remarkable, since they had completely vanished during the Cold War, Tito's Yugoslavia being the most advanced communist state and closest ally to the West.⁵

In the early twenty first century, Central Europe joined the European Union. However, so did the Baltic republics, Romania, Bulgaria, and even some former Yugoslavian republics. The concept of Central Europe has lost sense and the classic division between the old and the new Europe reappeared. Along with it came Eastern Europe. Its new definition as the eastern part of the European Union excluded countries such as Georgia and Ukraine, which in spite of the Rose and the Orange Revolutions (respectively in 2003 and 2004) were attributed to the Russian sphere of influence.

WESTERN EUROPE

While Eastern Europeans were desperate to be recognized as a full part of Europe but were ignored by the West, the opposite is true for some Western European regions. Neither their European identity nor their contribution to European civilization have been questioned by the rest of the continent. However, they have a different view themselves, perceiving their relationship with Europe as ambiguous and even taking distance from the rest of the continent.

The best example is Portugal⁶. Until recently, the country has identified with *O mundo português* rather than with Europe. The "Portuguese world" was the relict of the former colonial empire, that was built in the fifteenth and sixteenth century and lost in the early nineteenth (Brazil) and late twentieth century. Portuguese feel connected with regions and countries such as Goa, Timor, Malacca, Macao, Sao Tome & Principe, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Angola, Mozambique, and Brazil.

Much of this Portuguese world has disappeared. Huge parts are characterized by social misery, political instability, and economic backwardness. Lisbon's reluctant decolonization has led to civil wars and military coups, and many of the former colonies have turned to other allies. For instance, after Eastern Timor gained independence from In-

⁵ M. Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, New York–Oxford 1997.

⁶ J. Dewulf, 'Meer landschap dan buurschap. Portugal in Europa en de wereld' in I. Goddeeris (ed.), *De Europese periferie*, Leuven 2004 (*Alfred Caubie Reeks*).

onesia in 1999, its economy is much more dependent on Australia than on Portugal. The former metropolis itself has also faded and in spite of its rich history – Portugal has become a poor country. Apart from some monuments and the gold leaf on Portuguese churches, there are few tracks of its colonial past. This is partly the result of the Methuen Treaty of 1703, which made Portugal a semi-colony of England. Many of its imperial profits were shipped to London and not to Lisbon. Later, this dependence also expanded to the political field.

Nonetheless, *O mundo português* has continued to exist in people's minds. Portuguese explorers named many geographical places, from Cameroun to the Strait of Magellan. Few Portuguese settled in the former colonies, but they were still able to spread the Portuguese language, which now takes third place in the list of most spoken European languages, after English and Spanish, but before French and German (this is of course largely accounted for by Brazil). The common language has fueled further contact within the Portuguese world. Brazilian *telenovelas* used to be daily blockbusters from Porto to Luanda. Teenage girls mirror themselves more with Brazilian actresses than with American movie stars. Teenage boys dream of a career at Benfica Lisbon or F.C. Porto, the Portuguese football competition being closely followed in the former empire. Of the three traditional Portuguese F's – *fado*, *futebol* and *Fátima* – the former is the most popular, but this does not mean that Portuguese culture and Christian religion have disappeared, on the contrary.

Portugal's greatest writers have celebrated the Portuguese world. Fernando Pessoa, for instance, stated that [a] *Portuguese who is only a Portuguese, is not a Portuguese*. In his eyes, *Not Portugal is my homeland, but the Portuguese language*. Luís de Camões, the famous poet from the sixteenth century, defined his fatherland as *where the land stops and the sea begins*. Ever since, Portuguese have identified with the sea. When Portugal organized the last world fair of the twentieth century in 1998, it opted for the sea as the central theme. Its national dish is salty codfish: a kind of fish you will not find in Portuguese waters, but which conserves long and is perfect for long ocean voyages. Interestingly, more than 80% of the Portuguese population lives less than 50 kilometers from the Atlantic Ocean, in a strip of land that takes up only one-third of the entire territory. This *litoralização* also occurs in the former colonies, the inland capital of Brazil being a radical reply to this phenomenon.

Feeling connected with *O mundo português*, Portugal has been reluctant for a long time to join the European integration process. António Oliveira Salazar, who ruled Portugal between 1928 and 1970, reacted negatively on Aristide Briand's speech in the League of Nations in 1930: *Portugal could not be considered as fully European since an important part of the country did not lie on the European continent*. Its colonies were indeed considered as overseas provinces and allowed Portugal to develop its economy isolated from Europe. In the Second World War, Salazar opted for neutrality, wavering between the Spanish dictator Franco and the traditional ally Great Britain. After the war, he joined the Western bloc. He was not only fiercely anti-communist, but also strongly Atlantic, still considering Brazil a part of the Portuguese world. Portugal entered NATO and received some aid from the Marshall Plan.

Simultaneously, Salazar took distance from the European integration process. When Portugal was not invited to join the European Council, he did not treat this as a humiliation, but as the logical consequence of the country's special position. His country's economic dependence on the rest of the continent grew though, and in 1960 Portugal entered the European Free Trade Association (EFTA). However, the political discourse remained anti-European: Portugal was Atlantic and maritime, not European. The national Portuguese identity was built on this empire and Portuguese children were taught that Portuguese could be white, yellow, black or a mixture of these. Lisbon thought it was backed by London, which was also skeptical about the integration process, feeling different than the continent, identifying with the British empire and keeping strong ties with the U.S. Salazar was confused by London's application at the European Economic Communities (EEC) in 1961 and asked for more co-operation himself in the subsequent year, a request he withdrew after London's application had met with De Gaulle's *non*.

Things changed only in the 1970s. The expensive colonial wars took their toll: at a time when no other European state disposed of large colonies anymore, half of the Portuguese budget went to wars against freedom fighters in Angola, Guinée-Bissau and other parts in Africa. In 1974, the army put an end to this hopeless situation and assumed power in the so-called Carnation Revolution. Portugal's destiny was unsure for a time, and a communist coup was crushed by a counter-revolution. At the end of the day, democracy and European integration proved to be the best option. Portugal applied at the EEC in 1977, and officially joined it on January 1, 1986. However, the Portuguese historian Fernando de Sousa called this an arrival to Europe, not a return.

The integration with Europe unleashed an economic boom. Interestingly, Portugal became an immigration country and *O mundo Português* moved to Portugal. Nevertheless, new generations today identify more with Europe than with the Portuguese world. Of the three f's, only football has survived, and "Big Brother" became more popular than the *telenovelas*. Europe itself has also rapidly forgotten about Portugal's alternative identities and hesitance about Europe. Certainly after José Manuel Barroso became President of the European Commission, Portugal is perceived as a full European country.

A similar evolution can be traced in Ireland. Truly, the Irish have more mixed feelings about Europe than the clear-minded Portuguese, but from a historical perspective, their relationship with Europe has been subject to turmoil much more than one nowadays is keen to remember.⁷

Ireland was left aside by the Roman Empire, but was invaded by Vikings from Scandinavia and by Normand kings from England. Especially England has colored the island's perception of the outward. The English kings conquered parts of Ireland from the twelfth century onwards, until the Tudors controlled the whole island in the early sixteenth century and Henry VIII proclaimed himself King of Ireland in 1541. Ireland

⁷ J. Augusteijn, 'Van "redders der beschaving" tot "Keltische tijger". Ierland en Europa' in I. Goddeeris (ed.), *De Europese...*

looked for help on the European continent and found partners in Paris and Madrid, who thought they could use the island as a backdoor in their religious and political conflicts with England. London took anti-Catholic measures to break the Irish resistance, but this proved counterproductive and led to more emigration and new contact. For instance, the ban on the education of Catholic priests created a vast network of Irish seminaries – so called Irish colleges – across the European continent. This, however, did not result in a successful fight against the British. A last insurrection in 1798 was crushed, in spite of the assistance from revolutionary France. Ireland turned away from Europe.

In the nineteenth century, the Irish indeed developed new identities. Some of them felt strongly about the United States. Already during the American Independence War, the Irish elite had vividly sympathized with the colonists. In the following decades, the exponential growth of Irish emigration to America further fueled contact. Other Irish turned inwards and developed an Irish identity, just as other nations in this era of romanticism and *réveil national*. Initially, they emphasized the Irish contribution to the rest of Europe, claiming that the candle of Christian civilization was kept burning in Ireland and that the second Christianization by Columba and Columbanus was key in the survival of European culture. Increasingly, however, Irish nationalism advocated Celtic folklore and Irish superiority. There were exceptions, of course, mainly among liberals and Catholics. But even the Church became more Ireland-minded after the anti-Catholic penal laws had been abolished in 1795 and Catholic education was allowed to develop in Ireland.

This national awakening paved the way for the revolution of 1916-1921 and the dominion status of the free state of Ireland in 1922. The independent Irish state, which covered the entire island apart from the northeast and was renamed Eire in 1937, had an ambiguous attitude towards Europe and the rest of the world. On the one hand, it was determined to confirm its independence. As a consequence, Dublin joined the League of Nations and concluded bilateral agreements with France, Germany, and other countries. On the other hand, it was unwilling to hand over parts of its recently conquered independence to the new international institutions and was all but enthusiastic about projects for further international collaboration. Eamon de Valera, the Irish prime minister who was very active in the League of Nations, was the exception that proved the rule: his policy was not supported by his fellow countrymen in Ireland. Ireland's passion with an autonomous foreign policy was highly obvious during the Second World War. Dublin remained neutral and even sent a mourning telegram to Berlin after Hitler's death because it did so to all countries where the head of state had passed.

This policy did not meet with gratitude in London and Washington and Ireland was internationally isolated after the war. It received only a tiny little part of Marshall aid and was refused entry to NATO and the UN. However, the neutrality principle also bore fruit and Ireland was increasingly recognized as an independent state. As a result, the reservation towards European integration decreased. Even more, Europe became an interesting option in order to deal with the Irish economic dependence on the United Kingdom. In 1955, Ireland joined the UN and eight years later, it applied for accession

to the EEC. This was rejected by De Gaulle, and Ireland became a member in 1973, along with Denmark and the UK. It appeared to be more enthusiastic than London. Ireland left the sterling area for the European Monetary System in 1979 and joined the Eurozone in 2002. This was obviously also explained by the economic boom caused by the European integration. Ireland became a Celtic Tiger and transformed from an economically backward region into one of the three richest countries of the Union.

Once in a while, doubts surfaced. In 2001, the Irish rejected the Treaty of Nice because of the plans about a defense union. The Irish attitude after the financial crisis is not entirely clear yet. By and large, however, Ireland's affection with Europe is not questioned and the ambiguous relation in the past is largely ignored.

Even within the core members and founding fathers of the EEC, there has been much more doubt about Europe in the past than one is now aware of. Sicily, for instance, is struggling with different identities, locally, nationally and supranationally. Europe has only been one of the options and has just recently gained much popularity.⁸

The island was in the heart of the world in ancient times, but moved to the periphery after the Sicilian Vespers (1282) and was isolated from Renaissance and modernity. In the early nineteenth century, it developed its own identity, the *sicilianità*. It united both barons (a class that goes back to the Spanish rule of Sicily from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century) and *maffiosi* (who originally were no criminals, but adventurers that built up networks in order to gain power, possibly because of the very weak state structure). Together, they opposed foreign interference. In 1815, Sicily was re-united with Naples into the kingdom of the Two Sicilies, but Sicilians did not join the 1820 revolution in Naples against the restoration or the Rissorgimento movement aiming for the reunification of Italy. Instead, they advocated regionalist particularities. In *Storia critica di Sicilia* (1834), for instance, Giuseppe Alessi praised Sicily as the most fertile and richest island of the world. After Italian independence was asserted in 1860, Italian nationalists had to use arms to include Sicily into the new nation. Their pressure decreased only after 1876, when the new Prime Minister, Agostino Depretis, embarked on a less nationalistic course and found a *modus vivendi* with Sicily. While the north was allowed to adopt industrial capitalism, the south was left alone and continued to be ruled by the owners of large stretches of land. Time stood still in Sicily, as is epitomized in the famous novel *Il Gattopardo* (The Leopard) that Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa wrote in the 1950s.

Even Mussolini was not able to change this. He sent Cesare Mori to the island, who imposed national unity with iron hand, but was fired in 1927 after he had arrested a fascist MP whom he suspected to have contacts with the mafia. In the 1930s, landlords and *maffiosi* again grew to each other, and together with representatives of the masonry lodge, they established a committee in 1943 to stimulate the rise of a national Sicily. From 1945 onwards, the mafia boss Salvatore Giuliano led an independence movement, which ended only after he was killed in 1950.

⁸ J. Leman, 'Tussen Sicilianità, mafia en internationalisme. Zelfpercepties op Sicilië' in I. Goddeeris (ed.), *De Europese...*

Others advocated more collaboration with the United States and even created a *movimento per la quarantanovesime stella*, a “movement for the 49th star” which aimed at entering the U.S. as the 49th state. This may seem absurd and was indeed not taken seriously by Washington, but several elements can account for this attachment to the U.S.; Sicily had been liberated by U.S. troops in 1943, an invasion that had been prepared by the mafia. Moreover, there was much contact with the large numbers of Sicilian immigrants in America – between 1900 and 1913, more than a million of Sicilians had settled in the United States. In the interwar period, the Sicilian mafia had closely collaborated with the American one. Many American Mafiosi, such as Don Vito Cascio Ferro and Lucky Luciano, came from Sicily. Only the most infamous one, Al Capone, had roots in the Italian mainland.

Meanwhile, Rome weakened the Sicilian demands for independence by awarding the island with more autonomy. In 1947, it created a Regione Siciliana with its own *assemblea*. Gradually, Sicily integrated with the rest of the country. It did not forget its *sicilianità* though, and in the early 1990s tensions mounted again. The mafia found an ally in Gianfranco Finni's Lega Nord who agreed to develop a more autonomous Sicily into the “Singapore of the Mediterranean”: a tax paradise and a crossroad of legal and illegal trade. However, the Italian Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti did not comply with these plans, in spite of his agreement with the Lega Nord. As a result, three political assassinations were committed in 1992 and 1993: on the Euro-MP Salvo Lima and the anti-Mafia magistrates Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino.

These killings met with fierce protest by the Sicilian population, who marched onto the streets of Palermo. This was a significant difference with the general attitude in the previous decades, when nobody had rallied against the mafia. Europe gets the credit for this change in mentality. Brussels indeed showed interest in Sicily and launched the *Programmi integrati mediterranei* in 1985. It accordingly contrasted with Italy, which was in the forefront of European integration with pioneers as Alcide Di Gasperi, but took the Italian duality for granted. The results of this new policy were shortly visible: roads were built, monuments reconstructed, and education improved. New identities appeared, featuring a European flavor. Sicily now represented itself as the cradle of European civilization and the crossroad of contacts between Greeks and Romans, Arabs and Byzantines, ... *Sicilianità* continues to exist, but more as an expression of islanders' chauvinism than as a reaction against external influence.

Sicily developed a regional identity, but Scandinavia was suspicious of European integration for an opposite reason: transnational collaboration.⁹ The peninsula or – more broadly – the Nordic countries (including Denmark, Iceland, Greenland, etc.) have regularly showed their reluctance. Norwegians already twice, in 1972 and 2004, voted *nei* in referenda about accession to the EEC and the EU, and both Denmark and Sweden refused to introduce the euro. In 1992, Denmark also obtained four opt-outs after its population initially had rejected the Maastricht Treaty and blocked its coming into effect.

⁹ G. Laureys, ‘De periferie met een voorsprong. Nationale, Noordse en Europese identiteiten in Scandinavië’ in I. Goddeeris (ed.), *De Europese...*

This contrasts with their long and intense mutual collaboration. Denmark (which then included Norway and Iceland) and Sweden established a postal union in 1860, a Nordic academy in 1870, and a monetary union in 1873. The defeat against Bismarck in Königgratz, the loss of Schleswig-Holstein, and the threat of a united Germany are important explanations for this integration. The monetary union was disbanded in 1914, but in the same year, the Nordic countries issued a common declaration of neutrality, which kept them out of the First World War. During the Second World War, they fell on their own positions, Norway, Denmark, and later also Finland being occupied by the Third Reich. This experience led to further collaboration after 1945. Copenhagen, Oslo, and Stockholm founded the Scandinavian Aircraft Society in 1951, and, along with Iceland and (from 1955) Finland, the Nordic Council in 1953. This was a coordination organ with advisory competences. It consisted of the Nordic Minister Council and the Nordic Parliament (87 members, delegated by the national parliaments), which served as a forum for negotiation. The Nordic Council has since concluded several treaties, for instance on a common labor market (1954), a passport union (1958), and a Nordic Investment Bank (1976).

This transnational integration was instrumental, but also fell back on traditional ties. The Northern languages are similar and allow for semi-communication, certainly between Danes and Swedes (moreover, Danish is compulsory in Icelandic schools, and Swedish is the second language in Finland). The region also went through periods of common history. Scandinavia was united between 1397 and 1523, Finland was part of Sweden until 1809, Norway moved from Denmark to Sweden in 1814 and became independent in 1905, and Iceland obtained independence from Denmark after the Second World War. Last but not least, the Nordic countries share common values: the *Nordiska värdena* or *l'acquis nordique*. They include individual responsibility, redistribution of wealth, democratic participation, trust in state and authority, and a keen interest in consensus. For many, it is not a coincidence that a high number of international negotiators, including Carl Bildt, Thorvaldt Stoltenberg, Martti Ahtisaari, and Hans Blix, are Scandinavians.

However, this does not mean that it is all roses in Scandinavia. The unity did not eliminate variety, Sweden and Denmark regularly competing with each other and the other regions often frustrated about their rule from Stockholm and Copenhagen. Several postwar integration projects were not successful. The Scandinavian Defense Union was launched in the late 1940s by Sweden, which wanted to remain neutral and keep Denmark and Norway from joining the NATO. However, the latter had learned from their war experiences. They signed the North Atlantic Treaty in April 1949, and the Scandinavian Defense Union did not come into being. The Nordic Customs Union met with a similar fate. It was again proposed by Sweden and again rejected by Denmark and Norway. The latter were afraid to be surpassed by Sweden, whose economy had not been damaged during the war and flourished after 1945 given the demand of the continent. Moreover, there was an alternative: the European Free Trade Agreement, established in Stockholm in 1959. All Scandinavian countries joined it, and the customs union projects sunk.

A third regional integration project equally failed because of the European integration. The NORDEK or Nordic Economic Community was initiated by Copenhagen after De Gaulle had rejected the British, Irish, Norwegian, and Danish application for the second time. It was meant as a waiting room: a temporary economic platform joined not only by Denmark and Norway, but also by Sweden and Finland, that enlarged these countries' economies and made EEC integration appealing. However, De Gaulle's resignation shortly afterwards opened the door for new negotiations. Denmark eventually entered the EEC; Norway refrained in the last minute. The right feared the loss of sovereignty, and the left the spread of capitalism. Additionally, new oil and gas fields had recently been discovered in Norwegian territorial waters.

The European integration has thus both stimulated and impeded Nordic collaboration. The Nordic countries have an ambiguous and flexible relationship with Europe. They often illuminate their distance: Sweden, Norway, and Finland lie on a peninsula, and Reykjavik and Copenhagen on islands. Even Jutland, the part of Denmark connected to the European continent, is perceived as a *trait-d'union* (hyphen) rather than as a part of it. However, self-interest and geopolitical circumstances have eventually convinced three Nordic countries to join the European Union. Following the end of the Cold War, Sweden understood that its cherished neutrality had become outdated. It applied in 1990, also because it went through a bad economic conjuncture. Finland did the same a year later, fearing instability in the Baltic region on the eve of the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Norway followed in 1992. The latter's application was rejected in a referendum, but the former two joined the EU in 1994.

THE FLEXIBILITY OF IDENTITIES

All of these examples have clearly demonstrated that there may be a huge gap between a region's proper affinity with Europe and the way this is generally perceived. Whereas Eastern Europe has often been regarded as a new part of Europe, Eastern Europeans emphasized that they have belonged to the continent for ages and have ever since participated in its development. While countries and regions such as Portugal, Ireland, Sicily, and Scandinavia took distance from Europe until very recently and identified with other frameworks, their Europeanness has rarely been questioned.

It is not a coincidence that all of the latter examples are located in the western periphery of Europe. As a matter of fact, they all have something in common which lies at the base of their historical Euroscepticism: a strong neighbor. Sicily competed with Italy, Portugal with Spain, Ireland with England, Norway and Sweden with Denmark, Denmark with Germany. These neighbours were often bracketed together with Europe. As a consequence, isolating from the neighbour went together with taking distance from Europe.

In Eastern Europe, the situation was different. The countries in the northern part, called Central Europe in the past decades, also had a dominant neighbor. Russia, how-

ever, was often interpreted as the antipode of Europe. Russophobia therefore resulted in Europhilia rather than Euroscepticism. While western peripheral countries needed to orient to the sea or to overseas in order to adopt a profile different from their neighbour, Central Europe was automatically pushed in a western direction. Sometimes, it met with Germany, but Europe was varied enough and in such situations, Central Europe could link up with other regions such as France to foster its European feelings. In southeastern Europe, by contrast, there were more associations with eastern cultures, either orthodox Russia or Muslim Turkey. Many of these nations were therefore less desperate to identify with Europe.

This hypothesis does not aim to enhance the juxtaposition between East and West. On the contrary, scholars such as Larry Wolff have convincingly argued that the vertical axis is quite recent and that eighteenth-century Enlightenment thinkers have invented an Eastern Europe in order to erase the much more ingrained division between north and south. While the political and economic developments of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries seemed to confirm this East-West opposition, the events of the last few years may reveal its artificial character. On the one hand, the financial crisis has put the horizontal axis back on the European map, southern countries such as Greece, Portugal, Spain, and Italy suffering much more from debts and unemployment than the northern part of Europe. On the other hand, Eastern Europe proved to be all but a homogeneous region. Countries like Poland have so far done well, while other ones have huge problems facing the crisis. Interestingly, the latter group is spread across Eastern Europe and includes for instance Latvia, Hungary, and Romania. Again, this suggests that fault lines should never be cemented.

Greece is undoubtedly the biggest victim of the crisis and its exclusion from the Eurozone is openly taken into consideration. This would cause much confusion, but from a historical and identity perspective, it is less startling than it may seem. Greece has indeed often been represented as the cradle of Europe and the birthplace of democracy, but this is quite recent and has been put forward in the nineteenth century. It was prepared by the philhellenic movement in the 1820s that sympathized with the Greek independence struggle against the Ottomans. And it was explicitly phrased in the 1840s by the British historian George Grote, who published a new history of Greece in which he illuminated the democratic period in the sixth century BC as the apogee of Greek civilization and the origins of European thinking. He did so because he wanted to give more weight to his own political conviction: Grote was a radical Whig and aimed at providing a historical justification to his ideas.¹⁰

This was a major shift: until then, the origins of Europe were situated in the disintegration of the Western Roman Empire and its features were defined as Christianity or balance of power rather than democracy. However, the new view rapidly found ground. The nineteenth century was the era of nation-building *par excellence*, democracy became an overall accepted ideology in the following decades, and Greece was not perceived as alien, for not only democracy, but also literature, philosophy, and sciences

¹⁰ P. den Boer, *Europa. De geschiedenis van een idee*, Amsterdam 2007.

were developed in the Greek antiquity. The new view also accounts, at least partly, for Greece's fluent integration in the European structures. It did not fall into the hand of communists after the Second World War and joined the EEC in 1981, shortly after the fall of the Colonels' Regime in 1974.

For Greece itself, Europe was not the initial point on the agenda. It gave much more priority to the *enosis*: the unification of all historically Greek territories. Since the independence of 1829, Greece regularly expanded, conquering the Ionian Islands in 1863, Thessaly in 1878-81, Epirus and Macedonia in 1913, and Western Thrace in 1923. The ultimate objective was Cyprus. The island, however, was taken over by Great Britain from the Ottoman empire in 1878, became a British crown colony in 1925, and asserted independence in 1960. Cyprus was not annexed by Greece, but became a separate country and was divided following the Turkish invasion in 1974. The southern part entered the European Union in 2004. All in all, this is even stranger than Greece's accession. From a geographical perspective, Cyprus is part of the Middle East, lying only 100 km from Syria, but 400 km from Rhodos.¹¹ Greece's location is less eccentric, but its past has significantly diverged from European developments. Being orthodox and Ottoman for centuries, it was excluded from Renaissance and industrialization.

Of course, Europe has a sheer abundance of definitions, and the lack of Renaissance or a belated and limited industrialization does not exclude a country from being European. Moreover, Europe consists of several layers. Greece's position in the Eurozone may be questioned, but one does not cast doubt on its membership to the European Union or its belonging to Europe as a whole. This is another example of the flexibility of European identities, which also gives hope in these dark days of the European integration process.

Flexibility is indeed more a benefit than a burden. It allows adapting to new situations and can lead to more interconnectedness and even expansion. In 1987, the Turkish Prime Minister Turgut Özal¹² called Homer and Paul the Apostle his compatriots, suggesting the European roots of Turkey. Such claims cause indignation in some circles, but as a matter of fact, they are very similar to the construction of identities in the core of the continent. The Belgian Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt represented Belgium as a turning table of European developments, highlighting that the first Merovingian kings were buried in Tournai, the first Carolingians came from Herstal, and Charles V was born in Ghent.¹³ Although such claims from the European center are far less contested, they take for granted the continuity which is as stunning as the one between Pericles and Papandreou or Troy and Istanbul.

¹¹ H. Hauben, 'Europa in het Midden-Oosten. Cyprus: culturele verscheidenheid of politieke apartheid?' in I. Goddeeris (ed.), *De Europese...*

¹² T. Özal, *La Turquie en Europe*, Paris 1988.

¹³ P. Goossens, (ed.), *Grenzen van Europa. Referaten van het Internationaal Colloquium van 21 en 22 oktober 1999 in het Europees Parlement te Brussel*, Leuven 2001, p. 12.

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