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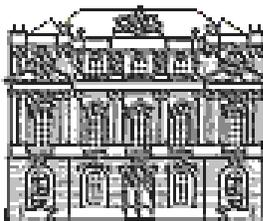
Monika Mokre

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"If I had to do it again, I would begin with culture."

Jean Monnet (?)

This paper will not deal with the question if Jean Monnet really uttered this proverbial phrase; it will, however, make the point that he had better not made this comment as it does not make any political sense. (see Barnavi 2002, 91) Culture is not a good starting point for a political project, at least not for a project of integration. The evocation of cultural differences helps strengthening antagonisms within or between states - or, as in our days, between whole parts of the world, world religions etc. (see Mokre 2000) but the building of a common culture requires a combination of different ways of convergence and harmonisation – so, culture can never be the starting point of an integration project but in the best case its final success.

Culture, cultural identities have external presuppositions (widely differing in different times and at different places) which cannot exclusively (and probably not even primarily) be found in traditions, common cultural heritage etc. but rather in more concrete commonalities such as a common market, a common currency, the abolition of national borders etc. (see e. g. Puntscher Riekmann 1998, 21) In this vein, the European Union has not fared badly up to now in laying the foundation stone of a common cultural identity. However, the creation of a cultural identity also needs political determination. And, sometimes, it seems as if this political determination while doubtlessly having been part of the political programme of the founding fathers of European Integration is lacking in the current political agents of the EU. (Barnavi 2002, 90)

The aim of this paper is to clarify that a cultural identity is not a pre-supposition of a political identity but that both emerge simultaneously. „A nation of citizens must not be confused with a community of fate shaped by common descent, language and history. This confusion fails to capture the voluntaristic character of a civic nation, the collective identity of which exists neither independent of nor prior to the democratic process from which it springs." (Habermas, 2001)

After theorizing the relation between cultural identity and political identity a bit further two contemporary examples derived from the Austrian experience - the so-called sanctions against

Austria and the conflict between Austria and the Czech Republic about the nuclear power station Temelin - shall show the necessity of a political identity for efficient policy making. Finally, the adequacy of the convention for the preparation of a European constitution shall be discussed in the light of the afore developed requirements.

Cultural Identity and Political Identity in the EU

Collective identities have many connotations, levels and nuances. When I try here an analytical approach to this term I know, of course, quite well that there many other, partly conflicting understandings of this concept. However, I think that for our question here, namely the political impact of collective identities a differentiation I took from a colleague of my research unit in Vienna (Pollak/ Mokre 1999, 320) can be helpful. Pollak differentiates two parts of collective identities, an ideational one and a political one. Ideational identity means common values, traditions and also expectations for the future; political identity is the "externalisation of the ideational identity in acts." (Pollak/Mokre 1999, 320) To act is an essential part of an identity. The "we" is constituted in acting and out of the necessity to guarantee stability and continuity of political acting institutions are built. Political identity is defined by its political aims: the design of governance and the distribution of rights and duties. An authentic political identity representing all parts and members of a society, mirrors and develops at the same time ideational identities. Ideational identities and cultural particularities need their realization in political identities and political institutions in order to develop and to stabilize themselves. Cultural identity and political identity are inseparably linked. The European Commission has acknowledged this in the programme Culture 2000 by stating:

> (5) If citizens give their full support to, and participate fully in, European integration, greater emphasis should be placed on their common cultural values and roots as a key element of their identity and their membership of a society founded on freedom, democracy, tolerance and solidarity; a better balance should be achieved between the economic and cultural aspects of the Community,so that these aspects can complement and sustain each other. (Decision establishing Culture 2002, 1)

In this way, the European Commission defines common political values as basic of a common culture – an interesting, not essentialist and open concept. It has, however, two major drawbacks.

1. By defining political values – freedom, democracy, tolerance and solidarity - as the fundamentals of a common European identity an essential concept of cultural identity as given by common ethnic roots is avoided but, at the same time, those political values are essentialised. They are not understood as dynamic concepts, continually developing and changing according to conflicting interests but as a kind of static quality a political community has or does not have. As the Croatian writer Boris Buden wrote with respect to the perception of the Balkans in Western Europe: "A society which is still involved in political fights with unforeseeable outcome is not simply a society with specific political problems but a society of the "uncivilised world". (Buden 1998, 4) In this understanding, freedom, democracy, tolerance and solidarity are not political values of a community (or a community-to-be like the EU) which are defined and re-defined in constant political struggles (see e.g. Laclau/ Mouffe 1985) but clearly defined qualities you need to be part of this community, a mechanism of inclusion and exclusion instead of a field of discourse.

2. Secondly and paradoxically, the institutional structures of the EU itself do not really meet these values propagated by the European Commission as common European values – at least if we understand those values not only as part of political ideas, of cultural values but also as political practice. (Obviously, this problem is closely linked to the first one: When political concepts are understood as part of a common, traditional culture, implementation into practice does not seem necessary.) But democracy remains an empty catchword if it is not translated into concrete political structures. And a basic democratic principle says that the citizens as subjects of rule should also be the authors of the rules – as Abraham Lincoln put it in his famous Gettysburg address of 1863: "Government of the people, by the people, for the people". State power derives from the people and is exercised on their behalf by special agencies who are accountable to the people for that exercise. The transfer of national sovereignty to the European level, however, was not met by adequate rights of co-determination for the citizens or a sufficient adaptation of the institutional arrangement at the national level to secure classical standards of democracy – i.e. the institutionalisation of a set of procedures for the control of governance which guarantees the participation of those who are governed in the adoption of collectively binding decisions (Jachtenfuchs 1997, 7). The often mentioned democratic deficit of the European Union can be understood as the fact that within the political system of the European Union rulers are only indirectly held accountable for their policies and actions in the public realm by citizens. There is

no competition of elites offering alternative programmes and vying for popular support at the European level (Andersen/Burns 1996; Van der Ejik/Franklin 1996; Schmitt/Thomassen 1999). The people's decisional powers are dwindling with the constant shift of competences towards the European level. The resulting system of European multi-level governance has severe consequences for the relationship between the represented and the representative. The balance of power in this relationship is constantly shifting towards the executive depriving the citizens of basic democratic rights hitherto bound to the nation-state.

Furthermore, modern democracies are based on constitutional arrangements clearly stating the formal division and relation of the three branches of power: the legislative, the executive and the judiciary. Obviously, such a clear-cut institutional arrangement cannot be found on the EU-level: The European Parliament is not a legislator in the classic sense of the term, the Commission is not a European government, while the Council certainly being the ultimate decision-making and therefore the most powerful organ in this arrangement is only weakly checked by the Parliament. While the members of the Council may successfully pretend to be responsible to national parliaments it is common knowledge that these are largely unable to scrutinize their governments and administrations when acting on the European level.

A further difficulty in analysing the relationship between the political powers at European level results from the absence of a European sovereign. In the context of most European nation-states the sovereign is the people. It is a matter of fact that a European demos, hence a European sovereign, is hard to discern. By holding this I do not favor the so-called „No-demos" thesis of the German Federal Supreme Court with all its ethno-cultural connotations. On the contrary, I argue that the common base of the „peoples of Europe" can be considered the shared political values of the Union as enshrined in its basic constituent documents (Weiler 1995: 1685). But the current modes of political decision making, especially its high degree of intransparency, hamper the development of a European public sphere where collective problems, political concepts and solutions can be discussed.

The public sphere in modern, large and multiply structured societies can only be understood as the sum of differentiated partial public spheres. This does not only hold true for the European Union but also for national public spheres. This is why the European diversity of languages or the impossibility of simultaneous communication are not a real impediment of a European public sphere – national public spheres do not work directly, either. (see Gerhards/Neidhardt 1991) The main question is how to interest potential participants of a European public sphere, how to make

understood the enormous impact European decisions have on individual lives as well as social structures, and how to create loyalties on the European level (which do not have to compete with national loyalties but can complement them in many ways.) Specific European elites have already organised their own communicative spheres but they are not wide and socially spread enough to be satisfying in a normative democratic sense.

Exanple 1: The Sanctions against Austria

My first example, the so-called sanctions against Austria, shows impressively the low level of the now existing European identity.

In the national elections of October 1999 both Social Democrats and the Christian-Social Austrian People's Party experienced heavy losses while the Austrian Freedom Party under its charismatic headman Joerg Haider gained an additional 5% since the last national elections in 1995. The Social Democrats still held the relative majority of 33.2% while the Austrian People's Party with its 26.9% was displaced to the third position. In February 2000, the new government of the conservative People's Party and the radical right Freedom Party was inaugurated.

Already in January 2000, at the big Holocaust conference in Stockholm, some of the most eminent European politicians met during breaks to discuss the situation in Austria. The theme of the conference made the adequate setting for an outraged outcry against this political development. After the inauguration, the 14 member states of the EU decided in a surprisingly fast move to stop bilateral political contacts with the government of the 15th member state. Though, officially, this was not a political action of the EU itself (as the Union has no legal instruments to deal with such a case) the EU confirmed by this move that it is not only an economic association but a community of shared values and that these values will be defended against internal as well as external threats. (see Mokre 2002)

The Austrian reaction to this conflict clearly showed that national interests and national feelings are in no way overcome by the membership in the European Union. Austrian patriotism as repulse of the accusations of the European Union was unbroken by the fact of Austrian membership in a community of shared political values. The reaction of the EU-14 was understood as intrusion into national sovereignty. This perspective was reinforced by the obvious fact that the reaction of the EU-14 was precipitate, badly planned and had no legal basis in the EU.

This example shows two facts

1. that national identities are still far from being superposed or even repressed by a European identity;
2. that the EU lacks institutions and instruments to achieve purely political goals.

Those two problems enhance each other as both severely impede the legitimacy of measures of the European Union contradicting the own interests of peoples, nations or individuals. To accept disagreeable political decisions people have to feel as part of the community making this decision, i.e. sharing some kind of collective identity, and they have to understand and accept the decision-making-process. Both preconditions were not fulfilled in the Austrian case; Austria as a nation felt badly treated by other nations (instead of accepting a majority vote as a minority with a different opinion) and the fact that there was no legal base for the sanctions within the EU further reduced the legitimacy of the measures. So, the lack of a common cultural or ideational identity combined with the lack of a political identity makes EU-politics in cases of disagreement implausible and inefficient.

While all these problems hold true for those states already within the Union they are even more pressing with regard to the candidate states. Their forthcoming accession to the Union is influencing current developments of the European Union heavily. Economic and political differences but also historically motivated conflicts lead to more or less precise fears of those already in the EU, while those still outside feel discriminated and devaluated by the long qualifying period, unfulfilled promises and political blackmailing by the member states. This haze of different sets of collective emotions can be shown very clearly by the example of the conflict between the Czech Republic and Austria about the nuclear power station Temelin.

Example 2: The Temelin Conflict

Temelin is a small city in the south of Bohemia, very close to the Austrian border. Planning for the nuclear power station in Temelin started already at the end of the 70s; construction was begun in 1983. Because of lack of money after the fall of the Communist regime and international doubts on the security of the plant it only started to work in 2000. Since its opening, closing periods because of technical problems were longer than the times it actually produced electricity. Austria does not have nuclear power stations. A referendum in 1978 decided not to open the first nuclear power station of the country just completed at this time and never to build another one. It

can therefore be imagined that Austrian politicians and citizens alike are very concerned by Temelin. I do not want to discuss here the advantages and disadvantages of nuclear power stations or else, if or why the Czech Republic needs this power station as these questions are not the point of this paper. I will, however, describe the conflict between Austria and the Czech Republic as I think it symptomatic for the problem of a European cultural identity.

While Austria has always been concerned by the proximity and the lack of security of Temelin – the Austrian government uttered its apprehensions against this project immediately after its own accession to the Union – the situation escalated after the actual opening of the power station: Blockades of the Austro-Czech border by Austrian demonstrators were endorsed by Austrian politicians and the Freedom Party started to define the close-down of Temelin as condition for the Czech accession to the European Union. This campaign found its peak in an Austrian referendum "Veto against Temelin" which was signed by nearly a million of Austrians being thereby the third most successful referendum in Austria after World War II. Joerg Haider asserted several times that "there will be no Czech accession to the Union if Temelin is not closed down." (Der Standard, 17.1.2002)

At the same time public opinion in the Czech republic became massively anti-Austrian. After the start of the blockades Czech shops and restaurants near the border put posters in their windows saying, "We do not serve Austrians." And the Czech prime minister Milos Zeman called the Freedom Party "post fascists" and Joerg Haider a "political Czernobyl" who were "neither an expert for nuclear energy nor for ecology but only for populism." (Der Standard, 17.1.2002)

The Temelin-conflict obviously has taken place on several different levels. According to Bauboeck (1996, 100-113) three different kinds of conflicts between groups of people are possible:

- interest conflicts: Conflicts between people who basically share the same values and feel as part of the same community
- ideological conflicts: Conflicts among people who do not share the same values but feel as part of the same community
- identity conflicts: Conflicts among people who do not feel as part of the same community

All three aspects can be found in the Temelin case:

- Austria has no advantages of the production of electricity in Temelin but only shares the risks of an accident; so, obviously we find here a conflict of interests.

- After the referendum against nuclear power in 1978, Austria has developed a very firm and undisputed stance against nuclear energy while the Czech Republic (in accordance with most of the post-communist states) has a much more positive view of this source of energy; this could be understood as a conflict of ideologies.

- Finally, the emotions set free by this conflict both in Austria and in the Czech Republic indicate a conflict of identities. So, Joerg Haider asserted that "the Czech had no democratic tradition" (Der Standard, 17.1.2002) while the Czech newspaper "Lidové Noviny" wrote: "Most Czech are allergic against interventions from the Viennese Hofburg as the Habsburg paternalism of many centuries is still forming a hereditary burden. (Lidové Noviny, [13.10.00])

This example also shows that identities are shifting and constantly changing constructions which can be re-defined, actualized or cooled down by political interests. When, after the fall of the wall, Austria hoped for a new geopolitical role as mediator between East and West collective identities in Central Europe were defined quite differently from the situation now. Partly because of the consciously populist interventions of the Freedom Party and of Milos Zeman and partly due to latent tensions between two successor-states of the Habsburg monarchy an identity conflict has superimposed an interest conflict thereby making any rational solution difficult. Obviously, the veto against the Czech accession to the Union is not a solution for the objective problems of an insecure nuclear power station. Quite in the contrary, the only viable solution will probably be to put Temelin under a rigid supranational control – e.g. by the European Union. – So, we can understand the Temelin conflict as an indicator for the fact that the democratic deficit of the EU leads to the possibility of political blackmailing of national governments damaging the aim of integration.

Joerg Haider has put at risk the EU enlargement without any consideration of the interests of the European Union because of his populist aims within the nation state Austria. And while the Austrian Freedom Party is pointedly EU-sceptic this form of promoting one's national political interest by using or abusing the European level is in no way limited to EU-sceptic parties. The results of a research project on the Europeanisation of Austrian parties carried out at our research unit in Vienna produced many more examples for that (Puntscher Riekmann, Hierzinger, Mokre, Pollak 2001, 74ff): In general, politicians try to put the blame for unpopular measures on others

while boasting of political successes independently of their real share in the respective political processes. As usually those politicians have the best access to the electorate who are closest to it - the lower level of policy making has more possibilities to apply this strategy than the respective higher level. This mechanism can be observed in the relationship between mayors and governors, between provincial and national governments and between national and EU-bodies. The additional polity layer of the European Union enables political representatives to some degree to play off the European level against the national level. Very frequently, Austrian parties have two strategies concerning European policies: On the one hand, European topics are autonomously dealt with at the national level – formulated, represented and used for national purposes. On the other hand, there is the Europe policy in the European Parliament.

This gap between real policy processes and its perception by the public leads to dangerous political developments as one of our interview partners in the project put out: "The level of the nation state becomes to a high degree a virtual public which is very prone to camouflage of real interests and power plays and which has a strong dynamic towards symbolic and psychological politics." (Puntscher Riekmann, Hierzinger, Mokre, Pollak 2001, 76) This unsatisfactory situation is due to the blur brought into European politics by the rising political impact of the EU: The traditional policy-cycle is split into two interdependent levels: the European Union and the nation-state. While the definition of socio-economic problems and the implementation of policies largely remain at the national level, the agenda-setting and the policy initiatives have to a considerable extent been shifted to the supranational level. This leads to an ever-growing cleavage between the agenda-setting power and the vote-/office- and policy-seeking strategies of national politicians.

While therefore national politics are devaluated by the high political impact of the European level EU politics are highly problematic out of a normative democratic point of view as mentioned before. The two examples of the sanctions and of Temelin, however, show clearly that democratic procedures are not only normatively desirable but also necessary for the efficiency of the political system of the EU. Only a European cultural identity manifested in a political identity can prevent national populist moves as the one from Joerg Haider and his Freedom Party. And to be sustainable such a collective identity can only be developed integrating the candidate states.

The European Convention

Current developments of the EU show that the European political elite has understood the need for a thorough political reformation of the Union. This is why the question of a European constitution has become a central point of European discourse and why a convention has been chosen as the adequate way to reach such a constitution. The Irish „No" to the Treaty of Nice has been another proof for the declining permissive consensus of European citizens to European integration. Not only has the bargaining of national interests in a intergovernmental conference once again shown its limited capacity of solving problems of the Union but it also has become obvious that European citizens are not longer willing to accept blindly the decisions of the European heads of government for the fate of Europe. The conventions seems an adequate answer of the European governments to the combination of interest for a closer political integration of Europe with a widespread scepticism with regard to the existing institutions of the Union. The fact that the candidate states are represented in the convention seemingly acknowledges the importance of including these states into far reaching decisions about the future of the EU.

However, the concrete concept of the convention calls this optimistic interpretation into question. The heads of the European governments have tried to keep their predominance by laying down important cornerstones of the convention. Above all, the convention was not allowed to elect its own president and also the European Parliament, the only direct representative of the European people,s was not asked for its opinion. Instead, the European Council appointed Giscard d'Estaing. And while the majority of the convention itself consists of - national and European - parliamentarians - we find a superior strength of executives in the presidium as the heads of the governments of Spain, Denmark and Greece represent the countries of the EU-presidencies in the presidium. After Berlusconi announced that he did not see the Vice-President of the Convention, Giulio Amato as his representative, France, Belgium and Italy received one more seat respectively for their governments in the convention thereby shifting weights there towards the executives.

Representatives of the candidate states are part of the convention but not of the presidium. When the national parliaments elected their representatives in the presidium they did not even invite the representatives of the parliaments of the candidate states. So, when the presidium opened the first session of the convention with a huge bunch of flags over their heads no flag of the candidate states was to be seen.

A further sign for the problematic democratic quality of the convention was set at the start of its work by its standing orders drafted by Giscard d'Estaing. The draft - heavily opposed by the parliamentarian members of the convention - gave the president an astonishing amount of power. The president decides how many sessions of the conventions shall take place when and where. He regulates the order of the agenda, the time assigned to discuss each of the matters on the agenda, he decides the duration of each single contribution; he chooses the experts to be heard and the documents to be translated ... In the last minute Giscard d'Estaing was persuaded not to have the members of the convention vote on this standing orders in the first meeting but to allow them some time for their own proposals. At the time this paper is written a decision on the standing orders has not been made, yet.

Obviously, it is much too early to make judgments on the convention. As to its starting points it can be asserted that the creation of a convention (instead of an intergovernmental conference) is a positive sign towards a democratisation of the European Union but the way of its construction and the start of its work gives cause for serious doubts about its democratic qualities. As to the status of the candidate states only the fact of their inclusion can be understood as a positive sign but their weight in the convention and the fact that they are excluded from the presidium make it plausible to assume that their inclusion is not more than a tactical move. This is deeply problematic as it is simply not acceptable that after years of negotiating pre-conditions of their accession states shall be confronted with a constitution which they neither accepted as part of the acquis communitaire nor participated in drawing up. The legitimacy and efficiency of the enlarged Union will depend to a high degree on the process of constitutionalisation taking place now.

If we look at political processes out of a rational choice perspective there is not much hope for the further development of European Integration. Those politicians governing the European Union within the Council of the European Union and the European Council and also dominating the presidium of the convention are members of national governments. They have been elected by national electorates and will have to response to them at the time of the next election. Naturally, their interest in the "ever closer" Union is limited.

This, of course, is a vicious circle: To enhance a European cultural identity a political elite is needed promoting this idea. But to interest a political elite in promoting Europe higher political prizes on the European level would be necessary, or, to put it in the terms of democratic theory

instead of the terms of political rent seeking behaviour: A more democratic, more representative political system of the European Union would be necessary. Which, on its part, would have to be implemented by a political elite.

What then could be the solution for this vicious circle? Being a child of enlightened Europe (to name an important facet of a European identity) I dare the probably absurdly naïve statement that rational thinking of the political agents could be this solution: If we agree that European Integration is a good thing then we should be aware of the fact that this integration is a process which cannot be simply stopped at one point because national politicians feel satisfied with the Status Quo; more integration or re-nationalisation are the alternatives the Union is facing. A common picture for this situation is the cyclist: She can either go on cycling or get off her bicycle but she cannot simply stand still. – And if European politicians understand this phenomenon out of my strange belief in human rationality I trust them not to put at risk the achievements of the last decades for short-term political successes – or, at least, I would like to trust them in that. Maybe, the implementation of the convention can be understood as a sign for this kind of rationality. But, at the same time, the composition of the convention mirrors all problems of the EU - the predominance of the executives, the marginalisation of the candidate states, the size of this political entity which makes a sensible representation very difficult etc. Still, when people discuss themes of common interest it is always possible that they transgress the narrow borders of their own political and personal interests and start to look for solutions for the sake of a common aim. In such cases, majorities are less important than pure presence and so, also the representatives of the member states have a realistic chance of being heard simply because they are able to speak within the convention.

To predict the outcome of the convention is not within the competence of this paper and its author. The aim of this paper was a different one, namely to show that for an eventual failure of the ongoing political integration the lack of common cultural values or traditions cannot be blamed but that success or failure of this project entirely depend on the success or failure to build a collective democratic political identity of the European Union.

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