

European Issues

n°479

02nd July 2018

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In the face of the European Union's political crisis: the vital cultural struggle over values

The question of European values lies on several levels, with increasing relevance since the hypothesis of progressive convergence towards Western-inspired universal values has been challenged by at least two trends: the affirmation of the emerging countries, without their economic development necessarily going hand in hand with liberal development at the political level, as well as the challenge of radical Islam. The collapse of the Marxist utopia did not rid "open society" of its enemies^[1] and the return of nationalist or religious fanaticism seems to be thriving and durable. This is changing the situation: the values which seemed to triumph in the 1990's are now under pressure, which paradoxically strengthens their European nature. Indeed, this development "de-universalises" these values and highlights some nuances, and some significant differences between the USA and the old Continent, thereby leading to the distinction of a European uniqueness in the Western block. A base of values that deserves to be qualified as European is therefore emerging, not just because a major part of the world sees (and rejects) them as such, not just because they are historically of European origin, but also because there is a European interpretation and a specific practice of these values that we might qualify as Western, whilst claiming their universality.

For the requirements of the discussion that now follows we shall simplify the definition like this: European values can be qualified as liberal and democratic as they have developed during Europe's history and which have been asserted to the full since the Enlightenment – the respect of human dignity and Human Rights, all fundamental freedoms, equality of citizens before the law, the rule of law, parliamentary democracy. These values - and this is what possibly makes them more specifically European – are applied in the light of historic experience of the peoples of Europe, notably following the horrors and tragedy of the 20th century, based on four main elements: the relative relinquishment of force and the preference for the peaceful settlement of conflict via negotiation in accordance with mutual respect; emphasis placed on solidarity and the quest for social justice conferring a major role on the State; a vision of international relations that relativizes the idea of State sovereignty; a strong spirit of moderation, tolerance, openness and the mistrust of political passion, notably those which are used in the name of religion or nations. All of this is embodied in the European political project, as it was encouraged by the Founding Fathers in the 1950's and has tended to become a value in itself: the fact of claiming (or not) to be European (in the partisan sense of the term, defending European integration) has become a vital marker in political positioning, comparable to the left/right split.

But, to what extent are these values European, in the sense that they are shared by all Europeans? The question is raised at the national level of each society, but recently, it has also and especially emerged quite forcibly at European Union level. Do its Member States all recognise themselves in this and do they respect it? Don't the most recent political developments, including the cleavage over the migratory policy, highlight a true divorce between East and West in terms of these fundamental values? The question is not just of a theoretical nature, since the European Commission has initiated the triggering of the measure included in article 7 of the TEU^[2] against Poland.

1. Cf. Popper, Karl (1945), *The Open Society and its Enemies*, London, Routledge

2. This article targets Member States where there is a "clear risk of a serious breach (by a Member State) of EU values" or "a serious and persistent breach by a Member State" of these values."

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1. THE EUROPEAN UNION: A COMMUNITY OF VALUES THREATENED IN THE EAST ... AND IN THE WEST

Which values?

In law the Union is founded on a community of values that are specified in the treaties: *"on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.* [3]." Naturally the Member States all have specific national identities and memories, and this Europe of values does not intend either to abolish national borders, no to impose a monolithic perception of what European values – and by this identity – are, since this perception varies from one Member State to another and even between their national political parties[4]. Hence, a series of surveys undertaken since 1981 in Europe[5] has led to the distinction of four circles of values within Europe that correspond more or less to marked collective preferences around which some groups of States are said to converge[6]. Finally, it is clear that the nation remains the vital political framework of reference for most Europeans[7].

The case of secularity and religious freedom serves as an example of this. Beyond the principles of freedom and religious tolerance, the nature of relations between the Churches and the State varies from Member State to Member State. France is the only one to have included secularity in its Constitution; with this it represents an original model in Europe to the extent that the other States have not introduced the separation of Church and State quite as strictly. Great Britain is not a secular country because it has an official religion (the

Queen is the "Defender of the Faith" and the supreme leader of the Church of England). Another example: the Greek Orthodox Church enjoys a particular status in the Constitution. And yet European societies distinguish themselves in the main by a high degree of secularity (with the cases of Poland and Ireland as possible examples to nuance this) and also set themselves apart from the other pole of the Western world, i.e. the USA, a secular country (assertion of the separation of the Church and the State) but which acknowledges a greater place for religion in the public sphere[8]. It is incidentally this difference in terms of secularity that undoubtedly allows us to perceive the gap between the approach by the media to the Danish caricatures and the attacks on Paris in January 2015 in Europe and in the Anglo-Saxon world[9]. We might extend the analysis by highlighting the differences in collective preferences between the Europeans and Americans[10] for example in relation to violence and the use of armed force; moreover, the upkeep of the death penalty in certain American States also allows us to make a distinction between the two sides of the Western world. And we should not forget the issue of the social model, with European societies having greater trust in collective management via State intervention and the American model, which places greater confidence in private, individual mechanisms.

Whilst these examples reveal a diversity of national situations in Europe that it would be vain and counterproductive to try and deny or destroy, they do however help us relativize differences between the States of Europe and to assert Europe's specificity within what is commonly known as the Western model, thereby accrediting the idea of a base of a Europe of values that cover a major part of the continent (which in the main corresponds to the Union)[11] and comprise the foundation of a common political identity, despite the specific nature of this or that value linked to a particular national political culture.

3. Article 2 TEU

4. Chopin, Thierry (2017), "Europe and the Identity Challenge: who are "we"? Schuman Report on Europe. The State of the Union 2017, Lignes de repères

5. <http://www.europeanvaluesstudy.eu>. The Eurobarometer surveys also offer under the theme "European citizenship", a question on values «Amongst the following which are the values that best represent the EU?» amongst the answers suggested: the rule of law, the respect of human life, Human Rights, individual freedoms, democracy, peace, solidarity, tolerance, religion, personal fulfilment, the respect of other cultures or "none". The Standard Eurobarometer 85 (June 2016) is specifically focused on European citizenship and the question of values.

6. Galland, Olivier et Lemel, Yannick (2014), « Les frontières de valeurs en Europe », in Bréchon, Pierre and Gonthier, Frédéric (dir.) (2014), Les valeurs des Européens. Evolutions et vivages, Armand Colin

7. As an example: according to Standard Eurobarometer 88 (Autumn 2017), 92% of the Europeans interviewed said that they were "attached or very much attached" to their country (56% "very attached"), against 55% who said they were "attached or very much attached" to the European Union (14% only "very attached").

8. This appears clearly regarding the political symbols and speeches (oath of the President of the USA, the motto on the bank notes etc.).

9. Whilst many newspapers on continental Europe published caricatures of the Jyllands-Posten to show their solidarity, the British and American press preferred to express their support without reprinting the caricatures. (cf. for example the article "US, British media tread carefully in cartoon furor", The Christian Science Monitor. Cf. also for example, the editorial of The Guardian published in response to the attack against Charlie Hebdo : "Anti-clericalism has always been a Republican rallying cry, especially on the left, in a way that's unknown in Britain and the US."

10. Cf. Tétrais, Bruno (2006), « Europe / Etats-Unis : valeurs communes ou divorce culturel? », Robert Schuman Foundation Note n°36

11. Akaliyiski, Plamen (2018), "United in diversity? The convergence of cultural values among EU member states and candidates", European Journal of Political Research; Oshri, Odellia et al. (2016) "A Community of values, Democratic identity formation in the European Union", European Union Politics, Vol. 17(1), pp.114-137

The challenge to democratic and liberal values

At present we are witnessing a wave that is challenging the base of these values across all European societies. Political forces, which are highly critical, hostile or even disdainful of these values and which aim to change the system, are gathering strength, sometimes in a spectacular manner and they are even entering office, at both local and national level. These forces generally favour or are even fascinated by regimes and leaders which obey other values and principles, such as for example Vladimir Putin's "guided democracy"[12].

Although this wave is affecting nearly all European democracies, it is running up against resistance – and also support – which varies from one country to another, fluctuating with the passage of time, according to political and economic situations. Hence, in Western Europe, the context of the economic crisis played an amplifying role, notably culminating with the Greek crisis and the referendum on Brexit. The results of the presidential election in Austria, the general elections in the Netherlands and the presidential election in France seemed to show that there is a kind of glass ceiling limiting the capacity of the "anti-system" parties in breaking through at national level, despite their often historic scores. However, despite the return of a more favourable economic context, the rise of this wave is to be expected and the idea of a glass ceiling was challenged during the general elections in Austria with the entry of the far right into government, in Germany with the entry of the far right in the Bundestag and even in Italy with nearly 22% of the vote won by the parties of the far right and nearly 33% for the Five Star Movement. However, even though the oldest democracies are far from having been spared, a clear difference is emerging in the European political arena, revealing an East-West split that the enlargement of the EU in 2004 had started to erase.

Indeed, between 2004 and 2015, although the split between the countries of the "former soviet bloc" was still clearly visible from the point of view of some socio-economic indicators (GDP per capita, purchasing power, investment in R&D), it was hardly pertinent in terms of analysing the Union's political life. On most issues, the new Member States barely appear as a coherent block. In the debate over the reform of the Union, regarding the Lisbon Treaty, some featured amongst the enthusiastic, others were reticent. Some rushed to join the EMU, others held back[13]. In brief, they melted into pre-existing splits, whilst developing according to their own domestic political dynamics. The emblematic example of this is Poland, which sometimes appeared to be a "troublemaker" by blocking the Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) of 2004 alongside Spain, while in other cases acting as a euro-enthusiastic country, offering the Union first class political personalities like the former President of the European Parliament, Jerzy Buzek or the present President of the European Council, Donald Tusk. And even though the policy of Viktor Orban caused tension with the European Union, as soon as he returned to power in 2010, he took his time before openly asserting that he wanted to develop an illiberal project[14], to strengthen his criticism of the European Union – whilst remaining – unlike the Czech and Polish Eurosceptics, a member of the EPP.

2015, a year of political change in Poland and the migratory crisis, accentuated the East-West split, with the countries from the Visegrad group (Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic and Slovakia) emerging as a block that is totally against the EU's majority approach in terms of the management of the migratory wave, raising question regarding the reality of a common base of values for all Member States[15]. Indeed, alongside an increasingly hard-line Hungarian government against the Union ("Let's stop Brussels"), but also against civil society (the anti-Soros campaign), the Polish government has now started to adopt the same illiberal leanings and is

12. Cf. Hassner, Pierre (+2015), « La transition autocratique en Russie », in *La revanche des passions*, Fayard, chap.12.

13. Slovenia joined the euro zone in 2007 followed by Slovakia (2009), Estonia (2011), Latvia (2014) and Lithuania (2015).

14. According to Fareed Zakaria, "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy" (1997), *Foreign Affairs*, 76:6. Viktor Orbán denounces the "identity crisis of liberalism" in a speech at the 14th Kötöcsé civil picnic, September 5th 2015 - <http://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/viktor-orban-s-speech-at-the-14th-kotcse-civil-picnic>

15. Rupnik, Jacques, Seifert, Pavel (eds.) (2018), *Europe at the crossroads : democracy, neighbourhoods, migrations, The Vaclav Havel European Dialogues 2014-2016*, Vaclav Havel Library

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introducing very questionable reforms regarding the rule of Law[16]. We should also quote the Slovakian government coalition, which includes a hard-line nationalist, Eurosceptic party[17] and even the Czech President Miloš Zeman, who, whilst declaring himself to be euro-federalist and a social democrat, does not hesitate to surf on a wave of anti-migrant populism and to show his affinities with Russia and China.

A problem for the Union as a whole despite a Central European specificity

Given these phenomenon, two widespread errors of perception and interpretation have to be avoided. In the West there is a strong trend to overvalue the "otherness", the specificity of Central and Eastern Europe in terms of values. This perception ignores the internal diversity of these countries, the often extremely strong resilience of the checks and balances and the gaps between the discourse and the political acts. Hence, Hungarian public opinion has discovered with astonishment that behind an extremely hard discourse regarding the reception of refugees and an ostentatious rejection of the quota system adopted by the EU at the peak of the crisis, the Hungarian government has accepted 1,300 refugees[18], i.e. a comparable number to that demanded of Hungary by the quota system. Conversely, the very same perception tends to minimise the problem in the West, where European values are also under great challenge and where, in terms of migratory issues, a sometimes more policed discourse can mask policies that all in all are comparable to what is happening in Central Europe. In the East, we often see – unsurprisingly, notably in the circles close to power – a minimisation of the phenomenon, denials about the wish to break with European values and even a counter-offensive claiming, on the contrary, the status of being a true defender of European values and civilisation, defined mainly on a religious base[19]. These narratives often promote the tragic history, which has yet to be digested, of the countries in question[20].

On an equal footing with these two approaches, we deem that the wave of contestation against European values, whilst being shrouded in narrative, symbols and specific themes linked to the past and the specific identity of each country, is a global phenomenon that is affecting Europe as a whole, both in the East and the West. However, the ability to resist this varies according to several splits, including the one that separates the oldest democracies from those that have been built since 1989. Although in the West the forces that are more or less anti-liberal and europhobic struggle to win power in a sustainable manner at national level, in the East they succeed more frequently, for the longer term and without the exercise of power leading to any clear de-radicalisation on their part, unlike the movement we have seen, to date in any case, and at least to a certain degree, in Italy and Austria[21].

Democracy's weaker capacity to resist in Central and Eastern Europe is not surprising because it can mainly be explained by four factors that distinguish – to various degrees – this part of Europe from the kind that was able to develop in a liberal-democratic framework as of 1945.

Firstly, and this is almost a truism, the youngest democracies are also the weakest, because they are based on weaker structures. Although the countries of Central Europe, encouraged by the conditionality of accession to the EU and NATO, quickly established institutions based on democratic principles, they have built slowly, in a more or less erratic manner, a true democratic culture based on a developed civil society, real and deep respect, and not just a formal, apparent one of fundamental principles, informed public debate, thanks to a quality media. Active citizenship, involved in public life, aware, responsible and self-confident in the face of political power is struggling to win over a sound majority of the population[22]. We note a major gap at this level between the old and new democracies, via indicators, such as the level of electoral turnout. As for public debate and the

16. Pech, Laurent and Platon, Sébastien (2017), « Systemic threat to the rule of Law in Poland: between action and procrastination », *European Issue* n°451, 13/11/17, Robert Schuman Foundation

17.. The National Party (SNS), member of the government coalition since 2016.

18. Cf. Simon, Zoltan (2018), "Orban on Defensive as Hungarian Asylum Data Prompts Backlash", 15/01/18, Bloomberg Politics, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-01-15/orban-on-defensive-as-hungarian-asylum-data-prompts-backlash>

19. Viktor Orbán said: " We Europeans – with or without confessing it, with or without being conscious of it – live in a culture that is structured by the teachings of Christ. (...) A historical task has been put before European countries in 2017. The free nations of Europe, the national governments elected by their free citizens have a new task: they must defend Christian culture." Cf. S.n. (2017), "Orbán: Europe must defend Christian Culture", 23/12/17, DailyNews Hungary <https://dailynewshungary.com/orban-europe-must-defend-christian-culture>

20. This factor undeniably weighs on present debate. Cf. Deloy, Corinne (2015), « Réfugiés : la fracture européenne », 21/11/15, Contrepoints, www.contrepoints.org/2015/11/21/229878-refugies-la-fracture-europeenne

21. Participation by far-right parties in the governments in Italy (1994, 2001-06, 2008-11) and in Austria (2000-03) did not lead to either notable change in these countries' European policy, or to worrying developments, unlike those to be seen in Poland and Hungary today whilst these two countries are governed by parties that remain affiliated to moderate European political groups, with the FIDESZ sitting with the EPP and the PiS with the ECR.

22. Even though there are plenty of positive examples: in Slovakia, as of the 1990's civil society managed to put an end to the authoritarian excesses of Vladimír Mečiar, likewise the recent demonstrations in response to the murder of the investigative journalist Ján Kuciak led to the resignation of Prime Minister Robert Fico. Similar examples might be quoted in Romania with anti-corruption demonstrations, or in Poland with the mobilisation of civil society to defend the right to abortion.

media, the limited size of most of these countries does not contribute to their quality, since the press market for example, is too small and not competitive enough to enable the emergence of quality titles[23].

Moreover, because of history, the geopolitical situation and the culture of these countries[24], alternatives to the European, democratic and liberal model seem stronger and more credible, finding greater resonance amongst a share of public opinion and enjoying greater support by both internal and external players, who have an interest in encouraging this divergence in relation to the European model. Hence the conservative "providential Christian" vision finds greater echo in Poland[25], in Hungary[26] and to a lesser degree in Slovakia than in most of the Western countries. The rejection of the Union – seen as a Trojan horse of anti-religious modernity, the bearer of societal values and choices that are denounced as decadent and destructive of true European identity – is a theme that seems to have a higher profile in public debate and in political choices of the citizens in the East than in the West, where the Union can – notably in France – sometimes be accused of the contrary – as in 2005 when some critics of the Lisbon Treaty saw in this a possible challenge to secularity[27] and the right to abortion. A pro-Russian or "Russian style" orientation also has a higher profile, thanks to an old pro-Slav tradition in the nations of Central and Eastern Europe[28] and even through political and economic links that survived the collapse of communism. Hence, a share of the business world in Central and Eastern Europe has strong interests in the post-Soviet sphere[29], which pushes them to support pro-Russian positions, notably in the context of tensions and sanctions after the annexation of Crimea by Russia. Russian propaganda and its strategy of hybrid war thereby find a more favourable echo in these countries: the influence of the pro-Russian, conspiratorial media, which spreads "fake news" regarding public debate in the Czech Republic and Slovakia clearly seems

greater than observations made in societies with older democracies. Hence, the Finnish version of the agency Sputnik closed after six months, due to a lack of audience[30].

But beyond greater awareness of these influences, the weight of the past generally plays a greater role in the fragility of accepting European values. The societies of Central and Eastern Europe remain largely affected by unhealed trauma, which feeds mistrust of the West and maintains them in positions of resentment and frustration. The feeling, analysed by Milan Kundera in "The Kidnapped West"[31] – of being nations whose existence "is not an evidence" fosters this state of mind and a mistrustful, if not sometimes a paranoid response, in the face of problems and challenges, including the migratory crisis. The belief of being the eternally oppressed victim, particularly by the Germans (the anti-German theme has made a major comeback in Polish public debate, notably with the issue of reparation[32]), the fear of suffering a diktat (the theme of the Trianon Treaty in Hungary or the Munich Agreements in the Czech Republic) and even the aversion to anything that affects the ethnic and cultural homogeneity of society (achieved in tragic and shameful circumstances in the 20th century, but which over the last four decades of communism, became second nature to these societies that were previously highly multicultural and multi-ethnic)[33] – all of these feelings can crystallise in the shape of a rejection of values carried by the European project.

Finally, for all of these reasons and also because of more recent and more specific factors linked to the functioning of the European Union, public opinion in Central and Eastern Europe is highly sensitive, and even over sensitive, to anything that may lead to the feeling of being or even seeming to be, in the eyes of the rest of the EU, "second class citizens". This feeling mainly rests on fantasies and on the wish to find excuses for the lack of initiative or professionalism of the representatives of these countries in the European

23. As an example: four of the main national daily newspapers in the Czech Republic (tabloids aside) have a circulation of around 30,000 and 140,000 copies (January 2017 data). In Poland the circulation of the *Gazeta Wyborcza* lies at around 180,000 copies, that of the *Rzeczpospolita* around 70,000 (November 2017 data). In Hungary, after the end of the daily *Népszabadság* due to financial problems, the same fate was announced for another daily *Magyar Nemzet*. This economic weakness leads to that of the independence of the media: two of the four main Czech daily newspapers were bought out by Andrej Babiš, the present Prime Minister. The Hungarian daily newspapers that disappeared were close to the opposition.

24. Cf. for example Rupnik, Jacques (2018) « Spécificités et diversité des populismes en Europe centrale et orientale », *Les Dossiers du CERJ*; and by the same author, « La crise du libéralisme en Europe centrale », *Commentaire*, n°160, Winter 2017-2018.

25. Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, just after his appointment declared that "his dream was to make the European Union Christian again" and that he would like "to help the West with good values" (interview with TV Trwam, 8th December 2017).

26. See the speech delivered by Victor Orbán on the occasion of the first anniversary of the death of Helmut Kohl, 16th June 2018 - https://legrandcontinent.eu/2018/06/21/la-doctrine-dorban/amp/?_twitter_impression=true

27. Cf. for example the declaration by the Comité Laïcité République on 13th December 2004 - <http://www.laicite-republique.org/non-le-comite-laicite-republique.html>

28. An extremely eloquent example is given by Ján Čarnogurský, a Slovakian Christian-Democrat of major importance to his country's political life in the 1990's, and presently the president of the association "Slovensko-ruská spoločnosť" (Slovak-Slovakian Society). On its web site this society summarises its goal: « We seek connection between the acquis of European integration and traditional Slovakian Russophilia. » (<http://www.srsoc.sk/>)

29. The PPF group of Petr Kellner, a leading fortune in the Czech Republic and present in Russia (banking services, real estate, insurance and agri-food) (cf. <https://www.ppf.eu/en/industries>). Those close to the Czech President Miloš Zeman have strong economic ties with Russia, notably his advisor Martin Nejedlý, former manager of Lukoil (cf. MacFarquhar, Neil (2016), "How Russians Pay to Play in Other Countries", 30/12/16, *The New York Times* - <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/30/world/europe/czech-republic-russia-milos-zeman.html>)

30. Cf. Standish, Reid (2017) "Why Is Finland Able to Fend Off Putin's Information War?", *Foreign Affairs*, 01/03/17, or Nimmo, Ben (2017), "Failures and adaptations: Kremlin propaganda in Finland and Sweden", 21/03/17, *The Foreign Policy Centre*, <https://fpc.org.uk/failures-adaptations-kremlin-propaganda-finland-sweden>

31. Kundera, Milan (1983), "L'Occident (Débat)", *Vol. 5*, No. 27

32. Iwaniuk, Jakub (2017), « La Pologne ouvre le débat sur la demande de réparations de guerre à l'Allemagne », 13/09/17, *Le Monde* - http://www.lemonde.fr/europe/article/2017/09/13/la-pologne-ouvre-le-debat-sur-la-demande-de-reparations-de-guerre-a-l-allemande_5185143_3214.html. At the IGC already in 2007, Lech Kaczyński demanded the upkeep of almost the same voting weight in the Council between Poland and Germany, arguing that without the events of 1939-45 period Poland would have a population of 66 million.

33. Krastev, Ivan (2017), *After Europe*, University of Pennsylvania Press

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institutions that struggle to contribute positive projects. But there are also some real issues that problematic. Whether this is the Union's inability to gain equal treatment of European citizens in terms of visas from the USA[34], double standards in terms of the quality of foodstuffs that the Commission only addressed recently[35] or discourse about social dumping, which almost systematically masks the profits that Western companies make out of their establishment in Central Europe[36], the list of issues over which the Central Europeans feel that they are treated condescendingly or in bad faith by their fellow citizens in the West, is long. Regarding values, undoubtedly the most emblematic and damaging issue is the attitude of "two weights, two measures" regarding the memory of two totalitarian systems, which bloodied European history in the 20th century and which shared the radical hate of European values. Yet the pro-European majority of Central European societies, which shaped the liberal democratic and pro-Western consensus of the 1990's was built on a clear rejection of the totalitarian communist past. The trust of this part of the opinion in the sincerity of the discourse about European values on the part of the Western elites has been subject to severe testing given the spectacle delivered by Western leaders who assume a Trotskyist or Maoist past without the slightest repentance or who pay tribute to Castro "romanticism".

In these conditions it is vital that winning back support for European values be based on an attitude that does not exaggerate, misinterpret or instrumentalise the real gaps between Western and Eastern Europe, which hides a diversity that is averse to any rapid simplification. Hence, the fair and legitimate denunciation of certain excesses in such and such a country in the East must neither stigmatise an entire region or mask one's own turpitudes or aim to re-establish a "little Europe" of an exclusive Western clique. The re-conquest must not underestimate either the global nature of the challenge or the variety of national specificities.

2. THE VITAL STRUGGLE FOR THE VALUES OF LIBERAL DEMOCRACY: WHICH STRATEGY?

Acknowledging the urgency of the cultural battle to undertake

The first step in winning back trust is to acknowledge the depth and urgency of the problem and to assume the fact that it will truly be a cultural battle. An asymmetrical, multi-shaped battle in which threats are growing, but which are all different. European values are facing the deadly and deeply ideological hate of radical Islamism. But also, the subversive and clearly more pragmatic hostility of the present Russian regime, that is imbued with a nostalgia of the superpower status of the Cold War era, with the desire for traditional power and with a fear of the model that already succeeded in destroying Russia's sphere of influence in Central and Eastern Europe. Our values may even become diluted or lose their specificity in a movement of globalisation, shaped at best by the USA or at worst by China. They are also being targeted from within, on the part of all of those who, for various reasons, prefer to recognise themselves in the model of the adversaries of the European project or who are so mesmerized by European diversity – real, legitimate and precious – that they forget its elements of unity[37], and especially the gaps that separate this European mosaic from other cultural, political and social models of the 21st century.

The central nature of education policies

This might sound like a cliché but it is not: the key lies in education policies and culture[38]. Lacuna in these areas allow the idea whereby a European community of values (and the ensuing political construction) is totally artificial to prosper, in the face of the supposedly natural character of nations, which are said to have always been there. The lack of pride and attachment to the spiritual and cultural heritage of Europe is an element of

34. Sewell, Chan (2017), "E.U. Sets Aside Calls to End Visa-Free Travel for Americans", 02/05/18, *The New York Times* - <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/02/world/europe/eu-visas-united-states.html>

35. Cf. speech by President Juncker on the State of the Union, 13th September 2013.

36. Cf. Piketty, Thomas (2018), « 2018, l'année de l'Europe », 16/02/18 <http://piketty.blog.lemonde.fr/2018/01/16/2018-lannee-de-leurope>. Regarding the period 2010-2016 the out-flow of profits and other property revenues (in the main towards East-West owners) represented an annual average of more than 7% of the GDP for the Czech Republic and Hungary, 4.7% for Hungary.

37. Chopin, Thierry (2018), *op. cit.*

38. Cf. Speech by the President of the French Republic, Emmanuel Macron, at the Pnyx, Athens, 7 September 2017 - <http://www.elysee.fr/declarations/article/discours-du-president-de-la-republique-emmanuel-macron-a-la-pnyx-athenes-le-jeudi-7-septembre-2017/>. Also see the speech delivered at the Sorbonne: "For a Sovereign, United, Democratic Europe", Paris, 26 September 2017.

weakness in the face of external threats carried by those who believe in the superiority of their values and culture. It is not by watching reality shows that young generations of Europeans will be able to find the means to counter these ideas. The damage caused by "conspiracy theories" amongst Europe's youth[39] is an eloquent example of a trend in intellectual mollification that is a delight for manipulators of all kinds. It is urgent for European education systems to realise that given the increasing superficiality conveyed by the media and social networks, the answer is not to chase this trend but, on the contrary, to play the role of a counterbalance, targeting depth, the long term, rigour and quality. Two areas should be addressed without delay. On the one hand, a true European dimension should be introduced into primary and secondary education with emphasis placed on history and culture, on diversity and the wealth of local and national reality, and also on roots and common denominators, as well as on a mixture of influences. On the other hand, there should be "consumer" education about the media[40], placing the idea of the critical mind at the heart of this educational approach – not to be confused with generalised, paranoid, epidermal permanent suspicion that opens the way to cynical nihilism. The European Union cannot and must not be the only bearer of this educational renewal: it is up to the States to take responsibility for it – notably encouraging mobility (pupils and students, and teachers alike), to provide quality support and to convey a narrative that breaks with technocratic cant. The voice of Europe must not just be limited to stories about quotas and regulations, but must be heard more regarding values, culture, history and education. Let us imagine a real Erasmus programme for history teachers[41]: what if tomorrow, in the Union's secondary and high schools it became customary that a share of the history lesson be taught by a someone from another Member State, even if it were just to make an amazing contribution in exercising students' critical mind, obliging them to challenge their certainties, to learn to understand "the other" better, to make them see European reality differently?

Conveying an assertive narrative about European values and project

The other key is to be found with Europe's political elites, who have to take up the narrative on European values and convey it with consistency, in a credible, audible manner. For too long, discourse about the European project has stagnated in a triple dead-end. Firstly, it is dominated by technical issues and tends to be reduced to a jargon that neither convinces nor mobilises citizens around a meaning that goes beyond ideas of standards and financing. In addition to this, even when the question of the deep meaning of the European project is addressed, it is done in a way that is still mainly oriented towards the past, comprising a mantra-like repetition of the discourse given by the founding fathers on peace. This is good and vital, but it has to be updated. A fantastic opportunity for an update like this occurred in 1989 with the push for freedom and European fraternity that this moment typified and on a darker note, in view of the Yugoslavian tragedy. Yet, few amongst the leading political representatives took the opportunity of the 2004 enlargement, which contributed to transforming one of the greatest successes of European integration into a semi-political defeat[42], for which we are now paying a high price, with populist excesses on either side of the former Iron Curtain. If the occasion provided by the present situation, marked by threats and the risk of seeing globalisation turn more to the advantage of players who do not have much in common with Europeans in terms of values and interests, is not taken up, despite the blow brought by Brexit, we may witness the collapse of the European project. A narrative on European values, resolutely anchored in reality and responding to fear of the future would help meet this demand for meaning and update the arguments justifying the European project, thereby bringing it out of its present double dead-end.

39. Cf. study by the IFOP for the Jean-Jaurès Foundation and Conspiracy Watch, quoted in *Le Monde*, 7th January 2018, http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2018/01/07/les-theories-du-complot-bien-implantees-au-sein-de-la-population-francaise_5238612_3224.html

40. Recent initiatives were taken by France, with as of September 2015 the introduction of an "education of the media and information" and of "moral and civic training" by the *Education nationale*.

41. Teachers in the EU can opt for academic mobility as part of the Erasmus programme+: they can go and teach in European partner schools and take advantage of training sessions. However, in 2016 only 1839 teachers and staff from secondary education took advantage of this possibility in one of the 33 countries that take part in the programme.

42. Macek, Lukáš (2011), *L'élargissement met-il en péril le projet européen ?*, La Documentation française

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However, this will only be possible if it succeeds in avoiding a third pitfall. Indeed, discourse on the European project remains confidential, addressing mainly the converted and generally bypassing those who are not. The problem of the audibility of the European narrative is linked to the inadequacy of the political mechanisms at the European level. For a long time now, we have called[43] for the functioning of the European Union to be more politicised, and notably for the political representatives, starting with the commissioners and MEPs, to start doing politics at Union level and behave like any elected official in a representative democracy is accustomed to doing, cultivating a direct relationship with his/her voters. The stand-off regarding the functioning of the rule of law in Poland or regarding the refugee issue in Hungary or the Czech Republic, cannot just be solved by press conferences in Brussels or by turning to the Court of Justice, or holding votes in the Council or even making threats of financial sanctions. It is by taking the political debate to the countries in question, by taking political risks and leaving one's comfort zone, by becoming an audible, customary player in national public debate that we can make things happen, by avoiding dead-ends, finding compromises. This requires a transformation in the way the Commission operates so that it has political relays and not just of the institutional nature, in each Member State[44]. This also requires a reshaping of the role and daily work undertaken by MEPs and even the functioning and place of the European political parties. None of these developments will be easy, quick or straightforward, but they are vital to break down the polarity "we, the nation" versus "they, the technocrats in Brussels", which is complacently maintained by many national MPs, for whom the Union is a scapegoat.

Beyond this need to bring European players into national public areas (thereby creating a true European public area, which does not mean superimposing national areas with one imposed by Brussels, but one which opens the situation

up), a new, combative, audible political narrative on European values can only occur by resolving a number of other issues.

At base it has to find a path, which is certainly narrow, between repentance, shame, and even self-hate and forgetting or rejecting the lessons that Europeans have learnt from their past. This narrow path is the pride in being European, not because we forget or plaster over the crimes and tragedies of the past, but because we have managed to acknowledge them, learning from them and find the means for action in the glorious part of our shared heritage[45]. Far from any nationalism, imperialism and Euro-centrism, this pride must remain humble, without preventing us from declaring out loud our belief in the superiority of our values in the face of the alternatives that the world is offering at present. This does not mean that we should want to impose them on others either. If we already ensure that they are implemented in an exemplary manner at home and if we provide a maximum amount of support to those, in spite of the oppression, who demand these values in regimes that advocate others, this would already be a lot.

As for the vehicle of the narrative, we have to find answers to increasing widespread mistrust that is being fed by the discrediting of the elites. The path is then open to populist discourse based on the image of "all rotten". Without awareness and a true change in behaviour on the part of the political, economic and cultural elites, this mistrust will not recede and any narrative on values may be disqualified a priori. But if we simply consider the degree of seriousness in the exercise of the role of MEP, we have to admit that many of them are the first to suggest to citizens that the European Parliament is hardly worth any interest and respect[46]. From another standpoint the professional reconversion of José Manuel Barroso[47] or the "Selmayr Affair"[48] show that awareness of the need for exemplarity remains inadequate amongst the Union's executive.

43. Chopin, Thierry et Macek, Lukáš (2010) « Après Lisbonne, le défi de la politisation de l'Union européenne », Les études du CERI, n°165, CERI / Sciences Po; and Chopin, Thierry et Macek, Lukáš (2018), « Reforming the European Union : a political and democratic imperative » European Issue n°463, 19/02/2018 Robert Schuman Foundation.

44. Chopin, Thierry et Macek, Lukáš (2018) « Pour l'introduction de listes transnationales aux élections européennes sous forme d'une prime de majorité », 21/02/18, Telos

45. Willy Brandt: kneeled before the monument dedicated to the ghetto in Warsaw, Helmut Kohl and François Mitterrand in Verdun, free, open, debate between historians – these are emblematic example of the way Europeans can rise above the trauma of History. They contrast with the management of the past typified by the present illiberal alternatives: bids to limit the freedom of the historiographic debate in Poland, the lack of symbolic gestures of comparable strength on the part of the present Russian regime in relation to the victims of Soviet oppression, and even a more a less direct apology of the latter – starting with Vladimir Putin who pointed to the collapse of the USSR as being the "greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century".

46. Chopin, Thierry et Macek, Lukáš (2018), « Réformer l'Union européenne : un impératif politique et démocratique », op. cit.

47. By accepting the post with Goldman Sachs in 2016, the former President of the Commission did not commit – according to the ethics committee consulted on the issue, "a breach of duty in terms of integrity and reserve" but he "should have been aware and informed that by acting like this he would trigger criticism and might damage the Commission's reputation, and that of the Union in general" and that he "did not show the discernment that one might expect of someone who had occupied a post of high responsibility for so many years" (opinion of the ethics committee, quoted by Le Monde, 31/10/2016.

48. Cf. Schoen, Céline (2018) : "Bruxelles plongée en pleine 'affaire Selmayr'", La Croix, 8/3/2018, : <https://www.la-croix.com/Monde/Europe/Bruxelles-plongee-pleine-affaire-Selmayr-2018-03-08-1200919173>

In brief, it is urgent to place the idea of “political virtue” back in the centre of public discourse, both at European and national level, which as Montesquieu recalled “is the love of laws and the homeland”, “a continual preference for public interest rather than one’s own,” “a relinquishment of oneself, which is always something quite difficult”[49]. And again, without the education of a critical mind, without the ability to discern things, to distance oneself from the superficial, there is great danger of getting it wrong, especially in a situation in which the media are increasingly subject to the diktat of continuous information and the immediacy of the social networks. Indeed, we tend to confuse the demand for political virtue – which must be in line with the ability to act as a convinced statesman – with that of absolute irreproachability, which is all the more unrealistic, since it is coupled with an assumption of unlimited transparency. The news is increasingly marked by the overexposure of leaked secretly recorded private conversations, of leaked emails, spontaneous remarks taken out of their specific context which go viral on the social networks and even by the “people-ization” of public personalities. How can we then be surprised at the trend towards the sanitisation of political discourse, of moderate politicians resorting to the use of meaningless statements and the supremacy of what the American journalist Joe Klein called the “pollster-consultant industrial complex”?[50] And is it surprising that this development opens the way to a response typified by the “true speak” of the populists, by the “celodurismo”[51], typical of a certain far right, in the fascination of a growing share of society for people who are deliberately transgressive? The loss of points of reference which help us distinguish the vital from the futile is a capital resource in the populist discourse and in that, it is one of the cancers eating away at the system of values on which are societies are built.

European values are threatened from without and within. In time and space the intensity and methods of these internal threats varies from State to State in the EU. A certain East-West split is undeniable, but overexposing it, turning it into the privileged reading grid to analyse the State of Europe’s values is a double trap. On the one hand, like a self-fulfilling prophecy, the excessive, all-encompassing stigmatisation of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe will simply strengthen the factors, which are at the root of the mistrust and even the rejection of European values by a share of the population in these countries: a feeling of being treated like second class Europeans, a victim complex, frustration in the face of condescendence (supposed or real) on the part of those in the West. On other hand, this perception corresponds to a guilty blindness in the face of a deep-seated malaise in terms of European values within Western societies, including in those with the oldest democratic traditions.

There are no simple quick fixes: the causes of the present situation run deep. Winning back ground will take time. Beyond the financial and diplomatic sanctions – which may be counterproductive[52] – examples have to be set. The weakening of support for European values in Central and Eastern Europe is also linked to the loss of prestige on the part of the West, which has lost its status as the uncontested, admired model that it held in 1989. The violence of the Greek crisis, the extreme difficulties that the Union has encountered in seeking to settle this, the hesitation and prevarication that surrounded it and the vulnerability of a good number of Member States was revealed: these various factors also helped to feed Czech and Polish reluctance to join the euro zone. If the old countries of immigration had shown that they were incontestable models of effective

49. Montesquieu (1748), *De l'Esprit des Lois*, Book IV, chapter 5.

50. Klein, Joe (2006), *Politics Lost: From RFK to W: How Politicians Have Become Less Courageous and More Interested in Keeping Power than in Doing What's Right for America*, Broadway Books

51. A neologism used by the Italian press to typify the macho, vulgar style of Umberto Bossi, the Northern League’s leader in the 1990’s.

52. Or, at best, ineffectual, as were those implemented by the other Member States in 2000.

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integration and that they enjoyed a sound consensus within their own public opinion on this issue, the response on the part of the countries of Central Europe would undoubtedly not have been so radical in the face of the migratory crisis in 2015. And what kind of credibility can we give to the West's criticism of the dangerous links entertained by Miloš Zeman or Viktor Orbán with Putin's Russia when we take stock of the professional reconversion of former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder?

European values have to be implemented in an exemplary manner, each at national level and collectively at European level. These values have to be reasserted in the face of the counter-models on offer elsewhere, by comparing point by point how Europe, despite all of its weaknesses and imperfections, still distinguishes itself by being and intending to remain a continent where

we try to respect a balance between freedom and social justice, freedom and security. Finally we must provide new impetus and self-confidence to Europeans. By rising to these challenges, the supporters of European values will be able to break the illiberal dynamic which is certainly not a foregone conclusion, either in the East or the West.

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