

МЕЃУНАРОДЕН ЦЕНТАР ЗА СЛАВЈАНСКА ПРОСВЕТА - СВЕТИ НИКОЛЕ

«МЕЃУНАРОДЕН ДИЈАЛОГ: ИСТОК - ЗАПАД»
(ФИЛОЗОФИЈА, ЛИНГВИСТИКА, КУЛТУРОЛОГИЈА)

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на научни трудови

**ЕДИНАЕСЕТТА МЕЃУНАРОДНА
НАУЧНА КОНФЕРЕНЦИЈА
„МЕЃУНАРОДЕН ДИЈАЛОГ: ИСТОК - ЗАПАД“
МЕЃУНАРОДЕН СЛАВЈАНСКИ УНИВЕРЗИТЕТ
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Контакт телефон: +389 (0)32 440 330

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КУЛТУРОЛОГИЈА

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Georgios Iliopoulos

Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy,
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens,
The NKUA Applied Philosophy Research Lab, Republic of Greece

THE IDEA OF EUROPE AND THE CRISIS OF GLOBALIZATION

ABSTRACT: The idea of Europe has already a long history and beyond its ethical attractiveness it became victorious in the political praxis of the 2nd half of the 20th century first of all as a motive force serving the aim of a long-term restoration of peace in the post-war Western Europe and then as a unifying principle for the whole continent after the collapse (implosion) of “really existing socialism”. A little later, in the course of the expansion of the free market economy towards the previously centralized economies of Eastern Europe it soon became obvious that the idea of Europe was not everywhere interpreted the same way and that in some cases it seemed to cause more problems than the ones it should have solved.

Especially the current refugee crisis that has initially emerged in the so-called developing world outside of Europe but nevertheless significantly affects the Old Continent can be seen as a major theoretical and practical challenge around the fundamental sustaining (and in itself sustainable) concept of European openness: i.e. in order to remain open in its internal function the liberally organized Europe has to close its outer borders and to decisively limit the access of many humans to its single common market, thus imposing obstacles to the generalization of prosperity and liberty that once were felt as its core values.

We will try to show that apart from the immediate cultural, ideological and strategic aspects of such phenomena and the often unavoidable pitfalls of short-term decision making it is important to study and explore the necessity of the current processes. The idea of Europe became, at least partly, synonymous with the overall economical and social globalization of our times whereas such a major process cannot unfold its inherent dynamic without the constitutive role of certain crises that eventually pose existential challenges or otherwise enable the stabilization of the newly emerging system(s).

KEYWORDS: Idea of Europe, globalization, existential challenge

The idea of Europe has already a long history which constitutes a subject in itself. It is not the proper place here to deal with the history in detail but there are for sure some basic points we should keep in mind. Our purpose will be through the historical-political retrospection to achieve, at least in form of a sketch, a meaningful connection to certain tendencies which certainly prove to determine present-day developments and thus are bound to exert a certain influence upon the (mainly ideally conceived) idea of Europe which still remains predominant in our practically shaped intellectual horizon.

I. THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND ITS HISTORICAL COURSE

The idea of Europe emerged initially and gradually out of common experiences and practical exigencies. It was obviously a very long time ago when some intellectuals along with certain travelers and rulers came to the idea that in the known world of their times – in the inhabited earth, as the term oikumene denotes – every single particular

country is mainly surrounded by a broad unity of countries and peoples that somehow belong together. Not only as a geographical but first of all as a cultural unity can our common continent look back at a long history before the emergence of our present supranational formations; in this respect, regarding the longevity of its existence in the world of politics, of culture and of ideas, Europe can really without any exaggeration be proud of itself. During this long period Europe was mainly conceived of as an ideal entity which on the other hand could take on concrete and specific forms in the world of praxis. The Christian faith has in this context played a crucial, albeit not always immediately visible, role in forging the sense of a rather loose but steady unity among the major peoples of Europe through the fragile, steadily vanishing and reemerging equilibrium of military, political and diplomatic relations. As Raymond Aron puts it: «In the Christian era, a kind of unity was born of a common faith. It found expression in the Church and in the universities. It excluded neither ethnological diversity nor multiple and autonomous centers of power. From time to time, it enforced the truce of God, but it imposed neither lasting peace nor obedience to the same laws»¹ .

There are many ways to consider a great area of study in its unity while at the same time pointing to the gaps it contains, whether important or secondary from a contemporary point of view. Our approach to the subject matter takes our present as point of departure. This means that we prefer to firmly distinguish between the long past of the idea of Europe and the present political processes which came into being only very recently. We do reaffirm that Europe as a set of ideas and as an established ideal towards the unification and the pacification of a continent that has suffered a lot throughout history did have an ethical attractiveness especially as far the enlightened circles or the dynamic social groups and classes in many countries were concerned, but if we want to give satisfactory answers to the problems of our age then we must set apart this ethical-ideological background from the broader conditions and circumstances that brought these or similar ideas to the foreground. The idea of Europe can indeed be traced back even into the admonishing speeches of the Popes to the Crusaders; apart from this it existed, in a more civilized form, already somehow in the writings of Voltaire – who spoke of Europe as a Great Republic consisting of several independent states who might have heavily differing constitutions, who compete and wage wars against each other, but otherwise they respect each other and act in a way that secures not only a political equilibrium between them but also the enactment of certain fundamental ethical and practical principles². The idea of Europe is also indirectly present in the Kantian project on the perpetual peace³ . These aspects of the idea of Europe in former ages make clear that, as in many other cases, we are confronted with an idea that rose and fell only along with certain currents of ideas or within the scope of certain political aspirations. Especially with regard to our actuality (*Wirklichkeit* in Hegelian terms) we should nonetheless point out that the idea of Europe became victorious in the political praxis of the 2nd half of the 20th century only when certain major politicians concerned with long-term strategies were searching for a motive force which would serve the aim of an enduring restoration of peace in the severely traumatized post-war Western Europe: an essential part of

¹ R. Aron, «The Crisis of the European Idea», in: *Government and Opposition*, vol. 11, No 1, Winter 1976, p. 5.

² R. Aron, *op. cit.*, p. 6

³ Certain elements of the pacifist ideal Kant's imply that it could only be implemented in an institutionally developed environment; this is obviously the case for instance regarding the necessity that the international law should be based upon a federal structure among free states (cf. I. Kant, *Zum ewigen Frieden*, ed. by R. Malter, Reclam, Stuttgart 1984, pp. 16-20).

this strategy was built upon the insight that Western Europe had a special position between the superpowers of the time and it could take advantage of it in order to regain a respectable role as a factor of international politics⁴. There were of course the great men – the famous Schumans and Monnets and Adenauers – that went down in history as the personalities who largely built their careers upon the idea of an economically and subsequently politically unified Europe – possibly on a federal basis – but the greatness of these men consists in fact, as Hegel puts it, in their ability and possibility to penetrate with their deeds the surface of the facts and express the inner needs and the most vital tendencies of their era⁵. So, by following Hegel's guidelines we maintain that the idea of Europe, like every other historically significant idea, every important event and historical phenomenon, appears and develops according to historical reason and necessity to which every other trivial, contingent or secondary aspect is subordinate. Our task is therefore to explore and determine concretely the whole phenomenon according to this set of theoretical priorities.

II. THE IDEA OF EUROPE, ITS DYNAMIC AND ITS FUTURE.

Few decades after its newest emergence, the idea of Europe left in an extraordinarily clear and impressive way the conclaves of the decision makers and the ivory tower of the intellectuals when it seemed quasi obvious that it was destined to become a unifying principle for the whole continent; it was the collapse (implosion) of the former 'really existing socialism' that made this major step, this boost forward, possible. It was a time that may occupy in future history the place of the Second – I'd rather call it tentatively the millennial – Belle Époque of Europe; most of today's adult citizens may remember that the talk about European Integration gave way at that time to the problematic of European Enlargement, with both terms in fact referring not generally to Europe but more strictly to the European Union, which meanwhile (in 1992) had been officially founded⁶. But as it was the case with the older and 'original' Belle Époque (i.e. the historic period between the end of the Franco-Prussian War and the outbreak of WW1), this phase of flourishing would be soon succeeded by a phase of crisis and conflict. So a little later, this time in our 21st century and in the course of the expansion of the free market economy towards the previously centralized economies of Eastern Europe, it became quite prematurely obvious that the idea of Europe was not everywhere interpreted the same way and that in some cases it seemed to cause more problems than the ones it was supposed and expected to solve. Major differences among different nations regarding their development in the sectors of economy, culture, as well in the area of the political and social institutions were for some period forgotten or suppressed but later on showed an inherent dynamic which inevitably led to their reappearance at the surface and shaped anew the European landscape.

The societies that were now included into the European Project were leaving their former status with which they were more or less accustomed. Even if they sought radical changes – such as the establishment of new states according to the ethnic

⁴ Cf. R. Aron, *op. cit.*, p. 13, 16.

⁵ Cf. G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte, Werke*, vol. 12, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1986, p. 46-48 / *The Philosophy of History*, transl. by J. Sibree, Batoche, Kitchener 2001, pp. 45-47.

⁶ On the meaning and significance of the Maastricht Treaty as the founding act of the European Union with the inseparable aims of institutional integration and territorial and material enlargement cf. for instance Th. Christiansen, S. Duke, E. Kirchner, «Understanding and Assessing the Maastricht Treaty», in *European Integration*, vol. 34, No 7, November 2012, pp. 685-698.

make-up of the populations or, more generally, the redrawing of the map of Europe⁷ – they expected that at least they would be able to retain the positive elements of their previous situation, mainly the normality of their everyday life and also the sense that their living standards would go upwards and in no way worsen. Everyone knows very well that this was not destined to happen, that prosperity even nowadays remains a distant dream for lots of people mainly in the financially weak regions and, maybe worse than that, we are not capable, as I see it, of telling when and if ever this prosperity and collective happiness we long for will at last become a tangible reality⁸.

We live nowadays amid rapidly spreading and overlapping crises. As if the initial structural socio-economic and political crisis were not enough, the one that has to do with the mutual adjustment of different levels of economic, political and cultural development within the Continent towards the mutual benefit of the peoples involved, a second crisis has now violently entered the stage and has overshadowed the first one or at least has become eminently dominant. We are talking about the current refugee or migration crisis – we should not bother much about this distinction from a pragmatic standpoint – which is deeply rooted in the so-called developing world outside of Europe but nevertheless is a profoundly European crisis because: a. its original causes result directly or indirectly from the politics of the mighty countries of the Continent and the rest of the developed world, b. it has already significantly affected and continues to affect the Old Continent. Many people across Europe may learn about it only through the news outlets but this time we have to do not only with the problems of some foreign individuals that we may feel free to ignore but in reality we are experiencing developments that do not only have practical consequences for our own lives but in their essence they reveal a matter of principle and as such they should be taken seriously.

The refugee crisis can be seen as a major theoretical and practical challenge around the fundamental sustaining (which should in itself be sustainable) concept of European openness: i.e. in order to remain open in its internal function the liberally organized Europe has to close its outer borders and to decisively limit the access of many humans to its single common market, thus imposing obstacles to the generalization of prosperity and liberty that once were felt as its core values and as the key to historical success. We witness nowadays the clear-cut reversal of the process that about three decades ago had led to the collapse of the Eastern European allegedly socialist regimes and the expansion of the free market economy. The open continent is on course of becoming a fortress, not unlike the authoritarian regimes of the past or the world outside Europe today.

By describing the overall situation in such general terms we imply that today's problems are not merely political in the narrow sense of the word. Just because the problems are multidimensional it is not exclusively up to the leaders to be or not to

⁷. «The Implosion of the Soviet Empire triggered a round of state-building in difficult circumstances that made the nineteenth-century idea of the nation-state almost irresistible to elites that found themselves exposed without theoretical or rhetorical resources» (B. Haddock, *A History of Political Thought: From 1789 to Present*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2005, p. 149).

⁸. The current situation just before the outbreak of the newest coronavirus-crisis according to the official EU-report (issued by the Eurostat) includes the recognition of the existence of lots of millions of EU-citizens who either already suffer from poverty and / or social exclusion or are at risk of entering such an unacceptable condition. The member states are constantly planning counter-measures and although «the rate of risk of poverty or social exclusion has reached its lowest point since 2005, yet the target» of lifting about 20 millions of people out of the endangered region «remains distant» (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Europe_2020_indicators_-_poverty_and_social_exclusion).

be immersed in processes that decisively exceed their personal capacities or the limits of the strategic position of their countries. Our point of view should be first of all a philosophical one and this means that apart from the immediate cultural, ideological and strategic aspects of the contemporary widespread multi-faceted crisis which result in the often unavoidable pitfalls of short-term decision making it is important to study and explore the necessity and the inherent logic of the current processes. The concepts that can prove helpful for us in this respect should consequently focus on an elementary and crucial dimension of today's world, namely that before our eyes there is a globalization going on. Globalization means first of all a process of profit maximization for the economic potentates⁹ of our time which leads, among other effects, to the emergence and rise of the so-called global players and by this we do not just refer to great multinational companies or lucrative enterprises but to major economic and political factors.

The idea of Europe became, at least partly, synonymous with the overall economical and social globalization in the sense that Europe plays an active part in the process as a whole. This means concretely:

- » that European enterprises try to benefit from the newest economic and financial developments,
- » that they are being supported in these efforts from their respective governments and in part also from the central European administrative apparatus, always in the name of the free market principles but also with regard to the guarantee of a generalized prosperity,
- » that one way or another the lives of the Europeans as citizens, producers and consumers are affected and undergo several changes.

The dynamic and the complexity of the globalization can in no case be underestimated. Such a major and comprehensive process cannot unfold its inherent dynamism without the constitutive role of certain partial and regional crises that eventually pose existential challenges or otherwise enable the stabilization of the newly emerging system(s). Towards a really challenging and constantly changing situation decision-making becomes correspondingly difficult.

As many political leaders rather often say, in order to succeed in the globalization process we must belong to a greater entity and the European Union is certainly such a great entity whose relevant presence can and must be taken into serious consideration by the other global players. This is a clear insight that as such cannot be judged according to its relation to truth inasmuch as it is directed towards the open future. It must nevertheless be shared by every European citizen not necessarily because of its extraordinary political attractiveness but first and foremost because of its pragmatically grounded orientation. And we should steadily keep in mind that even what in international affairs is usually called *realpolitik* can in the long run unfold a certain charm.

Already some decades ago Raymon Aron had stated that the European idea had no longer the function of a myth, in the Sorelian sense «of a vague representation of a future which is passionately desired, a future which is perhaps unattainable, but is the source of inspiration and purpose». This implies a relative discrepancy between the

⁹This description presupposes a more comprehensive reflection on the development of the capitalist system which in general undergoes certain alternating phases of material and financial expansion (cf. G. Arrighi-J. W. Moore, «Kapitalismus in welthistorischer Sicht», in: *Das Argument. Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Sozialwissenschaften*, vol. 43, issue 1, Berlin 2001, p. 45 et seq.).

consolidation and the normalization of the transgression of the national boundaries in the realm of ordinary political business and the level of public acceptance of this new reality which remained qualitatively low. A certain 'Europe as usual' was somehow «sliding towards the prosaic daily routine of life and democratic politics» while the broad majority of the population entertained towards it a substantially positive but rather passive stance. This could endanger the future prospects of the whole project altogether; in Aron's words, the idea of Europe «aroused neither enthusiasm nor hostility» and so it tended to lose its inner dynamic as a motive force, because every significant political project needs «either adversaries or supporters»¹⁰.

We now feel obliged to modify Raymon Aron's relevant thesis and claim that on the one hand the idea of Europe has meanwhile obtained, as it is well known, several passionate and determined opponents from within, if we just have a look at what is currently happening in the United Kingdom or in Eastern Europe, East Germany included. So, one condition for the strength and the enhancement of the idea of Europe is in this sense fulfilled. But on the other hand we point out that this is not the most decisive factor which can contribute to the dynamism of the European idea. Such a factor should be sought in the capacity of the European political life to successfully develop towards overcoming major antitheses and leaving behind one-sided projects that in the past have caused much harm to the peoples of Europe and beyond. Aron sees the attainment of new historical syntheses as the guiding ambition of the European supranational institutions: «(...) Western Europe asserts that there is no contradiction between the market economy and social justice, between permanent criticism and productivity, between the freedom of nations and their cooperation. It does not contrast itself with the United States in the same way; (...) Western Europe wants to affirm its identity or, again, to differentiate itself»¹¹.

If Europe with the European Union as main driving force will succeed in achieving such high goals remains to be seen. Its specifics and the heart of its strength lie in the fact that nowadays it has surpassed the level of a temporary and fragile stipulation among autonomous states¹² and as a complex structure of interwoven national interests has become a considerable global player and therefore shares in developments that from now on (possibly also for the foreseeable future) go beyond the limited scope of national states. Under the present circumstances the future of the European Union relies on the long-term sustainability of the capitalist globalization.

So, with regard to such a generally prevalent situation we should resort to such concepts which adequately circumscribe the emergence, continuous existence, development and eventual fall of great organisms. There are in fact several concepts that are suitable for such a theoretical approach, all of them maybe resulting or emanating from the Aristotelian doctrine of the causes and the teleology that rests upon them. Several studies on the financial circles and crises or even the very interesting conception of cybernetics could more or less satisfy our need of grasping the essential tendencies of major processes towards the shaping of major diversified

¹⁰ R. Aron, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

¹¹ R. Aron, *op. cit.*, p. 14; when referring to the internationally dynamic presence of the European Union we should also mention the Greek theoretician Panajotis Kondylis, who almost two decades later tried to study the dynamic prospects of the new transnational organism within the complex of the global antagonistic relations (cf., P. Kondylis, «Europa an der Schwelle des 21. Jahrhunderts» in *Das Politische im 20. Jahrhundert. Von den Utopien zur Globalisierung*, Manutius Verlag, Heidelberg 2001, pp. 111-135).

¹² This was characteristically Hegel's point of view some two centuries ago (cf. G. W. F. Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts, Werke*, vol. 7, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1986, addition to §330, pp. 497-498).

systems or transnational organisms. In my view one could maybe cast doubt on the feasibility of such a theoretical project but on the other hand it's not easy to dismiss its relevance. This means that the European Union deserves to be studied as a major global player because it is not a coincidental phenomenon, it is not a bubble that is bound to burst soon but it is here to stay inasmuch as it has established itself as a factor worth-considering in the complex and antagonistic world of today. And while our involvement in today's globalization goes on through the factual presence of the European Union and through the hegemonic role of the great European powers in the heart of Europe we have as far as I can see no better option than to seek and try new ways to overcome the shortcomings and contribute to the rejuvenation and the reinvigoration of the idea of Europe. In the course of such efforts we should fight sometimes against our own illusions in the sense that we realize that any inclination to an idealistic naiveté is out of place; the gains from such a fight could be promising for people who draw power and inspiration from ethical and humanistic ideals.

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