

Dr. Tibor Palánkai:

European Integration, National and Ethnic Identities and Central Europe

*Prepared for the XVth International Summer University at ISES
20th of June- 2nd of July 2010, Kőszeg*

1. Definitions – identities

Identity can be defined as an attachment to the given community, based on common characteristics, values, interests and destiny, which creates a certain degree of sameness in a group of people. Identification means a certain consciousness and devotion toward the common „cause” and values, and emotional attachment to the community. Such moral questions can be asked concerning identity: „who are we”, „who do we want to be”, and „what should we do”? I focus mostly on social identities, which means that I do not care about the philosophical and psychological aspects. The dimensions of individual identities and the identities of social groups or communities are equally examined.

Peoples have **multiple identities**. From a social point of view they can be attached to their smaller local and regional communities on the one hand, and to broader regional communities of nations (for example Europe), on the other. „Identities can be formed and reproduced around any number of institutions and cultural scripts, including social class, ethnicity, race, gender or religion. The local-global antinomy does not stand apart from these, although it may subsume them, given the extent to which the modern world and modern collective identities have been reproduced largely through ‘identity space’ of the nation-state.” (Barrie Axford, 1995 p.164.) We can add that identity may change by age, profession or social status. „One can have several identities – self-identification can be connected to a profession, a city, or a given religious or cultural community etc. – but there is a certain hierarchy among them. Since the emergence of nation-states, national self-identity has been the organising centre of identity policies.” (Bayer, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 1999. p. 33.) Identities are multi-dimensional – they have historical, traditional, social, economic, political and cultural aspects. In our paper, the main focus will be placed on **national, ethnic, European and global identities**.

In a great part of the related literature, **national identity** is considered as the most important social identity. It is not surprising, as the national state has been thought to be the most important political community of our age since the French revolution. In many cases, we can add that the state was conceived as a pure national state. Therefore, European social scientists have always tended to think in terms of national identity. Anthony D. Smith defines national identity as the fulfilment of the following criteria: "Common historical territory, common myths and historical memory, common mass culture, and common economy and rights and obligations extended to all individuals." (Smith, A. D., 1991. p. 14.) National identity is therefore a complex category, which relates to culture, traditions, even a territory, but also to economic and legal aspects.

National identities are institutionalised by **citizenship**. Citizenship is a formalised relation, which means a certain degree of protection, and care taking, which provides citizens with security in terms of basic human and political rights, welfare, consumption, education, health care, or environment, and in fact, all aspects of social life. Citizenship assumes obligations, the obedience of all laws, paying taxes, or rendering military and other public services.

Distinction should be made **between national and ethnic identities**. Compared to the national one, which is a strongly political category, ethnic identities are overwhelmingly cultural, historical or religious. For measurement of ethnicity one can use objective or subjective indicators. „Objective indicators, such as the language being spoken at home, or ethnic identification of ancestors” should be, first of all, mentioned. And of course, „we can use subjective indicators by asking people which ethnic identity they consider themselves as belonging to.” We can experience „considerable volatility of ethnic identifications”, as sometimes people change their identities as they „experience strong incentives, both positive and negative, to simulate or dissimulate, adopt or reject a certain identity.” (Offe, 1995. p. 24.) One could well identify this phenomenon in Central and Eastern Europe in the last one hundred years.

For ethnic identity **language** is one of the most important factors. It is the mother tongue, on which we can acquire the important knowledge about the external world, communicate our internal feelings in a perfect way, and have our dreams. Multi-ethnic societies are usually bilingual, one is the mother tongue, and the „second” is the means of communication among them.

Sometimes **religious factors** are stronger. While the Serbs and Croats speak a very similar language, it is religion that distinguishes them. Similarity of languages does not mean automatically cultural similarities. On the other hand, language differences does not exclude the possibility of strong cultural influences and sympathies (Poles – French – Hungarians). The Roma speak several languages, in their case, the **common origin and cultural traditions** play a decisive role.

As most countries of the world are **multi-ethnic societies**, their relation is quite complex and needs clarification. Hardly any ethnically homogenous pure nation states, where ethnic and national identities more or less corresponded, have in fact, ever existed. In reality, multi-ethnicity applies to all the countries in the world. According to a United Nations University study, there are about 5000 different ethnic groups in the world, which may claim the right of self-determination, and in case, potentially they may have necessary attributes to form an independent state. (Some estimate the number of languages in the world about 6000 - National Geographic-, others about 44000 -UNU.) It depends on that some dialects are considered “languages” or not. As far as the number of sovereign states in the world is only about 200, it means that multi-ethnicity is an undeniable reality. It could be added, that there is hardly any ethnicity which is limited to just one state. Consequently, most of the ethnic groups are in minority position, and in fact, there hardly exists any ethnic group, which is not in a minority status in some place or other.

The **conflicts** arise from that many of the states pretend to be homogeneous nation-states on the given territory, and usually the majority ethnic group claims the exclusive right of nation forming with its language, culture, heroes etc. as official prerequisites and symbols of the state. It is an ideal case, as Ignác Romsics, a Hungarian historian points out, when the majority accepts the minority as a state-forming partner or at least simply recognises the parallel existence of minorities without the aim of their physical or cultural elimination as a systematic strategy. „If besides this, they enjoy special rights aiming at saving their identity, preserving their culture, and guaranteeing their political influence, we can speak about a certain form of partnership.” (Romsics, 1998. p. 372.)

In recent decades, it has become broadly accepted, that basic social identities cannot be limited to just ethnic and national identities. The social identities have to a growing extent gained **regional and global dimensions**. Regionally, in our continent, the question of European integration and identity would be particularly examined.

Identity is a **dynamic concept**, which is changing with time, and is influenced by several factors. It should be stressed that identities are basically determined by socio-economic conditions. „One of the characteristics of identity is that it is not given once for ever, but its development is influenced by social changes. Big social transformations shake its so far formulated and valid forms. Then we can speak about an identity crisis and search for a new identity.” (Bayer, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 1999. p. 32.)

The socio-economic changes are, however, transmitted by **communication**. The forms, the intensity and the character of communication play, therefore, an important role from the point of view of forming the identity of a community. It is very instructive and illustrative, how communication shaped national identities in many ways. The expansion of trade in national proportions created national markets. It is well known that in the last centuries, the national languages and cultures have been greatly promoted through literacy, the printing of growing amount of materials, books, and newspapers, and the general and mass education of people. Recently, one can hardly overestimate the role of the radio and the television in these processes. In general, from the point of view of influencing the process of identification, education, culture, and the media have an extremely important role.

It is an important and highly controversial question, **how the different „layers of identities” relate to each other**. Jose Miguel Salazar conceives the local, national or regional identities as certain „**matrijoska puppets**”, where the smaller puppets represent the smaller communities. (Salazar, Jose Miguel, 1998.) The others speak about „**concentric circles**”, which follows the same logic. “In the field of identities, the multi-identities should prevail in concentric circles: side by side, equal European, regional, national, ethnic, and other local cultural group identities.” (Zsolt Rostoványi, 1999. p. 71.) In many respects, these approaches are well representing the realities. Surveys show, that in many cases, the relations and attachments to smaller communities are stronger, more intimate, and more important, than those to larger ones, which peoples may feel weaker, more distant and abstract. People are mostly interested in what happens in their close neighbourhood, and they care about national or global matters only if their interests are affected.

Huntington at the same time conceives „**civilisation**” as „the broadest level of identification”. (S. P. Huntington, 1996. p. 43.) According to Huntington, at the beginning of the 1990s, there were 9 major civilisations in the world, and their relations are decisive from the point of view of the development and conflicts of the world in the coming decades. „Everyone has multiple identities, which may compete with or reinforce each other: kinship,

occupational, cultural, institutional, territorial, educational, partisan, ideological, and others. Identifications along one dimension may clash with those along a different dimension: in a classic case the German workers in 1914 had to choose between their class identification with the international proletariat and their national identification with the German people and empire. In the contemporary world, cultural identification is dramatically increasing in importance compared to other dimensions of identity.” (S. P. Huntington, 1996. p. 128.)

Others question and deny the relevance of certain static hierarchy among the different layers of identity. **Identity is a flexible notion**, and it depends on the situation, or the related interests, which is considered to be more important. One can assume that at local elections, the local identities count, but it may be different, when somebody votes for the national or for the European parliament. In such cases, they can be felt equally important, particularly if vital interests are at stake. Fans can be attached to the local or one of the local football team, but at a European Championship they are equally emotionally related to their national teams. In general, the question, which identity is stronger may be irrelevant and it may depend on many factors. And it seems that in our times that is particularly the case. Surveys of Eurobarometer showed, that people feel equally strongly connected to their village or town to the region and to their country (the answers were positive in about 86-89% in each aspects), but at the same time more than half felt that Europe was important for them as well.

In an increasingly inter-connected and interdependent world, other approaches can be sought. Koller suggests a **„web or network of identities”**, which may fit to describe the diversity of identities of our century. The network of identities „means the dynamic coexistence of the multiple identity of individuals, and contrary to ‘concentric circles’ or ‘matrijoska’ it excludes the hierarchy among identities, and it introduces the time dimension.” (Koller, 2000.) The local, the national or the European identities are different points of the network. The ethnic identities are one of these important points of interactions. In the network, people can shift emphasis and interests from one point of knot to another, and they can flexibly change their attachment from time to time to a given point.

There are **negative and positive identifications**. Their possibilities usually are rooted in the contradictions of socio-economic systems, and they basically depend on how, in what directions, and with what sort of consequences the given processes or developments influence the positions of the individuals and social groups. Communication in this respect may reveal those consequences, or may help to manipulate opinions or even interests into a certain direction. This can lead to conflicts of different dimensions of identities some identities can be formulated as an antithesis of the other (national or global identities).

Circumstances also play an important role. National or ethnic identities can vary from narrow-minded, imperialistic, aggressive nationalism (dominant before the war) to open „healthy“ national feelings compatible with global thinking (hopefully spreading in present days).

2. Identity in our times

The new information society brings dramatic **qualitative changes** in terms of social identities. The new technologies, particularly spectacular development of the computer technology and telecommunication boast productivity and efficiency, increases welfare and consumption, and greatly increases the amount of free time available for leisure and entertainment. According to Francis Fukuyama fundamental social and economic changes have been achieved in different cultures. And we experience the extension of liberal democracy and market economy. Although his ideas have been challenged, no one can deny the revolutionary changes in economy, education, culture, and in fact, in all fields of human activity.

Communication has been substantially advanced by the present communication and information techniques. Many think that such new techniques as Internet may bring qualitatively new changes. They may prevent wars, reduce pollution, and combat various forms of inequity. Some even speak about a possibly „computer-aided peace“ (Michael Dertouzos).

Some of the **general changes and new trends** have to be particularly stressed.

One of the important changes following from the revolution in telecommunication and travelling is that the economies and the societies undergo a certain **„detrterritorisation“**. „Transnational electronic communications break free of particular territory, spanning and dissolving time and space, and thus erode the intimate particularity of places“ (Axford, 1995. p. 212.) It means that the significance of distance and territory as factors shaping national identities is diminished. The physical closeness, which determined human relations in local communities, is now unlimitedly extended, and the „global village“ has become a reality. The national money as an important attribute and symbol of identity has been also substantially

changed. Plastic credit cards and other forms of electronic or artificial money types contribute to the process.

After the Second World War, we have experienced the emergence and rapid acceleration of **regional integration processes**, and in the last thirty years integration has taken increasingly **global dimensions**. They were based, to a large extent, on new technologies, in the fields of both production and communication. They were accompanied by the great extension of regional (European) and global identities, as well.

In Europe, the integration of about 50 years has lead not only to a growing identification with the process, but European identity has been institutionalised by European citizenship (Maastricht and Amsterdam Treaties). As the legitimacy of institutions and a political system depends greatly on loyalty and solidarity of the citizens, the creation of European citizenship was an important step towards integration. The European Union has created the symbols of its identity, the common flag, anthem, feast, and last but not least the common money. "It is a question, when Europe acquires the important condition of common identification, the common language. Who is borne Dutch, Dane or Hungarian, should willy-nilly learn lingua Franca, if it wishes to communicate with the outside world. This is served by English, while the mother tongue preserves the culture, identity: this is the language of literature. Is this certain functional and situational bilingualism the language model of the future common European State?" (Bart István, *Népszabadság*, June 8 2002)

Some can claim that the European and the "European Union" identities should be distinguished. Some countries, like Russia and other former Soviet Union countries probably never will become members of the European Union, but they belong to Europe. In many respects, they are historically different, and they will never identify themselves with the European Union structures and values.

"Europe is not simply a geographical, but cultural (and closely connected to it political and ideological) notion, which at the same time has a symbolic content of meaning: it is the symbol of modernity, development, plurality and freedom" (Zsolt Rostoványi, 1999. p. 68.) In this respect, Europe is often claimed as holder of universal values. Others stress that cultural and "civilisation" differences should be recognised, and European values (human rights) could and should not be imposed on other countries.

The individuals and the social actors have also become part of a global division of labour, with substantially increased information and knowledge. Global competition favours knowledge based activities with creative and well-trained labour, which can greatly enhance the quality of human capital. In that competition training and education have become strategic sectors, which improve not only the quality of work, but also living conditions. The availability and accessibility of multimedia products open unforeseen perspectives in learning and entertainment. As result of unfolding globalisation, one can rightly speak about growing **global identification** of people. This identification can also be based on ethnic, religious, and political grounds.

New technologies and communications may promote real world economic integration. They can moderate differences, even the existing gap between the developed and the developing countries can be eliminated. „If a positive scenario of the global world really exists or strengthens, it shall be equal with nothing else than that the information society will **converge or unite** the first and the second world. I would like to formulate sharply, according to our present knowledge, only **the information society** can integrate the second world into the first, developed one.” (Csaba Varga, 1999. p. 17.)

The greatly expanded communication and information change and „**deepen**” **identities in all dimensions**. „In the post-traditional age, one can choose from more and more identity forms.” (Bayer, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 1999. p. 33.) **By new technologies local, ethnic, national, regional or global identities have been equally enhanced**. In spite of the revolutionary changes, there is no ground to assume that the former trends would have been changed. The multimedia and the „information industries” can equally help the promotion and propagation of authentic local or ethnic cultures, and preserve traditional national or ethnic cultural values and heritage, and they serve cultural globalisation. It is a cultural challenge and a great opportunity. It promotes global understanding among the different nations, but at the same time it can preserve cultural identities, linguistic and cultural diversity. The possibilities of the propagation of local values and programs increase awareness about cultural diversity, and local communities can more easily raise interest in their communities, and increase tourism. These equally apply to European or global identities as the communication of the present days brings breakthroughs in all dimensions. The integration of European economy through the flow of goods, capital or labour has substantially changed the thinking of people, and created common values, approaches or solutions to the problems.

Rapid changes, however, break up old structures, and by creating new ones, they generate tensions. „Change is reflected in the people’s life experience: their horizon broadens to

include the world, thanks to devices such as the more and more refined, fast and accessible communication tools, which favour a high degree of mobility; and the diffusion of mass-media and telematic networks, which allow the world to enter directly every home at any moment. All this causes a deep transformation in the bonds between individuals and territorial communities, first of all the one defined by national identity.” (Marita Rampazi, 2000. p. 33.)

Huntington mostly places the tensions into the framework of dimensions existing between civilisations. „In today’s world, improvements in transportation and communication have produced more frequent, more intense, more symmetrical, and more inclusive interactions among people of different civilisation. As a result their civilizational identities become increasingly salient. The French, Germans, Belgians and Dutch increasingly think of themselves as European. Middle East Muslims identify with and rally to the support of Bosnians and Chechens. Chinese throughout East Asia identify their interests with those of the mainland. Russians identify with and provide support to Serbs and other Orthodox peoples. These broad levels of civilisational identity mean deeper consciousness of civilisational differences and of the need to protect what distinguishes “us” from “them”. Fourth, the sources of conflict between states and groups from different civilisations are, in large measure, those which have always generated conflict between groups: control of people, territory, wealth, and resources, and relative power that is ability to impose one’s own values, culture, and institutions on another group as compared to that group’s ability to do that to you.” (S. Huntington, 1996. p. 129.)

The experiences clearly indicate that the integration processes in Europe **challenge the nation state and national identities from two directions**. „In the second half of our century, the modern world split stiffeningly into two to **globality and locality**.” (Csaba Varga, 1999. p. 15.) The nation state or the national principle has become relative from two sides: from above – the formulation of **supra-national integration**, and from below – **regional development**, the claims for regional autonomies (Scotland, the Basque-Country, Catalonia or Corsica) and the strengthening of ethnic-regional identities. „The absolute validity of the national principle, which influenced the thinking of the past 200 years, is dissolving. The nation-state is undermined parallel at once by the emergence of broader integrations, delegating its licences upwards, and by the devolution of power, namely the removal of government competencies to lower levels, fulfilling the regional and local autonomy claims.” (Bayer, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 1999. p. 35.)

Of course, new information technologies, are not automatic remedies to socio-economic problems and conflicts. „The transition to information society was celebrated by everybody”,

and many believed, „that these changes are beneficent both for the economy, and for the democracy and freedom, and in general for the society. No doubt that the information society has several obvious benefits, but are all the consequences necessarily so positive?“ (Fukuyama, 1999. p. 16.)

The tensions and conflicts are rooted in the socio-economic systems, and their treatment needs complex measures. As far as Internet is concerned, „the mistake people make is to assume that wars are caused simply by the failure of different peoples to understand each other adequately. Indeed, even if that were true, the Internet can also be used to advocate conflict. Hate speech and intolerance flourish in its murkier corners, where governments find it hard to intervene. Although the Internet undeniably fosters communication, it will not put an end to war. Even when everyone on the planet has been connected to the Internet, there will still be wars, and pollution, and inequity. As new gizmos come and go, human nature seems to remain stubbornly unchanged; despite the claims of the techno-prophets, humanity cannot simply invent away its failings. The Internet is not the first technology to have been hailed as a panacea – and it will certainly not be the last.“ (*The Economist*, August 19th 2000 p. 9 and 10.)

As, new information technologies brought rapid and massive change in the identification process, negative identifications seem to have been strengthened as well. The experiences of recent decades have proved that **global identities are much more contradictory** than any other fields of identification. It can be positive on the one hand, and it can be negative, on the other, but the balance of the two depends on the social, economic, cultural and political status of the individual. „How people feel about this depends a great deal on where they live and how much money they have. Yet globalisation, as one report stated, ‘is a reality, not a choice.’ Humans have been weaving commercial and cultural connections since before the first camel caravan ventured afield. In the 19th century the postal service, newspapers, transcontinental railroads, and great steam-powered ships wrought fundamental changes. Telegraph, telephone, radio, and television tied tighter and more intricate knots between individuals and the wider world. Now, computers, the Internet, cellular phones, cable TV, and cheaper jet transportation have accelerated and complicated these connections.“ (*National Geographic*, August 1999. p. 12.)

While the new information society also gives opportunities for the poor to participate in the world wide division of labour, and share its fruits, international studies prove that they not only re-produce international inequalities, but even enhance them. The Internet is concentrated on the Northern Hemisphere, and the gap between North and South further increases. „Perceptions may be either positively oriented to the ‘global circumstance’, for

example in the ideologies of those groups promoting the idea of 'one world', or negatively disposed towards it, as seen in various 'fundamentalist' and local responses." (Barrie Axford, 1995. pp. 27-28.)

Information technologies give birth to a new society, while challenging all the traditional values of identity, in national, social or religious terms. As Manuel Castells is quoted: „as a result of technological changes two basic institutions of classical modernity have been shaken, the patriarchal family and the nation-state." (Beszteri, 1999. P. 142.)

It is not surprising, that in many countries, and for many people, globalisation is broadly seen as an assault, a challenge or an atrocity against traditional cultures. That particularly applies to poor countries or societies. „Many attribute social polarisation and the worsening of their own position to modernisation and penetration of Western values. The social, economic and political marginalization serves as a natural breeding-ground for traditionalism, the survival of traditional social community structures and the spread of ideas and ideologies based on traditionalism. For those broad masses, who feel their daily life and basic subsistence endangered, and make primarily the modernisation, directly or indirectly the West, responsible for that, the traditional community solidarity and ties of relationship are securing not only a feeling of identity and belonging, but they are sometimes the sole resources of their subsistence." (Zsolt Rostoványi, 1998. p. 275.) Their answer could easily be terrorism and fundamentalism, and it depends mostly on the ways and content of the „communication of ideas", what they choose.

Communication reveals differences and varieties, but it may also make people realise that many of the characteristics of the other are attractive, one can learn useful things from others, and the coexistence and co-operation can be highly beneficial. „Global institutions and movements multiply and the concern with 'humanity' as a whole is perhaps greater now than ever before, as witnessed in the wide appeal in the West of environmental causes and humanitarian concerns. Tolerance of difference also seems more firmly rooted: in some respects the 'other' may be less alien in a world made more familiar by global communication and global cultural products." (Axford, 1995. p. 29.) We feel, therefore, that the notion of Huntington that realisation of cultural or "civilisational" differences automatically and necessarily generate tensions and conflicts, is highly questionable.

3. Ethnic problems and conflicts in Central and Eastern Europe

The collapse of the socialist systems and the Soviet Empire in Central and Eastern Europe was accompanied by the flaring up of nationalism, which revived ethnic disputes and conflicts, and in some regions lead to civil and ethnic wars. The bloodiest examples were Bosnia and Kosovo, where „peace” could be restored only by resolute Western political and military intervention. All signs indicate that these conflicts could not be solved overnight, it will probably take decades till they come to a rest.

Before analysing the problems of national and ethnic identities in Central and Eastern Europe in the Post-Soviet era, **the great diversity and heterogeneity of the region** has to be particularly stressed. The countries of Central and Eastern European region differ in many respects, and often substantially. The differences are historical, but after 1990 they have been further aggravated. Consequently, the heritage of division between „East” and „West” is further complicated by great historical, economic, social, cultural differences among the countries of the former Soviet Empire.

The most general distinction, which is often made, is between „Central Europe” and „Eastern Europe”. **Central Europe**, in a narrower sense, is considered to be composed of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, the Slovak Republic and Slovenia; Croatia also belongs to this group. These countries are often called Eastern Central Europe, as far as Austria, Germany (particularly Bavaria, Saxonia or Prussia) and Italy (particularly the Northern parts) are considered to be a part of (Western) Central Europe as a whole. Romania and Bulgaria also claim themselves to be Central European countries, because besides the close traditional cultural and historical links, they are also candidates for NATO and EU membership. In cultural and religious terms, Central Europe is a region of Roman historical influence with strong Catholic, Protestant and Jewish traditions. When the dividing line along „civilisations” (Huntington) between „East” and „West” is drawn, Central Europe may be regarded as part of the West. As far as we focus on the former Soviet Empire, later, when we speak about „Central Europe”, we mean „Eastern Central Europe”.

Eastern Europe historically and culturally has developed under the Greek Byzantine tradition with the dominance of the Orthodox Church. In this respect, the countries of the **former Soviet Union**, and former socialist countries of **Southern Europe or the Balkan** (Albania, Bulgaria, Romania, and most of the republics of the former YU, except Croatia and Slovenia) belong to this group. The division between the Western Latin and the Eastern Orthodox Christianity goes back to 1054. Central Europe has chosen the West, but the relations and influences from the East remained. The influence of Islam in Southern and Eastern

Mediterranean is even earlier, and in the Balkan it remained existent. Later, in the 16th century new division emerged between the Northern Protestantism and the Southern Catholicism in Europe. Central Europe is rather dominated by the Catholicism (Poland, Slovakia or Croatia), but in some countries the Protestantism has strong influence also. Due to large Jewish communities, the Jewish influence from the 19th century was particularly strong on the culture of Central Europe.

Of course, there is several other categorising of the countries of the region, but most of them are highly controversial. The Balkan countries, by their history and many other parameters, form a separate group, but even then the special status of Romania and Bulgaria (Eastern Balkan), as we indicated, should be mentioned. In many respects, **the Baltic republics** should be dealt with separately, they also have strong Western traditions and links, and they have become EU members. But no matter how we group them, it is important to draw attention to the fact, that in the last 15-20 years, the differences among these countries have not only been revealed, but they seemed to grow.

The 20th century was the birth and emergence of nations in Central and Eastern Europe as well. Till the early 20th century, the 22-24 major nationalities and many other smaller minorities of Eastern Central Europe lived under four major empires (Ottoman, Hapsburg, German and Russian). Their cohesion and identity was based on dynastic devotion and religion, but most of them endeavoured to form their own nation-states. After the First World War, on the ruins of these empires, 9 new nation states were set up, an arrangement that was re-enforced after 1945. Although, these countries gained independence, the Central European region in its recent history has always been exposed to continuously strong great power influences.

After the 1989-90 revolutions the number of these countries increased to 20 states with that about 22-24 major nation-forming nationalities. One can think that it was a triumph of pure nation states. It was not the case at all. All of those 20 countries remained multi-national or multi-ethnic states with varyingly substantial number of minorities (10-30%). The ethnic harmony is far from having been realised. „The tensions originating from disharmonious order of relations of nations, nationalities and states have not disappeared, but have taken new forms” (Romsics, 1998. p. 7.)

The **differences between „Central” and „Eastern” Europe** are not entirely historical or cultural, but they extend to economic, political and social fields. And as we mentioned, they have become more marked, in the past – approximately – 20 years.

1. There are great differences **in levels of development** of these countries. While, the per capita GDP of Central European countries (Slovenia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia) was roughly around 50-70% of the EU average, and it was not much less for Poland, the other countries level was only around 20-40% of the developed European average. The difference between the high range of CE (Slovenia and Czech Republic) and the low range of EU (Greece and Portugal) was not substantial. At the same time, there were substantial differences between Slovenia and Czech Republic on the one hand, and Romania or some of the CIS countries, on the other. The two extremes were around three fold differences.

2. Concerning the **speed and the depth of the transformation** Central Europe (and the Baltic countries) performed substantially better than Eastern Europe. While Western-type economic structures emerged in Central Europe and in the Baltic countries fairly rapidly, belated and long time hesitant steps have been taken to reforms, and post-communist regimes have long survived in many Eastern European countries. The same applies to the state of political transformation. The political structures of the Western democracies were established and consolidated in most of the countries of Central Europe, while persistence of authoritative elements characterises the political structures of many of the others (CIS).

3. There are substantial differences **in economic performance and situation** following 1989-90. There have been serious economic difficulties in all countries, and all of the countries of the region were hit by the „transformation crisis”. But in most of the Central European countries there has been a strong recovery since 1993-94 and these countries have **consolidated their economies relatively rapidly and successfully afterwards**. Most of the East European countries have shown dismal performance (for example in terms of inflation) and the improvement of economic situation follows the others with long delay. Some South European countries (Bulgaria and Romania) caught up with only a lag of some years. In Russia and other CIS countries, the recovery has started only at end of 1990s.

4. Central Europe in a broader sense (including the Baltic countries) **seems to be successful in integration with the West**, while others followed them with long delay, and with uncertain and contradictory perspectives. The dependence of most Central European countries (Poland, Hungary, but also Romania) on former CMEA relations was more

moderate. There have been differences in stronger or weaker orientation to the "East" or to the "West". While the CE has managed to increase its trade with the West (EU) rapidly after 1990, the others lost ground substantially at first. After 1990, the Western companies started to invest in Central Europe (Hungary, Poland and Czech Republic), while there was a lack of interest in directly investing in the East. The 10 new EU members come from mostly Central Europe (plus Baltic countries), and the prospects of EU enlargement concerning the Balkan countries still seem distant. The probability of direct participation of the former SU countries other than the Baltic countries in the Euro-Atlantic integration is highly questionable. There was a fairly strong co-relation between the economic and political consolidation of these countries and their integration with Europe.

5. In spite of the ethnic diversity of Central Europe, **there have been no substantial internal ethnic conflicts in the region.** There are proper legal frameworks to deal with minority problems in Hungary, Slovenia and Poland. The Czech and Slovak Republic managed their separation in a peaceful and civilised way. The same applies to dealing with internal and external **ethnic and minority disputes** among Hungary, Slovakia or Romania. These disputes are under control, and are usually solved in democratic ways. It can be stated and stressed without exaggeration, that in spite of continuous disputes, in terms of the coexistence of different ethnic groups, compared to some other regions (Northern Ireland, Basque country etc.) **Central Europe relatively remained one of the most stable and peaceful regions of the whole European continent.**

On the other hand, there have been several serious ethnic conflicts, which have lead to **civil wars with bloody ethnic cleansings in Eastern and Southern Europe.** Although, these were limited to given parts of the former SU and YU, István Borsody, the Hungarian-American historian rightly stressed: „The predominant characteristic is that the temperature of East European nationalism is terribly high. Tremendous changes would be needed to reduce this boiling sentiment to the level of Western European nationalism.” (Ferenc Miszlivetz, 1999: 264.). These conflicts flared up mostly in the Caucasus, and certain parts of Southern Europe, basically at the meeting points of different „civilisations”, such as the Islam and the Orthodox or the Catholic Christian religions (Croats and Serbs). These conflicts seem to support the theories of Huntington, or more probably they were one of the major sources of such conclusions.

Of course, it does not mean, that the Central European region would be exempt from the problems of nationalities, and even of extreme nationalism. After the 1989-90 transition, we could see a very strong „neo-nationalistic” wave in the whole CEE region, including the Central European countries. This was, to a great extent, strongly related to a national self-

determination and independence movement in many countries, aimed particularly against Soviet imperialism. Many felt that Sovietisation had undermined the national cultural and democratic traditions, values and identities, which need to be restored. Later, the same feeling emerged in relation to globalisation. The outdated archaic and folkloristic identifications widely flourish in the whole region.

These countries could also not avoid the conflict of identities, in terms of national and ethnic identifications. That was not surprising at all in a region of traditional multi-ethnicity. While the transition has brought relatively **broad democratisation** in most of the countries, at the same time, that **process has not been always satisfactorily extended to the restoration and re-building of minority rights**. Multi-identities, which are no less marked in CEE, than in other parts of the world are also burdened with frustrations. After many decades of crisis, decline and oppression it is not surprising at all.

4. The prospects of dealing with the national and ethnic problems in CEE

The national and ethnic disputes and conflicts in Central and Eastern Europe like any other region of the world, root not only in historical traditions and cultural differences, but also in the socio-economic problems and disparities, and the political heritage, particularly in terms of the lack of democratic traditions. Although, these differences or problems do not lead to conflicts automatically, but much depends on the character and content of „communication“, and its final consequences on the people.

After the collapse of communism in 1989-90, in Central and Eastern Europe, it was clear from the beginning, that the only way of getting out of the century long peripheral position and catching up with the developed part of the world is **integration** (or more precisely re-integration) into world economy. And for historical and geographic reasons, and based on mutual political and economic interests **the centre of gravity of this integration should be Europe**, namely joining the institutions of the Euro-Atlantic integration. It was understood that besides modernisation, the European integration is the only guarantee for enhancing their security and consolidating newly born democracies.

In the roughly 20 years, following 1989-90, a remarkable progress have been made toward this integration. In the period of 1991-95 10 countries of the Central and East European

region (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia) signed association (Europe Agreements) with the EU, which created a free trade framework among these countries by the end of 2000. The EU started membership negotiations with these countries in 1998 about their EU membership, which was realised a relatively short period and lead to that full membership in 2004 (for Bulgaria and Romania in 2007). These countries have become the members of NATO as well.

Concerning the European identification of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, we find, however, several contradictions and frustrations. After 1990, we could experience great enthusiasm toward Europe. „Re-joining” Europe has become a popular slogan. These countries expected peace and prosperity from the participation in European integration, they hoped that on the long run, it enhances their security, ensures the stability of their democracy, and helps their modernisation through getting out of their 500 year-old peripheral position.

It is a source of frustration, however, that several countries, which achieved their independence as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Empire, and democratisation by accepting the principle of "self-determination", feel particularly threatened, when facing the challenges of integration and globalisation. Countries, which were part of an empire through almost all of their history, or just got out of one federation choosing national independence, now knock on the door of a European Union, which assumes a federalist future. Many countries have no or very short experience of national independence (often under extraordinary circumstances) and they feel nation-building more important than integration (Serbia, White Russia, etc.)

The first experiences with EU membership are also contradictory. Many expectations proved to be high, and several developments (limitations on free movements of labour) caused disappointment. In many respects, enlargement created a certain sort of crisis (financial, and political), and as many difficulties remained unsolved, they were blamed on Brussels. The enlargement “fatigue” become general on both sides, and that was aggravated by the recent global crisis.

It is often told that European identity is primarily based only on cultural elements, and some often stress the religious traditions („Christian Europe”). It seems clear, that for Central and Eastern Europeans’ European identity is more than just a cultural attachment, it has very strong economic, political and social elements. This identification is perhaps not deeper than in the Western part of the Continent after half a century of experience with European integration, but it is not too much weaker either. If we look at the controversies concerning

the future of the political integration of the EU, some can consider it even stronger. The major difference lies probably in the fact, that for the West the devotion and the attachment are more practical and pragmatic, while in Central and Eastern Europe European identification is much more idealistic, and full of illusions and sometimes naive expectations. „In general, it is true that East Europeans know very well what they want without knowing precisely what it is that they do want or how to obtain it. Instead, their attachment or return to Europe is a nostalgic vision based on pre-war memories, historical explanations, half-truth and partial information; it is a loud political program which is not sufficiently based on actual conditions.” (Ferenc Mészáros, 1999. p. 119.)

For full consolidation of the whole Central and Eastern European region, the integration process should be completed and **extended to the other countries of the region**. With regard to longer-term perspectives, it means that EU membership would be realised not only for the present 10 candidates but for all the others, except probably for the countries of the former Soviet Union (of course not speaking about the Baltic states). Geographically, it means all of the Balkan countries, which are obvious prospective members, and in 2003, in Thessaloniki, the EU committed itself to that perspective.

Under the above circumstances, the **EU could be extended from the present 27 members to about 35 countries in the coming 20-25 years**. This would mean beyond the present candidates, like Croatia and Turkey the further 5 Balkan countries (Albania, Bosnia, Croatia, Macedonian Republic, Montenegro and Serbia), plus Kosovo, and with high probability Iceland, and even Norway and Switzerland.

The membership of Russia in the EU is out of questions for several reasons. As a stable and prosperous Russia is a strategic Union interest, **prospectively Russia should be accommodated with a security and economic community framework**. This can mean security arrangements in the broadest sense (beyond military issues, fight against organised crime, drug trafficking etc.), and a comprehensive free trade agreement, which for the EU would offer access to the huge Russian markets. An adapted European Economic Area type of structure could be considered. If properly shaped, such frameworks could be attractive enough also for such countries as Ukraine, Belarus, or Caucasian republics as well, and it could be extended to the former Soviet republics of Central Asia, which would anyway arise if Turkey joins the Union.

The completion of enlargements, greatly increasing the internal diversity of the European Union, will mean that EU integration will be in continuous **transformation in the next 20-25 years**, which assumes **broad and far-reaching adjustments for all the interested parties**. These adjustments will be needed not only from the point of view of completion of the integration processes, but also for meeting the challenges of global competition by the whole continent. The EU has to fulfil a formidable task of strengthening its integration through continuing with the process of deepening, and at the same time be able to absorb to the new members. But this is a mutual interest of all countries.

The **ongoing process of enlargement and deepening** would mean a Union in transition (or we can say “under construction” or “in shaping”), which realistically **hardly can be other than a multi-speed, or multi-tier Europe**.

From the point of view of the consolidation of the CE region, and in fact, for the stability and prosperity of the whole continent, **several important conditions and principles** should be met through that integration.

1. The process of deepening should be maintained in the EU, and the **strengthening the “Centre” should be of absolute priority**. Centre, which holds, which sets the pattern, and is able to keep on with the pattern, in spite of growing number of the members. Centre, which is able to absorb new members without weakening, and giving up its identity. This “centre” or “hard core” would not be just a political alliance of small number of the countries, but rather **a broader political and economic structure**, following the traditional European social, cultural and moral values, and which would comprise probably most of the present members (which gradually can be strengthened by new members). This structure should be composed of several elements, but some of them are of particularly importance. If we simplify, the strong centre assumes:

- well and efficiently functioning institutional structures,
- credible and functioning security systems,
- prospering and globally competitive economies,
- and not at last a stable euro, which will be probably one of the most important integrating factor of the Union.

I am convinced, CEE's basic interests are in a strong Europe. Put it other ways, what these countries expect, can't be offered and achieved by a weak and loosely integrated Europe. Of course, the old and new members probably remain divided on how far and how rapidly the Union should go toward real federal structures, which on the long run is unavoidable, but a democratic, efficient and competitive Union will be of all interest.

2. The integration process should be accompanied by **gradual economic and social convergence** of these countries. It is known that integration is a contradictory process, but its balance of costs and benefits should be positive for all parties, and in the long run, these countries should keep on converging. This convergence is important not only from the point of view of positive identification to European integration, but also for easing and solving their internal problems, including their ethnic conflicts.

We know very well that the reason of the conflict in Kosovo was not just the revival of old religious hostility, but rather the long process of the deterioration of the social and economic situation, the lack of possibility to find solutions for the socio-economic crisis, both from the point of view of the country, and the majority of the individuals. Between just 1991 and 1995, the per capita incomes in Kosovo halved, and about 85% of the population had no job. „Consequently, the social tensions played a serious role in the radicalisation of political endeavours of Kosovar Albanians" (József Juhász, et al, 2000. p. 73.) And the formula is very simple, and it is the same as in the case of globalisation. When globalisation is resisted or rejected, it is easy to find the reason, if it is threatening with unemployment and the decrease of incomes, creating competition, which endangers local business, or simply bringing negative social and economic consequences for the country.

In Europe, the positive precedents of convergence for the past are given. Finland between the two world wars was less developed than Hungary, and now its per capita GDP is more than two times higher. About 20-25 years ago, such present member countries of the EU as Portugal or Greece were less developed than the Czech Republic or Hungary, and now they have 20-30% higher per capita incomes. And one should not forget about the spectacular catching up of Ireland in the past 20 years. In the past decades, the Northern and Southern periphery has **successfully converged** to the developed European centre, and it is obvious that **the integration processes played a decisive role**. Now, for the future, we have no foundation to doubt, why it could and should not be so with the eastern periphery as well.

The **integration** conceived as extension and intensification of „communication“, carrying positive messages, and bringing positive results is the only **guarantee of overcoming conflicts** in the longer run, let them be so grave as they are presently in Kosovo between Serbs and Albanians.

The processes of strengthening the “centre” (deepening) and the enlargement accompanied with convergence are not necessarily contradictory. On the contrary, they may be mutually reinforcing processes. Of course, one can draw different prospects and alternatives for the future of European integration. One scenario of enlargement can be of overburdening the institutions and resources, as result, the collapse of main institutions, and falling back to a simple free trade area. In that case, the integration aims of the Union would be given up, and the periphery would “overwhelm” the centre. That type of general dilution is, however, of none’s interest.

3. Integration should enhance **the democratisation process** in the CE region. Following 1989-90, the basic democratic institutions have been built in most of the Central and Eastern European countries, and the candidates mostly fulfil the requirement of „stability of democratic institutions” set by the Copenhagen membership criteria. The question is more complicated if we look at **the minority policies**, and in many countries of the region it was only slowly accepted that the real existence of minority rights should go much beyond just guaranteeing the fundamental human rights for all of the citizens. The securing of equality and the existence of minorities require special regulations, sometimes equal opportunities are not enough. In certain cases and dimensions, positive discrimination is needed. This has been clearly proved by the experience of recent times, whether we are talking about the mutual treatment of minorities or the attempt to solve the Roma problems in Central Europe. „The preservation and strengthening of identity of minorities require special attention and separate legal regulation” (András Balogh, 1998. p. 25.)

The European experience of the recent decades has proved that oppressive assimilation policies were counter-productive, only the tolerant and supportive attitude from the majority to the minority helped peaceful and prosperous coexistence, and proper coherence and stability of the societies. „The insistence on 19th century conceptions of the nation-state and the repetition of nationalist waves have aided in the reversal of the self-limiting revolutions of 1989 and in the establishment of characteristically authoritarian-type of democracies. We need new ideas in order to ensure that the radical changes, the democratisation processes and the creation of civil society which began in 1989 are not halted or aborted.” (Ferenc Miszlivetz, 1999. p. 121.) By the acceptance and enforcement of

European principles and norms, the interests of the majority and minorities can be conciliated and harmonised.

4. It is widely shared that now by integrating in a region the peoples should not give up their national identity. On contrary, as they get increasingly aware of their regional or global attachments, it is also realised that the national state is no longer necessarily the best tool for national integration. As the European Union is pledged to a multi-cultural community, it guarantees the flourishing of the national cultures, it may be served better by broader European frameworks. „The basis of the strong European identity is by all means, the maintenance of cultural diversity, which is not contrary at all to peace and democratic stability. The content of European identity rather means a common political culture, which excels in handling cultural pluralism.” (József Bayer, *Political Science Review*, 1999. pp. 16-17.)

The „**unity in diversity**” as a basic concept of European integration should not be conceived as a certain concocted „cultural goulash”, or homogenisation or uniformization of different cultures. European cultural identity means a „unity in dialogue, in communication, and in participation of peoples in development of history of ideas. It is a tacit consensus of European peoples, that they never again recognise any political or cultural prerogative, and they render the freedom of development based ostensibly disordered, but merely immanent driving forces. Cultural identity of Europe is the freedom of culture, which can become and develop to what it wants to be.” (Lothar Spath, 1991. p. 230.) As Ferenc Glatz the former president of the Hungarian National Academy noted: „I conceive Europe as a Continent of ethnic, religious and traditional multi-colourity. As you can see, I consider the preservation of this multi-colourity important not simply from the point of view of human identity, but also as a condition of our social and productive competitiveness.” (*Magyar Hírlap*, August 19, 2000.)

The famous Hungarian writer Sándor Márai already formulated these ideas in 1942, in fact, at a time, when the European cultural diversity and inheritance was really in danger under the threat of fascistic oppression and uniformisation. „The great power source and battery of Europe will feed itself from the competition against and besides each other of peoples living here. A Europe, whose residents speak a common language, loose their historical conscience and popular ambitions, would cease to be Europe, as it has been in the past three hundred years, when it has really been a battery of human will for the whole world. The strength of Europe is multi-colourity, conflict, dispute, memory, proof and difference.” (Márai, 1993, p. 55.)

Of course, now, new concepts are needed, and the content of national identity should be redefined according to the new conditions. „As a result of globalisation, the economic structures have been blurred, and new spheres of interests have emerged, which do not correspond to either ethnic or political boundaries. For the people culture has remained only a „personal property”, if they foster it. For this healthy nationalism is needed. The principle of nation has to be re-defined. If this does not happen, Hungary will be corrupted into an old-fashioned chauvinism stirred from two poles by its enemies: from an ultra-nationalist and an ultra-cosmopolitan pole. These are two poles of the same magnet, they can exist only in interaction.” (Imre Maté, 2000. p. 7.)

European identities can be conceived, as special forms or expressions of global identities, on the one hand, and as a certain sort of anti-theses on the other hand. The European identity is partly related to the achievements of European integration, and is partly a certain sort of acceptance and devotion to the future of a closer Europe. „We should not choose between the nation state and integration; the stake of European accession is how we can balance the defencelessness unavoidably originating from globalisation with the advantages given by the union. Consequently, the European integration can prove to be the saviour of the nation state, at least if we think about its democratic forms.” (Bayer, *Political Science Review*, 1999. pp. 16-17)

The conflict generating extreme nationalism was always self-damaging and self-destructive. Now, in an age, when the regional and global integration is “not a choice”, but a necessity, it is much more the case. The closed and exclusive nationalism, therefore, should be replaced by an open one, which tolerates the differences, and tries to achieve national aims through peaceful co-operation with other nations. „We should not reject the national idea, but we should form our national identity in a democratic and open spirit that tolerates the political and cultural divisions inside the nation. Whereas, the distrustful and parsimonious version of national identity, which is urged today by so many on the right side, is not only of exclusive character, but it is also the expression of a continuous inferiority complex, and it is unsuited to cope with the challenges of globalisation.” (Bayer, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 1999. p. 37.) In another study he suggests that national identity and nationalism should be defined in terms of „constitutional patriotism” as proposed by Günther Habermas. „The political identity connected to the nation state as a modern idea today can be conceived especially in a modern form of patriotism. I characterised it in the concept of constitutional patriotism as drawn from similar disputes in Germany.” (József Bayer, *Political Science Review*, 1999. p. 20.)

In a Europe of “cultural diversity”, the notion of homogeneous national state should be given up (constitution of many countries of the CEE has not yet recognised that requirement), and the multi-nationality as reality should be accepted. This is the only way of gradually easing all of the tensions in the region, and creating a stable Europe.

5. A strong and cohesive Europe should be governed by two important principles: **the solidarity and subsidiarity**. The extended and liberalised markets through increased competition bring huge advantages, but the number of losers is also substantial. They need to be compensated, and it follows not only from the principle of social justice, but also from a general social and political interest functioning as a guarantee of stability and security in a broad sense. Solidarity as a guiding principle of policy has long been recognised by the EU, and in the light of present disputes around WTO or IMF, it seems that it also has relevance in global contexts. As Eveline Herfskens, the Dutch Minister for Development Co-operation stressed at the North-South Centre meeting: „Global interdependence is a key term. New policies of solidarity are needed, based on human dignity and social cohesion. Such policies are both a moral obligation and a rational necessity. People should have control over processes that affect them, this is the elementary principle of democracy at any level. Globalisation without democratic control could not possibly reflect the values, aims and principles on which the Council of Europe is based.” (*The Interdependent*. No. 90. 07.08/2000. p. 1.) This equally applies to Europe.

In Europe, solidarity is strongly rooted in the Jewish-Christian, and later in the labour movement traditions, and it was not by chance that the principle of the welfare state as a social policy and practice has been developed by the Socialist-Social-democratic and Christian-democratic parties in these countries, since the early 20th century. Solidarity is important from the point of view of necessary social and political cohesion of the society and to foster true European identity.

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