National Myths versus a European Identity and Healthy Patriotism
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Nationalism – the New Spectre in Europe

History did not come to an end with the collapse of communism. To misquote Karl Marx, another spectre is now haunting Europe. Narrow-minded nationalism and xenophobia are spreading. The dreams and talk of a new, multicultural European community on both sides of an iron curtain which has collapsed have given way to pessimistic arguments about an imminent, darwinist struggle between nations and cultures.

The strength and dangers of nationalism lie in its lack of a coherent ideology. Instead, it is based on a number of hazy ideas that land themselves easily to a miscellany of obscure political aims. Following the bankruptcy of communism, nationalism has become the tool which the Cuban and North Korean regimes use to justify their existence and the means which the so called “reformed” communist in Eastern Europe employ to hang on to power. In Western Europe, we can observe both left and right-wing politicians who are angling for votes by representing themselves as the guardians of their national culture which is said to be threatened by foreign elements. In Sweden, in anno domini 1994 we have even had to undergo the experience of hearing a Swedish cabinet minister warn us of the dangers of Catholicism. The Swedish debate on membership of the EU also demonstrated how erstwhile international socialists were transformed into socialist nationalists, now
preaching a form of left-wing nationalism that is just as murky and simple-minded as
turn-of-the-century jingoism.

Growing nationalism in Western Europe is based on a widespread fear of the future
and of a world in a state of rapid change. Increasing immigration by
people of foreign origin, the globalization of the economy and cultural
internationalization have created patterns of consumption and life-styles which are
felt to threaten national identities. Broad sections of the population feel that they are
losing their previous frames of reference and that they have no real roots in society.

Many take refuge in what may be termed welfare nationalism or chauvinism,
believing that their own county is best in every area and that they must therefore
protect themselves against the dangerous world outside. In most cases, this involves
an unholy alliance between the far right, the far left and the environmentalists.
Sweden differs in this from other European countries, such as France and Germany,
in that the left wing is significantly stronger than the right wing in this nationalist
alliance.

The sense of affinity which the nation appears to provide has become a refuge which
offers protection from the anonymity of modern society and a symbol of security and
of a familiar past to which people tend to cling in an era of change. Concern about
the future of national states in an increasingly integrated Europe has awakened a new
and intensive nationalism with racist overtones. Immigration has become the main
scapegoat for the rapid changes and the resultant economic, social and political
tensions. In their turn, these tensions provide sustenance for nationalist tendencies on
the extreme right, such as the Front National in France, Vlaams Blok in Belgium, the
Freedom Party in Austria, the extreme right in Germany and similar but smaller
parties in Sweden.

So far, we have only seen the beginning of the immigration pressures on which these
movements are based. Western and Southern Europe will prove to have tremendous
magnetics powers, even if and the economic gap between Europe and its closest
neighbours is more or less kept under control. We are thus on the threshold of
dramatic changes in what is currently regarded as the European identity. We are moving inexorably towards a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional Europe, even if opinions differ about the speed at which this is happening it is estimated that in 30 years there will be between 25 and 65 million Muslims in Europe.

There are different explanations for xenophobia in Eastern Europe. Since the communists suppressed nationalism as energetically as they persecuted all other ideologies, they gave it the legitimacy of martyrdom. With the disintegration of salvationist doctrines such as communism, with their claim to a monopoly of the absolute truth, there is a need for a new frame of reference and a new social identity. A narrowly defined concept of nationalism and all its myths will be widely regarded as more promising than a complicated supranational structure such as the EU. Nationalistic politicians are attempting to take advantage of this situation. As long as liberty is directly associated with the concept of a nation, there will therefore be a danger of unholy alliances on a broad front between nationalism and xenophobia.

Timothy Garton Ash described Czech dissidents in the mid-1980’s as candles whose light broke through from under the ice. Now we have seen not just melting ice but a communist meltdown as well. We have also seen that the disintegration of the former Eastern block is by no means a guarantee that coexistence among what were previously alleged to be brotherly nations will be characterized by harmony and cooperation, once the communist yoke has been cast off. To quote Adam Michnik, life without the communist devil was not as easy as people had imagined. Instead, the devil was discovered elsewhere.

Furthermore, capitalism showed its worst side first when it entered the arena. The first tangible results of the political transformation, including social polarisation, unemployment, the rapid spread of poverty among a broad section of the population, the gutter press, pornography and horror videos arrived much faster than effective democratic structures which, perhaps, in some cases will be awaited in vain.

All over Europe there are far too many signs that the nation is again about to become what the historian Eric Hobsbawm described as the “new civil established region.”
One prerequisite for dealing with aggressive nationalism is that we come to terms one and for all with the national myths that are the raw material of xenophobia and tackle the concept of the nation as a homogenous ethnic unity and of the national state as a foregone historical conclusion and hence the only possible social system.

The heart of ethnic nationalism is völkisch, a German concept which is difficult to translate. It is based on German romanticism and German cultural and spiritual reactions to the Enlightenment, the idea of universality derived from the French revolution and French revolutionary wars. The Blut und Boden (blood and soil) concept, and the idea that some races were historically bound up with certain definite areas, contrasted with this.

The nation is thus seen to be a fellowship of antecedents and nationality like a birthmark. People are born German or Swedish or French. People with foreign origins are considered a threat to national unity and purity and to a national culture which defines itself vis-a-vis others. The common ancestry is the end of history and has to be protected against everything foreign.

According to ethnic nationalists, not only is every people entitled to its own sovereign state but it also owns a historical predetermined area for all time for its own exclusive use. Areas once inhabited by a national group should rightfully be returned to them, by force if necessary, and with the expulsion of the present inhabitants as the outcome. Anyone leaving this mythical fellowship is stamped forever with the mark of Cain. To this kind of nationalist, it is inconceivable that several kinds of people could live together. Minorities are tolerated at best, but they are and remain second class citizens. Supranational fellowship is a threat to the legal system of the national state, which in turn is seen as ramparts which protect the national identity.

This kind of nationalism has rooted itself particularly deeply in present day Eastern and South-eastern Europe. Its ravages can be seen daily in former Yugoslavia. In an
area with an unusually broad population mix the national ideologists now preach racial purity and the primacy of a common ancestry. Historians, philologists and writers construct national cultures with total disregard of the words of the Swedish poet, Tegner, that only barbarism was once patriotic.

Myths about Race, National Unity and Purity

With few exceptions – Iceland for example – governments and peoples can not demonstrate a long, unbroken, historical continuity and ethnic homogeneity.

The cradle of people and nations does not lie in secret mythological obscurity, on the historical battlefields of Troy or Kosovo Polje but between the covers of history books. In many cases, nations were created by national romantic historians. They began looking for common denominators for a nation of the future. Thus, history, language, national soul, “Volkgeist”, culture and race came to play their part. The written language played an important role in creating a nation, as did a language constructed from the predominant dialects of the time. Language did not therefore precede the nation but instead came later. The emerging national state created its national language in order to legitimize itself. According to a classic definition, the difference between a language and a dialect is that a language has a government and an army.

National conscription, compulsory education and the development of mass media with supra-regional distribution were the channels used by the architects of developing nations in the 19th century in order to create contact between the centre and the periphery, and borders that appear natural on the basis of geography, language, ethnicity or religion. In particular, the emergence of national education systems and the mass media contributed to communicating a sense of affinity to a national collective, to extending the cultural horizons and getting away from provincial narrow-mindedness. The creation of nationalsymbols and myths and rewriting history were also part of the process of nation-building.
Originally therefore, a nation can be described as an idea searching for reality which a minority often violently forced upon a majority. This has since been maintained, with standardization as a goal and with an iron glove as an instrument in order to eradicate previous diversity. Nations were thus constructed and invented. People felt that they primarily belonged to a province, a town or an empire rather than a national state, and they barely protested when they were transferred from one kingdom to another. Eric Hobsbawn speaks of the mass production of nations in the 19th century, when cultural hallmarks were created for later presentation as authentic and ancient. The “real” aspects needed the “fake” and “foreign” in order to define themselves. The very weakness and lack of credibility of the national identities which were proclaimed, meant that they needed polarization in order to take root.

The ranking order of the factors that characterise a nation has always been subject to discussion – ranging from mutual traditions and collective political awareness, common antecedents, affiliation to a tribe or people, joint territory, customs and language, culture and religion. Objections can be made to all these factors. The inhabitants of the USA are nation notwithstanding their widely differing origins. The Swiss are undoubtedly a nation despite their different languages, religions and cultures, while not all those who speak the German language are members of the German nation.

Any attempt to provide some content to the concept of the nation must therefore automatically imply subjecting reality to rape. Karl Popper, the philosopher, stated at the end of the Second World War that:

“It has been said that a race is a collection of people who are united, not by their origin but by a common misconception about their antecedents. Similarly,
we can say that a nation is a collection of people united by a common misconception about their history”.

The shaping of a nation can be both a progressive and regressive process. It can come to a definite end, pause but return with renewed strength, as we are now seeing in the Soviet empire after its collapse. In the early 14th century, Dante wrote about “Slavs, Hungarians, Germans, Saxons, the English and other nations”, describing his own nationality as “Florentine”. Now, only the Hungarian, German and English nations remain. The Saxons were absorbed by the last two, for various historical reasons. However, the German nation did not come to include the equally Germanic Friesian, Dutch, Flemish and Luxembourg nations and Dante’s Slavs divided into some ten different peoples each of which now considers itself a special nation. As an example from a later date, in the 1860’s, Engels described the Welsh, the Gaels in the Scottish highlands, Serbs, Croats, Slovaks, Czechs and Ruthenians as “population relics”, “peoples with no future” and an “absurdity”.

The supposedly original population of France, the Franks, were only a small proportion of the mixed bag of Romans, Gauls, Celts, Bretons, Normans, Burgundians, etc., who gradually spread outwards from the Île de France to become present-day France. In the Seine basin alone they probably comprised some ten per cent of the population in the 6th and 7th centuries.

France does not therefore consist of ethnic Franks. Instead, a number of ruling families with a Frankish element, succeeded in forming other immigrant groups into a unit, a group that, until the Revolution, only comprised the upper echelons of society. Even after the Revolution, the simpler strata of population remained as they were, farmers, peasants, soldiers and craftsmen from Normandy, Provencal, Aquitaine, Gascony or Brittany, speaking many languages. During the French Revolution, the people of Marseilles did not understand the language in which the Marseillaise was sung. Even in the last century, French was still the language of high churchmen and worldly gentlemen. The state came first and the national collective was established later within its territorial framework as a result of a gradual and cultural standardization. Peasants in France could not be described as Frenchmen
until the Third Republic, at the end of last century, but the Basque, Breton, Corsican and Catalonian areas of France still do not feel fully integrated into the French state and nation.

In present-day France, the third of the country lying in the north east is ethnically more Germanic than southern Germany. The north of Bavarian is still described today as Franconia, and Charles the Great, or Charlemagne, represents a central chapter in the history, Frenchmen become Germans and the Germans French. If we continue even further back in time, the picture changes again. The French religious historian, Ernest Renan, wrote just over a hundred years ago that:

“There is no doubt that Lorraine once belonged to the German nation, but almost everywhere that inflamed German patriots invoke ancient German rights we can substantiate the (existence of) even older Celts, and before them the Allophylian people, the Finns and the Laplanders lived there, and before that there were cave people and orangutans before them. There is only one right in such a historical philosophy, and that is that the orangutans were unjustly driven out by an evil civilisation.”

Under ecclesiastical law, the German nation originally included the peoples of Scandinavia, Poland and Bohemia. Frederick the Great of Prussia normally conversed in French, and spoke only broken German. The King of Prussia’s appeal to his people during the Napoleonic War of 1812 was also made in Sorbian and Polish. When Prussia became the nucleus of a united Germany in 1871, it had more Polish than German inhabitants after Poland had been divided up into three parts.

The British are not a homogenous nation, either. The Celtic Britons who were not driven into the western fringes of the country in the 5th century by the Germanic Angles and Saxons were later absorbed by the invaders. A further ethnic mix occurred after the Danish invasion in the 9th century and the Norman Conquest in the 11th century.
The mother tongue of Cavour, the founder of Italian nation, was French. He had primarily thought in terms of an Italy based on a Turin-Milan axis. One of the leaders of the Italian “Risorgimento”, Massimo d’Azeglia, said in 1860: “Having created Italy, we must now create Italians.” Some 130 years later, there is still reason to question how deeply rooted the Italian identity is. Throughout history, and as a result of migration and invasion, Italy has consisted of a mixture of races which can be seen today in the physical differences between the well-built, ruddy-countenanced people in Lombardy, the Celtic features found in Romagna and the Mediterraneans in the south. Many Italians regard present-day Italy as a foreign invention and consider themselves to be primarily Florentines, Venetians, Neapolitans, Bolognese etc. The antagonism between north and south is expressed in the Lega Nord phenomenon which would like to free the industrial and modern north from what it considers to the poor “African” south.

Sweden’s era as a great power, still longed for by extreme right-wing groups, was a multinational society and Sweden did not become Swedish until we lost Finland in 1809. The Swedish national identity developed when its status changed from a Baltic power to a North European fringe state. The hero-king Charles XII, not only had and immigrant background, not unlike that of our present King and Queen, but he also specifically pursued an open borders policy – something opposed by the enemies of immigration today. According to their own line of argument, the skinheads of Tornedalen who now hunt “dagos” would not have any rights at all to their home area, which was originally populated by the Finnish and Sami people.

The Polish and Hungarian nations in the 17th century consisted of nobles who, together with the king, lived off the labour of the peasants and craftsmen. Even in the 19th century, the peasant population living to the north-east of Warsaw spoke a language called “Mazowiane”, and described themselves as Mazovians. At the beginning of the 19th century, only 40 per cent of the population in Hungary were Hungarians. Their numbers doubled during the next 125 years, while other ethnic groups increased by only 70 per cent. This was not due to their higher nativity but to
the fact that the Slovaks, Serbs, Germans and Jews who moved into the cities from countryside were transformed into a Hungarian middle class and proletariat.

The war in former Yugoslavia does not have its foundations in a nationalism with medieval roots but originates from the nationalist ideas that arrived in South-Eastern Europe from the West in the 19th century and which were then translated into reality in the territories of the conquered Austro-Hungarian and Osman empires by peace treaty after the First World War. Both real and alleged political events from the 14th century onward are cited as justification for cruelty. The conflict between the Serbs and Croats has its origins in our century, however, and began, in military terms, with the establishment of the Croatian Ustashi state in 1941. The Serbian minority in the Habsburg Empire cooperated politically with the Croats until the breakdown of the double monarchy. The idea of a southern Slav state was first put forward by a Croat, the Catholic Bishop Strossmayer, who, as his name reveals, had Germanic forbears. Today, an artificially constructed ethnic definition of citizenship has become a fateful question which allows the individual no choice. The Serbian war for the creation of a Greater Serbia is an extension of this principle. As long as all Serbs are not gathered in one state, the existence of the Serbian nation is considered to be under threat, in the same way that all Croatians must be incorporated into a new Greater Croatia, according to the Croatian nationalists.

The Serbian and Croatian argument against the Muslims is that “we have always been here while you have only been here since the 15th century”. This is not only incorrect but always elicits the next question as to why the 15th century should be selected as the point of departure for territorial claims. Following this method of reasoning, we might ask why the Slavs who arrived in the Balkans in the 6th and 7th centuries should not be sent back to the parts of north-eastern Europe where they came from, and why all Orthodox Christians should not be returned to Byzantine/Istanbul? According to Serbian and Croatian logic, the former Yugoslavia should be emptied of all people except the Albanians, whose presence can be proved farthest back in time.

Tension in the Balkans rose further with the Greek claim to sole rights to the name Macedonia. The conflict between Athens and Skopje is another example of how preposterous a nationalism based on historical myths becomes when subject to close inspection.
On the Greek side, a straight line is drawn from 2,300 years ago, from Alexander the Great to the present. In the early years of the 6th century Greece was exposed to such a massive Slav immigration in the Middle Ages the area was often called “Slavinia”. In the early 19th century, for example, 24 per cent of the Athenian population were Albanians, 32 per cent Turks and only 44 per cent Greeks. Nor was the Greek war of liberation from the Turks in the 1820’s an out-and-out Greek war. The Suliote heroes about which Lord Byron wrote were Albanians.

Eric Hobsbawm writes about the Greeks who took part in the Greek war of freedom: “The real Greeks who fought for what would be the founding of a new independent national state did not speak classical Greek any more than Italians speak Latin. The glories of Pericles, Aeschylos, Euripedes, Sparta and Athens meant nothing to them, and to the extent that they were aware of the history they found it irrelevant. Paradoxically, they were closer to Rome than to Greece (Romaica), i.e., they saw themselves as the heirs of Byzantine. They fought as Christians against the unbelieving Muslims, as Romans against the Turkish dogs.”

Macedonia, whose name is the reason for the current dispute, was a divided area at the turn of the century, with different languages, religions, ethnic groups and identities. Hobswawn gives the following description of the area in about 1870:

“The inhabitants of Macedonia had been distinguished by their religion, or else claims to this or that part of it had been based on history ranging from the medieval to the ancient, or else on ethnographic arguments about common customs and ritual practices. Macedonia did not become a battlefield for Slav philologists until the twentieth century, when the Greeks, who could not compete on this terrain, compensated by stressing an imaginary ethnicity... The Greeks later described the inhabitants in the parts of Macedonia that they annexed as “slavophone Greeks”. In other words, a linguistic monopoly masked as a non-linguistic definition of the nation”.

Thessaloniki, where the surge of Greek nationalism in now at its peak with the slogan “Macedonia is forever Greek”, had a population in the early part of the 20th century which was almost 60 per cent Jewish, while the Greek and Turkish populations each amounted to 18 per cent. Among these Turks was the young man who would become Kemal Atatürk, the founder of Modern Turkey. Northern Egypt with its quarter of a million Greeks concentrated
at Alexandria and large parts of Turkish Asia Minor were substantially more Greek than the part of Macedonia which now belongs to Greece. It was only after the exchange of population with Turkey, agreed by treaty and carried out by force, after the First World War, that there was a Greek majority in the area.

The Balkan wars at the turn of the century had their explanation in that the ethnic mixture in the area comprised an ethno-political vacuum. This has now been filled by the Macedonian people to whom Tito accorded special nation status after the Second World War. This vacuum will recur if the Macedonians are not allowed to be Macedonians. They would either be forced to define themselves as southern Serbs or as western Bulgarians. Bulgaria, for example, has only recognized the state of Macedonia but not the nation. Irrespective of the identity that the Macedonians would be compelled to choose, there would be an acute danger of a new Balkan war. It can therefore be asserted that the Macedonian nation would have to be invented if it did not exist.

In fact, for almost 50 years some 1.3 million people have been Macedonians, and a third generation is now growing up with a Macedonian identity and speaking Macedonian. Just as Israel is not able to dissolve the Palestinian identity by legislation, or Arab boycotts were incapable of preventing the formation of a Jewish state, a group of foreign ministers at a luncheon table cannot abolish the Macedonian identity, as Athens is currently demanding.

The Bulgarians are a mirror image of the Greek case. The Bulgarians were originally an Asiatic people who migrated to Eastern Europe in the 7th century, encountering and conquering Slav tribes who had come into the area in the previous century. But while Slavs who entered Greece were assimilated, the Bulgarians became Slavs to such an extent that only their name recalled their origins. There is not a single word in modern Bulgarian which can be traced to the people who gave the language its name.

The Romanian identity provides yet another demonstration that myths are stronger than facts. According to the national Romanian myth, the Romanians are the result of a merging of the Dacians, a Thracian people, and the Latin Romans. The Dacian-Romans disappeared from history when the Roman legions departed in the 3rd century AD, but according to Romanian accounts, they settled in inaccessible mountain regions where they survived invasions by the
Teutons, the Slavs, the Magyars and the Tartars, reappearing in the 11th century as the Vlachs, a Latin-speaking nation. It has been historically proved that these Vlachs, small numbers of whom are now spread all over the Balkans in the form of splinter groups, were assimilated by the Slavs and the Tartars. This Slavic element was particularly emphasized in the early years of the communist era in Romania, and the history books even went so far as to claim that the Dacians were a Slav people. Subsequently, when Ceaucescu began to develop policies which were independent of Moscow, the Slav connection was denied, and the Dacian-Roman theory was emphasized, to the detriment of the substantial Hungarian and German minorities.

The Nation – a Daily Referandum

Thus, nations are not eternally defined entities, but are in fact created. They are “imagined communities”, in the words of the American anthropologist, Benedict Anderson.

Nationalism is a two-faced, Janus-like creature. It is synonymous with self-determination for those who have the good fortune to live in a society which has its own history, language, culture and religion, but its can also be xenophobic, intolerant, aggressive, hegemonic and authoritarian, lacking the will and ability to allow others what the nation claims for itself.

The kind of nationalism which we see today, promising a brilliant future on the basis of an illustrious past (often artificially constructed and mysterious) is not a disease which can be cured with quick, radical cures or wished away on common-sense grounds. We must be able to find an antidote to the fear, hatred and insistence on homogeneity on which xenophobia and racism thrive, making it clear that these feelings have nothing to do with nationalism or natonality. If we want to ensure that the nationalists do not monopolize discussion about the “nation”, we must apply and employ an open definition of the concept of the nation.

Adherence to a nation must be an act of choice, and not a birthmark. Instead of “ethnos”, in which a sense of affinity is based on a mystical racial ties of blood, our perception of the national must be a question of “demos” – an open, universalist concept of the nation which focuses on the individual level, in which the nation is based on acceptance by citizens and their belief in a political order which protects their freedoms and rights. The individual can
choose to join, but he can also leave the nation. The nation may be ethnically homogenous, but it can also consist of several different peoples, as in the case of Switzerland. National culture is not static or laid down by history, instead it is a dynamic creation based on free and independent citizens.

As a result, the starting point in the fight against racism and xenophobia must be the concept of nationality which was defined by Ernest Renan, the French religious historian whom I have already mentioned, in his classic address at the Sorbonne on 11 March 1882, entitled “What is a nation?”

As far as Renan was concerned, national affinity was not a question of race, religion or place of birth, but was instead a matter of “an everyday referendum”.

“A nation’s being is based on all individuals having something in common, but also an ability to forget many things. No Frenchman knows whether he is a Burgundian, an Alani or a Visigoth, and every Frenchman must forget St Batholomew’ Eve and the massacres in the South of France in the 13th century. There are hardly ten families in France who can prove their Frankish origins, and even if they could, evidence of this kind would be incomplete due to the many unknown instances of crossbreeding which put all genealogical systems into such disorder... A nation is a spiritual principle, with its origins in the deep complexity of history, an intellectual family, but not a specific group shaped by the earth... A nation is a grand solidarity constituted by the sentiment of sacrifices which one has made and those that one is disposed to make again. It supposes a past, it renews itself especially in the present by a tangible deed: the approval, the desire, clearly expressed, to continue the communal life. The existence of a nation is an everyday referendum...

However, nations are not something eternal. They have begun, they will end. They will be replaced, in all probability, by a European confederation. But such is not the law of the century in which we live. At the present time the existence of nations happens to be good, even necessary. Their existence is a guarantee of liberty, which would be lost if the world had only one law and only one master.”
Healty Patriotism in a European Community

Renan’s words are still relevant 112 years later. National identities and their daily confirmation in the form of national frontiers and national symbols still set clear limits to a sense of European community. The national state is still democracy’s principal arena and platform for a political debate in which everyone has common points of reference, plays by the same rules, accepts opponents and is able to achieve compromises, and live with them.

At the same time, Europe is moving towards the confederation which Renan referred to. The classic national state was born in the 19th century, in a world which was characterized by self-sufficiency and a high degree of economic independence, very little spatial and social mobility and limited communications with other human beings. As a result, the state and its territory constituted an entity which was self-sufficient and finitely defined, not just in its national ideology, but also in reality. As a result of economic integration, mass tourism, refugee movements, satellite TV, etc, this epoch has long since passed. National frontiers have not merely become more open; they are being steadily eaten away and diversity within them is increasing. As was the case in the process in which European national states developed, the European Union will continue to be an elite phenomenon. The relative lack of interest which can still be seen in elections to the European Parliament shows that there is a long way to go. There is lukewarm media interest, the candidates are often unknown and the poll figures are low. What drives people to the ballot box is more dissatisfaction with domestic politics than a sense of participation in a European political process.

As already noted, all European nations have their more or less genuine historical myths, experiences, experience and perspectives. There are no European equivalents of the Bastille or Armistice Day. There is no Unknown European Soldier, no European kings or saints. Many people have experienced their common European history fighting each other in the Great European Wars, rather than working together. A European Community cannot be based on a German concept such as “Bult und Boden” or ideas about a European “Volk” or a European “civilized nation”. As a result, a European national state is a still-born project.
Hence Europe is neither a “communication-community” nor an “experience-community”, if we try to anglicize two German concepts. Both these factors are essential for the development of a collective political identity. An identity of this nature is built up on the basis of shared experience, myths and memories – often in opposition to similar elements in other collective identities.

Furthermore, this effect is reinforced when faced with something which is markedly different. Joseph Stalin should also be counted amongst the fathers of European integration, along with Schumann, de Gasperi, Monnet and Adenauer. In the Cold War, a sense of West European unity could be mobilized, but what counterforce is there today which can give Europeans a common identity? The USA belongs to the same cultural circle, and while Japan is certainly a homogenous and distinct society, it is too far away, does not represent either a political or military threat, and the thrust of its economic power is primarily directed at the United States.

Instead, it is dangerously tempting for Europe to choose to define itself vis-a-vis its Third World environment, with the Meditterean moat to protect the European fort. There is a risk that the construction of a pan-European identity will go hand in hand with a mechanism of cultural exculsion. The search for a European identity could easily take the form of a demarcation directed against “the rest” – a policy which could lead Europe into a cul-de-sac, at the same time as the ethnic diversity of Europe was increasing. A European identity must therefore be both distinct and inclusive, differentiating and assimilating at the same time.

National states have been built up over a long time, often as the result of protracted conflict. They are ideological contructions and, as Renan maintained, national identiy is ultimately a political decision. One prerequisite for a strong national identity is that citizens feel a strong measure of solidarity with the state because it allocates resources in society and takes care of education, the infrastructure, law and order, etc. Therefore the principal assignment for the “makers of Europe” cannot be to try to give Europeans a common identity based on a distant past in antiquity or the Middle Ages, but instead to develop political self-confidence and an ability to take action which corresponds to Europe’s role in the next century.

Hence, a European identity will not be established by central directives from Brussels or from the capital cities of member states, or conjured up at seminars or conferences. Instead, it will
arise because citizens of the individual European states feel that they, personally, have something to gain from integration and that, as a result, they say yes to the EU in their daily referendum.

Supranationality will not be accepted until there is a situation in which national, regional and supraregional identities are no longer established in a hierarchical order. Everyone must feel that all these identities are self-evident and part of their daily lives. As a result, a policy based on preserving diversity will be a prerequisite for creating European identity which neither should nor can replace a national identity, but which is able to support and strengthen political institutions which are neither national nor the framework for a European superstate.

Questions which involve cultural policy, education and historically based social welfare systems and values must therefore continue to be the concern of the national state. This involves rendering unto the national state what is the national state’s, and to the EU what is the EU’s, that is to say a security and foreign policy structure, the Single Market, and a common refugee and immigration policy. The relationship between a European identity and national identities might then take the form of a foreign and security policy, in a broad sense, which lays the foundations for a common European political identity. This means a “nation” in Renan’s sense, in which the individual can feel a political affinity irrespective of his ethnic or geographical origins, without therefore needing to feel part of a European “Volk” or of a European “national civilization”.

This will loosen up the historical links between the state and the nation. In this perspective, European integration does not mean the emergence of a new European superstate, but instead a dispersion of power. Cultural identity will continue to be based on the national level, but it will also be disseminated downwards to increasingly clearly defined regional identities. We will neither have a new European superstate nor sovereign national states. Nations will not disappear. Instead, we will have nations with fewer state features, and national cultures with softer shells.

At the national level, the German national concept would be retained, but in its original Herdian gestalt, in which a nation does not necessarily have to be expressed in the form of a state. Johan Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) was both a nationalist and an internationalist, who
stressed the concept of cultural patriotism. No people was superior to any other. Resting on secure and solid cultural foundations, each nation could contribute its special characteristics and cultural achievements to an international community of nations.

Thus, the “civilized nation” concept is becoming increasingly deterritorialized. People will feel an affinity with a particular area and its cultural and political history, but this area does not necessarily have to be linked to a national state with a defined territory. This may enable an overall European identity to develop, but it would be one of many identities in Europe, seen in relation to and supplemented by various national and regional identities. It should provide an antidote to various “Blut und Boden” ideas, thus making it easier to deal with immigration questions.

If we are to achieve this, a narrow nationalism must be replaced by a healthy patriotism characterized by five patriotic commandments which Michael Mertes, Chancellor Kohl’s close assistant, recently formulated in an article:

* You shall respect the patriotism of other nations as much as you wish your own patriotism to be respected by them.
* You shall be a loyal citizen of the country to which you belong by birth or by free choice.
* You shall accept and respect your neighbour as a compatriot irrespective of his ethnic, cultural and religious background, if he is prepared to be a loyal citizen of the country to which both of you belong.
* Your love for your country must never be divided from your love for liberty. You shall therefore defend your religious freedom of religion and freedom of thought, and that of your neighbours, and resist all attempts to force you or your neighbour into a conflict of loyalties between your civic and human duties.
* You shall not make an idol of your own country, for there are universal values above all nations, including yours.