

Conference report/Documentation

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Western Values and european identity

Report on an International Conference on European Identity
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The European Union is facing the greatest challenge in its history. Above all, the deficit on acceptance among the population places the European project in question. Europe is no longer accepted by its citizens as a project of peace that merits approval solely because of its stabilizing effects. Growing Euro-skeptic sentiment, which found its expression in the referenda on the European constitutional treaty, as well as elsewhere, has intensified the discussion on the issue, what, at its innermost, holds the Union together. In this respect, strengthening the collective European identity is increasingly understood as one of the most important challenges for the EU.

The concept of European identity, however, is an open term. Are we speaking of a myth, a continent, a partnership with a special purpose, cultural similarities or a community of values? Which commonalities connect the Europeans? Is it the Christian-occidental culture, the common market, or the growing legal system? How the EU is perceived by the outside world is an especially important element for European self-conception. How will the EU and its policies be received in the regional and global context? Which role and meaning is the EU given in light of global challenges?

The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and the Fundación para el Análisis y los Estudios Sociales (FAES) have come together, devoting themselves to a year-long cooperative project on “European identity”. Its prelude was heralded with this international conference. With a mix of views on the EU both from within and without, the international conference on 12 December 2005 in Berlin identified the various ideas and approaches which form the framework of the identity debate. The conference did not have the pretence of defining European identity. Invited were international experts (politicians, academics, diplomats, journalists) from Europe, the USA, the Middle East and Asia.

In the following report, significant conference contributions have been highlighted in the form of a short summary on the conclusions reached on European identity.

1. Identities in the EU

The first panel, in which experts from a number of chosen Member States exchanged perspectives primarily on Europe's self-conception, made clear that there is a basic consensus on common values in the European Union. That being said though, different ideas and approaches prevail in addressing the identity debate. The main statements are listed below.

European Leading Culture (Leitidee)

If a Europe with a plurality of national identities is to be supported and preserved while developing a collective identity, a red thread, a political core idea is needed. Successful handling of practical, political problems cannot be achieved, if the context in which the solutions are to take hold is unclear. Moreover, Europe was never a purely geographical term, but rather always an idea about a form of cooperation. Fundamental for the European project was and is above all its common values, inasmuch as the European Union is also an expression of identity. European integration has become more difficult. Thus, it has become all the more necessary to create a European consciousness which looks not merely to the past, but rather also questions what Europe means today and will in the future.

Modernizing Europe

Europe must define the challenges before which it stands and, on the basis of its commonalities, develop approaches and solutions to respond to them. Preserving Europe's social dimension through renewal of the European social model is in this regard one of the most pressing tasks, as is the development of a democratic, transparent and functioning political system in the EU. Required, however, is also a clear definition of the goal of integration with regard to the size and depth of the community. As long as the European Union does not build an adequate structure which enables it to deal with the challenges of the modern world, Europe will not be able to rediscover its identity. The question of European identity must also be raised on the level of political operation.

Cultural identity as a prerequisite for the political project

Unity in Diversity – so goes the slogan, and it expresses well what Europe represents: respect for religions, cultural and political differences, and community without a uniform ideology. Thus, European unity also means recognition and respect for the freedom of the Member States to develop their own identities. The EU in its political form has never attempted to replace national identity with a European one. Alternatively, however, in none of the self-conceptions of European nation states is national identity without a European context and also presumably not maintained. The understanding of commonalities is the prerequisite for the enabling of differences.

Steering Enlargement

Membership in the European Union must not depend only on the fulfillment of formal accession criteria, but also must take into account Europe's ability to accept and fully integrate the applicant into the larger community. In this regard, the EU must function as a standard for its own values. European values find their expression in Christian concepts as well as in tolerance and pluralism.

Furthermore, the identity debate must be separated from the enlargement question; rather, it should be approached as a cross-sectional topic. Solely focusing on the enlargement aspect harbors the danger that the debate will be understood as an instrument of exclusion.

Functionalism and Pragmatism

The EU must concentrate on solving practical problems like economic reform. Europe is in the first place a political, institutional, pragmatic and non-ideological project. It is above all the practical benefits which bind the citizens to Europe.

The most important value of Europe lies not in a single vision, but rather in the pluralism of ideas, attitudes, traditions and religions. Their fundamentals are freedom and solidarity, and are expressed through common responsibility and aid within Europe and solidarity vis-à-vis poor regions outside of Europe. Not only the preservation of living standards must be a concern, but Europe also must face changes and become involved in shaping and finding solutions for them.

2. Perceptions and Images of the EU

How is the EU perceived in neighboring regions? This question was discussed in the second panel with assessments offered by experts from the Ukraine, Israel, Jordan and Turkey.

European and Universal Values

A fundamental question is whether, and if so how, European values differ from western, and accordingly, universal values. Indisputable is that universal values are based in many respects exclusively on European concepts: especially regarding human rights, democracy, and equality before the law. International law and the values debate is primarily determined by Europe. Under all circumstances, Europe must defend universal values.

Globalization and Values

With the development of globalization, values, principles and identities are changing. It is challenging the relationship between principles and interests, economic prosperity and self-confidence. Globalization is an example that not all social classes share the same values in such a changing world. The litmus test for European values is above all its handling of the increasing existence and visibility of immigrants in European societies. From the outside there is the fear that Europe could break with its own values of pluralism, tolerance and solidarity.

National vs. European foreign policy

There is a noticeable difference between the bilateral relations of European states and the foreign relations of the EU as an international actor. The political positions of Europeans differ often times accordingly in these two dimensions. The EU must represent a common position internationally. This will make the EU Member States and the EU as a whole more dependant and reliable as an international player. In its foreign relations, Europe must vehemently stand up for its own values, perceptions of

human rights and democracy. The argument that Europe does not want to impose its own principles on others negates the universal character of these values.

The Arab world mostly sees the EU in power political terms. The EU is perceived as a countervailing power to the USA. This is connected with the hope that the EU will vouch for those values which many in the Middle East believe the USA has already given up. The EU's dealings with Turkey will be decisive for the Arabic states' perspectives on Europe. Should Turkey be denied in its membership efforts, then it will serve as proof that the EU is a "Christian club", not accepting of different faiths.

3. The EU in its wider geographical context

In the global context, the impression prevails that the European Union is itself uncertain of its place in the world. In this regard, it has less to do with the foreign political meaning of the European Union and more with its self-defined understanding of identity. Questions were also raised as to the EU's inner condition and its ability to adapt to dynamic developments.

Integrative Identity

Transatlantic relations do not play an unimportant role in the identity debate in Europe. Despite common values, on both sides of the Atlantic, there is frequently wide disappointment, with one side measuring the other by its own conceptions and criteria. This discussion is taking place at a time when the rest of the world is interested in affirming western, and thus, universal values. At present, no *clash of civilizations* is taking place; rather, a clash between open and closed societies is occurring.

Europe is in danger of defining itself in opposition to others. This "negative definition" of European identity is directed, among others, against the USA. Traditionally, it was Asia who was "the great other" and against which Europe wanted to define itself. Turkey is an example of Europe's search for a geographical border. It has become a symbol of all the questions regarding Europe's relations to the eastern and southeastern parts of the world. A much more pressing challenge is the handling of the problems of immigration and integration. Only the creation of a national identity

with reference to all ethnicities and religions in a common democratic culture can be a basis for a European identity.

Renewal through change

The demographic change makes clear that a population which does not renew and reproduce itself is unsure of its values and principles. Should Europe lose its particular political role, it cannot defend itself against external forces which threaten its values. In light of strengthened economic power in Asia, the question emerges whether Europe is prepared to meet this challenge. New ideas and actions are required. Moreover, their origins must lie in a wide, popular movement, motivated by the European people, rather than following on ideas of elites. Communicating and spreading this mindset, however, is the greatest challenge.

4. Conclusions

Irrespective of the differences, among the national and international experts consensus was reached on the meaning of the identity debate. Agreement prevailed that each society, each community needs a minimum degree of shared convictions and outlooks, without which its laws and its legal framework could not function in the long-run.

From the inner European perspective it is undisputed that the EU can sustain its inner legitimacy only on the basis of commonly borne convictions. Differences manifested themselves in the question of practical, political handling of the identity question, in particular between the new and the old Member States. While representatives from the new EU states advocate more pragmatism and less emotionalizing, experts from the old EU Member States see an increased need for an offensive identity policy. Understanding, however, was had on the point that the European identity cannot be forced on its citizens. A future task is thus to make clear to every citizen the benefits of the EU.

The balance of outside views on the EU tipped slightly to the critical side: Europe is not yet in the position to face global challenges and to become involved in solving them. Which strategies is Europe pursuing with regard to globalization, demographic

change, regional instability, and security? A change in consciousness must be consummated so that global challenges can be addressed not only in a specific situation, but rather also with a strategic view forward, thereby allowing Europe to demonstrate its creative power both inwards and outwards.

Programme

Western Values and European Identity International Conference 12 December 2005

09.30 – 10.00h

Welcome Address

Dr. Norbert Lammert

President of the German Bundestag, Vice-Chairman of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation

Opening Remarks

Miguel Ángel Cortés

Member of Parliament, Vice-Chairman of the parliamentary group of Partido Popular, Spain

Elmar Brok

MEP, Chairman European Parliament Foreign Affairs Committee

10.00 – 12.00h

Panel I: Identities in the European Union

Peter Altmaier

Parliamentary State Secretary to the Federal Minister for the Interior

Miguel Ángel Cortés

Member of Parliament, Vice-Chairman of the parliamentary group of Partido Popular, Spain

Prof. Pawel Spiewak

Member of Parliament, Vice-Chairman of the Committee for Foreign Affairs, Poland

Dr. Nils Muiznieks

Former Minister for Social Integration, Latvia

Chair:

James Elles

MEP, Chairman of the European Ideas Network, GB

13.00 – 14.00h

Western Values and European Identity

Dr. Daniel Hamilton

Richard von Weizsäcker Professor and Director Center for Transatlantic Relations, Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), The Johns Hopkins University, USA

14.00 – 16.00h

Panel II: Perceptions and Images of the EU

Soli Özel

Bilgi University Istanbul, Turkey

Ambassador Dr. Waleed Sadi

Member of the Board of Trustees of the National Centre for Human Rights, Former Chairman of the UN Commission on Human Rights, Jordan

Ambassador Dr. Dore Gold

President of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, Israel

Taras Vozniak

Advisor to Governor of Lwiw, Ukraine

Chair:

Pierre Lequiller

Chairman of the Delegation of the National Assembly for the European Union, France

16.30 – 18.30h

Panel III: EU in its wider geographical context

Prof. Dr. Y.S. Rajan

Principle Advisor to the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII)

Waleri Nikolaewitsch Bogomolov

Member of the State Duma, First Deputy Administrator of the United Russia Party Group in the State Duma

Vince Haley

American Enterprise Institute, USA

Carlos Alberto Montaner

President of the Unión Liberal Cubana

Chair:

Prof. Michael Stürmer

Chief correspondent, *Die Welt, Welt am Sonntag*

18.30h

Closing remarks

Dr. Michael Borchard

Head of Department Political Consulting,
Konrad Adenauer Foundation