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OF LEVIATHANS AND OTHER ANIMALS: NOTES ON EUROPEAN IDENTITY

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On October 31st, 2006, a Google research for the words “European Identity” resulted in 35 millions of entries. This is evidence enough that the debate on European identity has left academia and is now part of a much wider public space. Probably, the defeat of last spring’s referenda has contributed to bring issues such as European identity and European legitimacy to the forefront of political debates, as the Union has been questioned in its very *raison d’être*, and it has been the object of many bitter comments for its failure to acquire a direct popular support. The debate about the possibility of developing an European identity, therefore, can no longer be considered of exclusively academic interest. The identity question is in fact closely connected to an issue, the legitimacy of a political construction as complex as the European Union, whose immediate political relevance is well beyond discussion.

This essay will move from a very brief reference to some philosophical reflections on identity that may be relevant for the main theme of European identity. It will then proceed to discuss some of the most important positions on European identity and it will link it up to the specific nature of the Union; more specifically, European identity will be examined in view of sovereignty and democratic legitimacy. It will close on a position of mild optimism, affirming that thinking about a political revamping of the Union is not wishful thinking – upon same conditions.

1. *Identity: sameness or selfhood*

The word identity comes from the Latin *idem*, which means “the same thing”. If one thinks about what “identity” signifies in its most

direct and immediate sense, evident in every aspect of personal life, the most natural association is with one's ability to recognize oneself as "the same person". At the root of the concept, one finds the idea of persistence and also of sameness, or, to be the same as before, to be identical. However, this explanation, albeit seemingly innocuous, has actually been hotly contested in the history of philosophy, especially when the attention moves from personal to collective identity: what follows is a very short reference to some of these debates, in the conviction that they may not be totally irrelevant for a reflection on European politics of identity.

Identity may be conceived in terms of selfhood or in terms of sameness; the differences are far from being immaterial. Basically, this essay moves from the idea that identity does not necessarily express a monolithic condition, impermeable to time and to the confrontation with alterity. On the contrary, it looks to the strong trend in Western philosophy which stresses the importance of the dialogic element of identity, for both personal and collective identity.

If meant as sameness, "being-the-same", identity embraces also an idea of persistence; in other words, affirming "identity" implies that it is possible to think that one person is identical, the same today as he/she were yesterday. David Hume is among the first and fiercest critics of this vision of identity, and somewhere along the same line we may find contemporary philosophers such as Parfit. In Hume's opinion, one cannot maintain that a person remains "the same" over time. Every individual is rendered himself through actual sensations and experiences that are continually changing and in progress. The awareness of being "the same person" is only held together exclusively by the *fil rouge* of memory. Indeed, it is only our capacity to remember that allows us to recognize ourselves, but above all to recognize our actions. In this sense, the theme of identity meets the plan of ethical reflection, because "memory", the possibility to recall the past, is the condition needed by the self to take up responsibility, meant as the ability to respond for actions performed in the past. From this perspective, that which matters isn't the certainty of being "the same person", but rather the capability to recognize one's own actions and choices, and to be accountable for them. Much later on than Hume, Paul Ricoeur articulated his philosophy of identity in terms of "narrative identity", opening up a perspective which has shown to be extremely relevant also from the point-of-view of the reflections on political identities. The category of narration has central importance in the thought of Ricoeur, who develops the theme already sketched by Hannah Arendt

of the difference between *bios* and *zoe*. *Zoe* is sheer survival, whilst *bios* is the narrated story of one's life, a "bio-graphy", that is a life that receives meaning from its having been made dialogically available to a listener (Kristeva 1999: 30-58). The act of narrating implies the need not only to recall our story through an exercise of memory, but also to make it understood by the interlocutor that stands in front of us. Furthermore, a narrative interpretation of identity inevitably leads to the taking on of responsibilities, or rather to the need of having "to account for" one's own actions. Shortly, this essay will at least sketch the reasons why memory, or, to be more precise, collectively shared memory, plays such a central role in setting up the frame of an European identity.

A dialogic dimension has therefore been recognized has a fundamental component in the long journey of identity in the history of western philosophy. In this sense a very important passage is represented by what has been defined as the "paradigm of recognition" as elaborated first by Hegel and later re-interpreted by many different angles of observation, and mostly by Axel Honneth. A serious discussion of Hegel's philosophy of identity would go well beyond the scope and the ambition of this simple essay. These pages will limit themselves to recall how, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, only a dialectic relationship – which is also a conflictual one – allows for a mutual recognition to take place between different subjectivities. Without an encounter with the other, no subject may acquire complete awareness of his own identity: this is a crucial legacy that Hegelian philosophy has left not only to the reflection on subjectivity, but also on the reflection on political identity. The Hegelian line plays a central role in a good part of the moral and political philosophy of the twentieth century, and especially in the latest development of critical theory. The reference is obviously to Honneth, who identifies in the dynamic of recognition a sort of "basic grammar" for all kinds of social and political relationship, and consequently also for the construction of both personal and political identity. In this sense, society and the public space in general become the theater where a "struggle for recognition" is taking place, a dialectic that, in the concrete experience of Western politics, has eventually evolved into a system of rights. The angle of observation of recognition, therefore, is an excellent vehicle to move from a reflection focusing on the individual and subjective dimension of identity to a reflection on collective identities and more specifically about political identity.

This essay moves from the assumption that political identity is one form of collective identity; it is important for our reflection to assume that the political dimension of identity may be conceptually separated from all other identity components such as language, ethnicity, religion or “culture”. More than anything else, it is important for a reflection on European politics to emphasize the voluntary, artificial character of a European political identity as opposed to other forms of collective identities. This artificial character makes it possible for a given kind of political identity to exist side by side with different cultural and ethnical determination of identities; of course, this cohabitation is by no means simple and easy to construct, and surely this essay does not move in the clear-cut space as defined by the most “classic” liberal discourse on political identity, such as one can find in John Rawls. Still, these pages are grounded in the conviction that a political identity can be creatively constructed, or, in other words, that political identity may be seen as a political project and does not necessarily have to depend entirely from so called “cultural” factors. Moreover, for any kind of polity that cares to define itself as democratic, it is important that its citizens may recognize themselves into some kind of identity profile, which is grounded in some shared principles. In this perspective, the question of political identity interacts with another essential dimension of politics, that of legitimacy. Once these general considerations have been made, the next step is to assess and understand what are the different elements that sustain the possibility for individuals and groups to “identify” themselves – thus conferring legitimacy – in such a special political body as the European Union.

In this time of second modernity, or, according to another vocabulary, in this post-modern time, the connection between identity and politics is gaining more and more momentum. As of late, it has become almost a commonplace to affirm that the prevalence of identity conflicts upon conflicts of interests is the characterizing pattern of the passage from modern to the post-modern politics. Even though things are far from being that simple, it is evident that the political arena is increasingly functioning as the space for the redistribution not solely of material goods, but more and more of symbolic resources, such as identity and recognition. Societies are increasingly diversified, and collective differences of all kinds are elbowing to be allowed space and light in the public space. However, those forms of identities that are voicing the strongest claims to recognition in the global public space seem to be pre-political or extra-political: religious, linguistic, and ethnic claims to identity are gaining more and more strength in public

discourse¹. Bertrand Badie has pointed to the rise of a *vague primordialiste* (Badie 1999). This revival of pre-political, “primordial” forms of identity is typical of the condition of second modernity, exactly because it is profoundly linked to the crisis of the modern model of national – territorial state. How important this aspect may be for our reflection on European identity is self-evident.

Modern Europe has made his own specific experience of the connection between political identity and legitimacy, which has centered upon the construction of the discourse of national identities. The “imagined community” embodied in the nation has been a most powerful instrument to strengthen the political legitimacy of modern territorial states. Modernity had been breaking all “natural” loyalties, through the symbolic – sometimes even actual – patricides performed by the great modern revolutions of the 17th and 18th century. The newborn category of popular sovereignty was faced with the challenge to define its body of reference in opposition to a potentially endless cosmopolitanism. In response, the idea of nation emerged and represented a way to root political legitimacy into a natural community of some sort, whose membership was firmly supported by equally “natural” criteria of exclusion. As Habermas points out, through the narrative of national identities strangers learned to be brothers and sisters; in this sense, the idea of nation represented the key foundational narrative for legitimacy of European modern states, creating a power ground for the emergence of what Habermas calls “civic solidarity”. Paradoxically, that same Europe that developed a concept of nationality so much dependent on pre- and a-political elements is now coming to terms with the need to live in the post-national constellation.

2. Which identity for Europe...

As much as it is difficult to talk or think of a European identity, it seems clear any that we focus on in considering even just the physical *morphé* of Europe: the fleeting character of this identity is clearly visible already in its physical shape. Europe seems to be allergic to the territorial dimension that is so dear to modernity; to begin with, the European continent of Europe is not identified by clearly-cut up geographical, natural boundaries. Its borders,

¹ Claims for collective rights based upon gender identity would deserve separate attention. The considerations that follow cannot be applied automatically to gender.

apart from those next to the sea, are mobile and “arguable” (Morin 1987; De Giovanni 2002; 19; Pagden 2002; 45; Brague 2001). And in fact these borders have been moved throughout history, towards the North and the West, relinquishing its Mediterranean origins and expanding as to embrace northern Europe (Pocock 2002: 60) As a consequence, Europe has developed its own self-perception and self-awareness always with regard to its problematic borders, and in particular with the own real altering borders represented by its eastern borders (Delanty 1995)

One can conclude that Europe’s *ubi consistam* is to be found more in a network of perceptions rather than in a reference to “nature” – so it has been obvious that European identity was to be looked for in the realm of culture; summarizing the debate to the point of laying it out flat, one can however outline a genealogical source that links Europe to modernity, and especially to some of its key values. As a paradigmatic example of this type of genealogy, one can quote Agnes Heller and her vision of Europe as a sort of synonym of modernity, or, in other words, her idea of Europe that has as a characteristic feature all those elements that contribute to creating the face of western modernity. In her writings, Heller refers to a noble tradition whose origins can be traced back in history as early as to Machiavelli and Montesquieu and the conflict between the characteristic “despotism” of the Asian continent and the “liberty”, which characterizes the style of European life. In this reconstruction, the European continent was therefore the land of civilization, a “republic of many states” as Voltaire said (quoted in Pagden 2002), the home of laws and constitutional regimes, opposed to the darkness of tyranny typical of the Asian continent. This same genealogy continues in the philosophical discourse of the twentieth century, with names such as Gadamer, Jaspers, and Husserl. This trend may be defined as “civilizational”, as it identifies the essence of European identity with the cultural patrimony related to values such as critical rationality, tolerance, humanism; more recently, also Todorov has made a list of typically European values, quoting among them rationality, justice and democracy (Todorov 2003). In this genealogy, Europe is identified with modernity and thus conceived as essentially reflexive. Modernity in fact – *reformata et semper reformata* – if it is true to its own spirit, can never cease to question and criticize itself; Europe/modernity, therefore, is necessarily “omnivorous”; or, at a more careful observation, it is especially devoted to self cannibalism, as its very nature consists in the endless work of critical thinking (Heller 1999).

This reconstruction is extremely fertile as a project for the future, as it suggests a Europe that is able to be as faithful to the ideas of critical spirit and of tolerance as to learn to respect even those who do not share these values, as in Derrida's view (Derrida 1991). Yet, it does not represent a genealogical account upon which a political identity of the European may rest, as it does not completely, or convincingly, answer the questions that inevitably arise about the dark sides of Europe. The monstrous brainchild of modernity, totalitarianism, is a specifically European phenomenon; therefore, any reflection about European identity must never sever the umbilical cord that since the early days of the Schumann Declaration has united the project of European integration to the memory of war and of the Holocaust.

Moreover, another unspoken presence prevents the reflection on European identity to abandon itself to this comforting genealogy; and this is the seldom theorized and generally removed memory of colonialism. Europe is reluctant to come to terms with its colonial past, or to theorize race or the so called "color line" as a relevant element of its own identity (Braidotti 2002). Yet, the perception of Europe in many areas of the so called third world still is profoundly influenced by the memory of European imperialist expansion, and after all, the practice of colonialism was just inches away in the past of some of the countries that most enthusiastically gave birth with the treaty of Rome to the process of European integration.

These considerations may be strong enough to demonstrate how it could be advisable to dismiss the strategy that links a political identity in the making for the new European polity and the glorious past of Enlightenment, critical thinking and practice of toleration. However, this does not necessarily imply that all the European experience must be liquated and quickly sacrificed to politically-correct sense of guilt. Rather, this heritage could be creatively reconsidered as suggested by Bauman: "Europe was the first to proclaim that "the world is made by culture" – but by the same token it was also the first to discover/decide that since culture is done by humans, doing culture is – may be, ought to be – a human *job/destiny/vocation/task*. It was in Europe that "humans first set themselves at a distance from their own mode of being-in-the-world and thereby gained autonomy from their own form of humanity" (Bauman 2004: 12). Europe's foundation, therefore, is better understood as a projection in the future than as a heritage from the past. This conception makes it all the more evident the specifically political (because project-oriented) nature of European identity.

3. *Which identity for which legitimacy*

The reflection on European identity is a reflection about a special brand of political identity therefore it has to be developed in conjunction with a wider reflection on “the nature of the beast”, that is, on the specific character of the EU as a political construction. The European Union has been given many different definitions, ranging from Zielenka’s grand “empire” to the more homely “condominio” as in Philip Schmitter. This essay follows the lead of all those who have defined Europe as a “polity *sui generis*”; with this expression are normally emphasized both the uniqueness and the political nature of the Union. Defining the Union as a polity aims to stress its political character; at the same time, it helps to avoid defining it as a “state”, “federation” or even “confederation”. The language, vocabulary and grammar of the typical model of modern territorial states, seem to be increasingly inadequate to express the real political life of the Union, even when such references are elaborated so elegantly as in Vivien Schmidt, who describes the EU in terms of a “regional state” (Schmidt 2006). The EU is so distant from the classic script of western political modernity as far as sovereignty, legitimacy and identity are concerned, therefore it cannot have, nor expect to create, mere replicas on a wider scale of the models of legitimacy and understandings of identity that have proved to function in the modern national territorial states. The question of sovereignty in the EU would call for special attention, as in fact there are reasons to observe that a sovereignty that is “shared”; “pooled”; “fractioned” is so different from its original pattern as to be almost unrecognisable; in this sense, the specific character of the EU seems to be better captured if described through the model of multi-tiered governance (Marks & Hooge 2001). But whatever the destiny of sovereignty in the EU may be, the affirmation that the EU has a different pattern for legitimacy and a different relationship with the notion of territorial sovereignty does not amount to say that the Union is merely a business committee. On the contrary, the Union is definitely a political animal – simply, it does not belong to the same species as modern territorial Leviathans.

In general it is evident that most of the literature assumes that the mechanism of identity-making that has enabled the great European nation states to construct that “solidarity among strangers” so important for the consolidation of legitimacy cannot simply be repeated on a larger scale. This statement marks both the beginning and the end of consensus, as both the academic-scholarly and political debates present many different views about European legitimacy and, consequently, also about European identity.

First of all, a particularly radical position holds that, as the EU cannot count on the same type of collective identity as nations which united culture and politics, it cannot have any identity at all; this is equivalent to a negative forecast on the possibility to realise a viable European polity. Some interpreters have the same point of departure and yet they reach a different conclusion, taking up a civilisational approach (very much in the wake of the noble genealogy of Gadamer and Jaspers). Still upholding the importance of a shared common cultural background for the construction of political legitimacy, they suggest that Europe can actually count on some kind of common shared ground. In general, one can conclude that those belonging to this school of thought still see cultural and political identity connected, and identify a common cultural ground for Europe.

On the other hand, it is important to recall that there is a consistent, and authoritative, trend in European Union scholarship that is not too concerned about the lack of a European identity. More specifically, this trend suggests that, after all, a shared, value-based political identity is not crucial for the functioning of the European Union, because of its specific nature and the unique quality of legitimacy it enjoys. For the most radical interpreters of this view, such as for example Andrew Moravcsik, the EU rests on performance-based legitimacy, or, in other words, the EU is legitimate as long as it fulfils its purpose – to bring peace and prosperity, or, as many have observed, peace through prosperity. Therefore, it has no call to develop a political identity, or at least an extremely “thin” one. It must also be noted that at least Moravcsik seems to adopt a notion of political identity still largely dependent from cultural identity. With different arguments, Zielonka has also separated identity and legitimacy. His reflection on identity for his vision of a neo-medieval, imperial Europe is satisfied with the slogan “identity in diversity”, as his main agenda is to emphasize that the EU reality cannot be understood through the categories that were typical of modernity. A westphalian, “Leviathanic” state needs a strong collective identity, whilst a “neo-medieval empire” does not. Therefore, Zielonka does not see in the “widening” derived from the enlargement of EU membership to new states any risk for the “deepening” of the political functioning of the Union. On the contrary, the more the EU will enlarge, the more it will be faithful to its imperial character and therefore the more it will be able to realise its most profound vocation (Zielonka 2004).

Other interpreters move from a different point of view, which may be described as constructivist – actually, this paper can be considered as inspired by this position. A constructivist approach evidently needs

a conception of political identity as autonomous – at least to a tangible effect – from cultural identity. It emphasizes the specificity of EU identity and at the same time it reaffirms that it is possible for EU legitimacy to rest on something more than the capacity to maintain the promise of prosperity and to satisfy economic interest. Those who claim the need to construct an European identity – as different it may be from the national model – are also interested in increasing the “democratic temperature” of European political life, and are also convinced– although in very different degrees – that the Union needs to be rooted a model of legitimacy not solely grounded on its performance and ability to ensure prosperity. The challenge facing Europe consists in the possibility to construct an exquisitely political identity, separated from the cultural and “civilisational” determinations of identity (Habermas 2001, Cerutti 2003). Habermas has oftentimes criticised all essentialist notions of Europe; on the contrary, he has pointed to the ever more urgent need to construct networks of solidarity in the midst of societies that are increasingly dis-homogeneous, taking seriously the perspective of a post national constellation. Before the defeat of the referenda in the spring of 2005, Habermas had linked this specifically political identity to the notion of *Verfassungspatriotismus*, which should have constituted a *demos* without nostalgia for any form of *ethnos*. In this perspective, the constitutional process played a primary role in constructing an European identity that was not to rest on any cultural proximity, but on a shared political project as embodied by the constitutional treaty.

Habermas’ position of course has now to take up the burden of proof; still the referenda’s defeat does not undermine the validity of the constructivist approach. European political life has not been extinguished by the referenda – the challenge is therefore to politicise the Union, even in the absence of that kind of constitutional framework as provided by the treaty. As in Cerutti’s word “the European peoples should be given time, but also more concrete ways to *make experience* of the Union” (Cerutti 2005). This is a political project that goes way beyond well-wishing, on the contrary, which is feasible and realistic – and depends to a great extent not only from Brussels bureaucracy but from a different set of actors.

4. *A possible identity*

A philosophical reflection on European identity would not be complete without at least a glance to the work of other disciplines –

rather, it would run the risk of self entrenchment in a ghetto of wishful thinking, where it would be left to produce solutions doomed never to find any political shelter. As shown by the Google count quoted at the beginning of this essay, the discussion on European identity is now becoming a priority interest in the field of EU scholarship. This essay does not have the ambition of mastering it all, but nonetheless there are some elements unearthed by sociological quantitative and qualitative researches on European identity that seem to confirm the theoretical reflections discussed above. First of all, it is interesting to remark that in spite of the often quoted 1999 Eurobarometer, which registered the disaffection and distance between the Union and its denizens, a perception of European identity is in fact beginning to spread among the citizens of the Union. It is a perception of a special kind, which could be defined a “hyphenated identity”, to quote Michael Walzer’s words out of contexts.

Empirical research shows that the perception of an European identity does not replace national identities. Rather, it coexists with different determinations of collective identity, from the national to the regional and local level, in other words people identify themselves as being Germans *and* Europeans, or Bavarian *and* Europeans, without being forced to choose between their national identity or the European one (Eurobarometer 63; Fuchs & Schlenker 2006). This empirical research gives a very solid ground to a constructivist perspective, as it seems to demonstrate that it is possible to pair an European identity with other sources of identities, and that European identity may be at least to a great extend separated from a shared culture. Moreover, a multi-tiered, composite identity seems to make sense for a polity that is essentially an example of a multi-tiered governance – where multi-tiered not necessarily means immaterial. The concept of *la nation* such as it has emerged from the history of political modernity is not the only possible way to think of a *demos*, and therefore an European identity may in fact emerge even though it does not follow the same pattern that was typical of national identity. A *moi commun* may exist, even though obviously it will not be conceptualised in the same anthropomorphic terms that have given expression to the classic version of democratic legitimacy. On the contrary, the European experience may help us to think in terms of a *moi commun* to be continuously re-negotiated, re-discussed and re-defined (Balibar 2001). And in fact, although reflexive, “artificial” and mediated, European identity can however count on some distinctive and marking features.

Europe is a special kind of political animal, yet it is a full international actor: many interpreters agree on that from a spectrum of widely differing perspectives (Lucarelli & Manners 2006; Zielonka 2004). Foreign policy seems to be one ground where a European identity is becoming more visible. Habermas is probably the most radical on this point: in his *Gespaltene West* Habermas presents a profile of European identity that could be summarized in the formula “social model plus refusal of war”. And in fact, the reluctance to consider war among the possible tools and means available to politics seems to be one of the traits of European identity that has been recognized by most authors, to begin with the classic definition of “gentle power” created by Duchesne, to the idea of Europe as a civilian power, represented by the image of a “prince without the sword” as recently articulated by Mario Telò (Telò 2004).

Even without going as far as Habermas, one can reasonably affirm that many interpreters point to a sort of “European spirit”, rather, a European style in foreign policy. Of course it functions according to a very different pattern from what used to be typical of modern territorial states: governance rather than direct domination. Zielonka has chosen to read the EU in the terms of a neo-medieval empire, and through this lens also its role as international actor is assessed. The imperial character is evident in the fact that the EU has soft and fluctuating borders, instead of the clear-cut frontiers of westphalian states. Moreover, Zielonka observes as the distinction between members and non members is being increasingly blurred, and has been replaced by the cleavage between centre and periphery. But the feature of the Union that more than anything else justifies the definition of “imperial” and “neo-medieval” is its model of governance, where a multiplicity of various military and police institutions may interact even though they do not respond to a single centre of power. From a completely different point of view, Zielonka joins Habermas in identifying as one of the marking features of European identity its refusal to consider war as a possible mean for the solution of international conflicts, a view not altogether denied by the breaking up of the European front at the time of the second Gulf war, as such a refusal remains a constant feature of European foreign policy.

Last but not least, it must not be forgotten that the very source of the European integration process since its earliest inception has been the firm intention to prevent at least western European countries to ever go to war against each other. The short and simple words “never again” were present with great urgency to the founders of the European

Community. This moral imperative to refuse war is not made weaker by its having been realised by a very pragmatic effort of promoting prosperity. However, some basic features of Europe as a foreign policy actor – be it imperial or not – may be reaffirmed beyond reasonable doubt: EU does not consider “punishment” or “pre-emptive attack” and is overall based more on persuasion through conditionality than imposition through the threat of sanctions (Cerutti 2001; Lucarelli & Menotti 2006; Balfour 2006).

Another possible line of development for European identity could be seen in the normative character of Europe. Again Habermas comes to mind, with his claim that Europe is now replacing the US as a normative power – idea that empirical research seems to disprove. On the other hand, it is clear that for the EU it is important to “act normatively”, or, as Ian Manners has stated, it is predisposed to act normatively (Manners 2006). The EU makes extensive use of values, principles and visions of the world. This experience cannot be liquidated all of that as “ideology” or a way to sweeten material interest. One good reason for refraining to do so is that the English School has well demonstrated that expectations play an important role in the behaviour of international actors. Rhetorical discourses shape expectations and therefore shape behaviours; as they not only represent a “trap” that limits the freedom of manoeuvring of the actor, but may come to actively shape self-understanding and self-perception (Clark 2006; Lucarelli 2006).

The other face of the identity profile and of the self-perception of Europe expressed by foreign policy is the perception of Europe from the outside – and on this point, empirical researches do not give a particularly positive feedback. To this point should be given special attention, in remembrance of the philosophical framework mentioned in the first paragraph, where identity was always linked to dynamics of recognition and to the encounter with alterity. The image of Europe reflected in the eyes of the other has the power to question profoundly our own self perception as citizens of this new polity. Perceptions of the EU in the eyes of the external observer seem to stretch to the extremes: a peaceful, post-modern, solidarity-oriented Europe faces a selfish economic superpower that has no scruples in barring the way to poorer countries. American liberal intellectuals are a very good example of the first vision, when they see in the European Union the ideal-typical alter ego of Bush’s America – of this trend, Jeremy Rifkin is a most paradigmatic, and best selling, example (Rifkin 2004). On the other hand, the perception of EU in the so-called Third World

has not yet been assessed by many empirical researches. Inquiries conducted so far show that Europe is still perceived in many countries (India and South Africa as primary examples) as an economic fortress. Whilst political *élites* may somehow admire the EU as a political actor, civil society actors point out that European integration is conducted in vast measure at the expense of the South of this planet, because of the double standard (liberal at home, protectionist abroad) applied by the Union. The EU therefore is seen as a potential adversary, rather than a supportive interlocutor (Fioramonti 2006).

The Habermasian formula for European identity joined inclinations to soft power and traditions of civic solidarity; this second component has not yet been taken enough into consideration. The aspect of European identity linked to the so called “European social model”, however, seems to present more dark than bright sides. First of all, it looks as though social solidarity is a patrimony of the European member states – although in various degree – but surely not of the Union as a whole, as member states are extremely reluctant to give up this particular policy field. But surely this is not the end of the story. The “social model” that many interpreters indicate as an essential component of European identity is becoming all the more fragile, in the twilight of that “solid” modernity which represented its breeding ground. The world of flexibility and the society of information are posing many new challenges to the social contract traditionally embodied in the welfare state, and these transformations are a serious challenge to the traditional European left. Even Jacques Delors, rightfully considered a supporter of “social Europe” has recently advocated a drastic change, that should see “civil society” taking better care of itself, and claiming a growing part of the tasks so far performed by the welfare state (Delors 1999).

Last but not least, Europe, according to the glorious genealogy mentioned in the first paragraph and to the list of values elaborated by Todorov, should also mean democracy. And this is another good reason to consider, without illusions but also without resorting to the easy way out of cheap pessimism, the possibility of constructing, without illusions but also without resorting to the easy way out of cheap pessimism, possibility of constructing a political identity for the Europeans. It has already been mentioned how the shared perception of an European identity may be essential to raise the political temperature of the Union – this means upholding a vision of Europe that should be something else and something more than a *Technocratie ouverte*, as in the brilliant definition by Paul Magnette (Magnette 2003). On this point, it may prove helpful to drastically revert the angle of observation, and looking at the ques-

tion in a perspective, so to say, “bottom up”. In other words, behaving as Europeans cannot be the result solely of scholarly projects and networks, funded by Brussels and manned by the happy few among cosmopolitans NGO professionals. A key role may be played here by national public spheres and also by national political *élites*. A well known set of special constraints shape political action in the EU, with a major impact also on the chances to develop a real sense of political identity among its citizens. To mention but the most famous among them, the lack of clearly identifiable culprits that may function as target for political mobilization makes all the more difficult the emergence of contentious politics (Imig & Tarrow 2001). In general, it is evident that the very structure of the EU, with its multi-tiered, complex and somehow fluid system of governance does not facilitate the creation of actors with a specifically political agenda, but that on the contrary seems to favor corporatism and the lobbying for specialised interests. All this is certainly true; however it must not overshadow the role played by political *élites* on the members-states level, and how they are used to skillfully operate the mechanism of “blame shift”. Member-state public spheres, and *élites* in the individual member-states have an important role to play in the construction of an European identity, as they have the opportunity, and therefore the responsibility, of “europeanising” the public space in each specific state, thus helping citizens to develop that kind of “and-and” identity that is, to a certain extent, already present. The language of the democratic deficit, therefore, does not completely exhaust every aspect of the question of democratic deficit in the EU. Joseph Weiler has suggested an alternative language, that of the political deficit of the Union (Weiler 1999). Time has confirmed, rather than undermine, Weiler’s intuition. The problem of the future of the Union as a political actor, as suggested by Magette, is to be seen in a wider context, that of the generalised crisis of parliamentarism; a major field of research opens up thus, that is not for this essay to pursue here and now, but that certainly must be kept as a general background.

5. *Concluding remarks*

This short journey towards the possible interpretations and visions about European identity seem to converge in pointing to Europe’s responsibility as an actor on the scenario of global politics.

Going back to the lines traced in the first paragraph, Ricoeur’s lesson must be especially recalled. There is no genuine construction of identity which does not come to terms with memory; but construct-

ing a memory-based narrative necessarily implies taking up responsibilities, and accountability for past actions and choices. Even in light of such a skeletal mention as this, the possible role of a shared historical memory in the construction of European identity becomes more and more evident. The narrative of the noble genealogies that associate Europe to Enlightenment and to critical spirit is not an option, just as well as its twin and enemy genealogy, that of the Christian roots of Europe. The memory that keeps Europe together is not glorious and reassuring, on the contrary, it is a memory of divisions and bitter conflicts. As Habermas points out, Europe had to learn at a very high cost how to settle differences, institutionalise conflicts and stabilise tensions. Rather, European history may show that is at the same time possible and necessary to construct a common identity through a dialectic of recognition (Habermas 2005: 25).

European identity is not rooted in any pre-existing shared cultural heritage: it is artificial in the good sense of the word, whereas artificial recalls that specific quality of political action captured by Hobbes in his *Leviathan*. Nonetheless, artificial does not mean fake. Fake narratives construct aggressive myths, whilst narrative that make memory available to the other, in a spirit of accountability and responsibility, enhance dialogue and may generate new public spaces. Therefore, if Europe is to be true to itself, it needs to confront its history, in all its complexity, and most specifically it has to glance at the total evil represented by the experiences of totalitarianism, and by the remembrance of the War and of the Shoa. Its political identity, therefore, has to be conceived as artificial – in the sense of being the result of a project. Being artificial does not necessarily mean that a reflection on European identity is bound to be superfluous, or “fake”. Such a reflection can only be rooted in a reflexive – therefore non-manipulatory – use of memory and also in an assumption of responsibility. Europe cannot escape the need to reflect about its past: its role as a political actor is determined by this memory, and the very existence of European Union is a clear sign that Europe is trying to learn the hard lessons of so much bloodshed in its past. Europe does not have a vocation as a global actor because of a glorious history: rather, it has a call to become an actor on the world scenario because it came to the point of contemplating total evil. Exactly because it has experienced the crisis of Enlightenment, Europe may reasonably be thought to have developed the necessary antibodies to take up responsibility for the unfolding global risks (Cerutti 2002). Europe, Bauman warns us, as always been ahead of itself: its vocation therefore is not in re-entrenchment but in its capacity to become a real global actor.

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