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## **New Europe, Identity and Frontiers As One Question**

Putting together and considering as a whole the concepts of Europe, identity and frontier (border, borderline, limit etc.) is certainly not new by itself. It is impossible to talk about Europe without tending to define its identity and determine its borders. There have been, therefore, many various propositions, from most abstract and philosophical to the most pragmatic ones, aiming to outline Europe's borders and set its identity. The question of identity and borders is of particular importance for those who are looking for the "essence" of European being, who assume that, without such essence, Europe could be neither thought nor made as a viable entity. Still, all attempts of defining the European "essence" are risky and deceiving, because inevitably pushing out of the "essential" Europe a part of European tradition or potentialities. This is why we can also hear that Europe as such has no definite identity and, therefore, no fix borders. Surely enough, we are forced to admit, at the basic level, that there are no natural or physical frontiers or limits of Europe, since it is merely a sub-continent within the large Euro-Asian continent. What is more, we seem bound to admit that it has no clear historical and cultural frontiers either. The only frontiers we can possibly mark for Europe (though, still there, with rather arbitrary decisions) are political and economic ones, which delimit Europe as a space of common law, common policy and common market. That is why it seems that the best way of defining Europe is to say that Europe proper consists in having nothing proper, or that its

essence is nourishing itself with the other (other cultures, different possibilities).

The problem of Europe's frontiers and European identity has been evidently exacerbated by the collapse of communism and, further, the process of EU enlargement. It has become impossible to define Europe in opposition to the communist and "totalitarian" world. On the contrary, it has become clear that also West-European "identity" – in a certain contrast to American one – has been for a long time co-determined by communism, not only in a negative, but also in a positive way. Nevertheless, the frontier between Western and Eastern European countries, even when officially removed, has appeared, in many respects, real: not only because of an economic under-development of the East, not only because of the lack of its democratic experience, but also – paradoxically enough – because many of ex-communist countries have become, while hurriedly overcoming the communist heritage and "making up for lost time", more anti-communist, more pro-capitalist and pro-American than the "old core" of Europe (I mean of course the policy, not social mass mentality). That was the reason why some politicians (American, but also European) could oppose "New Europe" – limited to the countries newly integrated into the EU or aspiring to join it – to the "old" one. In that context, the concept of "New Europe" has got a narrow, polemical and, all in all, pejorative meaning (except for Donald Rumsfeld). It means indeed to divide Europe, to split it into two parts.

However, in a more general and more interesting sense, it is the whole enlarged EU and the whole Europe "from the Atlantic to the Urals" that, after the collapse of communism and removing the frontiers between the West and East, has become "New Europe". In fact, the fall of Berlin wall and enlargement of the EU towards East does not mean a "return home" of a lost part of Europe, as if "home Europe" could be assimilated to its occidental part, but, rather, a deep refurbishment of such a home, a re-questioning of the European "idea" and "identity". New Europe in a broad sense is, therefore, Europe put into question, uncertain and looking for itself.

First of all, New Europe appears as a space of moving, changing and more and more complex frontiers. The frontiers between nation-states are losing their importance in favour of supra- and sub-national (ethnic, religious, social) borderlines. The "official" (political, administrative) frontiers cross and, often, are undermined by the "unofficial" ones. Some frontiers seem rigid and impervious, others flexible and

permeable. There are many sorts of frontiers or borders indeed. But it seems true – for New Europe in the broadest sense – that we live more and more often not between borders, on a safe territory well delimited, but on a frontier or, rather, on many different frontiers at the same time.

The above remarks throw new light upon the idea of “European identity” that is not, and can not be more than a “frontier identity”. Maybe even, it should not be more than that? Still, the concept of “frontier identity” is far from being clear. It is worth developing and clarifying. By the way of a quite preliminary explanation let us say the following.

In a sense, every identity could be qualified as frontier related, since the two concepts are closely co-related: there is no identity without frontiers which determine it and every frontier implies at least two identities between which it lies. However, this very abstract perspective does not seem to be useful to indicate a real problem.

In a more concrete sense, what we can call a frontier identity is an identity shaped through the relation to a frontier given *before* and *beyond* subjectivity, or perceived as an “objective” one by many subjects. In other words, it is an identity facing and “working” within political, social, ethnical, cultural frontiers.

It is obvious that that there is no “frontier identity as such”, but there are as many sorts of identity as of frontiers. Nonetheless, it seems legitimate and possible to abstract and generalise on some features of different identities shaped in relation to an “objective” frontier in order to construct heuristic models, or their “ideal types”.

There is a fundamental difference, of course, between a model that should serve a description of facts and a model that would indicate a norm to be realised, an ideal.

The most general sense of the concept “frontier identity” depends on the way we define “frontier”: as a limit and barrier, or as a contact, meeting and passageway, as a distinction and separation, or as a junction and communication. Let us make do, at the moment, with an assertion that the status of frontier is double: on the one hand, it separates, on the other hand – makes link, connects. Consequently, a frontier identity would have at least two general (abstract) forms:

- would be a “feeble” and “plural” identity, a hybrid, mixed, if not “synthetic” one, which emerges by transcending and overcoming given distinctions and oppositions between “the same” and “the other” or “the self” and “the other”;

- would be a “strong” identity, building and affirming itself in opposition to the “other”, rejecting what is beyond a frontier.

An important question is to know which of those two kinds, or aspects, of “frontier identity” is and will be dominating within New Europe. And which of them, if any, is more desirable.

So, in order to develop the concept of frontier identity, it seems extremely useful to examine this kind, or these kinds, of identity which appear in the area of cultural and political borderland between the West and the East, between the “advanced” Europe and the “post-communist” one. We can hazard an assumption that it is the whole New Europe in the broadest sense that, in a way, constitutes such a borderland. But, in a narrower, and more precise sense, such a borderland is constituted by the Central-Eastern and Southern-Eastern Europe, i.e. by the “post-communist” countries. In a still narrower, and the most precise sense, it covers only these regions which are closely adjoining the present border of the EU, on both sides of this border – such as Polish-Belarusian frontier zone. It seems indeed that, in the most literal borderland area, we have to do with particularly expressive forms of “frontier identity”, torn between the “West” and the “East”, between “liberal democracy and capitalism”, and some nostalgia for communism, between modernity and pre-modern (pre-communist as well as pre-liberal) traditions. Still, if we assume that the identity of the whole New Europe in a broad sense has gained or is gaining a “frontier” character, then we can assume that the Western-Eastern borderland in a narrow sense is like a lens or prism in which some important features of the European identity “as such” are focusing, concentrating and revealing themselves.

Therefore, the originality of the idea lying at the sources of this conference consists in the proposition of re-considering Europe by referring not to what, within Europe, is supposed to be central, but to its frontiers and borderlands. That is, one can say, the proposition of “deconstructing” a certain idea of Europe, according to which Europe has or ought to have a distinct centre, in space as well as in concept. What if there is no centre, if there are only different borderlands with moving frontiers?