

4th RICHIE conference:
“National cultures and European common identity: A challenge for the European union”
(11-13 December 2008)

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In the middle of December, the European identity was focus of discussion during the 4th international RICHIE conference in the Paris region. The event was organised by the international research network of young historians of European integration (RICHIE) in cooperation with the research centres CICC (Université de Cergy-Pontoise) and UMR IRICE (Paris I - Paris IV), and the German historical institute in Paris. The papers had been studied and selected by a scientific committee including well established professors of different European universities. Young researchers, members of the scientific committee and other interested scholars came together during three days to tackle questions on the European identity, especially the relation of a European public space to a greater sense of common identity.

The topic of identity and European conscience has often been approached by historians from the angle of civilisation, historical heritage and shared culture. Since 1993 the Pierre Renouvin institute (University Paris 1), the network of European historians «Les chemins et les temps de l’Europe» and the Europe liaison committee of historians have developed several research tracks (with conferences organised in Salamanca, 1997 and Paris, 1999). The RICHIE conference followed in the footsteps in this line of research while focusing on the theme of the European public space.

In the morning of 11 December, the participants gathered at the German historical institute Paris where a key-note speech was delivered by Krysztof Pomian, scientific director of the Museum of Europe in Brussels. Beginning in ancient Greece he gave a historical perspective on the European identity and thereby breached on different themes in the field of European identity while giving a historical perspective on the European identity, beginning in ancient Greece. In the afternoon, the first session took place at the University of Cergy-Pontoise, after the opening address of professor Gérard Bossuat. The European identity, he said, is difficult to define. Only few are capable of translating into words the meaning of being European. Since 1950 a “new” common identity is continuously in formation. It requires a redefinition of our relations with cultural values which however are often dominantly national. Bossuat distinguished fundamental aspects of this identity and several of its current representations, stimulating debates throughout the conference.

During the first session six papers focused on the nature of the common identity. Iris Glockner approached the subject through an analysis of the fault-line

of exclusive versus compatible identities by using cultural and political identity approaches. Krzysztof Iszkowski elaborated on the cultural and political sides of the development of a European identity. Political integration would have more impact on the emergence of this identity than the creation of symbols. Political aspects were also discussed by Sara Lamberti who has undertaken research on the common European position at the CSCE conference. This coordinated European position possibly served as advantageous means to West-German foreign policy. In his paper on the development of European monetary politics, Frédéric Clavert concluded that the emphasis on identity aspects have been abandoned to the benefit of a more technical bankers' vision. The European identity in foreign policy towards the Maghreb region was the subject of the paper of Houda Ben Hamouda. She investigated the role of the European identity in these politics and if this identity was a pragmatic, artificial construction or if it had a more ideological basis. The last paper focused on the Baltic states. Philippe Perchoc analysed the development of a European common identity in these states whose history "has always been a history of frontiers".

In the morning of 12 December, the participants discussed the role of the European institutions in the formation of a common identity. David Trefas opened the session with an analysis in six European media arenas focussing on national newspapers. Trefas findings suggested that European identity references replace those to the Cold War bloc formation. National references however still dominate the European media. Oriane Calligaro investigated the EU actions in the field of heritage. She argued that the European Parliament played a leading role. The EU action in the realm of 'identity politics' are of incremental rather than intentional dimension. Moreover, Calligaro found that within the EU institutions the concept of European heritage is neither centralised nor monolithic and possibly even contradictory. Valentina Vardabasso's paper dealt with the first European Conference of Culture in Lausanne, December 1949. She asserted that the originality of the conference lay in its capacity to bring together intellectuals. The conference highlighted the intellectuals' responsibility to promote the cultural dimension in the construction of Europe. Julien Gueslin concentrated on the common information politics in the 1960s. In France, these politics would have been less effective than in Germany and Italy because of a lack of cooperation of the French administration. Muriel Bourdon analysed the efforts of the Commission to promote the formation of a European identity at the universities from the 1960s onwards. Her research focused on the developments at the Grenoble University of social sciences (renamed in 1991 as the University Pierre Mendès France). The session concluded with Emma de Angelis' analysis of the emergence of a coherent historical narrative of Europe within the European Parliament aimed at the construction of a collective European identity.

The third session focussed on the symbols of the common identity. Daniel Habit selected the three examples of Patras, Sibiu and Luxemburg in 2006/7 to examine the implementation of the EU concept of 'European Capital of Culture' within the urban local context. According to Habit the vague guidelines issued by

the Commission gave much room to individual interpretation of the cities. How schoolbooks of secondary teaching in Spain, France, England, Italy and Portugal treat the cultural and historical construction of Europe was Clara Serrano's focus. Apart from the diversity in European history presentations, she found a recurrent stress on the national dimension, which in her opinion reinforces national rather than a common European identity. Laurence Saint-Gilles's topic was the role of the French language and a European cultural identity between 1958 and 1974. She found that Georges Pompidou launched an offensive to maintain French as working language in the Community institutions at the time of the first enlargement. The French strategy was to show the importance for Europe as a whole to affirm its identity on the international scene in distinction to the United States. The role of those responsible for the history syllabus in France in the formation of a European identity was Patricia Legris' subject. She adopted a methodology linked to historical sociology of public school politics. Essential in relation to the theme of the conference, she found that the European identity is depicted as one in continuation of the suggested French identity, instead of being in opposition to it.

The final session took place at the University Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne. It focussed on the role of other actors in the formation of a European identity. Eight participants presented research on national cases in the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Serbia, Greece and Italy. Robin de Bruin examined the images of a future federal Europe and the effects of these on a transformation of Dutch politics in the years from 1948 to 1958. He analysed the debate of European integration within the ARP and the Dutch Labour Party. Lise Rye and Kristian Steinnes identified how ideas of national culture and Europe played out in the campaign leading up to Norway's 1994 quest for EU membership. They found that the cultural arguments are much more important than the economic ones to explain the rejection of EU membership. Fabio Calugi examined in his paper the distrust and opposition of the Communist movement to the first steps of the new Europeanist project. He highlighted the outstanding communication strategy and the capacity of the Communist movement to turn anti-European rhetoric into practice. The ambassador Calvet Magalhães's contribution to the building process of a European identity in Portugal was Isabel Valente's subject. His efforts put him at odds with supporters of Portugal's imperial role. Claske Vos discussed in her paper the main rhetoric used with regard to a cultural heritage programme carried out in Serbia by the EU and the Council of Europe. She suggested that the success of the programme was primarily related to the preservation of 'sites' and 'practices' whose identification has been left to the individual member states and their specific national concerns. Heritage is still seen as primarily a technical matter. Eirini Karamouzi focused on the political discourse within the EC institutions from June 1975 when Greece lodged its application up to February 1976. She argued that in the course of discussing Greece's application for membership, the norms of liberal democracy became central aspects of the European identity. Dag Axel Kistoffersen's paper discussed how the Norwegian Labour Party changed its

European policy in the late 1960s. This party perceived the EC more and more as an important instrument in international politics to help overcoming the North-South and East-West divide. In domestic politics the EC became a useful tool to enhance social equality.

In his concluding remarks, professor Robert Frank reflected on three major aspects of the European identity. First, while focussing on the state of the European identity, he noted that although Europe has not entered in a post-*national* era, it has entered in a post-*nationalist* era. The distinction between patriotism, implying self-love, and nationalism, implying hate of the other, is imperative to be distinguished. Frank considered the common identity as a construction which needs active building. Therefore the role of the historian is to study the subject of European identity in its chronological evolution. Second, Frank considered the dynamics of European integration questioning the idea of “spill-over”. The question was for Frank, whether the economy is the way to construct such a European identity as Monnet suggested. In 1950 a federation was expected as a result of economic integration and the spill-over effect. But in 2008 a federation still does not exist. Frank also wondered whether a cultural Europe produces automatically a political Europe. The Council of Europe has started constructing a cultural European identity. However it is not because one feels more European that consequently one wants a Europe which is politically more integrated. Third, while focusing on political aspects of the process of European integration, Frank noted the fundamental contradiction between the demand for more democracy at the same time as the refusal to relinquish parts of national sovereignty. He also noted the influence of democracy and social identity. Since the beginning of the 1970s, economic and financial crises have destabilised the social basis of European societies which produced on their turn identity crises and provoked a fear of Europe. Interestingly, as some papers showed, enthusiasm for Europe has always showed when states emerged from a dark period in history such as the Second World War. According to Frank another important subject discussed was migration because identity rests upon a *political* choice of heritage, which by definition are often contradictory. A further aspect of democracy in respect to Europe is the creation of a public sphere, which can come about either through a bottom-up or top-down approach to political decision-making. Unfortunately to date the decision-making realm in Europe remains on national level. Frank concluded that Europeanisation is a difficult process, and requires enthusiasm. For him this is why RICHIE is important.

In future research professor Bossuat wished to see an examination of concepts not just of sovereignty but of sharing sovereignty, for example a study of the Socialist internationalist movement. What was supposed to stay, what was supposed to be shared in political decision-making are central questions. He also stressed the significant role that the older generation of historians and researchers have in transmitting knowledge to the younger generation. He then emphasised the relevance of the younger generation to take into account the findings and discussions which have been going on prior to their research. Young researchers

need to build upon those and engage with these findings. Finally, Bossuat remembered Monnet's words that 'Europe will form through institutions'. Indeed, the conference has shown again that the diversity itself is not sufficient to create a European identity. Institutions are necessary to bring about and foster such identity.

The proceedings from the conference will be edited by Jenny Raflik and Marloes Beers to be published by the Peter Lang Publishing Group in Bruxelles.

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