
Questioning Europe

The so-called unification of Europe appears to be carried out with little thought. Moreover, the imposition and promotion of the new international reality seems to be a substitute for an understanding of the nature of this reality. As things are, Europe is a self-evident value, its 'integration' an unquestionable good, and the united Europe le meilleur des mondes possibles. The integrative processes are praised as historical progress and self-congratulatory Euro-politicians have won the day - with the majority of intellectuals lined up behind them vociferously or tacitly subscribing to the fashionable formulae.

It is not for the first time that Europe is uniting, yet this has never been marked by such a poverty of ideas and lack of reflection. The articulation of the new European order after the World War II, for example, was accompanied by a number of books dealing with the idea of Europe. Today, nothing parallels the intellectual efforts of the mainly Italian, German and Scottish authors of the fifties and early sixties: it is as if the reality which dictated an East Central European novelist to talk about the 'Biafra of the spirit' had to disappear for that gloomy metaphor to come true in the Europe of the 'end of history'.

It would appear that one has to come from the other side of the world to find it necessary to challenge the 'mystique' of Europe, as J. G. A. Pocock has recently done. He uttered his critique from the standpoint of one outside that entity yet not belonging to another civilisation: 'I am not a European because I am an Antipodean; yet I speak the same language, I live by the same values and I have at least some of the same historic memories as many of you. What then does it mean to learn that I am not »European«, and what is this »Europe« to which I do not belong?'

We find ourselves in a similar 'inside/outside' position, in some aspects closer to Europe and in others more far away. Up until three years ago, we were 'outside' because we lived in a communist country. In Slovenia, as in Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary and the Baltic States, asserting that we were Europeans meant criticising communism and the imperial structures imposed on us. We accepted the European identity game only to realise that, in the end,

we could only lose. When communism collapsed, we continued to be excluded from the Europe in which we live culturally, politically, economically, historically. Europe had needed communism more than we did; and when we freed ourselves from it Europe kept us in the position of the Other, only the reasons for that have changed: ideological and political considerations are being succeeded by racial ones.

The post-communist exclusion we have experienced as citizens of Slovenia and neighbours to war torn Croatia and Bosnia, made us think about Europe. What we have learned since the late eighties, from observing and analysing the European 'Yugoslav policy', conflicted with our positive prejudices about Europe. We were put into a position in which we had to lose our illusions. They are gradually being replaced by what we regard as a more realistic understanding.

We would like to introduce the questions we wish to ask by summarising some of those observations.

Europe having declared the nation-state obsolete was opposed to the formation of new nation-states. However, no alternative has been found yet for that framework which the nation-state has provided (even if imperfectly) for individuals to be able to act as citizens; European citizenship is a conceptual swindle, and at best, can only be a privilege for the powerful and well-off. The refusal to recognise new nation-states was more than a negation of the principle of self-determination: it was a denial of the right to political existence and citizenship. Paradoxically Europe, while acting this way, accused those who strived to institute the conditions for their civic existence of nationalism and alleged hostility to the very notion of citizen. At the same time, European states, in their opposition to new nation-states, acted on the least attractive principles of an international order based on nation-states. Is it by accident that dreams of 'empire' have recently been invoked, and that Europe supported a unitary Yugoslav state when it was obvious that this was just a disguise for a Serbian Reich (and has continued to support the creation of that 'monstrum' when this started to proceed without any disguise)? Is a post-modern imperium to become the alternative for the nation-state? What is the political constitution of Europe? If any? For Europe may be becoming an huge Gesellschaft mit begrenzter Hoffnung – and limitless ambitions?

Europe has given no help or support to the democratization in Yugoslavia, on the contrary, it has consistently supported the center of anti-democracy. It consented to the Serbian apartheid in Kosovo while it was frustrating the potentials for democratic development in Slovenia and Croatia. The Bosnian state, founded on modern democratic concepts, has been destroyed by European diplomacy as much as by Serbian warfare. Meanwhile the Serbian

chieftainry in Bosnia, which calls itself a democracy, has come into being not only with help from Belgrade but also from London and Paris. The regime in Serbia is regarded as democratic because it originates in people, because it is the opposite of nationalism. Indeed, it is the Volkwerdung der Nation, to use the term invented in a similar situation sixty years ago. Slovenia may have much more liberal-democratic institutions and political culture, but it is 'nationalist' and therefore 'anti-democratic'. So what is the meaning of democracy, for Europe, in the post-Cold-War world? And what is European democracy? Does the state of Europe suggest that the 'end of history' thesis is actually an attempt to evade the recognition of the end of liberal democracy? Does it still make sense, in this Europe, to refer to democracy?

Europe encouraged the forces in Yugoslavia which led the country to war. Moreover, in the Bosnian case, it provided the blueprint for Serbian aggression and the Serbo-Croat partition of Bosnia. The European 'peace plans' were a recipe for 'ethnic cleansing'; while 'peace talks' are a means of prolonging the war until genocide is accomplished. What does Europe mean by peace? What is 'European peace' if war is peace?

Europe has failed to confront Serbian fascism. It has only strived to make peace with it. But Europe has never been able to confront and defeat fascism symbolically, that is, politically, and it is not for the first time that it is appeasing fascists. In World War II fascism was finally militarily destroyed. Today, the two 'most democratic' European countries seem to have been successful in preventing a military confrontation with Serbian fascism, and in one of them the desire to rehabilitate the pre-war appeasement-with-Hitler-politics is more than an exercise in historical revisionism. Does the failure to confront Serbian fascism mean that Europe is anxious not to face fascism within itself? Would this endanger its innermost identity? And does the rise of English and French germanophobia mean that historical animosities exist precisely in those countries which are most determined to explain the war in the Balkans in terms of alleged 'historical animosities'? Who is actually haunted by demons of history?

Europe has not tried to prevent the genocide of the muslim population in Bosnia. It not only has the capacity to live its normal life with the full knowledge of genocide happening, as it were, on its doorstep. It is responsible for its smooth accomplishment. It is preventing the Bosnian government from purchasing arms to defend its population while it is at the same time refusing to defend this government and its people. Europe is creating and preserving a situation in which the aggressor can kill and destroy safely. It is tolerating concentration camps and crimes against humanity and promoting their originators as statesmen. What remains of the jus gentium when a gens is

exterminated; of international law, when the international community with cool head (and cold heart) agrees to the destruction of a nation which it had just recognised? And what becomes of the international community when the international law is torn apart? What are the laws of the 'European society'?

Europe has made 'muslims' out of Bosnians. It has diplomatically dissolved the legal government: it treated Bosnian Croats who were represented in, and by, that government as a separate entity, and because Serbian warmongers, losing the political battle, had already withdrawn from it, the government could subsequently be declared a 'muslim government', representing solely 'muslims'. Next it was styled a 'warring faction', equated with the self-styled Croatian leaders and Serbian war criminals. No serious attempt has been made in Europe to explain that Bosnian muslims are all but 'islamic fundamentalists'; that Bosnian society was a largely secularized society; that Bosnian towns which are falling victim to the urbocidal Serbian mob were historical centres of cultural pluralism and tolerance. What was generated was the image of the warring muslim, the Urangst of the Christian, cultured and civilized Europe. Is Europe accomplishing the history started in Clermont, 1095?

We have argued that the so-called unification of Europe is carried out with little thought. We would like to conclude this invitation by articulating the problem in philosophical terms.

European unification, which has gone on surprisingly free from thinking and reflection, has often been presented as the long awaited answer to the question Was ist Aufklärung? However, while Kant modestly suggested to his contemporaries that they should be content to simply know that they live in the 'era of Enlightenment', our contemporaries, lacking any humility, declare the united Europe the advent of the 'enlightened era', the final and ultimate realization of the project of the Enlightened modernity. Initially, the project was characterised by the simultaneity of political and intellectual event, by the inseparable intertwinement of the democratic invention and the Enlightened philosophy; what does it mean, then, that, at its end, the project seems to be realized by forgetting and suppressing its own intellectual origins? Is a united Europe abdicating from reflection because through its political project the reign of the Enlightened philosophical reason is coming true? Or does the abandoning of reflection, on the contrary, indicate that, what is suppressed and lost in the present constitution of Europe, is precisely that which many hold to be the most valuable inheritance of Enlightened philosophy: its emancipatory dimension, its attempt to conceptualize the inconceivable without accommodating it to the concepts used?

If by thinking we understand, slightly unzeitgemäß, thinking in the strict sense of the word, we raise the question of whether a philosophy of united Europe is possible at all; and if so, how is it possible? In what ways does the rational knowledge on which the present project of a united Europe is founded relate to the key philosophical concepts of the European modernity: Reason, Subjectivity, Truth, Being an others, if it still relates to them at all? Is the united Europe still an heir of the ambivalent Enlightenment heritage, and if so, in what ways? Who is, for example, the subject of the utterance: 'We Europeans'? Which identity concept, which identification mechanisms, constitute this 'we'; in what relation to the other and different, diverse, is it constituted? Which constitutively excluded Other is the condition for European identity? If a possible philosophy of united Europe is defined by concepts of universality, dialogue, rationality, consensuality, what do the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia, war in the Balkans, and skirmishes in the former Soviet Union, mean for the united Europe?

We do not claim that the above observations of a particular aspect of European reality from a particular standpoint are generally valid. However, we do think that they require a serious rethinking of what is generally held to be Europe, and of the values customarily attached to this entity. Our observations and questions suggest a pessimistic, or at least highly sceptical, view of what is Europe. We do not expect such a view to be widely shared. We would hope, however, to be able to exchange ideas and reflections about what is Europe, focussing on the question: What are the social, political and philosophical articulations of European identity today and what historical constructs of Europe underpin them?

*Tomaž Mastnak
Jelica Šumič-Riha*

