

The Intercultural Danube - a European Model

Gheorghe Lates¹, Mirela Costache²

Abstract: The EU construction began following the logic of economics, which in time it has created dysfunctions that seem to accentuate and create a quasi-general skepticism. This paper aims at analyzing the union construction and reconstruction on other conceptual premises, placing culture at the forefront of the new strategy. A multicultural Europe, based on the state primordial ethnicity is no longer current; the cultural diversity does not lead to unity, but rather it is a factor of dissolution. The Danubian model reunites races, languages and religions, being so diverse that their functional diachrony justifies the idea of reconstruction, based on what it was, and it did not generate tensions or conflicts. The ethnic identity did not become, in the Danube area, ethnicism, what it constitutes in a synchronic approach, as a model of rethinking the union, not by hierarchies, barriers, but rather by the opportunity of the coexistence of the peoples that connect history and the present of the horizontal axis River of a united Europe.

Keywords: interculturalism; Europeity; euro-skepticism

The European Union is a reality, a project that defined its shape, a player on the world market, all of which are constituents of a debate, on different voices, the validity of such supranational structures, which, as it expands eastwards and South shows its functional precariousness.

This is how it was born as a trend – the euro-skepticism - which manifests on different voices and tones from one country to another, stronger in the west and, more veiled, towards the eastern border of a united Europe. It is specific to the limited areas, where the message of the strong center reaches with more difficulty, more diluted as intensity and accuracy.

Compared to what the founders thought, more accurately said the artisans of the idea (Jean Monnet and Robert Schumann), a supranational structure focused on coal and steel industry, designed to mitigate the old Franco-German idiosyncrasies, so tributary to the postwar context, the European Union is today a conglomeration of states and cultures, with some common values, but also with huge differences in

¹ Associate Professor, PhD, Faculty of Law, Danubius University of Galati, Romania. Address: 3 Galati Blvd, Galati, Romania, Tel.: +40372 361 102, fax: +40372 361 290. Corresponding author: gheorghe.lates@univ-danubius.ro.

² Senior Lecturer, PhD, Faculty of Law, Danubius University of Galati, Romania. Address: 3 Galati Blvd, Galati, Romania, Tel.: +40372 361 102, fax: +40372 361 290. E-mail: mirelacostache@univ-danubius.ro.

the economic, legal, and cultural background. Hence the difficulty of controlling a Community mechanism that works so differently from one country to another.

Here it belongs also the need to rethink the foundations of this union, thought as multicultural, but facing the depletion of resources of the ethnic pluralism operation. The authoritative voices (Angela Merkel is one of them) note the failure of multiculturalism, proclaimed by the slogan "Unity in Diversity". It is a clear sign that Europeity, thought as being multicultural, as a reunion of different cultures that can coexist under the same roof, is no longer current, therefore it is necessary to rethink it. There must be found other items that can coagulate such a huge diversity, in order to overcome the institutional bottlenecks, generated by such a vast organizational structure.

Beyond what unites the constituent countries of the Union there are many others that obstruct the functional consensus: a previous history of conflict, challenged interstate borders, *in sotto voce*, what is right, major economic gaps, inter-religious frozen conflicts, obvious identity differences and many others. The economic preeminence is not a sufficient criterion, if it is not accompanied by other dimensions of Europeity, able to coagulate a real union and not a supranational structure which resembles strikingly to the former Soviet Union, such as the model envisaged by the artisans of the European Union. The disintegration of the former may be a premonitory sign for an inherent and inevitable disarticulation of the second? Euro-skeptics come on the trend of political skepticism and even popular here and there. Two-speed Europe, Schengen and non-Schengen Europe, the triadic center (Germany, France, England), too strong and too authoritarian, and many other regional realities are not good signs for a necessary coagulation of a single European spirit, generically called "Europeity", more accurately the conscience of the preeminence of a united Europe in relation to the national states, mostly ethno-centric. The political scientists seek pragmatic and immediate solutions, the philosophers want to establish the basis of European axioms and principles to confer durability, and the citizens express, in many ways, the dissatisfaction for the effects of these political, legal and social hesitations. *Mutatis mutandis*, Community Europe is not in crisis, but it is not doing well either.

It is almost impossible to control a structure with 28 states, different in many respects, and others in imminent accession process, the more so since it depends on the US military force and the emerging markets of Asia and the former Soviet Union. Located in the clash of interests between the great powers, the European Union is a fragile construction and hence the feeling of economic, political and social even insecurity. Free movement of goods and people is a clear win, but it does not solve many problems yet unsettled. The funds, generous until recently, are no longer enough, more accurately said they are not accessible in those limited areas freshly joined. Financial and banking crisis, which started in America and outdated there, has not yet consumed its retardants effects in the EU and therefore

the Euro, the official currency, is not doing too well either. So many discrepancies create uncontrollable phenomena, such as migration, which the Union hardly manages, and the Member states welcoming migrants react differently and fluctuating, depending on election cycles.

During this tense framework, the European reconstruction is no longer just a phrase with which the political scientists operate, but a first rank necessity, in order to restore the citizen's optimism and decision maker's factors. Perhaps this inevitable reconstruction should be reconsidered as a strategy, changing the direction of regulation and enforcement from the edge to the center, and not vice versa, as it has been so far. When a building weakens, it should not be found consolidation solutions for the still strong side, but the weak parts should be strengthened. When the economy does not become a safe criterion of balancing the levels of development, the cultural criterion replaces it, much less tense than the former. When the social phenomena are overwhelming (unemployment, impoverishment, migration), it attacks the foundations of European civilization, which proved their validity in the previous centuries. As responsible citizens, we weren't overexcited to join, we did not suffer too much from the repeated attempts to enter the Schengen area, we no longer wonder why we contribute with higher amounts than we receive from projects. There was a state of frustration, but the effect was not the euro-skepticism manifest, but a self-analysis of our precariousness as a state and as a nation. The solution is not to complain about our injustice, but to ask ourselves, even insistently, with what substantial things we come within the union. How persuasive is our voice, how effective are the corrective solutions, which are the areas of excellence, able to be innovated, these are the right questions and not "why", "how so", "when", "what if" and many others of its kind.

According to our abilities, we have thought a scientific and cultural project that had as aim Europeism, i.e. the logic of EU existence, the coagulants factors and certainties which could restore the vitality and dignity of innovative supranational structure and not mimetic. In our representation, perhaps naive or utopian, a certainty, as a back bone, positioned horizontally, is the Danube River connecting East and West to gather around its nations and languages (Slavic, Latin and Anglo-Saxon), strengthened spiritually through the three religions: Orthodox, Protestant and Catholic. The Danube Battle, turned into the Danube Strategy has deep historical roots that go down into history until the Roman Empire times, maybe even further, if we expand the Greeks' presence until the river's mouths or the prehistory of the Germanic or proto-Dacian or Thracian states. In those distant times, the Danube was a natural border, a sort of the "great wall" used as such in the expansionist strategies or as a centerpiece of migrations. For a while, those on the right bank have looked with distrust those in the left, calling them barbarians, which meant then a hostile *otherness*.

The Romans were the first who built a bridge over the Danube, firstly a provisional one, the boats linked together, then of stone and wood, at Drobeta, where the rocky bottom of the river and the close banks made it easier to build and more durable. Canceling a natural border, they needed another, and then the Transylvanian Mures became a limit of the military extension conquest of Dacia. In the East, the Danube and the close mountains were united by a wave of defense and flanked with camps in order to control migration in their chaotic times. We do not see too many strategic innovations in what it is happening today: the EU border is a river, tomorrow maybe a river, camps became border crossing points, and the suspicion towards those beyond these waters is still high, although they are not wearing a beard, but only the stigma of a disintegrated communism.

The political component, behind which there are hidden the economic interests or of any other type, is present in every union step, even if it is packed in words that seem to say otherwise. Those beyond the union borders are now beyond the border, which we no longer agree from the military point of view (we accept the premise that NATO is a defensive alliance) as in terms of economy, a more refined form of war that can reach planetary scale (it even took such proportions with the crisis, which has not yet retreated its reverberations). In these troubled times, when the unexpected is the daily word in everything, we need certainty, especially when you think to bring together polarities, antagonist, idiosyncrasies, historical drama and huge discrepancies. Starting from such disaggregated factors of the union consensus, we established a Center for Danubian Research and Studies actively manifested in the public space through university partnerships from riparian countries, and collaborations with neighboring economic, administrative and cultural structures. Institutions and researchers meet annually on June 29, on the Danube's Day, in order to communicate to each other the results investigative and conceptual effort. A university scientific publication, published in three languages (English, French and Russian), brings together the results of this effort and it is available both in print and online, under the title "*Journal of Danubian Studies and Research*". The Center has also a thematic book collection, "Danube Library". There are forms at hand for the private university, Danubius University of Galati, which understood the Danubian vocation, mainly scientific and intellectual. The Danubian project meets the Danube Strategy, the Romanian-Austrian initiative of the European Commission and it is thought to be a vanguard of mutual collaboration and understanding. Therefore the International Conference "The Danube – Axis of European identity" is itinerant, this year took place in Ruse, Bulgaria, a priority partner country in culture and tourism within the Strategy of Danube 2015.

When Galati and Ulim, Izmail and Belgrade, Cahul and Budapest (headquarters of the partner universities of the riparian countries, with which we already work) will be brought together under one generous dome of scientific-cultural connections, the Danube Strategy will have a functional and precise instrument through which it

will constantly assess how the macro-regional cooperation project works and it is stimulated in its effective implementation.

Danube is more than just a river transport opportunity that can unite Constanta with Rotterdam; it can focus on most accurate and convincing reconstruction of a united Europe, after years of hesitation and euro-skepticism in evident progress. The Danubians, with its riparian states, have always known how to find the least conflicting ways that bring mutual benefit and knowledge of the *Other* as a prerequisite for a favorable harmonious coexistence. By the time it would appear as supranational structures, such as the European Danube Commission and the Danube Commission, the countries surrounding the river got along and worked together, going over the differences of race, language or religion. Instead, they used these as some chance of mutual understanding, not as a pretext for distrust and conflict. The latter belonged to the states, not to the inhabitants on both sides and throughout the Danube. The Danube model exceeds the Danube Strategy, as it is much earlier and more comprehensive; it has surpassed the Strategy and it completes the 11 strategic objectives with a few others, not being contemplated by the initiators. The model of authentic Europeity which we articulate step by step is one that already works and we offer disinterestedly to the strategists with the role of decision making and implementation. The attachment towards the river should be transformed into a civic responsibility, since the delicate moment of the European construction needs massive infusions of enthusiasm and new ways of articulating a genuine European spirit, which can be found also beyond the differences attractive only up to a point.

The Danube is Europe River, the logic of its horizontality, the common spirit coagulated before the existence of the EU, which the latter can be used as an opportunity in any strategic initiative. In other words, it is geography, history, spirituality and above all it is a model of interculturalism, a European Union *avant la lettre*.

A federal Europe is not the same as the European Union, i.e. a legislative, economic and administrative building with unique standards in the reference field and with minimal local brands. The latter ones are more numerous and more intense defended by the apologists of the diversity, the more difficult it is obtaining a coherence of the system. Among the most protected areas of the natural movement of the systemic harmonization are the legal ones, the traditionalist arguments are extremely numerous. If the economic and the political federation is possible and largely was also implemented, the legal domain is the favorite target of an emphatic and damaging speech about preserving the national identity, in other way than the one natural and beneficial for all: culture, seen not as a juxtaposition of national brands, but as a benefit of assuming this diversity.

For selfish nationalist reasons the project of a European constitution has failed, which greatly hindered the next step, the harmonization of the national laws, an area of large differences from one country to another.

Dependent of the legislation is the juridical, and the executive obeys the legal laws. As long as the status differences of the European Union powers are very big, the gaps and synchronizations are realities of the cumbersome operation of the system in its practice side, such a Europe that is guided by the rules of a good unique governance, it is no longer a goal, but rather the *sine qua non* condition of further continuation of systematic unification process, the differences in culture being desirable, especially since the mixing of ethnic races takes place at an accelerated pace. What differentiates a European citizen from another is that it no longer has the identity restrictions and therefore the volatilization of boundaries is followed by the ethnic limitations. Such dilution of the spiritual side is compensated through a legislative, judicial and executive determination. An objective which can only be achieved under the conditions of the actual union of the systems, that needs to be accelerated and not postponed *sine die*.