Whose Europe? The "New Europe" and Controversy around the European Idea

Introduction

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From edition *Whose Europe? The "New Europe" and Controversy around the European Idea*

Who belongs to Europe? And when we say 'Europe', what exactly do we mean? Such questions are the subject of controversy all over Europe and beyond. The idea of Europe as a community and the European Union as a supranational and intergovernmental community of states have so far been, and still remain, important frames of reference.

In cooperation with local stakeholders from the Eastern Partnership Countries, as well as with partners from the Central Europe Project, *Whose Europe?* identified and devised various forms of interaction at the local, national, and European levels, specifying their effects and then publishing the outcomes. Thus, making them accessible throughout Europe and beyond but also putting them up for review in their original local contexts.

In the cities and regions of Eastern Europe, the parallel processes of reconstituting a national identity and Europeanisation (i.e. forging a European identity in the context of EU membership) have sparked fierce debates with regards to the European question(s): How does it relate to the respective history and (re)constitution of each country's national identity? How can it contribute to forging complex identities? Particularly in cities with artists, activists, and urban planners among others who are vehemently committed to the democratic and European reorientation of their societies and have founded democratically enlightened civic initiatives. What could be considered the common ground for a European "civic society"?

The project *Whose Europe?* consisted of a conference in Yerevan, local Interventions in Chişinău, Kiev, Minsk, Tbilisi and Yerevan, as well as an exhibition and a discussion in Berlin and furthermore this publication.

At the conference, the participants presented a series of public lectures with their reflections on the questions and discussed it with the audience. Three major questions were identified and then further discussed with the attempt made to have them answered:

Where is Europe?
Where does it start, where does it end? Looking at geographical representations, it becomes clear how blurred the spatial borders of Europe are — and that, on the contrary, Europe is anchored in our consciousness. Furthermore, this raises the question of what this 'Europe of our mind' means: where it is centred, where is the periphery? And is this so–called European periphery developing new governance techniques that require it to be critically examined?

What is Europe?
Is there such thing as a 'civil society' in Europe that can raise a common voice beyond the borders of the nation state? 'Civil society' means, as clearly shown in the transformation of the Eastern European system, a 'hard' concept of (self–)responsibility and strong binding forces in resistance to dictatorship and the claim of national emancipation. Is there a perspective for the hard concept with its strong binding character (which implies solidarity among the members) on a European level? Is a European narrative beyond the nation state imaginable, which is non–mythological, unfinished, open (contra identity politics)?

Who is European?
Who is included and who is excluded from the idea of being European? It is not only a matter of political equality but also of social justice (solidarity). Is there an idea of a social Europe imaginable? An idea, which can be transformed to an inclusive enlightened and emancipatory narrative? And how can this narrative be inscribed into the bodies of the cities and societies, physically and mentally, as well as in the structures of political decision making and governance? How can a 'civil society' claim to say: "We are Europe?"

On The Margin of Europe

Hrach Bayadan

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by Hrach Bayadan

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In the announcement of the "I am a European! Where is Europe?" (May 19, 2019) debate organized at the Institute for Contemporary Art (Yerevan) it was said:

Many Armenians say that when being in foreign countries they are asked where from they come [sic], the answer often leads to misunderstandings. Most of the questioners mistake Armenia with Albania or Romania. Additional clarification requires a certain geographical knowledge which is not necessarily at the required level.

These lines reminded me of the novel *Mrs Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf — the part where the main character Clarissa is occupied with her thoughts while lying on the sofa staring at the roses she received from her husband. In her 'stream of consciousness' fragments from her husband's explanations related to Armenians occasionally appear. Her husband, Richard Dalloway is a member of the House of Commons and has gone to participate in "some committee's" activities — he left after bringing a pillow and a quilt and reminding Clarissa about the doctor's instruction to lie down and rest for an hour,

There were the roses. 'Some committee?' she asked, as he opened the door. 'Armenians,' he said; or perhaps it was 'Albanians' … He was already halfway to the House of Commons, to his Armenians, his Albanians, having settled her on the sofa, looking at his roses. And people would say, 'Clarissa Dalloway is spoilt.' She cared much more for her roses than for the Armenians. Hunted out of existence, maimed, frozen, the victims of cruelty and injustice (she had heard Richard say so over and over again) — no, she could feel nothing for the Albanians, or was it the Armenians? But she loved her roses (didn't that help the Armenians?)

— the only flowers she could bear to see cut … She muddled Armenians and Turks; loved success; hated discomfort; must be liked; talked oceans of nonsense: and to this day, ask her what the Equator was, and she did not know. (pp. 133–136)

This quotation is made from the Collector's Library series book published in 2003. The book has not yet been translated into Armenian, although some of Woolf's texts have been translated and published in Armenian during recent years. It seems that there is a certain kind of ridicule here directed toward not only Clarissa's unawareness of political events but also toward the political establishment of Britain and its unclear, ineffective actions.

As we can see, in Europe, confusing Armenians with Albanians is not something new and apart from the obvious resemblance of the two names, this also implies the marginal significance of these nations for Europe. I read this novel for the first time in Russian translation. It was at the end of *Perestroika* — the last years of the Soviet Union — when almost simultaneously James Joyce's *Ulysses* and Woolf's extensive collection of works including the novels *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* were published. The previously banned or undesirable works that were being published during these years, along with many other texts, added a new layer to 'the Europe' and the European culture imagined by the Soviet citizen. By the way, the Russian translator had to make some changes, since in Russian it is easier to confuse Armenians with Slavonians than with Albanians („*armyane i slavyane*").

For an Armenian translator it might be even harder to find such a combination.

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The events of the novel take place on a day in June of 1923. At this time the Lausanne conference was happening, where a crucial decision was to be made on the 'Armenian Question'. After the end of World War I, the topic of Armenia had been discussed in London (1920), Paris (1921), and elsewhere. In Lausanne, the Western Armenians, who had been subjected to massacres and displacement into Turkey, lost the opportunity of having their own territory and administrative unit, which had been previously promised to them by the great powers of the world. Great Britain, France, and the USA served the 'Armenian Question' for their own purposes, and this event defined to a great extent the two–faced if not 'the betrayer' image of Europe for Armenians — since it left alone the small Christian nation in the face of Turkey. Europe was mainly what it should or at least could be — the reflection of the expectations and disappointments of a helpless nation.

A few months earlier, in March 1920, poet Hovhannes Tumanyan had died, who, one might say, was the last Armenian intellectual that consistently wrote about Europe and the Western prospects of Armenians. In his works, Europe was divided between two poles — on one side there was the Europe of Imperialist interests, political intrigues, and the brutalities of war, while on the other there was the Europe of a developed civilization, the ideas of Enlightenment, great intellectuals and artists. He once again attested the dual situation of the Eastern Armenians under Russian rule: "Similar to the Armenians that were once under the influence of Persia but appealed to Greece for high culture, the new Armenians, despite being within Russia's boundaries and subjected to its culture, have always appealed to Germany for advanced development."

During the Soviet period, the topic of the relationship with Europe, being politicized to an increasing extent, was pushed out from the circle of public interest and during the Cold War years Soviet Armenian intellectuals, among other things, were completely unaware of what cultural language could be used to speak to Europe and about it. And the reason the Armenian writers who had hosted Jean–Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir for two days in 1963 did not know how or what to talk about with them was not at all due to the fear of KGB or to the 'inner censor'. Thus, it can be said that after the collapse of the Soviet Union people in Armenia had a very vague, fragmentary notion of Europe and to this day little has changed in this regard. During the past 200 years, the communication of the Eastern Armenians with the world has been carried out through the Russian medium and even if the periphery of the Soviet Empire has been given a word, it has almost always been expressed through the language provided and allowed by Moscow. Therefore, from where and in what way can new languages, new thinking, and thus new notions about Europe and possibilities for a new relationship with it come?

In 2007, I wrote a series of three articles titled, "Where Do Europe's Borders End?"[1] The stimuli for writing the articles were the discussions that commenced in Armenia about globalization and the prospect of Armenia's relationship with the European Union on this

Notes
[1] Availible in English: https://hetq.am/en/article/21380, https://hetq.am/en/article/24017, https://hetq.am/en/article/24018

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issue. Discussing the relationships of the three large states of the region — Iran, Turkey, and Russia — with the EU, which were gradually worsening, the articles come to a conclusion about the further development of Armenia's relationship with the EU that is far from encouraging. From today's perspective, the claims made in these articles remain correct. Here's the entrance of the first article: "Hardly anyone would seriously ask today, 'Is Armenia a part of Europe or not?' This was a question around which there was a lot of debate in the early years after independence, but which has since lost its urgency. Another formulation — 'Armenia on the road to Europe' — is a lot fresher." Further on it is proposed to change the metaphor describing the relationship between Europe and Armenia from "Armenia on the road to Europe" to "Armenia on the margin of Europe," where 'margin' as a metaphor has both geographical and socio–cultural meaning but is not necessarily negative in its implication. It is a metaphor that does not point to any direction of development and is, at the same time, free from the optimism of the previous one.

I would like to cite the part concerning Russia:

It is pointless to speak of a possible Russian entry into the European Union, at least as far as Russia's current territory, ambitions and developments are concerned. The current situation in Russia (the question of Chechnya, widespread suppression of democratic freedom and so on), where differences which exist with the West are being emphasized and becoming clearer

on a daily basis, all suggest a stage of complicated Russia–Europe ties, the estrangement of Russia from the West, and many analysts consider these changes irreversible. It is also very clear that Russia does not conceal the jealousy with which it views the improving relations between the West and former Soviet republics.

The fact that Armenia 'unexpectedly' refused to sign the EU Association Agreement in 2013 is another proof of Russia's control over Armenia and it is not really apparent that the current authorities of Armenia will be able to decrease the extent of that control. In order to summarize the subject of Armenia being torn between Russian and Europe, and to come to an overall conclusion for this text, I will quote another excerpt about how decisive is the experience that has remained from the Soviet times:

For the current fate of Armenian society and culture. In an article on cultural globalization published in 1990, Arjun Appadurai specifically emphasized that globalization is not really Americanization, but rather Japanization for the Koreans, Indianization for the Sri Lankans, Vietnamization for the Cambodians, Russification for the Soviet Armenians and so on. Now, a decade and a half after the collapse of the Soviet Union (when researchers speak in unison about the Americanization of Russia), this assumption is subject to doubt especially in the case of Armenia. Of course, in the larger picture, talk about the Russification of Armenia makes sense even now, but one of the problems with this idea is that Russification was one thing during Soviet times and is something totally different today.

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Nowadays, when Russia still has military, economic, and political leverage over Armenia, there is a key difference that came forth in the post–Soviet period — the significant decrease in the Russian cultural hegemony. In Tsarist Russia and Soviet Union, the Russian domination over the Armenians was, among other things, justified by the Russian 'civilizing mission'. Today, there is no need for such a mission, and Russia is not capable of such an undertaking any more. In the context of current cultural diversity, the attractiveness of the 'great Russian culture' and 'great Russian language' has diminished significantly.

Today, Armenia is certainly still far away from Europe, and one of the ways to gradually overcome the Russian influence is to become closer with Europe through creating a new cultural environment and through consistently changing the intellectual atmosphere; particularly by engaging the youth in cultural and educational programmes and someday this will perhaps allow us to imagine a new prospect for Armenia.

Political and Civil: Implicit Divergence or Imminent Concurrence?

Solomiya Borshosh

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by Solomiya Borshosh

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We were standing by the Serpentine lake in London's Hyde park. It was a sunny summer day, a few days after the Brexit referendum, an embryonic stage of the turmoil which was yet to be known as 'Brexit Negotiations'. It was too soon to talk about 'deal or no–deal'. It was too soon to talk about a Government that would not deliver and the banks that would be leaving the country. But it was a high–time to talk about the feelings.

»"How do you feel about Brexit?", I asked Alan, a good friend of mine who had just entered the world of academia (in political science) after a decade in military and two decades of law practice.

»"The referendum result is disastrous, but this is a decision of civil society. I have to accept it.", he said with innate tranquility in his 'BBC voice'.

Three years into post–referendum life: British politics is devastated and so are the people who are trying to understand how post–Brexit Britain will look.

For me, personally, it is also three years into constant contemplation and enquiries of *what civil society is and what it is not. Does calling something 'civil' mean framing it out of genuine talks on the norms and power structures in society? And if so, what might be an issue that actually hinders its significant role in such discussion?*

My friend Alan used the term in its widest possible version: civil society constitutes those who exercised their legitimate right to influence political decisions of their country by casting a ballot. The threshold for calling this part of a population 'civil society' is apparently political and quite low: especially for the minds of countries with constant but rarely fully successful fight for democracy and human rights — post–Soviet ones. In the latter, for it to be referred to as a civil society, one commonly has to be much more politically engaged than just vote. For some, it means institutionalization of civic initiatives. For others, it stands for a participation in street protests. For extremes, one will have to go through the ordination of arrest and detention as authorized by those in power.

What unites all these illustrative definitions? This is an idea — whether an informed or misguided one — that 'civil' automatically means alienation from the political sphere; that 'civil' hardly influences the norms and power structures of the society; that 'civil' is a framework for keeping activists away from the real power talks. As a conclusion, if you want to change something, be political. Not civil. This a misleading conclusion with very bad timing. And here is why.

Youth is traditionally less prone to vote. This is a shared feature of baby boomers, Millennials, and Generation Z or X. The recent years have seen a number of reports proving little political participation of youth (e.g. EES to name one), but this is nothing new. What does appear as unfortunate is that the pre–digital and digital generations' watershed may and does cause extensive discrepancies for contemporary political and social reality. So, let us first consider several possible reasons for less political participation nowadays.

In the majority of European countries,[1] with some exceptions, young people enjoy higher standards of living and a

Notes
[1] I deliberately narrow my focus to the European countries due to the overall theme of the project "Whose Europe".

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more progressive human rights framework than their parents or grandparents were used to. Therefore, majority of people tend to abstain from casting a ballot in their twenties or thirties — there are no causes or reasons to engage into a political fight. They have 'had it all' since birth, and so, take the achievements of previous generations for granted.

In addition, 'political' is apparently very much Hobbesian: everyone is an enemy for everyone. In contemporary democratic societies, it means constant feuds and slinging as much dirt as possible in order to win the hearts and minds of voters. Multiply it by absurdity (talentedly illustrated by Black Mirror's 'Waldo' episode). Amplify it by the social media (the devoted soldiers of instantaneity). And well, apparently you will have something one would like to escape.

Last but not least, fatigue of the political is even more acute in the conflict–affected societies (there are still a bunch of such in the European latitudes), where the 'enemy' is not only a frame of mind for intellectual contemplation, but actual armed squads with 'no time' to think about one's right to life.

On the other hand, the younger generations of the contemporary are those who tend to reveal their political concerns more practically and usually beyond the political, i.e. voting, realm. For instance, the issues of climate change, non–discrimination, and equality are those which they willingly put ahead when making decision over a product they buy, an employer they work for, and even a person they date. Paradoxically, those who, at first sight, are outright escapists, are deeply concerned and know how to exercise their agency and they do express themselves politically — just in unconventional ways. It has

already made a number of big companies and institutions rethink and change their policies. Gillette's We Believe: The Best a Man Can Get advert in January, 2019 is a refined example for this.

Thus, 'escapists' are apparently great advocates for a change in the public realm. And so, the task at hand within this equation sounds out as: do more politics with less politics.

I have some institutions in mind which are actually doing this. These are civil society organizations. They keep their private nature as established by the private will of individuals. Regardless of their forms — either grassroots initiatives or a think tank established by a ready–to–use model — organizations work in order to promote their own agenda and interests. But such interests are presented and are only secured in correlation with the interest of others — in the public sphere. I would, therefore, dare to call civil society organizations as those with the quasi–public nature.

By all means, civil society lacks the tools necessary to influence the public sphere directly. It does not have the enforcement mandate needed and mainly acts via advocating, pushing, convincing, etc. But they also set the agenda, develop the norms, i.e. determine the level of 'normality'.

For instance, a great deal of civil society organizations in Ukraine have been working as the watchdogs of the Government since yore. Well, at least since 1991. They have been pushing for more transparency and accountability for years, even though the conditions were not always favorable. Once the opportunity arose, they used it to introduce

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the e–declarations of public servants. Today, after a few years of the practice, it is difficult to make a U–turn in these practices without the media and the public to notice and openly criticize it. Any attempts to do it are met with the strong social condemnation. Furthermore, some MPs are preparing the periodic reports on their activities even without legislation requirements — the benchmark which is difficult to imagine in Ukraine in e.g. 1995.

Indeed, civil society has no mandate to exercise the power (there are other institutions for that — either in democracy, autocracy or even in the fights of warlords'). But it can question, challenge or otherwise affect the power structures within society. After all, it can allow for more strategic thinking as they are not strictly limited by the 4 or 5–year political life cycles. The advantages of such an approach can be then exercised: at least in democracy, there are ways to put the ideas of civil society into practice (via policy–making procedures).

However, the question still remains: how can this quasi–public nature of civil society organizations can be put into practical use in real life? Moreover, whose interests do civil society organizations represent and how can they do it properly? It is, indeed, easier to grasp if an organization was established and narrowly works with the purpose of protecting interests of their founders, e.g. of twenty investigative journalists. But what about those with a quasi–public nature? Those, who push an anti–corruption agenda? Or fight for the better protection of the environment? The interests are clearly beyond those of founders. Such organizations have their constituency: the part of population on which they ground their

aspirations and efforts. Those who legitimize them with their genuine needs and concerns. Those who transform organizations from the status of a donors' grantee to the representatives on the part of public will. But do organizations know their own constituency?

Is this constituency–based approach realistic and necessary? Yes, and its value added was illustrated above. Is it prevailing in the contemporary civil society of European countries? There is no enough evidence for us to claim that.

Current models of raising the funds, accountability, and management (especially in countries–recipients, such as Ukraine) leads to the misconception that one does not have to be tied to their constituency. It is enough in practical terms to secure funding and hire a good team who will sufficiently do the work. Funding is easier to secure from institutional donors: less efforts with more effect. Team is best composed of those who agree on the same theory of change. After all, this all looks more natural. However, in this case civil society risks missing out the whole point: the impact in society. Without grounding their work on the constituency — through constant communication and engagement — it will end up in hollow declarations of ideas, but no implementation of the change it aspires.

Summing up, civil society is a good model for channeling people's aspirations and political concerns into actions, especially in the times of populism, absurdity, and instantaneity. But, does it regularly take a reality check? Is it related to the ground? And, is it vigilant enough?

Europe's Wars and Walls

Vasyl Cherepanyn

Europe's Wars and Walls
by Cherepanyn

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What is of foremost importance with regards to the idea of Europe is that we are dealing with a very specific ambiguity of the concept and respective reality it represents. On one hand, we are observing the closing of the 'European mind' as the European Union became a technocratic machine ruled by neoliberal ideology without possessing a common political discourse. Political imagination has evaporated from the modus operandi of the EU. The Eurozone has abducted Europe from itself, where politics was substituted by policing and protecting borders from newcomers. On the other hand, we can refer to a very important concept of modernity (also in artistic terms of modernism) which, as we know from Jürgen Habermas, is an unfinished project — much like Europe is as well. Europe is still in the making and needs fulfillment and accomplishment and those at its (semi–)peripheries, Ukraine in particular, have a strong say. A crucial dimension of subverting the metropole — as periphery dialectics lie in a proper political articulation or vocabulary — is how different experiences in the borderlands are translated in other parts. It is this East/West in–betweenness profoundly embedded in the borderlands that defines an urgent need of a political translation of how various educational, social, and political experiences are transferred to different contexts.

What has to be taken into consideration, especially with regards to the overlapping of Realpolitik and the functioning of cultural and artistic fields, is the logic of the EU Eastern neighborhood policies defined by two major factors nowadays. The first one is war and the second one is wall. The dominant type of EU governance today basically consists in the externalizing of internal problems and conflicts beyond European borders and at the same time punishing the peripheries for a crisis of its own making. The profound structure is that in order to keep a 'center', an internal space safe and in peace, its antagonisms and antinomias, though embedded in the very construction of the European Union, are being pushed beyond the 'European Wall'. That's why we've ended up in the situation where the EU is surrounded by a belt of wars toward the south and east. At the same time, what is projected to the outside returns in a perverse form to the inside. That which is called the 'refugee crisis', a totally misleading term as there is no crisis of refugees but a European political crisis for which war is a basic reason. Europe itself is becoming a battlefield for new types of terror. Paradoxically, we are now facing the task of reactivating the very foundations of why such a project as the European Union had been started at all. After the Second World War and the monstrosities of the Holocaust, a united Europe emerged as an idea to further prevent war and make peace on the continent — where there is Europe, there is peace — and this task still remains urgent on the current political agenda.

This claim is one of the most important: stop all the wars on the European continent. Indeed, if one conducts proxy wars in the peripheries or borderlands, one will never be safe in the metropole, it too will fall. EU policies in that regard can be called 'bordering violence', pushing violence to the outside, and this is exactly the role of the border wall. The Berlin Wall didn't fall, it just took on another form as some of its pieces were used to build another wall — the European Wall which

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now runs along the southern and eastern borders of the European Union. The notion of the wall still remains a main principle driver of the EU politics today. The very idea of the 'Union' was supposed to overcome the historical division and political isolation of Europe's east, and that was also the promise fostered by the Velvet Revolutions of '89 which broke down the Berlin Wall. Yet, the idea of borderless Europe was falsified and turned into fortress Europe. Thus, the logic of bordering violence to the outside is now multiplied within the EU at a time when a range of European nation-states are reintroducing border control; literally building walls and barbed wire fences in what was supposed to be a free, borderless Schengen zone.

In Europe's east and south, after the breakup of the USSR, the relevance of borders expanded, and that was the reason for numerous local wars. It's not just a border, it's a wall — it depends which side of the wall you are on as it defines the perspective from which one tries to figure out what Europe is nowadays because we will get two different Europes — the one that is, from the inside, a progressive, polished Europe and the one that is, from the outside, a barbaric, second-hand Europe. This wall is basically separating 'totalitarian free' space from the one where there are still it's supposed remains. Ukraine in this context plays a crucial role for the EU as it acts as a buffer or a wall country between Russia and the Union. The wall is not necessarily just a borderline, whole countries can play the role of a border, protecting an 'inner body' from the outside. Ukraine has been employed in this constellation for creating a big privilege for the EU not having a common border with Russia.

Paradoxically, this matrix is currently multiplicated and applied to the so called 'refugee crisis' — the EU strategy towards Turkey or Libya is precisely about outsourcing, thus creating a belt of border countries around it to prevent newcomers from entering the inner territory. Therefore, the notion of migrant is a key to understand this problematic field. If we refer to an ancient Greek myth which gave birth to the very idea of Europe, it appears that Europe itself is a refugee. According to the narrative, when Europe was abducted and raped by Zeus, she disappeared and three brothers of hers started to search for her but never found her. From that time on, Europe has always been cherchez la femme, always absent. That's why it is hard to centralize because the center of Europe is always-already somewhere else. Politically and ethically speaking, it is totally catastrophic that the figure of the so called 'illegal migrant' in today's Europe became a new kind of symbolic Jew, and the EU common strategy to deal with the 'refugee crisis' is to eliminate 'illegal' people from our eyes.

Europe is not just facing problems; it is part of the problem(s). In order to tackle the conflictuality inscribed in the very construction of the European project, it is crucially important to address its antagonisms in a proper way because they are currently suppressed on a mainstream political level and are finding a perverse way to be channeled. This is obviously evident in the rise of right–wing populism, as one of the leaders of AfD's youth organization said at a party gathering in 2018, "European Union has to die so that Europe can live." Throughout recent decades, the political left has almost totally failed and the right is becoming dangerously more and more

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far–right. We are not pessimistic enough in that regard as we are still somehow defending the current political status quo, whereas, the status quo itself has to be questioned foremost. The EU establishment is very keen to stress how 'our Europe' is threatened by nationalist populism while also naming other global concerns: climate change, digital technology, terrorism, migration, etc. Yet, they forget to mention a main reason of the far–right populist surge in Europe, that is the politics of the European establishment itself. It is these conditions of war, political reaction, violence, and far–right populism as its results that are harshly challenging the modus operandi in which artistic, educational, and cultural fields operate, these are its main enemies today.

My Europe

Tinatin Gurgenidze

My Europe
by Tinatin Gurgenidze

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After the dramatic collapse of the socialist system in the 1990s, previously almost unknown and new countries appeared on the world map. The newly born 'post-socialistic' states had to undergo the inevitable but rather painful change from planned to market economy.[1]

So, as it happened, on 9th of April 1991 Georgia was declared an independent country, marking the long period of political and social instability.

My childhood memories of the 1990s are full of thoughts about everyday temporalities, the struggle for survival amid wars, political instability, poverty, and difficult social conditions. I do have one special memory that follows me all the time and has definitely influenced me as a person.

It was a sunny day in Tbilisi, on May 26th 1995. I still remember looking at the blue sky where the planes of the Georgian Air Force produced a spectacle for Independence Day. I will never forget the feeling when my father jokingly told me that I too could jump from plane and parachute like the soldiers. I think the memory of that day will accompany me throughout my life. We stood on the Rose Revolution Square — former Republic square — in Tbilisi, while watching the Military Parade dedicated to the Independence Day of Georgia. We all celebrated and applauded. We enjoyed our newly earned freedom, although the air still smelled like war. It was not too long ago that the same place on which we were standing was the battlefield of the 1991 civil confrontations. The Hotel Iveria[2], which had lost it's original face, stood just in front of us, serving as a constant reminder of the war our country had suffered in those recent years.

I did not immediately reflect upon the situation of this memory but just accepted it, as naturally as any child does when perceiving its surroundings. Decades later, when visiting Tbilisi with my young daughter, I came to realize that this memory is really a story of myself and that is when I really started to have feelings of freedom. For me, personally, this feeling of freedom or self–liberation is connected with Europe.

Since gaining independence in 1991, Georgia struggled to survive between west and east. If we revise our turbulent history, it has not been too different due to the geopolitical situation, so somehow, we go around in similar circles all of the time. The same can be said about the people who struggle to understand what their identity is. So, where really is the border of Europe? Who are those that belong to Europe and those that do not?

"I am Georgian; therefore, I am European," is part of a famous speech by former Prime Minister of Georgia, Zurab Zhvania who died in suspicious circumstances in 2005[3], at the European Council in 1999. This iconic speech marked the beginning of the long journey of the Georgian State getting closer to Europe. 20 years have passed since this speech and we still ask ourselves if we really do belong to Europe mentally, physically, or with our identity. "What it means for Georgians to be Europeans has changed drastically over the past 30 years. The concept has been affected by politization in the local

Notes
[1] Revaz Gachechiladze, "The New Georgia: Space, Society, Politics", London, UCL Press, 1995
[2] Hotel Iveria located in the centre of Tbilisi was home for Abkhazian IDPs since 1992 for about 10 years
[3] Zurab Zhvania (9 December 1963 – 3 February 2005) was a Georgian politician, who served as Prime Minister of Georgia and Speaker of the Parliament of Georgia until his death in 2005.

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context — to be more "pro western" has created polarized society," says Liza Zhvania, the daughter of the former prime minister, while reflecting on her father's speech 20 years ago. Since the visa liberation[4] with Schengen States, more Georgians have probably visited Europe[5] than ever before. For many this fact also became a temporary opportunity to earn some money — by working for 3 months[6] and making more than they could in an entire year in Georgia. For others it became easier to travel as the borders that had separated us from this part of the world in some way had become closer. None of our bordering countries have the same visa free access to European States but somehow Georgia, a small island in the far eastern part of Europe, has managed to, making it easier for its citizens to travel to 'European' countries. In some way, the understanding of 'Europe' and who belongs to it is very diverse across different social groups. For those who struggle for everyday survival by living in temporary conditions the questions of identifying themselves with European culture and values is not relevant at all. One might say, this question of "Who belongs to Europe?" is a part of an elitist discourse and has less to do with the reality that Georgian citizens are living in.

If I ask myself again if I belong to Europe I start thinking about my identity and cultural background. Even though I have been living in Europe for the past 13 years, the strong identity of my being Georgian has never stopped existing in me. In order to be able to answer this question we need to define the meaning of 'European' in the first place. If we talk about a 'European' as a person of basic human values, as I recall in my childhood, I can easily say that I do carry these values with me. So, maybe we have always been European?

According to Gachechiladze (1995–5), Georgia managed to widen the actual boarders of Europe. Although geographically situated at the edge of Asia, culturally Georgia has always tried to get closer to the West and be a European nation.

As I understood 'Europe' as a child and as I perceive it now, when I observe the current situation in Tbilisi, the part of Georgia that I am mostly familiar with, I can describe it by talking about different levels of informalities in social and urban life. The transitional processes after socialism and the introduction of an era of neo–liberalism (Harvey 2005), which I perceive as very critical are reflected on the built and lived spaces of Tbilisi. The inhabitants have created informal self-made structures and in many cases they serve as solutions to their problems. Therefore, the informality can be understood as a phenomenon of self–liberation, emancipatory, and practices of self–survival among citizens. These practices are the ones which have been mainly in use after Georgia's independence. The urban areas of Tbilisi are full of informal individualized and fragmented spaces, in this entire process of urban and social transition, the feeling of common space and society seems to be forgotten.

My personal story of neo–liberalism or individualism is connected with the external extension[7] of our childhood flat

Notes

[4] The regulation lifting visa requirements for Georgians entered into effect on March 28

[5] Between March 28 and April 27, 11,700 citizens of Georgia travelled visa-free in Schengen area and only 26 people were denied entry at the border.

[6] A period of time (90 days) one is allowed to stay in Schengen states without a visa

[7] In 1989, the Soviet government of Georgia actually permitted the construction of vertical extensions – sometimes called "vertical slums" – on multi-story buildings.

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in Tbilisi, where my family still lives now.

Each time I go back to my childhood apartment where my parents live, I stare at the door and wall where our apartment once ended. This wall marked the end of the living space and attached to it was a small balcony offering a transitional space to the outside.

Additions and the endless process of loggia extension are part of my childhood story. I remember in detail how the metal frame was attached to our block, this was the beginning of our extension process. The metal frame remained untouched for years, it became an endless process as each family had to provide the money for finishing the extensions, making it even more complicated. For us, the children, this transformation process and perpetual construction attached to our apartments offered an interesting and dangerous vertical playground. I recall how often I would carefully go until I reached the end of the metal wire and would feel proud of myself that I had made it. The next step in our extension story is that the metal frame was slowly filled up with the concrete. This was the time when our balcony was detached. Now the brand new 40 square metre platform was our new terrace, a perfect place to spend hot summer days. I recall myself chilling in the hammock for hours during the summer. The endless games on the terrace are priceless memories of my childhood. The terrace also allowed us to connect with our neighbors and gave direct access to their apartments even though the neighboring flat was situated in a separate block.

So, by drawing to a conclusion of these personal stories, the ones that have followed and influenced me during my personal and professional life are, they have shaped my understanding of 'Europe'. My 'Europe' is self-liberation; it is exactly the practice of individualism and neo-liberalism which, in my words, I have explained through some of the architectural and urban phenomenon taking place in Tbilisi. As sad as it might sound, even though the actual values of Europe might be different, the reality that we live in today in the western countries or in the most parts of the developed world are indeed the product of the neo-liberal era. After all, I don't really believe in borders, rather in my idealistic world I dream of a world sans frontieres, so I think the border between 'Europe' and the rest does not really exist and the understanding of 'Europe' is a basic understanding of human values and culture.

From Liturgy to Flash Mob: The City as a Body of Political Desire

Nazareth Karoyan

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by Nazareth Karoyan

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On March 18th, 2011, the day when the Bahraini government sent troops to violently repress the rebellion at the Pearl Roundabout, Manama (renamed as Tahrir (liberation) after Cairo's infamous square), a rally of tens of thousands gathered in Yerevan in front of the Museum of Ancient Manuscripts and decided to march and 'liberate' Liberty Square. The goal of 'liberating' the square might seem to be a strange one, at least unusual, in the backdrop of the Arab Spring, the Spanish Indignados movement, Occupy Wall Street and the global anti–austerity movements that began in 2011. It is unusual if you are unaware of the fact that Liberty Square was closed to rallies and demonstrators for over three years as of March 2008. However, on that day in 2011 the demonstrators reached their goal and 'liberated' the square. Yet, at the ridiculous end of the seven–day rally–strike (with complaints from demonstrators on the availability of public toilets which received ironic reactions from political leaders of the ruling RPA) organized by the Armenian National Congress Party in the autumn of 2011, from October 1 to 8, shows that they cease to play a real part in organizing political life.

To understand the reasons for this transformation we need to look away from the history and look towards space and spatiality, to the layout of the city, its urban development, streets, transport nodes and communication nets, squares, gardens, and water surfaces, and observe this from the point of view of historical transformation. The current center of the city, built in the 20–30s, is based on the architect Alexander Tamanyan's plan. It is a north–south–facing, clockwise slope with three semi–circular streets surrounded by the south–east to the north–west and from the south–west to the north–east streets. In the center of the north–south axis, two squares lie: Republic Square and Liberty Square.

Incomparable in size: The square of Republic Square is about five times larger than that of Liberty Square and can accommodate five times as many human beings. They are also pretty different in their links between the structure and the street network (their communicative function). If the Republic Square, with its oval borders and the net of streets 'opening' into a starry public square, the Liberty Square has no direct connections with the streets. Being situated in a circle between the adjacent streets, it is a patched space opening into the spacious yard of the State Opera House, which was called Theater Square in Soviet times. As a sign, Republic Square is directly connected with the Soviet Union. Being the central square of the capital of Soviet Armenia, it was initially named after Lenin as the main symbol of the Soviet power with his statue erected in it. This genealogy was one of the reasons for refusing to consider Lenin Square (Republic Square) as central by the Karabakh Movement initiators in 1988 and choosing Theater Square (Liberty Square) for their rallies.

However, this choice was not only conditioned only by the symbols. The reason was also political and tactical. As part of the state of the Soviet Union, the local administration was still strong, and Theatre Square with its characteristic features, was providing a safer, somewhat protected area with its natural borders. There was also a psychological aspect, the origins of the movements initiators and its 'active' part — they were intellectual, cultural, dissenting circles. Theater

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Square was therefore able to bring them a feeling of 'home', it was a friendly place.

All of these circumstances were to come together in a joint sense of the conventional, ritual, and representative gathering in the square, to formulate a procedure that requires an actor on one hand and a spectator on the other hand; or a priest/preacher from one side and the believers from the other. Thus, turning the whole gathering into a ritual as a form of representative democracy, when a decent formulation, a rhetoric or electrifying appeal emerged in the leader's speech appreciative shoutings or chanting of the leader's name would echo.

In hindsight, the Theater Square rallies and its opposition to Lenin Square symbolized the period of diarchy when the power was formally in the hands of the Soviet Armenian administration and the real power in the hands of the Karabakh Committee as the leading force of the movement. Moving on in the course of time the movement turned into a popular struggle for democracy, making the Theater Square a sort of uterus embracing political independence. It was here that the tricolour flag was waved for the first time and here that the main political forces were formed, using the square as the physical stage in the organization of social and political processes in Armenia for two decades until 2008. Lenin Square, which after the collapse of the Soviet Union and Declaration of Independence, was renamed to Republic Square stayed inactive and subjugated for oppositional political forces maintaining the status of the appendant to the alien that existed during the Soviet era.

Thus, the bicellular center of Yerevan's architectural plan had given an eccentricity to the political life of Armenia excluding any link between power and opposition, a polarization which served as a basis for continuous rebellions. In a materialistic and spatial sense it had shaped a primitive understanding on political struggle and power, according to which, the power belongs to the one who has been able to concentrate all the material and administrative resources in his hands and continuously reproduces himself by nullifying the elections as a legitimate tool for forming or changing the political power. And according to the same idea, in order to achieve a change of power, the opposition should undertake two simple steps: to gather in Liberty Square and then move to Baghramyan 26, the President's residence.

When the construction of the Northern Avenue (linking Liberty Square and the Republic Square to the straight line), began and finished throughout 2001–2007, the simple–minded political circles were unable to realize the consequences of the implementation of this urban development — which had been designed by Tamanyan himself but not yet implemented during the Soviet era — and also, the new possibilities that it could open. Meanwhile, they appeared just after the opening of the avenue, during the February–March 2008 post–election processes, when it literally acted as a 'short cut' between these two squares. First, the participants of the post–election rally, organized by the ruling Republican Party, went to the demonstrators who were protesting and not accepting the results of the elections in the avenue (thus dragging up the number of those who were there), and then, ten days later, when

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the police violently dispersed those participants of the indefinite rallies', the latter were able to partially escape the same avenue police robbery.

In fact, the 'invisible' effects emerged even before the opening of the avenue, during the course of its construction, in the form of booming civil and civic activism. A large part of civil society was formed in the struggle for the legacy of heritage, the preservation of the historical layers of the city, and the protection of the rights of families and individuals separated from their homes. Therefore, as a result of the different fights for social justice in general, whose activity was exacerbated from the axis of Northern Avenue, manifested as a struggle, starting from every tree and shrub to complete parks, protests against the rise of fees for urban transport, and a civil uprising against the rise in electricity tariffs. Ten years of civic activism and struggle eventually gave birth to knowledge. Activists realized that just one step was enough to reach the authorities. It was enough to assemble in a particular place in the city and say "NO!", and it will appear in face of the police.

This certain experience and knowledge of civic activism in the public uprisings was put into action Armenia during April/May, 2018. For example, a hike in ticket prices for public transport by one politician raised a wave of disobedience that, as a matter of fact, was demonstrated over the course of a few weeks with a simple step taken by everyone: you leave the house or workplace (office, workshop, university) and close the street. The solemn ceremony of a rally of thousands in Liberty Square, with its hierarchical structure and functional division of stage and audience was now in the past. It was rather an impromptu and a widespread flashmob with a duration regulated by the natural light of the day, with the central venue moved to the Republic Square which was pulsating as the crowd increased, chanting deep from their lungs the atmosphere was swinging before emptying entirely at night. The police could close it, but they were unable to keep it closed at the same time as Liberty Square.

Judith Butler says: "As much as we must insist on there being material conditions for public assembly and public speech, we have also to ask how it is that assembly and speech reconfigure the materiality of public space, and produce, or reproduce, the public character of that material environment."[1] Yes, the urban environment is a support, a 'body' that constantly needs to be settled in the eyes of the public's desire, with words and deeds that come from these desires. But can one claim that space is only a passive supporter of the public, that is just a decoration of the stage on which the public is played as a performance and to keep it this way is enough to make that spectacle continuous?

Independent Armenia's political history has shown that political struggle and urbanization are intertwined with the fact that the space is an active factor in shaping the public and when it loses its significance due to urban transformation and development, the attempt to make it function again is doomed. The way out of that deadlock is to move to a new space, to find a passage and do over. Together, with the change of other factors, values, and medias this transformation also takes place as the city itself is transformed into

Notes
[1] **Judith Butler**, "Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street", 09 2011, transversal - eipcp multilingual webjournal.

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a living organism by creating a passageway.

The change of the place of political struggle from Liberty Square to Republic Square was not just a mere passage from one square to the other via the newly constructed Northern Avenue, but a transition from one form of democracy to another, from its representational form to a participatory one. The citizen who has gone through it is not just a spectator nor the main actor in a theatrical performance, but a dignified and proud participant of the flashmob.

Pluralist Europe: Across The Borders, or How to Counter Right-Wing and Authoritarian Populists

Olga Shparaga

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Towards the end of the first decade of the 21st century, the problem of global inequality is increasingly at the epicentre of the studies of political processes across the globe. This phenomenon is associated with the neoliberal globalization of the past 25 years. In the current democratic, European and North American space, this problem has yet another aspect — right–wing populism. And although the fears of its victorious march through the EU on the eve of the elections to the European Parliament did not materialise, the right–wing populists have indeed strengthened their positions, but more importantly, have convincingly consolidated their presence in the field of institutional politics.[1] This new European reality is not at all new for Belarus — the populist president has been single–handedly ruling the country for 24 years. And although the context of this particular authoritarian populism is different and can be identified though state paternalism (and not global market neoliberalism), it is linked with right–wing populism through the moralized form of anti–pluralism. Jan–Werner Müller reflects on this phenomenon in his book on populism. This common core of right–wing and authoritarian populism today reveals that it is precisely pluralism — the obligation "to find a just basis to share a common political space with other people whom we respect as free and equal, but who are simultaneously fundamentally different in their identity and interests"[2] — that happens be the main challenge for the contemporary world both connected and divided by globalization.

Between the old and the new forms of discrimination

In this new context, pluralism can hardly be reduced to the question of values, or rather, to the discourse on values outside the realms of economy and politics. The "other people" that Muller mentions are no longer only refugees and migrants from Arab countries, but also representatives of different generations, social groups or genders.

In his widely quoted book on global inequality, Branko Milanovic indicates that if in the second half of the 20th century the main form of inequality was inequality between countries, during the early part of the 21st century internal inequality took its place, bringing us back to the picture of the world as described by Karl Marx.[3] It is precisely the economic inequality that is increasingly seen today as a key driving force for AfD supporters in Germany, while the economic crisis and the erosion of the welfare state were among the top threats to Europe on the eve of elections to the European Parliament.[4]

However, it is important to keep in mind that economic inequality, which even in democratic countries can take form of an erosion of the middle class, no longer exists in its pure form and is accompanied by a number of aggravating transformations. One of these transformations concerns gender. The processes of emancipation, which gave impetus to the formation of a welfare state in the 20th century, led to

Notes
[1] See article: **I. Krastev**, 'The Far Right Is Here to Stay. And other lessons from the European Parliament elections', *The New York Times*, (May 28, 2019) https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/28/opinion/european-elections.html?searchResultPosition=1 [accessed May 2019]
[2] **Jan-Werner Müller**, *What is Populism?*, (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016) [Electronic version]. p.32 & 98
[3] **B. Milanovic**, *Global Inequality: A New Approach for the Age of Globalization* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2016) pp.118-154
[4] See article: **I. Krastev, M. Leonard & S. Dennison**, 'What Europeans really want: five myths debunked' *European Council of Foreign Relations*, (April 2019) https://www.ecfr.eu/specials/what_europeans_really_want_five_myths_debunked# [accessed May 2019]

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a weakening of the symbolic role of a father, who ended up losing his monopoly on the role of sole breadwinner. Circumstance of the deteriorating economic situation (also affected by the arrival of the service sector in place of production) hardly contributes to search and formation of the new, progressive symbolic patterns. That is especially true if society continues to uphold (at a level of mass culture and in the spheres of care and domestic work) stereotypes and behavioural patterns that are at odds with processes of female emancipation. We can draw the conclusion that European societies today are at a crossroads of numerous transformations requiring radicalization of issues and agendas, springing from the 1970s (in anticipation of globalization) and related to new forms of social state and social policy, gender equality and further trajectories of emancipation. And although they are formulated in new, different conditions that are no longer affected only by globalization and migration, but also by climate change and by the new nationalist aspirations that came after the year 2015 — there is, at times, a feeling of déjà vu about the fact that such phenomena are still possible at the beginning of the 21st century as a justification of economic superiority, social hierarchies, or sexism.

However, the most popular response offered today as a solution to the aforementioned problems is not a criticism of social inequality and the various forms of discrimination within the globalized European space itself, but identity politics. It seems to throw European societies back to the time before the emergence of the welfare state — to forms of existence that were regulated not on the basis of social solidarity, but on

the basis of the justification and consolidation of various privileges. Longing for those privileges happens to be at the centre of the new–old identity politics today.

Other Europe and others within Europe

This tendency is especially pronounced in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. For the citizens of these countries religiosity is important as a way of understanding their national identity (while in Western Europe religiosity is on the decrease). There is a direct correlation between religiosity and refusing women the right to their own body, the right to abortion and the general right to same–sex marriage.[5] From a Belarusian perspective, the growth of religiosity can be seen as due to the lack of serious, well–founded public discussions on all kinds of moral issues. They are practically absent from the Belarusian education system and media, while this state of affairs is supported and utilised by the authoritarian state to control public opinion. The need for such discussions, in turn, is due to a sense of economic and social insecurity, the vulnerability of living in one's own country with an eroding social state and the power structures outside of the citizens' control. As a consequence, moral discourse in Belarus, as well as in the neighbouring European countries is easily colonized by the church. This applies even to the quasi–believers, who are in the majority in Belarus and were given the characterisation 'Orthodox atheists' — that is, those who attend churches only

Notes

[5] See article. 'Eastern and Western Europeans Differ on Importance of Religion, Views of Minorities, and Key Social Issues', Pew Research Center (October 29, 2018) https://www.pewforum.org/2018/10/29/eastern-and-western-europeans-differ-on-importance-of-religion-views-of-minorities-and-key-social-issues/ [accessed May 2019]

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on religious holidays while simultaneously being superstitious and believing in horoscopes.

However, when it comes to the 'Muslim threat' the right–wing populists in Western Europe love to speculate on the idea of 'Christian Europe'. As is the case in of Central and Eastern European countries, this approach is about replacing problems with concepts — instead of analysing the conditions, including economic conditions,[6] that makes it difficult for various communities and members of society to integrate, it proposes to strengthen the very things that divide 'us' and 'them'. Neo–nationalistic rhetoric gives rise to more and more 'Others', which include traditionally divided groups; men against women or Catholics against Jews; as well as the newly constructed ones related to migration or a different interpretation of sexuality.

New societies of solidarity over borders

To summarise, social justice related pluralism in contemporary European societies must be affirmed along many lines at once taking economic situation and social status into account equally. This means that the disadvantaged position of certain people and groups should receive its own examination and undergo the identification of conditions that will make it possible to see globalization as a multidimensional phenomenon, used in their own interests by very different players and for very different purposes.

However, in order to recognize some of these purposes as unacceptable, it is necessary to return to the principles

and values resulting from social reorganization of the world after World War II. The most important among them are egalitarianism and the criticism of privileges. In adherence to this principle, the social deprivation and humiliation, for example, of white men in the United States who have lost their prestigious jobs and social statuses (as Francis Fukuyama considered in his recent lecture)[7] cannot be ignored, but should be placed in the context of the struggle for a decent life and social recognition of all other people and groups.

The upholding of social equality in its open and debatable form, or equality without unification, can no longer be considered outside of the struggle for gender equality and women's equality, which should not fall victim to the right of various communities to their cultural identity. This is clearly stated in the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women: women (and men) cannot become hostages of traditions and prejudices based on the idea of inferiority or superiority of one of the sexes.

Upholding those and other principles in the EU requires a critical look at culture as a whole. Different cultural models played and continue to play an important role in the lives of people and communities, however, that can hardly be the case when they take form of romanticized ideas about 'life before the European Union' or life before industrialization and globalization. This means that contemporary cultural

Notes

[6] Nowadays discrimination on the labour market on ethnic and other grounds is still a prevalent topic in the EU. See article: 'No progress in curbing racial discrimination in the European labour market — in particular for women of colour', *ENAR* (Brussels, 21 March 2018), https://www.enar-eu.org/No-progress-in-curbing-racial-discrimination-in-the-European-labour-market-in-1490 [accessed May 2019]

[7] F. Fukuyama, , 'The new identity politics. Rightwing populism and the demand for dignity', *Eurozine* (Lecture, 18 April 2019) https://www.eurozine.com/new-identity-politics/ [accessed May 2019]

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models should not be in conflict with the values and principles springing from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as to the agreements based on it. This makes the question of structure and existence of the communities themselves one of the most important issues of the day – in other words, today the structure of communities themselves must prevent them from turning into ghettos, i.e. should not allow their borders to become absolutely impenetrable and the principles of their organization to become closed to discussion.[8]

This leads to a key issue — the structure of the European community itself, or the European Union. Is it still possible to defend egalitarianism, solidarity, and adherence to human rights in a situation where EU borders are closed — as dreamt by the ultra–right leaders and politicians? All this in the situation of globalization, that allows the privileged people and groups, including those from Europe, to continue enjoying the benefits of globalization primarily for their own economic interests; and with a situation of war in Ukraine, whose citizens have clearly expressed their pro–European choice and require the full support of their European partners.

Hannah Arendt, one of the philosophers most cited at the beginning of the 21st century, arrived at an observation while considering the refugees in the period between the First and Second World Wars: she writes that there simply wasn't a place they "could land without facing the strictest restrictions." She concludes, "it had almost nothing to do with the material problems of overpopulation. The problem was not in spatial, but in political organization."[9] I am convinced that the fate of the European project, both at the level of individual

European countries and the EU as a whole, depends on the solution to this problem. If that is achieved, the European project can become the counterpart to the visions of the future of Europe by right–wing and authoritarian populists.

Notes

[8] I reflect on this in more detail in my book, *Community-after-Holocaust: on the way to inclusion in society* (Minsk: Eclab Books, 2018)

[9] **Hannah Arendt,** *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace & World, 1996 ed.) p.393

Whose Europe? Whose World?

Vitalie Sprinceana

Whose Europe? Whose World?
by Vitalie Sprinceana

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As a Moldovan I find it particularly difficult to talk about Europe. Of course, Europe is a complex topic but so is almost any political and/or cultural topic.

When I was studying in the US people would ask me where do I come from. "Moldova", I answered. "Where is that?" … "In Europe?" … "Where exactly?" … "A country between Romania and Ukraine." … "Is this close to France or Italy?" … It is easy to make fun of, in these instances, the supposedly geographical ignorance of ordinary Americans but I would bet that even some distinguished intellectuals are not aware that the confusion of some Americans is perfectly justified: some European borders (including the borders of territories or state departments of some European countries) for example, the one between French Guiana and Brazil is much closer to Washington DC or Ottawa than to Paris or Marseille. Later, when I was on vacation in Thailand, beach vendors and hotel workers were asking me directly what part of Europe am I from. I remember that I asked one of them how they know that I am from Europe and not from the US or Canada (other countries where white males live) and the answer surprised me: people from the US or Canada are constantly smiling, even in the most serious of circumstances, while Europeans appear more serious, even when they are happy and joyful, as if in each and every moment Europeans have to think about the hard questions: what is the meaning of life, what are black holes, and so on.

At some point later I started to travel often between European Union countries in order to meet with fellow activists and speak at conferences and meetings (I have even done a stand up on the decline of social–democracy on the Swedish island of Gotland). There were, at all of these meetings, discussions about Europe. Some were optimistic — I remember comrades from Podemos (Barcelona), Pravo na Grad (Zagreb) or Razem (Poland) dreaming about the days that they will have an opportunity to build a more just, equal, and inclusive Europe. Others were more pessimistic — the resurgence of the right wing in Poland, Croatia, and Hungary was sending strong worrying signals across the continent: public funds for independent cultural initiatives were being cut, xenophobic discourses were becoming normalized in almost all countries, and censorship seemed to be back in fashion again. But I couldn't miss the point that was a unifying feature of all these discussions: when talking about Europe they were talking only about the European Union (whose borders, if you believe conventional geography textbooks, stop right next to the very center of the subcontinent of Europe — a rather obscure location in Western Ukraine). Moldova (as well as Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia) is excluded from these discussions about Europe or only included out of courtesy (as honorary, but still, voiceless guests).

At the local level, in Moldova, politicians, writers, and journalists rarely think or write about Moldova as a European country. Rather, Europe is something very different, not only geographically and politically, but also civilizationally. They have already internalized the conceptual framework "Moldova is not yet Europe" and they have built an imaginary Europe that is everything Moldova is not: prosperous, tolerant, inclusive and so on. Europe, in this sense, is a paradise that

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waits to be conquered, that will be offered as a reward after we, Moldovans, complete our necessary quantity of sacrifices and pain. The best example of this Europe as a dreamland of aspiration is that most of the politicians that governed Moldova after 2005 came to power on a promise to keep the country on the European pathway and where possible, to deepen this pathway. Should I mention that Moldova is as far from joining the EU in 2019 as it was back in 2005?

These rather idiosyncratic accounts of the many understandings of Europe (some of them mutually exclusive or incompatible) being used by many people in various contexts and places are an indicator, for me, that thinking about Europe only in terms of Europeanness (whatever that means!) is part of the problem that Europe wants to solve. Europe is obsessed with looking for another idea of Europe. Look at the progressives: they criticize the EU for its democratic deficit, for its neglect of peripheries, for the privileges it gives to the rich and powerful, but they are afraid to think large: what if EU stops being centered on Europe and expands the model of political–societal–cultural–economic integration on a global scale? Look at the right wing: they criticize the EU for its alleged elitism, bureaucracy, and multiculturalism and want to retreat back to the confines of the Nation–state (while keeping some of the outsourced industries and agricultural subsidies they receive from Brussels). It is this unwillingness to think about Europe outside its connection to a specific place and its supposedly 'exceptional' destiny that traps many discussions about Europe today — let's face it, when examined closely European history is full of wars and conflicts and is anything but exceptional:

Europe has had just better luck with people writing its history.

What if the idea of Europe is to be decoupled from the subcontinent bearing the same name?

What if the idea of Europe ceases to indicate a place and starts to indicate a process (whereby people can overcome centuries of hatred and enmity and start to build a peaceful present for a prosperous future)? What if the idea of Europe is stripped of another of its 'imperial' attributes — the belief that Europe is something exceptional in the history of mankind — and becomes just another project put on the grand table of the future of mankind, one model among many others? What if, as arrogant as it is now, the idea of Europe could acknowledge the incommensurable damage it has done to other cultures and starts to learn from them other ways of relating to the world? After all, learning the ideas of Ubuntu in relationship to other human beings or Pachamama in relationship to nature will bring only benefits. These questions might not yet have easy answers. But they show a direction. If Europe, this unfinished idea (and all the good ideas have to be left unfinished), is to move forward, it has to look less at the past and more into the future. It has to think less about what is so exceptional in its past and more at what newness it can bring into the current, diverse, dynamic and complex world.

Is There Such a Thing as European Civil Society?

Kai Vöckler

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From edition *Whose Europe? The "New Europe" and Controversy around the European Idea*

What contribution can civil society initiatives make towards the unification of Europe? What would be the common ground of a 'European civil society'? While these questions cannot be answered here, an attempt will be made to arrive at a better definition of the concept of civil society — and to assess whether it is at all transferable to the European level. Introducing the very concept of 'civil society' into the European debate means more than just initiating a form of democratization (participation). There is a tougher side to it, as it implies disengagement (and return) of civil society from its local and national contexts towards a novel, supra–state entity, as currently constituted by the European Union.

Correlating with the collapse of socialist systems in Eastern Europe, the notion of civil society has had an extraordinary impact. Associated with it was the drive for democratic reformation, against the reform–resistant cadres, often lead by public figures: artists, philosophers, scientists, but also union leaders. The concept of the civil society operates on two levels of meaning: on the one hand it is a democratic alternative to authoritarian and dictatorial systems, self-organization that has been socialized against a repressive state. On the other hand, there is a certain type of civility at play, of certain values and norms of behaviour (tolerance, acceptance of difference and diversity) as well as a certain notion of a public space outside of both the state and private sphere (in 1984 Györgi Konrád defined it as "antipolitics", a counterforce that has no governing power as such, and yet because of its moral-cultural significance possesses a kind of power)[2]. However, in recourse to the idea of civil society formulated during the Enlightenment and the emancipation of the middle classes, it is clear that it ignored the criticism of bourgeois society as was later formulated in the nineteenth century (especially by Karl Marx): that bourgeois society cannot be considered outside of its economic system and is characterised by social inequality, self–interest, and injustice[1]. The fact that this critical view of civil society has been left out of the discourse ought to manifest itself as a potential problem.

The transformation process in the Eastern European states was informed by the neo–liberal reform policy, which — through liberalization, deregulation, and privatization — led to an economic upswing, at least until the financial crisis of 2008. However, this only benefited a small part of the population[3] and led to dramatic changes in most Eastern European countries, the negative consequences of which can still be seen in the very high rate of emigration to date. This shows weakness in the concept of a civil society that defines itself solely as antithesis to the state and the economy. The East and West European reform movements have overrun the changes between the state, business, and society that began in 1989. The release of capital caused by globalization and the emergence of new transnational production relations accompanied by transnationalisation of social inequality has not only led to a loss of sovereignty of nation states, but has greatly changed the affiliations to a country or region, including its cultural

Notes
[1] **Kocka, Jürgen:** "Zivilgesellschaft und soziale Ungleichheit aus historischer Perspektive." In: Rehberg, Karl-Siegbert / Deutsche Gesellschaft für Soziologie (DGS) (Hg.): Soziale Ungleichheit, kulturelle Unterschiede: Verhandlungen des 32. Kongresses der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Soziologie in München. Frankfurt am Main: Campus 2006, 131-143
[2] **Konrád, György:** Antipolitika, 1986 (dt. Antipolitik. Mitteleuropäische Meditationen, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1985)
[3] **Ther, Philipp:** *Die neue Ordnung auf dem alten Kontinent.* Eine Geschichte des neoliberalen Europa. Berlin: Suhrkamp 2014

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traditions [4,5]. The question of civil society is therefore re–examined, as it was originally geared toward the nation–state.

This becomes all the more clearer when one enquires about the European dimension of civil society. The civil society that in its various groups, milieus, and scenes (local, regional, national) has a high bonding capacity on the local scale as well as a high dispersal potential on the regional. At the same time it means autonomy of the cultural sphere on equal terms with politics and economy. Civil society as a place of social self–awareness in a public space had evolved within the framework of the nation-state, deriving itself from an overall understanding of a common culture that had been formed nationally. It would be a mistake to characterize this sphere as 'soft', for it mediates a feeling of belonging to familiar circles of community as well as instituting in the individual the idea of belonging as such, in particular to a shared geography and history (nation)[6]. Even if nation is an imagined community, the enormous power of abstraction and integration that the idea of nation–as–state-community invokes should not be underestimated. Although the notion of a national community is a social construction, it nonetheless finds concrete meaning in, for example, state-regulated tax or social legislation, rooted in the solidarity of the members of the nation. The same is true for the willingness to defend the state to which one considers themselves belonging. Two different views that are difficult to reconcile collide in the concept of nation: the ethno–cultural concept of nation as a community of descent, culture, and language, as well as the political concept of nation as a legal community (which also allows to see the 'others' as a part of the national

context on the basis of shared core values). Laws are also founded on habits, traditions, and shared attitudes of human communities. In this respect, a legal political framework such as the European Union also needs an overall substantiating idea that would provide a concept of belonging (Held commented on it critically in 2015). Accordingly, the civil society would be the place from which the 'European idea' can emerge. This calls for comprehensive values and standards across the national contexts that would provide the basis on which common shared practices can develop and common goals can be formulated. The key to this is solidarity: the belief in collective cohesion (and not the alleged 'organic' solidarity of a fictitious national body), in a shared framework that brings together the unequal, the diverse — and a state framework of governance where the common goals are politically negotiated through which they are enforced. This goes far beyond the festivalisation of European culture (food, festivals, cultural capitals, etc.) —what needs to be developed are the ideas of European solidarity and the future of European civil society. Firstly, within in the national civil societies and simultaneously from them outwards into the European space. The dissolution of ethno-national self-centredness and the recognition of cultural differences does not exclude the loyalty to a supra–state, law based social system of organization such as the European Union — provided that political participation is possible and effective.

Notes

[4] **Sassen, Saskia**: *The global city*. New York, London, Tokyo. Princeton, N.. J.: Princeton University Press 2001

[5] **Koppetsch, Cornelia**: *Die Gesellschaft des Zorns*. Rechtspopulismus im globalen Zeitalter. Bielefeld: transcript 2019

[6] **Held, Gerd**: "Die Sackgasse des ,Immer enger vereint'. Europa lebt vom Pluralismus nationaler Zivilgesellschaften". In: Werner Müller-Pelzer (Hg.): Europe Renaissance. Essaying European Civil Society / Europa-Renaissance. Die europäische Bürgergesellschaft auf dem Prüfstand. Göttingen: Cuvillier 2015, 31-54.

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Perhaps the common ground of the European idea lies precisely in the fact that this complex ethno–national and cultural fabric cannot be unified. Or, to put it another way: there is only unity in diversity. Diversity here does not mean something arbitrary, interchangeable, but as a culture of difference. Cultural diversity should be recognized, but its universalistic horizon should not be forgotten — formal legal equality is essential as the basic constitution of liberal society. The experience of difference should not be negated, but form the starting point of an overarching European idea. However this will only be politically effective if it credibly comes to solidarity with the 'others' (in Europe), expressed also in the distribution of public goods and in the effort to bring about social equality. An emerging European civil society can contribute to this end and begin to formulate an overarching and self-binding solidary European idea.

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