

UNITY AND DIVERSITY IN EUROPEAN CULTURE

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Abstract: The author studies the role played by the national culture in the present day European cultural context. The European institutions have to solve, among other problems, the problem of European identity versus national identity. The findings show that the cultural dimension in the European Union is taken into consideration both by the Council of Europe and the European Commission and that different measures were taken to respect and to promote the diversity of European cultures, to bring the people of Europe together and to increase the sense of a European identity. The author analyses the cultural diversity in Banat, Romania, an example of the assimilation of the cultural values keeping at the same time its specific value and identity.

Keywords: culture, Culture 2000 Programme, diversity, European identity, national identity, European Union, Banat region, multiculturalism, plurilingualism.

1. Introduction

The article is part of a research on the management of communication in the European Union programs, studying the EU cultural policies and how the national culture is seen in the European context.

Initially, European Union had merely economic objectives and only later culture was taken into consideration. The change was caused by the unique cultural European context: secular cultural tradition and inestimable cultural heritage.

1.1 Culture in Europe

In our survey regarding European culture we referred to EU official documents. In these documents is considered an essential element for the European integration and for the assertion of the European society model. Culture is more than an economic factor, it is a social one. Culture has an intrinsic value for all the people in Europe. Nowadays it has to face the new challenges of the community, such as globalization, informational society and the creation of employment. The process of globalization plays an important role partly because it exposes each society to different currents of thought.

The role of culture in the social progress and in the transmission of values cannot be denied. The *European Cultural Convention*, adopted by The Council of Europe on the 19th of December 1954, is the basis for cooperation in different fields, the cultural one included.

Article 5 stipulates the obligation for all the countries to safeguard the common cultural heritage, thus:

... each contracting party shall regard the objects of European cultural value placed under its control as integral parts of the common cultural heritage of Europe, shall take appropriate measures to safeguard them and shall ensure reasonable access thereto.

Fortunately, even after half a century, the provisions of the document are still in force. The *Third Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe*, Warsaw, 16 - 17 May, is another landmark in the European strategy designed to protect the European culture, concluded by adopting a political declaration and an Action Plan laying down the principal tasks of the Council of Europe in the coming years.

We are going to mention only the most important relevant articles to our research. Section III, *Building a More Humane and Inclusive Europe*, Article 5 refers to *Protecting and promoting cultural diversity*. Respect and promotion of cultural diversity on the basis of Council of Europe values are essential conditions for the development of a society based on solidarity. The document stipulates that measures are to be taken to develop strategies to manage and promote cultural diversity while ensuring the cohesion of societies, to support diversity and artistic creativity, to enhance access to cultural achievements and heritage.

Article 6, *Fostering intercultural dialogue* stresses the actions to be taken to encourage intercultural and inter-faith dialogue, based on universal human rights, as a means of promoting awareness, understanding, reconciliation and tolerance, and of preventing conflicts. The dialogue between cultures is also fostered by accurate understanding of history and the involvement of the civil society.

2. Culture 2000 Programme

The Decision No 508/2000/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 February 2000 established the Culture 2000 programme. This instrument for cultural cooperation has a running period of four years, 1 January 2000 to 31 December 2004, with an extension of two years. It replaces the Kaleidoscope, Ariane and Raphael cultural programmes which marked the first positive stage in the implementation of Community action on culture.

The cultural aspects were taken into account under the provisions of the Treaty other than Article 151, meant to respect and to promote the diversity of European cultures in accordance with Council Regulation (EC) No 1260/1999 of 21 June 1999.

Point 5 of the Decision 508/ 2000 stipulates that in order to achieve a better balance between the economic and the cultural aspects citizens should give their full support and participate in European integration. The common values and roots are the key elements of their identity and of their memberships of a society founded on principles such as: freedom, democracy, tolerance and solidarity.

Point 6 gives direct responsibility to the European Union for the creation of a closer union among the peoples of Europe to contribute to the flowering of the cultures in the member States. The implementation of this objective has to observe, first of all, the national and regional diversity and at the same time to bring the common cultural heritage to the fore. Safeguarding the position of Europe's small cultures and less widely spoken languages is not to be ignored.

Point 7 stipulates the necessity for the promotion of a legislative framework conducive to cultural activities and able to ensure respect for cultural diversity, and the integration of the cultural dimension into Community policies, as provided in Article 151(4) of the Lisbon Treaty.

The next 12 articles focus on encouraging creative activities, cooperation agreements for the implementation of joint projects, exchanges and dialogue and promoting the cultural heritage. At the Community level, effectiveness of the measures should be increased by concentrating the resources available for internal policies. All actions have to take in consideration the cultural area specific needs. This decision is to have a single financial programming instrument for cultural cooperation, and The Culture 2000 programme should be the only programme operating from the year 2000 in the field of culture.

We can summarize that the EU commission has in view the following main cultural objectives: to promote the cultural dialogue, to highlight the cultural diversity, to share the cultural heritage at a European level, to take into account the role of culture in socioeconomic development, to foster intercultural dialogue, to recognize culture as an economic and a social factor and to involve as many EU citizens as possible.

The following programmes were a follow up of the 2000 Culture Programme: Work Plan for Culture 2011-14, Work Plan for Culture 2008-2010, European agenda for culture in a globalising world, Culture programme (2007-13), European Capital of Culture, Europe for Citizens (2007-13), Online access to Europe's cultural heritage, Online digitisation of cultural heritage and i2010: Digital libraries, etc.

We can infer that there is definitely a concern for culture at the highest levels of the European institutions and measures have been taken to create the conditions for bringing the people of Europe together and to increase the sense of a European identity.

3. European Union Cultural Diversity

Cultural diversity in modern European society has several sources. Many societies include different ethnic, religious, cultural and other communities, with their more or less distinct ways of life. People move freely within the European Union, and when they return they bring with them some new ideas and practices they have acquired during their stay.

Globalisation brought many benefits and material comforts but also demands for fast, technology-based, and different patterns of work. Multinationals move their staff around from one country to another. As the economy develops diverse cultures come into contact. People who work for different companies have to be aware of the fact that they have to comply with the company value system which sometimes might be incompatible with their moral beliefs and ethics (Constantin, 2010:26). When there is dissimilarity regarding the cultural assumptions, social norms and societal values conflicts may arise. Culture is a whole heritage of traditions, customs, values and

norms which people follow unconditionally and there are conflicts even within the same society, between people belonging to the same culture as subcultures have different ethical standards or different interests. It is generally recognized that the knowledge of another culture helps you better understand your own culture. To avoid the collision of cultures all the people, not just the business ones, have to be aware of the dangers of inappropriate conduct. Any international communication carries a cultural message and speaking a foreign language fluently does not always guarantee success in international settings (Constantin, 2009:29). Dialogue makes people aware of *their commonalities and differences as well as their strengths and limitations, and encourages critical self-consciousness and legitimate pride and humility* (Parekh, 2011:4).

The European Union faces the problem of integrating its members into a cohesive social whole. Specialists consider that the challenges EU has to deal with are not easy to surpass since *diversity cannot be suppressed and unity cannot be dispersed*. The present day European context has to face another reality. The Union is made up of countries, which even in the last century were involved in armed conflicts and now they have to take decisions together. The European Union is aware of the importance cooperation between people, not only at the political and economic level but also at the cultural one; cooperation among people envisages cooperation in all fields.

The motto chosen by the European Union in 2000, "United in diversity" signifies *how Europeans have come together, in the form of the EU, to work for peace and prosperity, while at the same time being enriched by the continent's many different cultures, traditions and languages.*

Cultural diversity is a permanent feature of modern life. Cultural pluralism implies accepting the other, tolerance, plural coexistence, but with the opportunity to assert one's own opinion (Cucoş, 2000:160). One of the Romanian ex-foreign ministers (Severin:2002:12) wondered about the possibility of a conciliation between an European identity, still undefined, with the national identities which witnessed the development, but have not yet solved successfully the problem of peace guarantee and the elimination of war as a way to solve divergences.

The cultural diversity of the European Union derives from different sources, one of them being culture understanding. No one can ignore the historical realities. Countries perceive the belonging to the EU differently depending upon their traditions, history and culture. Interculturality implies a cultural change an interaction. This is partly achieved by becoming aware of the cultural information about the new culture from the perspective of that culture. "When in Rome, do as the Romans do" is a well know proverb but observing behaviour is not enough (Constantin, 2009:29). By observing any rituals of life we can derive possible interpretations but meaning is beyond what we see.

To promote and respect the linguistic and cultural diversity is a strategic priority of the European Union and a key element for the European integration.

Integration is difficult, but there are different types and different levels of integration (Constantin, 2011:130).

For the cultural integration efforts have been made with the Culture 2000 Programme. It is extremely important to encourage an intercultural and interreligious dialogue at the level of the European states to lessen the tension of the interethnic relations, and to find common points and communication channels accessible to all.

4. Banat: an intercultural realm

Our research on communication has as target population the people living in the rural area in Banat, and we studied the way in which cultural diversity is perceived in this particular region.

The demographic structure of Banat is due to successive colonization. The evolution was determined by various ethnic groups which settled in certain regions with appropriate environment for developing their activities. According to researchers Banat is considered singular form the intercultural point of view at a continental level (Buzarnescu, Pribac, 2002:167).

Unlike the western counties, where interculturality developed as a replica to the cultural models of the emigrants, in Banat it has, at its basis, an original permissive behaviour which allowed each ethnic minority to integrate in the history of the community without feeling aggressed by "the natives", be it minority or majority. They participated in the common life like the rest of the population, found ways of becoming an integral part of it and they developed a sense of shared community. In Banat interculturality has been continuous and interactive. The social cohesion was natural, generated by the necessity to solve ordinary day-to-day problems, the population was confronting with, irrespective of nationality.

4.1. Plurilingualism and intercultural communication in Banat

We can say that intercultural communication also exists at the national level, not only at the international one. Even if the same language is spoken there are situations when it is very difficult to surpass the cultural differences. Only the confrontation with new situations can raise the awareness of the fact that there can be other ways to behave than those learnt in your culture.

In Banat several cultures coexist for centuries. There are educational institutions with mother-tongue teaching and also cultural institutions, both state-budget financed. Timisoara is the only European town with state theatres in three languages: Romanian, German and Hungarian.

Communication among minorities has always been remarkable, the support being plurilingualism frequently used in all the ethnic minority communities. Germans also speak Romanian and Hungarian, Serbians and Bulgarians have always been bilingual, Romanian being the second language learnt in their families, the Jews are

multilingual. Multilingualism in Banat was perceived as a wealth belonging to each and every inhabitant, a way to get closer to people.

4.2 Traditions and customs in Banat

Along the history, the geographic position of Romania has facilitated the contact with several peoples and empires, bearers of their own cultural heritage, sources of great richness and vitality. The Romanian cultural space has been a refuge for many men of culture exiled from their own countries. Therefore, the cultural space within Romania's borders is extremely diversified and heterogeneous, profoundly influenced by the inhabiting of several ethnic minorities with a strong national and cultural individuality.

The tolerant character of the people from Banat and the openness of the autochthon culture towards communication have allowed the other "cultural entities" to express themselves. From the cultural point of view this region can be a real ambassador in Europe.

However, we cannot say that, at the national level, there are not extremist tendencies or non-constructive and retrograde political interests, but they have to be dealt with adequately. Multicultural societies are not easy to manage, and there is no saying what external and internal factors might destabilize them.

In Banat traditions still play an important part. Another significant fact is that people keep the custom to take part at the other ethnic groups' events, thus in mixed ethnic villages Ester is celebrated twice. Other customs have been adopted as well, e.g. Balul Ionilor, Balul Izmenelor. In 2010, the 10th Festival of Ethnic Groups" took place in Caras-Severin the home for hundreds of years of 20 ethnic groups. The particularity of this itinerant festival is that each year it is organized by another ethnic minority.

The Kirchweih is celebrated in Romania by the Germans living abroad, annually or at every two years, keeping thus a secular tradition. It is worth mentioning that the initial religious celebration purpose is changed, the holiday being moved in summer to give people who work the possibility to come.

5. Conclusions

The article is part of a research on the management of communication in the European Union programs, meant to identify the role culture plays in the EU policy. The findings show that culture has an intrinsic value for all the people in Europe, is considered an essential element for the European integration and for the assertion of the European society model. Culture is more than an economic factor, it is a social one.

The study of the EU documents shows the European institutions are concerned about the protection of the European heritage, the promotion of culture among of the peoples of the whole world. Respect and promotion of cultural diversity on the basis of Council of Europe values are essential conditions for the development

of a society based on solidarity. There is a real concern for increasing the sense of a European identity. The common values and roots are the key elements of EU identity and of a society founded on principles such as: freedom, democracy, tolerance and solidarity. The cultural diversity in Banat is an example of the assimilation of the cultural values while keeping its own specific values and identity, an example of intercultural communication. In this case tolerance and trust are key words for the cultural diversity.

We can summarize that the EU commission has in view the following main cultural objectives: to highlight the cultural diversity, to share the cultural heritage at a European level, to take into account the role of culture in socioeconomic development, to foster intercultural dialogue, to recognize culture as an economic and a social factor and to involve as many EU citizens as possible.

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