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CREATION OF THE «OTHER» AS A WAY TO SOLIDIFY EUROPEAN IDENTITY

Abstract: this article analyses the desirability and possibility of the creation of common European identity. It mainly focuses on the concept of the «other» and evaluates if the creation of common enemy is an effective solution for Europe nowadays in order to create strong and distinctive identity.

Аннотация: в статье анализируется целесообразность и возможность создания единой европейской идентичности. Она опирается главным образом на понятие «Другой», при помощи которой оценивается, является ли эффективным решением для Европы противопоставление европейцев людям из других регионов и других религий для того, чтобы установить прочную европейскую идентичность.

Keywords: European identity, other, orientalism.

Ключевые слова: европейская идентичность, другой, ориентализм.

There is no escaping the fact that the European Union (EU) is currently facing an identity crisis which was highlighted by events such as failure to ratify Constitutional Treaty in France and Netherlands, lack of disagreement among the EU member states over Turkey's accession and the rise of far right parties, to name but a few. Some argues that the EU was created as economic and political organization based on universal values (democracy, rule of law and human rights) and distinctive identity is not a necessity. Others, however, stress that this kind of organization without a coherent identity resembles a ship which floats somewhere in a middle of the sea without a clear direction [1]. While there are many «for» and «against» European identity it is obvious that its creation is not an easy task.

Edward Said in his classical work «Orientalism» stresses that «The construction of identity … is finally a construction – involves establishing opposites and «others» whose actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of their differences from «us» [2]. In this book, he argues that the image of Orient, as he called Eastern world, was not only created by contrasting it to Western societies but it also helped Western societies to build up their own identity. Said provides the example of Lord Cromer, who was the British governor of Egypt during colonial times and had described Oriental actions as completely different from Europeans especially in terms of logical capabilities and reasoning [2]. Oriental was portrayed as inferior, backward and barbaric, whereas Europeans perceived themselves as advanced societies with superior knowledge which should be used to control the Orient. The aim of this paper is, therefore, to analyze if the creation of the «other» or common enemy is an effective solution for Europe nowadays in order to create strong and distinctive identity.

The idea that common enemy or ¨other» might help to strengthen an identity of the groups is, however, not Said′s invention. Even before him Frederik Barth stated that the notion of what people are is normally constructed as a reply to «other» group [3]. Said's input was the perception that the state of «other» or enemy is not static, but on the contrary, flexible and prone to changes. Therefore, there is a constant need of reflections and interpretations which would correspond to the changing circumstances. In fact, during the early stages of the EU, the organization was not exposed to identity issues, because the Iron Curtain clearly symbolized the boundaries of Europe and the line from which «other» was to be found. It was understandable that Western Europe stood for democratic, liberal and free market values which could be easily contrasted with communist, totalitarian/authoritarian states in Eastern and Central Europe and Soviet Union. However, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the integration of Eastern and Central European states into the European Union erased the «other» and therefore led to the decrease of the identification with Europe. If Europe indeed needs to find or construct «other», Samuel Huntington is among the first ones to offer it. In his prominent article «The Clash of Civilizations» he raised the hypothesis that the upcoming

conflicts will be not ideological or economical, as it used to be during the Cold War, but rather civilizational [4]. Religion is considered to be among the most important features which define civilization. Huntington argues that because of bloody history, geographical proximity and current political developments the main antagonist of Western civilization (Europe is included) will be Islam [4]. So, one could argue that the religion might be a trump which has a potential to strengthen European identity. Turkey's EU bid, endless Muslim's immigration to Europe and social unrests related to it provided Europe an opportunity to construct its identity based on Christianity while contrasting itself to Islam.

Indeed, possible Turkey's accession raised heated debates in the EU which were mostly not about Turkey's progress in making reforms but rather about its predominantly Muslim population, different traditions and culture and how it might affect EU's social and cultural state of affairs. Currently there are more than 20 million Muslims in the EU and Turkey's accession would provide a representative, a «voice» for Muslim societies in Europe. On the other hand, a strong political union, which the EU aspires to become, requires «European we-ness» which would indicate common historical and cultural heritage[5]. Turkey's «otherness» and Europe's reluctance to accept it as a full member evolved from the division between Christianity and Islam[6]. Christianity is the clearest feature which bounds all member states of the EU. Observing recent developments related to enlargement it becomes obvious that religion is a crucial part of EU's cultural identity and even is considered to be an unwritten requirement for membership. Statements of Angela Merkel and Nicolas Sarkozy that Turkey could be offered a privileged partnership instead of full membership unambiguously indicated that.

Majority of immigrants coming to Europe are still from Muslim countries. Presence of Islamic symbols in European public sphere has become extremely visible during past few decades. In Brussels, European capital, 26 percents of inhabitants are Muslims [7]. Religious or traditional practices by Muslim immigrants are perceived as a serious concern to contemporary European identity. Muslim immigrants, therefore, are

usually not viewed as an integral part of contemporary Europe, but rather as an oriental threat towards ethnic Europeans. As Bulent Kucuk argues: «Orientalization of the Muslim immigrant leads not only to their discrimination, but also to the symbolic unification of European identity, masking European differences [5]. However, the real impact of negative attitudes towards Muslims in building common European identity is rather questionable. Here it should be emphasized that radical right wing parties in Europe which even do not try to hide their hostility towards Muslim immigrants are at the same time nationalistic and Eurosceptic. Moreover, the response to Muslim immigration varies among different member states of the EU and all of them have their own integration policies.

Anthony D. Smith while distinguishing other important factors in creation of common identity such as mass, standardized education system and media (which now are mainly national and lack European dimension) questions the desirability of European culture which would be based on cultural (religion) and racial exclusiveness [8]. He acknowledges that the way how separate European states treat minorities is not an attractive one and that each of Europe's national states seek to construct the EU body based on their own self-image [8]. Even with clear «other» but without common European educational system and media, which would enable the development of common symbols, myths and rituals, the construction of European identity would be hindered.

Conclusions. It is obvious that Said made a relevant argument that creation and reinterpretation of the «other» is a necessary condition in order to develop and maintain the identity. However, it is not sufficient one. In European case, if the establishment of the «other» (Muslims) is not supplemented by common symbols, myths and rituals which would be provided by European media and educational system, there are high chances that separate European countries will perceive the «other» differently in accordance to their own national interests and demands. This would provide little contribution in creating common European identity and might make the region even more divided.

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