NATIONAL IDENTITY AND MULTICULTURALISM

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IDENTITATE NAȚIONALĂ ȘI MULTICULTURALISM

Abstract: *Over the last decades, Western Europe became a multicultural space. This tendency is in contradiction with the original project of the nation state. For almost two centuries, political leaders acted within the nation states in order to achieve ethnic and cultural homogenization. The ideal project of the nation state stipulated the creation of a community that had language and numerous ethnic and cultural elements in common. At the theoretical level, there is also an alternative: the political nation, respectively the sharing of a large number of civic values, beyond linguistic, religious or cultural differences.*

Keywords: *identity, nation, multiculturalism, nation state, culture.*

Adnotare: *În ultimele decenii, Europa de Vest a devenit un spațiu multicultural. Această tendință este în contradicție cu proiectul inițial al statului național. Timp de aproape două secole, liderii politici au acționat în cadrul statelor naționale pentru a realiza omogenizarea etnică și culturală. Proiectul ideal al statului național prevedea crearea unei comunități care avea în comun limba și numeroase elemente etnice și culturale. La nivel teoretic, există și o alternativă: națiunea politică, respectiv împărtășirea unui număr mare de valori civice, dincolo de diferențele lingvistice, religioase sau culturale.*

Cuvinte cheie: *identitate, națiune, multiculturalism, stat național, cultură.*

Introduction

We identify two major visions on the idea of nation: the German and the French. The Germans claim that nation is closely connected to a common language and ethnicity, to an assumed historical past and to shared cultural values. On the other hand, the French, without ignoring the elements brought about by the Germans, consider that nation is, first and foremost, political and voluntaristic (in the spirit of the French Revolution which occurred in 1789). Therefore, it means adhesion to a nation, "a daily plebiscite", as Ernest Renan put it. And yet, this did not deter the French from conducting a process of denationalization of those who did not speak the French language. The German model implies nation overlapping ethnicity. Therefore, the German nation is made up of ethnic Germans. The creation of nations was first realized in the imagination and, afterwards, in reality, nation states were formed. In this process, within the Western Europe space, the boundaries between ethnicities and languages were easily set. The main exception was the Alsace-Lorraine region, which was disputed between the French and the Germans (conflict which is, of course, currently over). This region is inhabited by ethnic Germans

who consider themselves French. So, from a German perspective, they are Germans, being Germans from the ethnic standpoint; but from the French voluntaristic standpoint, they are, of course, French. [1]

National identity

There are many interpretations of the concept of identity. It is often brought about when references are being made to "identity crises". With the evolution of society, human solidarity was manifested in various forms, relevant being the primary types of solidarity: solidarity within the family, socio-professional solidarity, ethno-linguistic or confessional solidarity. In the Middle Ages, the Latin term, *natio*, from which comes the modern nation, was used mainly in reference to a community organized on socio-political criteria, which differs from the others in terms of social position. In the historical evolution of societies, there were times when socio-political solidarity coincided with some primary types of solidarity. If, during the migrations, it held a central place in establishing the socio-political status, after establishing a territory and after Christianization, the ethno-linguistic criterion became secondary. [2]

The concept of nation underwent a process of evolution, acquiring, in the 19th century, a comprehensive meaning. Of course, there are divergent views on the origin, age, and definition of nations. Anthony D. Smith conducted a comprehensive analysis of various opinions. [3] [4] [5] In his view, a nation is a community that shares the same history, has a common culture, lives on a territory with its own economy and benefits from regulated rights and obligations. Some analysts believe that nation dates back to Antiquity or the Middle Ages, while others believe that the origin of nations is closely related to the phenomenon of modernization in the modern era. [6] Amongst the numerous interpretations of the term *nation*, we mention: belonging to a community that differs from others by language, ethnicity, religion, historical past, own borders, geopolitical or economic interests. John Stuart Mill and Ernest Renan talked about the importance of a common historical past in defining the idea of nation. [7]

Since the middle of the 18th century, on the European continent, socio-political solidarity coincided with ethno-linguistic solidarity, this fact leading to the birth of national consciousness. In the 19th century, a conception was established, according to which the political organization of the nation was "the natural and inevitable form of political organization on a large scale." [8]

The modern definition of nation includes: a consolidated state (however, the state does not unconditionally identify with the nation), the emergence of national languages (although several languages may be spoken within the same nation, such being the case of Switzerland), the establishment of the internal market, the awareness of a common historical and cultural identity. Some analysts believe that the modern nation must also include the concept of democracy, namely equality before the law for all citizens of the same state. [9] [10] [11]

According to Jacques Maritain, nation does not belong, like ethnicity, to the biological domain, this being a component of the ethical and social domains (the community being reunited based on sharing common values with its moral meanings). [12]

Sometimes, territorial centralization was an essential step in creating national consciousness, with spatial unification preceding and conditioning unification on the imaginary level. The territorial centralization of France, from the top, by bringing together, within a single state, some ethnically and linguistically fragmented territories, led to the birth of national sentiment over time. However, around the year 1900, only 50% of the French people used French as their native language. The rest of the population spoke various dialects and languages of Romance origin, and,

in Brittany, Alsace and Lorraine, languages of Celtic and Germanic origin were largely spread. [13] On the other hand, the emergence of a strong national consciousness in the absence of state unity, led to territorial unification (in the case of Germany, Italy or Romania). At the beginning of the 19th century, in his work *Discourses on the German Nation* (1807-1808), Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814) emphasized the German unity of spirit, beyond territorial fragmentation.

In England and France, which experienced an early centralization phenomenon, governments adopted measures to linguistically and culturally homogenize different ethnic elements and create a unitary national history.

Patrick J. Geary identified in the Central and Eastern Europe found under the control of the empires, three stages that preceded the establishment of national communities: involvement of enlightened intellectuals in the study of the language, culture and history of his own people; subsequently, the results of the scientific analysis were taken over by a second group, that of the "patriots", which popularized them; the last stage involved imposing the movement at community level. This process took place, with insignificant regional differences, in the 18th century in the German space and in the next century in the Habsburg, Ottoman and Russian empires.

From the 15th to the 16th centuries, we witness the emergence of the modern state in Europe, a phenomenon which involved the central authority taking over political and military responsibilities, previously held by the privileged, which, in turn, benefited from economic and social benefits. In fact, John Locke highlighted the fact that ensuring the protection of property is the reason why people are organized in communities and states, accepting a government. [14]

At the beginning of the establishment process, the modern state had limited possibilities to monitor the citizens. High aristocracy, which imposed its will at regional level, interfered between the great masses of the population and the king. For example, the Crown of Castile could be considered a "federation of municipalities". The central authority did not exercise a rigorous control over local communities, which were able to avoid paying their taxes.

The existence of the modern state was not based on coercion, as it could not survive without popular support. In 1697, Bossuet, a theorist of absolute monarchy of divine right, stated that "God has invested kings as his ministers and rules through them over the peoples." Therefore, the monarch was given a divine nature, which gave him legitimacy. The established hierarchy was based on the divine will, being correct and legitimate. The established system of government aimed at ensuring the prosperity of the people. Only the abdication from the carefully arranged norms determines the appearance of social inequities – amongst the main attributions and duties of the state was the protection of the subjects.

A visible element in the emergence of the modern state was the formation of the permanent army, which was in continuous improvement. The army represented a distinct universe, with specific rules and customs. The army was a career to which officers and soldiers devoted their whole lives. Most of the officers were part of the nobility, the "army profession" being considered "the only one worthy of a gentleman." According to the tradition inherited from the Middle Ages, the first born would adopt a "military career", while the next one would receive ecclesiastical positions. In the process of promotion, the nobles were preferred by the king, their promotion falling into the category of favours which he granted to its subjects. When Michel Le Tellier, Marquis de Louvois (1641 - 1691), one of Louis XIV's ministers, tried to speak of promotion based on seniority, he faced opposition from the nobility, being forced to give up his intentions.

Nation and nation state are different concepts, the latter representing, in the 19th century, the modernized absolutist state. In the previous century, both the French and Spanish monarchies tried

to legitimize their authority by invoking national sentiment, but the results were modest. In Spain, Olivares drew up a plan for a "Union of arms", but this did not prevent the start of conflicts that led to the separation of Portugal and Catalonia. From the absolutist regime, the French Revolution inherited a group of nations, the element of cohesion being a community archetype that gave each citizen the title of "son of the birth land". The main innovation of the modern age is the unification of the state and the nation into one entity. Modern nation is the expression of the sovereignty of the people organized in a state. [7] The state constitutes a nation and citizens are the nation. Max Weber called the state an "agency" which holds the "monopoly of legitimate violence". [15]

The ideological significance of the kingdoms of divine right has gradually lost its amplitude. A profane cohesion was established, based on the worship of the homeland and the creation of symbols. Such is the example of the national flags, but the strongest elements of unity were the national market (the creation of economic connections at state level, regulated by common laws), as well as education organized by the state. School was given the task of implementing a national mythology fabricated by creating a common history; imposing the language of the predominant ethnic element; promoting the same cultural values in a diverse cultural area; making maps of the territory inhabited by the nation with rigorous delimitations. Within the formation structures we can also include the justice system and the prison, which established the acceptance of national legislation and the consolidation of order.

The above-mentioned elements contributed to cultural solidarity but harmonisation took important steps only after the weakening of local support. These transformations were justified by invoking the need for economic development, despite traditional structures which were against. The agricultural revolution and the industrial revolution led to the erosion of regional ties and the accentuation of inequity in the distribution of wealth. Consequently, the most important instruments by which the state accomplished centralization of the territory were – as we have shown – the creation of an internal market, the imposition of a common language, an education system at national level and a police system whose mission was to supervise them. [16]

The nation state undertook the mission to achieve cultural harmonisation through education, the official language and the administrative system. After World War II, mass-media (especially television) was used to support national ideology to the detriment of peripheral languages. [17]

A number of analysts consider the nation state to be an "imaginary community", accomplished due to political and economic elites for the development of national markets; in most cases, nation states and national markets were formed at the same time. Nation states offered a favourable framework for protecting national markets, asserting sovereignty in comparison to other nation states and entering a competition with them. The elimination of local separatisms was achieved by creating a common history and identity, a phenomenon that also occurred in countries such as England, France, Germany and Italy. In many cases, members of a nation state previously belonged to different ethnic groups. According to Montserrat Guibernau, if the nation has "a common culture, values and symbols", that nation state undertook its mission "to create a common culture, symbols and values". [18]

Anthropologist Ernest Gellner believes that the nation state has led to the establishment of national identity. Traditions were invented, which contributed to the homogenization of society, fragmented from the social point of view, due to the accentuation of the division of labour in the industrial society. People left from village to the city, in search of jobs, abandoning both their old traditions and dialects, adopting a different language. As part of the project of creating a national culture by adopting a common language, education coordinated by the state held a fundamental

role. A relevant example in this respect is France, where, in 1789, less than 50% of the population spoke French and only 12-13% spoke it correctly, while in the northern or southern parts of the country, French speakers they were a rarity. In the 18th century, in the German space, only about 500,000 people spoke or read in the dialect that would later become the official German language. In unified Italy, since 1861, only 2.5% of the population was fluent in literary Italian.

The creation of national languages was not exclusively the result of the policy applied within the nation states. The demographic facts related to the distribution of books in the beginning period also mattered. Printers faced the problem of the many dialects spoken in Europe. As a consequence, in order to expand their book market, they used the dominant dialect of a certain region, thus transforming it into a common language. The current French, German, Spanish, Italian and English languages are the result of combining several dialects, to which grammatical standardization was applied, the centralized national education system having a fundamental role in determining the population to express themselves and read in those languages. [19]

Jeremy Rifkin notes that the "transition" to modern nation states, which began in England, United States and France and continued throughout Europe in the 19th and early 20th centuries, was supported by two events: the confiscation of church agricultural property and their takeover by the new bourgeois class and the expansion of the telegraph and the railways. The state confiscated the property of the Jesuits in France and Spain (from the middle of the 18th century) and in Italy or Germany the lands of the Church were sold, being taken over by the wealthy bourgeoisie at modest prices. The creators of the new society supported private property, engaged in a free market within a "centralized nation state".

In the modern nation state consolidation process, a fundamental part was played by the development of communications. The spatial and temporal obstacles were alleviated: in 1780, the road between London and Manchester lasted four to five days, a century later the train travelled the same distance in just five hours. Representing an important lever in the evolution of society, the railways became true national networks which developed in a spectacular manner. In 1840, Great Britain held a network of 2,390 km of railways, and after only six decades, over 30,000 km. In the same period, France had an increase from 497 km of railways to more than 38,000. At the same time, the telegraph facilitated long-distance communication.

By acting consistently, the state cemented "national solidarity" to the detriment of other types of previous solidarity. Due to this fact, the nation acquired an identity, based on highlighting the qualities of the people and encouraging patriotic feelings. The gradual acceptance of an increasing number of components belonging to a "common culture" has led to the strengthening of *national consciousness*, which remains today the most important form of assertion of identity for many Europeans.

Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism and communitarianism show a central interest for organized communities, which they consider essential from the perspective of achieving social solidarity. That is why the great theorists of multiculturalism such as Michael Walzer and Charles Tylor are sometimes regarded as community philosophers. These two philosophical schools refuse to accept an abstract view of the individual and highlight the major part played by a series of legacies, respectively, a series of norms, values or cultures, in the materialization of social connections. Despite these common elements, a significant difference can be identified between the two philosophical schools. This is reflected in the way it relates to the liberal vision: communitarians reject the

accentuated individualism specific to liberalism, while the promoters of multiculturalism do not refer to the liberal heritage.

Taylor and Walzer refer to the most important principles found at the core of the US society, namely respect paid to individual freedom and equal opportunity, plus protection for cultural diversity. The promotion of social and cultural particularities takes precedence over common moral values. [1]

Multiculturalists reject the integration policy specific to the nation state, which favours national cultures to the detriment of peripheral ones. They believe that all cultures deserve to be recognized and that minorities have the opportunity to use their own language and promote their values. The perpetuation of one's own culture is of an importance comparable to the principles at the core of individual freedom: freedom and equality. Therefore, multiculturalism does not exclude liberal democracy. Multiculturalists point out that "protecting the dignity of cultures" does not fall within the scope of the classical model of citizenship. It is characteristic to French republicanism and American liberalism and it is based on the distinction between the public and private spheres. In the latter, citizens enjoy the full freedom to preserve their particularities, which imply belonging to a certain community, adopting a certain religion and sharing a certain historical past. Yet, in the public sphere, the place of manifestation of political life, individuals subscribe to the status of citizens, sharing similar rights and duties.

In the old Western European monarchies, such as France, Spain or England, kings played an essential role in the creation of nations and nation states. The Old Regime period, based on monarchical absolutism, was much criticized by the philosophers of the Enlightenment. However, under monarchy and based on the principle of sovereignty, state centralization was achieved, which led to the emergence of modern nations and nation states. Another process of the formation of nation states took place from the bottom up, the crystallization of a strong national consciousness led, in the 19ᵗʰ century – the "century of nationalities" – to the emergence of new nation states. The national project encountered difficulties in Central Europe and the Balkans, a particularly mixed ethnical area. This led to population exchanges, expulsions or even genocide. As a consequence, the ethnic and cultural aspect of the states in the region has been significantly simplified. However, it became materially more complicated in Western Europe, where the ethnic aspect of the states was more homogeneous. In recent decades, many emigrants moved to Western Europe. They fled a poor and insecure world in order to seek refuge in a stable and prosperous world. This phenomenon was also supported by the need for labour force of the West, marked by demographic stagnation and the refusal of its citizens to perform a series of "lower" jobs. Some of these immigrants have been assimilated and others are in the process of assimilation. However, many were not assimilated and do not want to be assimilated. The greatest resistance to this process of assimilation is posed by the Muslims. The Christian West, then the secular West, is gradually becoming a Muslim West. As for the Muslim percent in France, the estimate figures range from 3.5% of the total population to an impressive 11%. The French state had previously denationalized Bretons, Provencals or Alsatians. Newcomers are much more different, and, in their case, the French assimilation mechanism seems to be inefficient. In other Western European countries, the percentage of Muslims is estimated to be 5% of the total population: Germany (the Turks make up the majority of the Muslim population), Belgium, Austria and the Netherlands. If we also add other communities from Africa and Asia to the Muslim population, the result is an average of about 10%, in the Western European space, of people belonging to other cultures than the European one. To these, a large number of Eastern Europeans is added, European who settled

in Western Europe after the fall of communist regimes. However, they are much closer to Western culture and, consequently, have a greater capacity for integration. In Germany, more than 15 million people come from immigration, representing about 20% of the population. In many cases, significant cultural distinctions overlap with marginalization and poverty. This phenomenon can be seen in the suburbs of major western cities. In France, inside these real ghettos, urban riots took place. [1]

Multiculturalism involves a number of "virtues" but also an increased number of risks. Undoubtedly, cultural differences contribute to the spiritual enrichment of a society, but they can also lead to conflicts between people. A culturally homogeneous society involves even fewer risks.

In fact, multiculturalism "was not a desired project, but an imposed virtue." France continues to rely on integration, but there are doubts that multiculturalism is a success story. A xenophobic current also crossed the Netherlands, and they used to be known for their tolerance. Also, we must not forget the statement of Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany in 2012, (in the meantime the situation has not improved, on the contrary): "Multiculturalism has failed".

Until today, the percentage of those who settled in Western Europe from other partially assimilated cultural areas does not affect the preservation of the "Western pattern". Regarding the future, there are several possibilities. A first scenario would be that in which immigration will be kept under control and the integration of newcomers will have positive results. In this case, the Western world will maintain its profile and will even become more dynamic, through an infusion of new cultural elements. The other scenario concerns uncontrolled immigration, to which we should add the failure of integration and the significant increase of the foreign element in the Western European culture. There is an opinion that France will become predominantly Islamic in just half a century. In such a situation, France would no longer be France. In the West, the "besieged fortress" complex returns, individualized in the so-called "myth of Islamization." However, not only Islamic immigrants arrived and continue to arrive in the Western world, but also other immigrants, bearers of various cultural elements. This surplus of population, to which social contrasts, ethnic, religious and cultural differences are added, may lead to conflicts across all levels. Certainly, we don't know for sure how the events will unfold. What we do know, however, is that the percentage of newcomers is going to increase.

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