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In the Name of Identity

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In the Name of Identity

*Gabriela Guerra**

The rest of the world belongs to Europa. [...]. The god bestowed the girl's name on the shore [...] which by that title he consecrated as a memorial for his love.¹

Throughout the ages, the classically romantic myth of the Phoenician princess, Europa, has been artistically rendered by scores of European masters. From Tintoretto to Rubens to Poussin, said artists have interpreted the tale of the beautiful princess being carried away to Crete by Zeus, in the form of a bull, in their own respective manner. However, in each account the link between the myth and the present-day identity of the continent is indisputable, for, as the Italian poet, G.B. Marino describes in *The Whispering Wind*, "Then in eternal memory, Europa with her name was given, to the most beautiful region of the world, the most noble part...". It is indeed difficult to imagine that one name, Europe, can represent an ever-changing civilization which stands for a multitude of values that vary over a time span of more than three thousand years.² This European identity symbolizes the population of those who reside in the region in its historical, cultural, geographical, economical, and political contexts through the eras.³ Over the last five decades, Europe's political landscape has changed dramatically. A continent divided by national hatred, ravaged by war, and bereft of a firm psychological basis has evolved into an increasingly peaceful, prosperous, and confident polity in which various nation-states are experimenting with a novel kind of international relations.⁴ Since its inception, the European construct, an economic and political union among twenty-seven nations under the governance of intergovernmental and supranational ideologies, has been wedded to the fetish of movement and progress, as visibly demonstrated by the gradual increase in cohesion, delineated in various EU treaties. While a plethora of European institutions have been firmly established as political beacons of democracy, it is often said that the European Union lacks a 'demos'—a perceived sense of common political identity deemed as necessary to construct a democratic political system.⁵ According to the influential Tindemans Report, "Europe cannot proceed to a greater degree of political integration without the underlying structure of a unifying European identity". This paper examines the present search for a true European identity from where the democratic polity, as a whole, can legitimately extract power. The paper will begin by exploring the origins and implications of holding European citizenship. It will then examine the political, cultural, and nationalistic identities held by the citizens who inhabit the region defined by its unbounded diversity.

In order to establish an accurate perception of the complex European identity, one must first examine the legal element that constitutes a European citizen: citizenship. European citizenship developed in stages during the entire process of European integration. At the Copenhagen summit in 1973, a paper on European identity was issued and at the Paris summit in 1974, the question of a 'citizens' Europe' arose officially. The heads of state and government agreed on the establishment of special rights, in order to bring political and civil rights acknowledged by the European Community (EC) closer to rights traditionally acknowledge to the

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¹ Marcus Manilius, *Astronomica*

² Peter Gommers, 13

³ Ibid

⁴ Jeffrey Checkel & Peter Katzenstein, 4

⁵ Stefano Fella, 12

national citizens.⁶ In 1984, at the European Council of Fontainebleau, an *ad hoc* Committee was set up to address issues relating to a ‘people’s Europe’. The Adonnino Committee published two reports concerning the enlargement of economic rights, and the establishment of new rights to bring Europe closer to the citizens; the Committee put forward proposals on rights of citizens, culture, youth, exchange, health, social security, free movement of people, town twinning, and symbols of EC identity.⁷ The European passport, the European flag, the European anthem, which are elements of citizenship traditionally linked to nation-states, were adopted in order to increase the awareness of the EC as a new political actor, and foster the feeling of belonging to the Community.⁸ Moreover, exchange programs for students and professors were created to favor an open-minded European culture through mobility.⁹ In 1986, the Single European Act (Article 8A) clearly referred to the right of free circulation of people by granting Europeans substantial rights of movement. While the aforementioned initiatives paved the road for European citizenship, the formal meaning of said citizenship was explicitly composed in the Treaty of Maastricht (1992): in addition to granting political rights, it also constitutionalized existing rights that were part of the *acquis communautaire*, and establishing new rights for European citizens.¹⁰

European citizenship appears among the primary objectives of the European Union, denoted at the beginning of the Treaty of Maastricht: ‘The Union shall set itself the following objectives: ...to strengthen the protection of the rights and interests of the nationals of its Member States through the introduction of a citizenship of the Union’(Title I, Article B). Title II Part Two of the Treaty formally establishes the ‘Citizenship of the Union’ stating that: ‘Every person holding the nationality of a Member State shall be a citizen of the Union’ (Article 8, 1). A supranational citizenship is established offering EU citizens the possibility of exerting the Union’s rights along with national rights; the Union citizenship is not designed to compete with national citizenship, rather the former is additional to the latter and the nationality of a member state is the *conditio sine qua non* for European citizenship.¹¹ In fact, the Treaty of Maastricht establishes a ‘multiple citizenship’; in a similar way one can refer to a ‘multiple identity’ by considering local, regional, national and European identities as compatible without excluding the one from the other.¹² In order to stress this complementarity between the Union and the national citizenship, the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997) states that ‘Citizenship of the Union shall complement and not replace national citizenship’. Thus, the Treaty of Amsterdam stresses the EU goal to create ‘an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe, in which decisions are taken as openly as possible and as closely as possible to the citizen’.

Perhaps one of the most significant implications of citizenship to any given country lies in the political rights granted, thus producing a lucid political identity. A political identity is both a social and a historical construct. As a social construct, it reflects the institutional nature of the political community; as a historical construct, its emergence and consolidation is bound up with historical contingencies and with the way in which competing narratives and ideologies shape the self-perceptions of the members of the community.¹³ The perennial aspect of political identity however, lies in sustaining citizens’ allegiance and loyalty to their respective political community.¹⁴ Herein presents the dilemma of political identity for citizens of the European Union. Europe is composed of twenty-seven small states that have maintained national sovereignty for centuries. The denizens of said nation-states are very much attached to their

⁶ Stefania Panebianco, 19

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ireneusz Pawel Karolewski, 44

¹⁰ Stefania Panebianco, 20

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Ibid

¹³ Dario Castiglione, 29

¹⁴ Ibid

independence, and proud of their sovereignty and their national identity. With the emergence of a multilevel polity comprising both intergovernmental and supranational levels of governance, there has been a question of allegiance. Does a European Union citizenship require a shift of loyalty from the national to the supranational level? This very predicament can be flawlessly illustrated in the 2005 constitutional crisis with the defiant French and Dutch “No” votes on issues regarding the Preamble of the Constitutional treatise. The downfall resulted not only from the lethal blend of an overdose of Weberian legitimacy (the normative overweight of the Constitution itself) and diminished performance (the presumed inability of the Union to protect underprivileged layers from the effects of globalization), but also from a large lack of an emotional and symbolic grasp on the citizens’ souls by the political elites, which were almost unanimously in favor of ratification.¹⁵ The French and the Dutch held atavistic fears of losing both their national identities and sovereignties over political matters. William Pfaff, commenting on the French and Dutch referenda in the *New York Review of Books*, conveyed a similar message: “The rejection surely demonstrated the current gap of comprehension between political elites and the European public, but was mainly evidence of the consistently underestimated forces of national identity and ambition in each of the twenty-five nations. The French were enthusiastically seconded by another highly nationalistic and individualistic European society, the Netherlands—also one of the founding Fathers of the European Union”.¹⁶ While this certainly provided an obstacle for the process of European integration, it opened the eyes of political elites in Brussels to the intrinsic nationalistic tendencies held in the hearts of the European citizens. In this case, the respective nation-states temporarily retained the ultimate locus of political authority, however, it has rightly been argued that European political identification does not need to be in direct opposition to either national or regional identities, since they can all easily cohabit in a nested structure causing neither psychological nor cognitive dissonance.¹⁷ The aforementioned contention can be embodied in the notion of the “positive-sum nature”, where it is, after all, possible to be and feel both British and English (or Spanish and Catalan; or Italian and Sicilian) at the same time, although these are complex historical constructions that conjure up various kinds of meanings and associations, resting on political and cultural experiences that have on occasion taken divergent or even opposite directions.¹⁸ Thus European citizens may embrace the notion of multiple allegiances, both on the national and supranational levels.

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of this newly constructed European identity lies in the perceived nationality of its citizens. National identity has been defined as “a people striving to equip itself with power, with some machinery of compulsion strong enough to make the enforcement of its commands probable in order to aid in the spread of habits of voluntary compliance with them”. In order to attain this, there has to be an alliance among the members or disparate social groups. While great leaps have been taken in the European integration process in the last five decades, said process has not lessened the claims to national identity and has not yet produced an emotional attachment with the European Union.¹⁹ Public opinion analyst groups, such as Eurobarometer, have surveyed this very matter of emotional attachment since the early 1980s. According to a Eurobarometer survey published in May 2008, 91% of the interviewees felt attachment to their nations and only 49 % to the European Union.²⁰ While two-thirds of Belgians (65%) and Poles (63%) declared their identification with the Union, only a quarter feel the same way in Cyprus (25%), Finland and the United Kingdom (both 27%); low levels of attachment can be found both among founding countries, such as the Netherlands (32%), and in new member

¹⁵ Furio Cerutti, 12

¹⁶ Juan Diez Medrano, 1

¹⁷ Dario Castiglione, 31

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Menendez, 143

²⁰ European Values and Identities, 1

states, like Estonia (34%).²¹ Hence, it is easier to feel French, Spanish, or British than European because people have a sense of knowing what their nationality is or at least they have a positive representation that they learned in school, through the media, and in their everyday relationships.²² While the surveys demonstrate that most European citizens still keep their respective countries at heart when reflecting upon their own identities, it must be noted that a general pattern of public support for Europe has emerged over the past twenty years, on average within member countries.²³ It is also intriguing to note that 65% of Belgians identified first and foremost with the Union, considering that the preponderance of EU institutions are situated in Belgium. Perhaps this indicates that the citizens residing in countries with lower attachment levels to the EU simply feel more removed from the daily governmental activities that exist in incomparable European cities, such as Brussels.

While the greater part of Europeans do not yet find their national identity within the EU as a whole, a collective identity is slowly growing among the society. For now their cultural identity will be defined by the European Commission's official dictum, 'unity in diversity'. This all-encompassing cultural classification is nothing new; it has been the method of choice for European officials in characterizing their citizens' culture since the 1980s. In November 1989, the 'Comité des consultants culturels' reported: 'la culture européenne est une réalité...faite de la somme de toutes les cultures nationales, régionales et même locales et de leur interaction'.²⁴ In 1995, a member of the Commission responsible for Culture indicated that 'la cultura europea es la suma de las distintas culturas europeas, de las que existen en los distintos Estados, incluso de las que existen dentro de cada Estado y que constituyen unas identidades culturales propias'.²⁵

The search for a political and cultural countenance of Europe may be proceeding, however, the continual cultural interaction and common heritage is undeniable. Without the Italian, Petrarch, or the Frenchmen, Ronsard for example, it is impossible to imagine Shakespeare's sonnets; without a theological debate of Spanish Baroque it would be impossible to imagine a European phenomenon like Mozart's Don Giovanni; without the Schlegel brothers in Germany—'transferred' to Spain by the consul of Hamburg in Cadiz, Johann Nikolas Böhl von Faber, Spain would not have rediscovered its own baroque drama.²⁶ While during the Baroque era, Italian architects not only built churches in Prague, Vienna, Madrid, they also prepared the scenery for plays in the Spanish Court of Aranjuez; a Greek painter sojourned to Italy and set himself up in Spain (Domenicos Theotocopuli, better known as El Greco); Goethe's worth would be unthinkable without his trip to Italy; from his native Hamburg, Brahms moved to Vienna, where he discovered the Hungarian world; and the Viennese, Mahler, in the third movement of his First symphony, used the theme of a French children's song ('Frère Jacques, dormez-vous?').²⁷ This cultural intertwined region is embarking on a new journey of self-discovery with its overarching political framework. A new kind of citizenship is emerging that is neither national nor cosmopolitan but which is multiple in enabling the various identities that we all possess to be expressed, and our rights to be exercised, through an increasingly complex configuration of common institutions, states, national and transnational interest groups and voluntary associations,

²¹ Ibid

²² Ibid

²³ Stefania Panebianco, 25

²⁴ Report "Une culture pour le citoyen européenne le 1^{er} an 2000", from November 1989, p. 7 ('European culture is a reality, comprised of the sum of all the national, regional and even local cultures and of their interaction')

²⁵ Marcelino Oreja, at the European Parliament, session of 14.3.95, DOCE Anexo 4-460, p. 64 ('European culture is the sum of the different European cultures, of those that exist in the different States, even of those that exist within each State and that constitute cultural identities in their own right')

²⁶ Enrique Banus, 170

²⁷ Enrique Banus, 170

local or provincial authorities, regions and alliances of regions...A multiple identity allows different identities to be expressed and different rights and duties to be exercised.²⁸ While the ultimate locus of identity may rest within national identities, the growing collective identity of the European Union is irrefutable and should be understood as concentric identities as opposed to conflictual ones.

European identity is the notion that a political community needs a common set of values and references to ensure its coherence, to guide its actions and to endow these with legitimacy and meaning.²⁹ Through the establishment of European citizenship, which was intended to reduce the gap between EU institutions and its nationals and the various treaties delineating the concept of 'multiple citizenship' it is apparent that in a post-sovereign space like Europe, the possibility of one "real" European identity is insurmountable. However, in a region composed by the diversity citizens it is difficult not to hope for a further consolidation of their common heritage. For in the words of the exiled diplomat Salvador de Madariaga, "This Europe must be born. And she will, when Spaniards say 'our Chartres,' Englishmen 'our Cracow,' Italians 'our Copenhagen,' when Germans say 'our Bruges.' . . . Then will Europe live.

²⁸ Stefania Panebianco, 33

²⁹ Euractive, 1