

Student Project “Europe Renaissance”

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Introduction to the Project¹

Welcome to Dortmund! I am glad to see that our common concern – Europe – has brought together ancient and new partners, from the South West, the western part, the middle, Middle East and the eastern part of Europe. Thank you for joining us to tackle the European dilemma.

First, I would like to thank Carsten Wolff, vice rector of FH Dortmund, for his moral and material support which made it possible to start this European round of reflection and common experience. I am sure that this initiative will have a strong continuation in November 2014. With this key event, I hope you will be able to convince your directors and Head-masters to take over the initiative for a new European round in 2015.

My idea to address Europe as an academic topic began with the disastrous project of a European Constitution in 2003. The absence of public debate frightened me. I felt expropriated concerning my role as a European citizen. In most of European countries, there was no debate, and where we observed debates, i.e. in France and the Netherlands, the citizens voted “no”. With an allusion to the slogan of the German reunification one could shout: “We are the Europeans! Europe is our heritage!”

Today, we see the same situation: Is here anybody who has been asked if he or she is *d'accord* with the proposition of the TTIP (Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership) with the United States of America? Why these quasi clandestine negotiations? Democracy is not made for applause, democracy lives only with the critical awareness of its citizens, as the ancient president of German Constitutional Tribunal, Jutta Limbach, stated once.

By now, we all know that doubts, deceptions and disenchantment coming from an increasing distance between the politics of European Union and its citizens have obscured the brilliant image Europe enjoyed only 10 years ago. The younger generations begin to lose a positive affective relationship with European affairs considering Europe to be more a “beau cadavre” than a great hope.

On the one hand, this is fairly surprising for those who have lived the astonishing history of the European unification beginning with European Coal and Steel Community, the Common

¹ The text of the introduction has been slightly extended.

Market, the European Economic Area, the Schengen zone and finally the European Union and the Eurozone. A union of 15 states in 2013 growing to 28 states in 2014, to former generations this would have been a dream! On the other hand, the causes of the decline of reputation are evident: The management of the bank crisis, the dramatic increase of unemployment in a number of countries, the drastic austerity politics. But even in a spoiled country as Germany the disenchantment about European affairs is obvious. So, there are not only economic reasons to explain the loss of the European enthusiasm: The EU has lost its charm as a new way to conceive the coexistence and cooperation of European nations. Today, we have to realize that the politics in Brussels are nothing else than the extension of national political business as usual. So, here we are: an economic giant but politically, socially and culturally more divided than 20 years ago.

But the world around us does not wait till we will have found a new balance someday. We have to act now to avoid a unilateral dependence from other powers. Nevertheless, we don't have a common vision of European future yet. We find ourselves in a classical dilemma.

The problem to resolve seems to me that we are masters in doing a lot of useful things but we have lost the European heritage to do the right things, too. Our meeting, than, is about to search for a new ground to do the right things which may inspire common action.

First, we need a high analytical intelligence to criticize what went wrong, and this is a particularly thorny way because the EU has blurred the deep differences in European thinking with an inappropriate triumphalism pretending that the EU is the fulfillment of all European aspirations! The good ones of course! But we can't simply serve us as in a supermarket. We have to take in account that our past is characterized not only by heroes but also by demons. These demons are not just regrettable accidents but integral parts of our identity. As Jacques Delors said: We have to demystify Europe and to reintroduce debate! Forgive me the striking examples: We have to face Jesus AND Plato, Cesar AND Brutus, St. Francis of Assisi AND Lucrezia Borgia, Martin Luther AND Ignacio de Loyola, the Enlightenment AND the Inquisition, catholic as well as protestant, Auguste Comte AND Bakunin AND Karl Marx, and so on: These persons, one could quote a thousand more, are a clear indication that divergence is as much European as convergence.

To speak under these conditions about a Renaissance of Europe does not mean that we are looking for a lost harmony. No! We have to demystify the commonplaces. The term "Renaissance" means – as it did in the historical epoch of the same name – that those who are choosing a new vision of the world have to appropriate the findings of past epochs, but then transform them to become their own. Renaissance despite the reference to traditions is the creation of something new. And this consciousness to create new expertise, to be the actors of our common future provides us with an affective norm, an imperative of the type: *tua res agitur!* This is the only way for acting in common.

The first topic today is economics: What is a responsible method to regulate European affairs, above all the banks, the financial sector and the future of the Euro? The strengths and weaknesses of the respective remedies should be measured from a “Genuine Progress Indicator”: Shall we accept that banks and state are rescued but not the people?

“Responsible” refers to the second subject: The future of European societies. The European project needs the support of European societies, i.e. their coherence depending on mentality, moral, and the feeling of a more or less equitable situation. Is it ok that the fortune is progressively distributed to the upper class and that the gap between low and high incomes is widening more, that the discrepancies between the southern and the northern EU-member states are growing?

But the less appreciated subject is the question about European identity. What does it mean to be a European? Is Europe a continent, a historical souvenir, a way of life or a global player? Are there frontiers, is the EU the legitimate heir of Europe, is it something private or a political reality?

The most puzzling observation for me is, nevertheless, that the oldest European institution, the University, is mostly remaining in the state of “absence” (Peter Sloterdijk), a syndrome which describes the situation after a shock. We should wake up the current academic research from its “absence” and invite the different disciplines to participate in the search for a European Renaissance.

The university is in a certain way the “Ford Knox” of European identity. Beginning with the Greeks we see emerge for the first time in history a civilization relying on the principle of the best argument. This was absolutely unknown compared with the surrounding despotism of princes and priests, on the one hand, and of the rule of customs and conventions, on the other. The principle of the best argument is the center of our civilization but at the moment, apparently it needs some help. Here, I can’t resist quoting Anthony Giddins: “Europe needs memory as much as it needs jobs.”

A striking way to show the relevance of this memory is the definition of Aristotle of what is practice: Practice, he says, in contrast to theory, is what also can be different. This is the reason why a good European can’t accept the pretention of Mrs. Merkel who said that her financial decisions were “alternativlos”, without alternative. With the knowledge of Aristotle we can see that the contrary is true. In a certain way, Jacques Delors, the last European statesman, applies this sentence stating: If it’s true that nothing is acquired for ever, then it is also true that nothing is completely lost forever.

This gives us the courage to question our own European errors. To be critical with others implies the courage to self-criticism. And here one item is central: the irresistible European tendency to maximalism.

Three taboos have to be quoted:

- There is no doubt that the idea of technological progress is part of the European heritage. Nevertheless: maximal technological progress has also been identified as the greatest threat to mankind.
- Economic growth idem.
- Global expansion idem.

Against this European tradition we have a lot of impressing European authors and traditions to rediscover. They converge in the conviction: Not all what is feasible has to be done. Maximalism has to be disciplined by the criteria of what is right. The Olympic motto “Citius, altius, fortius”, generalized to become the formula for politics and practical life, is the shortest slogan of a wrong way of living on earth. If there is no aim, the mass of instruments does not contribute to an increase of quality of life. Delors states: “Une panoplie de moyens mais une pénurie de finalités supérieures. Des sociétés et économies performantes mais un manque de liens sociaux.”

I hope that this introduction has prepared the terrain for our discussion today.

Now, I would like to introduce the five teams and their subjects:

1. The Financial Crisis and the Future of the Euro
2. Reasons of Disenchantment of European Youth - Which Opportunities through the European Research Area?
3. Russia and Europe: a very Special Relationship –Turkey: Full Membership in EU?
4. Nation State, new Nationalism, Separatism and the Future of UE
5. EU Intergovernmentalism or „méthode communautaire“?