# A liberal contribution to a common European civic identity

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# Foreword

This publication is a result of the European Liberal Forum project "A liberal contribution to a common European civic identity" described as follows.

"To explore the common aspects of our European identity, particularly our civic identity, which we believe is first and foremost based on human rights and democracy as a shared background. We expect that this discussion will have a strong connection to the peaceful development of Europe and its member states. The idea is to (i) define a principle position with regard to key questions and (ii) link the principles to specific policy fields, such as education and integration."

In a number of seminars different aspects of civic identity in a European context were raised. Many knowledgeable persons from several countries participated and discussions were fruitful and intense.

The report contains an introduction and then five chapters based on paper presentations at a number of seminars organized by the European Liberal Forum. The chapters can be read separately. The report ends with a chapter with conclusions and policy implications. The intention is to make a contribution to the development of liberal policy in the European Union and its members. The responsibility for the texts in the report lies with the respective authors. The project has been financed by the European Liberal Forum with grants from the European Parliament

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# Introduction

By Giulio Ercolessi and Ingemund Hägg

Is it possible for Europe, and for Europe's principles, values and interests, to exercise any influence in today's global world policies? Is it possible for Europe to become a political global actor without sharing a common European identity? What kind of identity might Europeans have in common, upon which they could build a political subjectivity? How does the religious and cultural pluralism that is typical of contemporary Europe play in this "Europe-building" process? Is the liberal tradition of separation between churches and state, faith and public institutions, still an asset, a necessary one in our pluralistic societies, or an obsolete tool?

The liberal family is historically more committed than others to European integration and to the promotion and enhancement of individual human rights. But, as we realized throughout these events, different historical national traditions suggest slightly different approaches and sensitivity.

We perhaps knew better what we were as Europeans when we were faced by the "Great Other", the Soviet bloc (or, previously, when liberal democracy was assaulted by fascism). Nowadays we have to face the new and more confusing challenges of the global world: the new pluralism brought inside our societies by education, freedom in the choice of individual life-styles, and by immigration; and we should be committed to preserve our open societies within this increasingly pluralistic environment

At a seminar held in connection with the ELDR congress in October 2006 in Bucharest, we drafted our view in a paper that was submitted to a lively discussion and largely although not unanimously supported by those attending. See Annex I.

We focused on two ideas in particular.

First, if the historical individual European nation-states can no longer play the same role they have exercised in a world where Europe was undoubtedly the leading power, what could be the new subject able to express a European voice? This in not just a matter of political institutions or constitutional rules: it is a matter of political persuasion, decision and will. The present crisis of the European integration project is also due to the lack of awareness among European citizens and political classes about what constitutes a common European identity upon which a European political subject could be convincingly built. We think that this common identity can be, to a large extent, basically provided by the great heritage of European liberalism. Europe could never be based upon ethnic unity (as "invented traditions" have successfully pretended in the past for individual countries – but it was in a different, less sophisticated, less demanding and even more violent world), nor upon a homogeneous linguistic heritage, or uniform cultural behaviours that no longer exist even inside our individual countries, increasingly pluralistic as they are growing today. But we share, in our laws, in our constitutions, hopefully even settled down in our customs and cultural anthropology (despite recurring challenges and the surviving regional differences), a common civic character that is sometimes better perceived looking at liberal and democratic

Europe from outside. This civic identity has much to do with the respect for the individual, his or her dignity, freedom of choice and right to pursuit his or her goals in his or her own way

Although we would like these principles and values to be universally shared, although we attach them a universal vocation, they are deeply rooted in the historical development of the European liberal tradition, and our countries' civic culture is probably still the most demanding in this domain.

More and more, such a common civic identity is proving to be not only the core of our values and principles, but also the only possible basis for more cohesive and fruitful developments inside each of our countries.

The second main point concerns what consequences pluralism, and especially religious and cultural diversities, have in the shaping of civic identities.

Despite the vows of populist politicians, increased diversity is the necessary consequence of life in free and open societies. That also applies to individual beliefs.

We no longer live in religiously homogeneous societies, provided we ever did. Secularization has made religious belief a personal choice, not an ascribed identity given with birth once and for ever. And immigration from countries with different religious traditions just enhances that inherent religious pluralism. Different faiths and unbelief must be regarded as equally respectable options also by the political establishment.

In our opinion, the increased, and increasing, cultural, philosophical and religious diversity of European societies, far from making separation obsolete, has strengthened the reasons and the soundness of the traditional liberal idea that the strictest possible religious neutrality of public institutions is a guarantee for religious freedom – that is, the freedom to practice or not to practice, to join or to reject any form of religious or non-religious belief. Political religious neutrality is the only possible tool to provide equal respect and equal social dignity for every single citizen, believers and non-believers alike.

And it is also the most effective tool to protect the rights of individuals, whose religious freedom could be put at jeopardy by their family or community, or who could be discriminated against for religious reasons because their ascribed identity or personal nature or life-style do not comply with the requirements, the expectations or the demands of religious leaders, neighbours or relatives.

As such, religious neutrality also represents the best possible strategy to cope with one of the most important tasks of our time: integrating in the values and principles of liberal democracy, of individual human rights, of the rule of law, at the same time our increasingly diverse autochthonous fellow citizens and our new fellow European citizens who come from different cultural traditions or are the offspring of the immigration, who must be recognized as entitled as we are to have their freedom of belief fully guaranteed, irrespective of their ancestral origins.

Inter-religious dialogue is obviously welcome, but civil society, not public institutions, should be its natural arena. Any participation in such dialogues by public institutions would inevitably result in a form of discrimination, as it would imply recognising some religious movements and not others. Most of all, we think it should never be a substitute for integration policies.

## Identity, state, civil society, secularism and related concepts

A number of problematic concepts are involved in the project, not easy to be defined. In this section briefly discuss some of the more basic concepts. Deeper discussions can be found in other parts of this report and in the attached papers.

First, identity is a problematic concept. We can draw a distinction between individual identities and collective identities, and between ascribed and chosen components of such identities.

Each individual's identity has different components. Some of them are ascribed to the individual concerned: that is, they are not the result of a personal choice, such as birthplace, family of origin, genetic code, sex, age, physical characteristics, possible disabilities. Other parts of the individual identity must be recognized as matter of entirely personal choice, such as cultural and political orientation, religious or non-religious belief, life-style. We recognize that choices are actually made in the individual´s social, cultural and economic environment, but each individual should be recognized the right to make her or his choice. In this project the focus is on the individual and the identities – often several – that the individual her- or himself recognizes. We can also draw another distinction: identity as something discussed as a concept on theoretical levels, or as something measured by asking people about their attitudes and values.

Second, we regard a society as including state institutions: government, parliament, regional and local parliaments or councils, administrative and other public agencies on national, regional and local level. And also as including a civil society. Here voluntary associations and organisations – cultural, religious, charitable, human rights, social service, etc. – live and act.

Third, secularism can refer to the entire society, to the state or to the civil society. The French talk about laïcité when defining the state as neutral to religious and non-religious belief systems, a definition which is fairly clear – in principle. When other countries call their institutions secular, that notion is often more vague even if the idea is similar to "l´état laïque" and even if arguments and historical and cultural frameworks are different. We, finally, do recognize the semantic problems when translations between English – secularism - and French – laïcité - are done.

# Identity and democracy in the European Union

By Kjell Goldmann

I have been asked to report some thoughts from work I have done about the relation between collective identity and politics. Assertions about national and similar identities are often obscure with regard to their meaning as well as their empirical validity. So far as Europe is concerned, the conventional wisdom in political science is that the democratic shortcomings of the European Union are unavoidable because of the lack of European identity. This raises the question what precisely Europe is presumed to lack and whether it is true that this is lacking.

I cannot go into the conceptual issue here. Suffice it to say that I consider collective identity to be simply a matter of ideas held by the members of a collective and not something mysteriously inherent in its history, geography, or culture. Two sets of ideas are essential in most conceptions of the identity of a collective: the extent to which members share a sense of community, and the degree to which there is a community of values among them.

## A sense of community among Europeans?

I have experimented with four indicators of the extent to which Europeans identify with Europe and with each other. None of them is perfect, but all are relevant. I have data for 24 member countries (Cyprus, Bulgaria and Romania are not included).

*Self-identification*. An obvious indicator is self-identification, that is, the extent to which EU citizens see themselves as Europeans. An item to this effect has been included in Eurobarometer surveys for many years. The standard format is: "In the near future, do you see yourself as" French (etc.) only, as French (etc.) and European, or as European only. The results are fairly stable over time. On the whole, a tiny proportion sees themselves as Europeans only but about half as Europeans at least in part (with a variation between 70% in Italy and 35% in Finland, data from 2004).

*Confidence*. Another plausible measure is the extent to which EU citizens have confidence in their common institutions. Data about this, collected in 1999-2000, may be found in the *World Values Survey* (WVS), a rich source to which I will return. The EU24 median turns out to be a mere 43%. However, confidence in one's national parliament is about equally widespread, even though there is much variation between countries: the Italians, the Poles and the Irish have vastly more confidence in the EU than in their national parliaments, whereas the reverse is the case among the Swedes, the Danes, and the Dutch.

*Participation*. A plausible indicator of political participation is election turnout, which of course has been low and decreasing in EP elections. Turnout in the 2004 European election was merely 46%, and if this is compared to turnout in the most recent national election in each country, the

average "Euro-gap" (a term coined by a British political scientist) is found to have been as large as -24 (but again with much variation between countries: from -53 in Slovakia to +4 in Luxembourg).

*Solidarity*. The extent to which there is solidarity among EU citizens may be measured by asking them if they care about the welfare of other Europeans. It turns out that, at the turn of the century, only 13% replied that they cared a lot (WVS data). This may seem to be a strong indication of a lack of a sense of community among Europeans. However, compared with the extent to which people cared about the welfare of their own nationals—another "Euro-gap"—the difference was merely -11 (ranging from -22 in Slovenia to -2 in Denmark).

What does this add up to? I have made an attempt to see this by defining critical thresholds for each of the variables and then computing the value for each country and variable in percent of the threshold value. The result is shown in Table 1.

The level assumed to be critical for democracy is shown at the top of the table. The threshold for self-identification—50%—is fairly arbitrary. The threshold for confidence is defined on the basis of mean confidence in one's national parliament in France, Germany and UK. The threshold for participation is similarly guided by mean turnout in national elections in the three largest EU member states, and the threshold for solidarity by mean concern for one's nationals in these countries. The overall impression is that the situation is reasonably satisfactory with regard to identification and confidence but relatively problematic with regard to participation and solidarity.

Table 1. Sense of community among Europeans (percent of thresholds)

|  | self-identification | confidence | participation | solidarity | mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| threshold | *50%* | *35%* | *60%* | *20%* |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Malta | 134 | 160 | 137 | 135 | 142 |
| Italy | 140 | 197 | 122 | 90 | 137 |
| Luxemburg | 134 | 166 | 152 | 85 | 134 |
| Ireland | 98 | 171 | 100 | 100 | 117 |
| Portugal | 98 | 197 | 65 | 90 | 112 |
| Spain | 122 | 151 | 77 | 90 | 110 |
| Belgium | 104 | 134 | 152 | 45 | 109 |
| France | 138 | 137 | 72 | 70 | 104 |
| Slovakia | 118 | 157 | 28 | 80 | 96 |
| Germany | 112 | 106 | 72 | 90 | 95 |
| Hungary | 78 | 169 | 65 | 45 | 89 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Slovenia | 116 | 106 | 67 | 55 | 86 |
| Denmark | 118 | 77 | 80 | 50 | 81 |
| Poland | 108 | 123 | 33 | 60 | 81 |
| Czech Republic | 94 | 123 | 47 | 55 | 80 |
| Greece | 82 | 71 | 105 | 60 | 80 |
| Sweden | 86 | 83 | 62 | 80 | 78 |
| Lithuania | 84 | 89 | 80 | 55 | 77 |
| Austria | 84 | 109 | 70 | 40 | 76 |
| Latvia | 102 | 100 | 68 | 15 | 71 |
| Netherlands | 96 | 94 | 65 | 30 | 71 |
| UK | 72 | 74 | 72 | 50 | 67 |
| Estonia | 102 | 89 | 45 | 25 | 65 |
| Finland | 70 | 71 | 68 | 35 | 61 |
| **EU24 median** | **102** | **116** | **72** | **58** | |

*Sources*: *Eurobarometer 61* (self-identification), *World Values Survey* (confidence, solidarity), IDEA (participation).

The issue is less the validity of the indicators than the definition of critical levels, that is, the attempt to specify what is required for well-functioning democracy at the European level. There is some reason to believe that I have defined too low a threshold for identification and too high a threshold for the other three variables, but there is no way of determining what is right: the theory of democracy is inadequate for this purpose.

**A community of values in Europe?**

Is there a community of values among Europeans? The *World Values Survey* is a much-used source of data in this regard. The WVS is based on surveys in more than 80 countries. The most recent data available are from 1999-2000. The WVS people have used statistical data reduction to organise their findings in a two-dimensional "cultural map", as they call it. The WVS "cultural map" must be one of the most cited social sciences graphs in recent years and is reproduced in Figure 1.
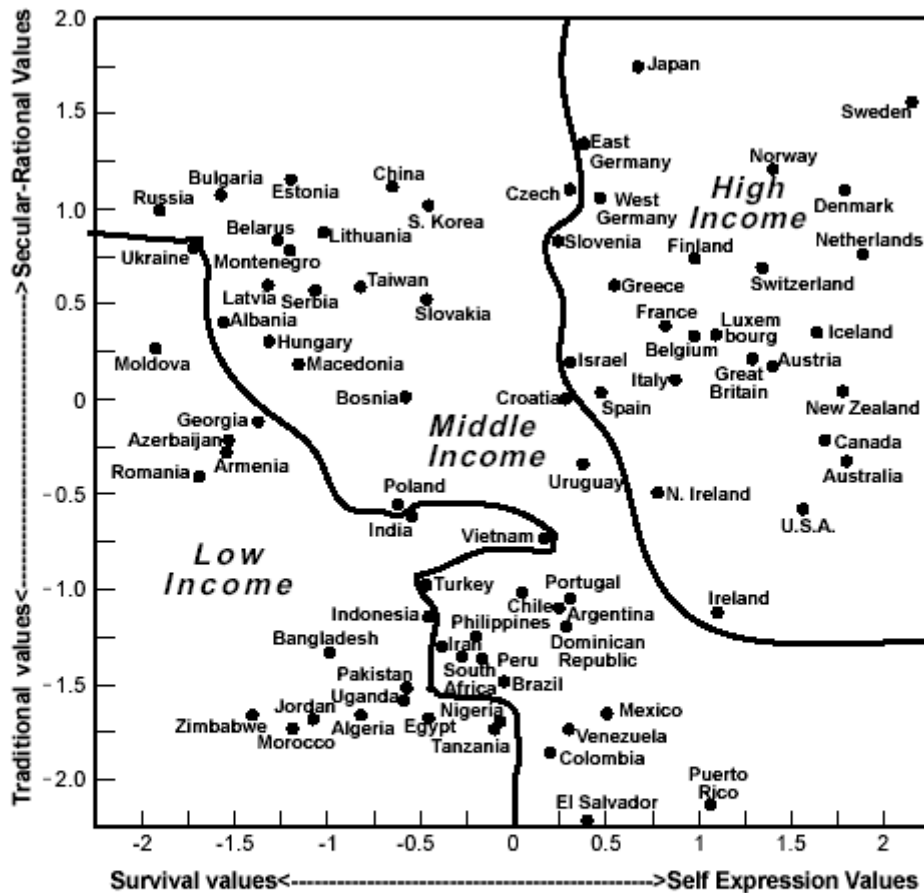
Figure 1. Cultural map of 81 societies, with economic zones superimposed.
Cultural locations reflect each society's factor scores on two major dimensions of
cross-cultural variation. Economic zones are from World Bank,
*World Development Indicators, 2002.*
Source: R. Inglehart and C. Welzel. 2004. *Modernization, Cultural Change and
Democracy: The Human Development Sequence.* (forthcoming).

The interpretation of the two dimensions—"traditional vs. secular-rational" values and "survival vs. self expression" values—is debatable; this is generally the case when it is a matter of dimensions generated by the radical statistical reduction of vast amounts of data. The important point for our present purposes, however, is that EU countries can be found in very different locations: Scandinavia and the Netherlands tend in one direction, Ireland in another, Bulgaria and the Baltic countries in a third. Europe, WVS analysts conclude, does indeed represent unity in diversity. Some Europeans, we may add, are similar to Americans, but others are quite different.

This is the overall picture, but it is useful to go into detail and consider individual items. The argument about the need for European identity may be taken to refer to a European value consensus that is uniquely European and that differs in particular from that among Americans. Little of this is evident from the WVS. What we find are three other patterns.

It is sometimes the case, first of all, that a substantial difference between Europe and the US coincides with even larger differences between Europeans. This is the case with regard to religion: 71% in the US consider religion to be important as opposed to 43% in EU24 (the EU median is used

in this and subsequent comparisons), but within the EU there is variation from 71% in Malta and 64% in Greece to 24% in Sweden and 22% in the Czech Republic. Similarly, 72% of Americans feel proud of belonging to their nation as opposed to 49% in EU24, but with a variation from 79% in Portugal and 71% in Malta to 20% in the Netherlands and 17% in Germany. In the US, furthermore, 70% believe that more respect for authority would be a good thing as opposed to 53% in EU24, but 92% in Malta and 78% in Portugal believe this, as opposed to 22% in Sweden and 17% in Greece.

Another pattern is a moderate difference between the average European and the average American, in combination with considerable differences among Europeans. An example is the willingness of people to make sacrifices for the sake of the environment: 65% in the US and 53% in EU24—but 78% in Sweden and 74% in Greece as against 31% in Germany and 24% in Lithuania. Another example is the extent to which respondents agree with the assertion that men should have more right to a job than women when jobs are scarce: 10% in the US and 23% in EU24 agree with this—but 47% in Malta and 35% in Poland versus 6% in Denmark and 2% in Sweden.

There is a third pattern: little difference between the average American and the average European, and comparatively moderate differences between Europeans. An example is the extent to which people express dislike of deviant neighbours (index for dislike criminals, other races, Muslims, immigrants, and homosexuals): 21% in the US and 22% in EU24 express such dislike, with a variation from 40% in Lithuania and 38% in Slovakia and Poland to 12% in the Netherlands and 11% in Sweden. Another example, which is pertinent for our present purposes, is support of democracy (index of several indicators): 77% among both Americans and Europeans, with a variation between 92% in Greece and 88% in Denmark, on the one hand, and 66% in Latvia and 64% in Poland, on the other.

What we find, then, are vast value differences among the Europeans but some consensus over values relating to democracy, a consensus however that also includes the Americans. This again raises the issue of what is needed in order for democracy to work well in the EU. Is an essential consensus over democracy itself sufficient? Is a wider consensus over values essential? Or even a consensus that is uniquely European? No answer to such questions can claim to be well-founded.

**The EU and Canada**

What keeps Europeans together, then, is more than zero even if not much. It is useful against this background to assess the EU not just in relation to a democratic ideal—this is commonplace—but also to an actually existing democracy. I have found it useful to compare the European Union with the Canadian Federation: there is a striking similarity in structure but a big difference in democratic reputation.

Vast, decentralised and multinational Canada in fact suffers from some of the same democratic "deficits" as the EU. Canada, of course, is a sovereign, federal state and not an international organisation. However, the ten provinces are highly independent, and much policy making in Canada consists in negotiations between the provincial governments and between them and the federal government. This is called "intergovernmentalism" in Canadian textbooks, and the

consequences are familiar to everybody who has heard about the democratic deficit of the EU: closed doors, lack of accountability, diminishing influence for parliaments and voters. Hence one of the most respected democracies of the world suffers from some of the same defects as those of a union known for its democratic deficit. If what goes for Canada is acceptable, the democratic deficit of the EU may not be all that large.

What is more, it is not clear that the sense of community is vastly stronger in Canada than in Europe. This is not easy to assess, but Francophone Québec, one of the largest provinces, is on the verge of leaving the federation since the 1970s. Polls have found that Quebecers (more than a fifth of the population) tend to identify with their province rather than with the federation. Canada, furthermore, is not only bilingual but multilingual (with Chinese as the third largest language). What is more, according to mass communication research, Francophone and Anglophone media represent separate and different worlds.

And yet survey research similar to WVS has found that there is in Canada a remarkable community of values that contrasts with much larger regional differences in the US and, of course, with national differences among Europeans. This, together with the constitutional difference, helps explain an essential difference between democracy in Canada and in the EU: the Canadian parliament is more independent of provincial politics than the EP is independent of politics within member states. The party groups in the EP, of course, are essentially coalitions of national parties, elections are largely fought over national issues, and turnout is much smaller than in national elections, all of which contrasts with politics in Canada.

### Identity change

This leads on to the question of identity change. Pessimists tend to regard what they consider a lack of European identity to be permanent. Let me mention, therefore, three well-established theories of value change.

1. functionalism, which is an old thought about international organisation: cooperation and exchange lead to positive attitudes, and this leads on to more cooperation and exchange, and then to even more positive attitudes, and so on. Integration, on this theory, tends to strengthen the sense of community among Europeans

2. institutionalism: political institutions tend to shape and strengthen the ideas they need. If you set up an institution, identity will tend to follow. Just as state formation has created nations, the EU is in the process of creating a European demos.

3. postindustrialism, which is a WVS contribution to theory: economic growth and the welfare state tend to reinforce values of the kind predominating in some but not all parts of the EU. Over time, South and East European value structures will become increasingly similar to those of the Northwest, and hence a European community of values will emerge.

The bottom line is that European identity is limited but not non-existent, that the need for it may not be quite as overwhelming as some have presumed, and that there is some reason to

expect that the sense of community and the community of values will become stronger in the long term. A way of actively promoting a development in this direction may be to act along the lines of the theory of institutionalism and focus on European-level political parties and their role in European debate and EP elections.

## References

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# Religion, secularism, and European integration

By Giulio Ercolessi

A fringe session on the theme of this paper was held in Bucharest, in connection with the ELDR conference in October 2006, when we were still an informal network of liberal think tanks. The Bucharest meeting was introduced by Professor Ingemund Hägg and me. There we realised that, although very widely shared, some of the ideas and principles stated in the paper we had drafted appeared to be debatable in the eyes of some of us

The title of the paper was "A liberal contribution to a common European civic identity" (See Annex I in this report).  It seemed to us that secular and religiously neutral public institutions were one of the most typical liberal contributions in shaping our European civic identity (at least the sort of paradigmatic originally Western European political identity we usually think of when we say "European").

Most of us usually underestimate how much and how deeply European liberalism, i.e. our own political and cultural family, has shaped, in the end, the face of our civilisation, of contemporary Europe, indeed of the Western World, and, hopefully, of a great part of the world. Of course we should also never forget that was just the final outcome, after successfully overcoming many "challenge and response" historical situations (according to Arnold Toynbee's model): and we have to remember that the possibility of failure is always there, if we are not able, or not willing, to respond to the new challenges of our time. We also usually underestimate how much we are seen by others as a part of the world with a common, very peculiar and recognizable, cultural, civic and even political identity. This is not so obvious at all for many of our fellow Europeans, nor is it so obvious that there are new challenges to which we are called to give new responses.

Two other assumptions in our Bucharest paper proved not to be so obvious to everybody: that we have – and need – a common European identity and that this cultural European identity can only be a civic one.

All these three assumptions – we need secular institutions, we need to be aware of our common European identity, we need it to be a civic one – have to be argued for.

Our European Liberal Forum is a suitable instrument to tackle issues of this kind, given that political parties appear to be no longer the proper instrument for long-term political and strategic discussions. Indeed, the process that is forcefully turning professional politics into showbiz is also enticing politicians into becoming more and more followers rather than leaders, many of them paradoxically feeling forced into being full-time engaged in miming a natural charisma, that is more and more required, by electioneering techniques, at almost any level of political representation nowadays, and that most of them inevitably lack.

National political and cultural histories can very largely interfere with the perception of these issues, and all the three assumptions mentioned above have much to do with them. We cannot

even think of imposing any common view, but it is time to face and discuss these problems at least at EU level.

First point: of what kind of identity are we talking about?

There are analogies between individual identities and public ones, i.e., they are always built in connection (not necessarily in competition, or, worse, against, even if the latter has unfortunately usually been the case in history), with others; they help, and are indeed necessary, to be able to say "I" or "we": they imply a difference with the world outside.

This is a first obvious obstacle for us: even if we realistically know and do not expect that our liberal principles are universally shared, we have always attached to our values a universal vocation and often successfully managed to have them declared universal – often with some reluctant assent by others. Anyway, we will always be more than reluctant to accept that our political values remain forever a continental (or little more than a bi-continental) peculiarity.

In any case, the common identity we are talking about here is a political one. It has to do with the "sense of historical individuality". That was the definition of the idea of nation, in the solely European, non global world, that exists no more, that was given by historian Federico Chabod, an antifascist intellectual who long investigated the roots and nature of the idea of nation and of the idea of Europe: not by chance, he was born in Valle d'Aosta (Vallée d'Aoste), an Italian frontier region that was disputed immediately after World War II between Italy and France.

Individuals in free societies must be free to adopt multiple identities of their own choice, and not be bound to the ascribed components of their personal identity, set once forever by luck when they were born. And also national identities have always been multi-folded and matter for interpretation: think of Dickens's (and Disraeli's) "Two Nations", of "les deux Frances" in French historiography; Britain can be thought of as the cradle of individual freedom and parliamentary democracy, as well as the antonomastic imperial and colonial power; much the same could be applied to the US in the XX century.

When liberal and democratic customs and institutions were first established in a few European nations, they represented the peculiar identity of those very nations (early Dutch tolerance, the British Bill of Rights, the US Declaration of Independence and Constitution, French "Principles of '89").

At least since the end of World War II these principles are no longer typical of a small number of individual nation-states, and have rather more and more grown as the core of the common political identity of the Western world. (And in Western Europe – and now also in Central Europe after the fall of communist rule – it has probably been the violence – rather than any supposed original irenic cultural vocation – of our past history that prompted us today to share a keener sensitivity for issues such as the stiffness of the criminal justice system, the death penalty, police brutality, guns control and universal protection from life's harshness, than many Americans probably do).

These principles are nowadays so widely shared among Europeans that we often consider them as already consolidated as universal. We are therefore even led no longer to consider them as typical of our civilisation. Globalisation should awake us from that illusion. Political bodies in liberal democracies should stand for the liberal democratic principles of their constitutions and charters: if

we did, we would also be much more aware that we are talking of that part of our identity that allows us to say "we".

Hopefully, these basic democratic principles are, or at least should be, shared by the vast majority of our people – even if many have no idea of how liberal these principles are. That does obviously not exclude that there will always be extremist lunatic fringe groups that do not share these basic principles: we have no totalitarian vocation, we respect also radical dissent, but we should not be neutral. Especially in the multicultural societies we live in, we should stand for our liberal principles and argue for them in all political and social arenas, as well as in our educational systems.

The second issue: do we need a European identity?

This could obviously be the matter for another entire series of seminars. And we actually started tackling the issue, from its geopolitical side, in the Helsinki seminar on multilateralism we held two weeks ago.

Here I would just stress that, at this point of our history, it is a simple matter of survival. GNP is obviously not the only unity of measurement of the international weight of countries or civilisations, but it is meaningful enough just to take a hint[i].

Politicians may have to respond to day-to-day urgencies, but it is inescapable to face these problems. We have to remember that:

a) in a democracy the rights of the people are paramount, but the duties of political and cultural élites are not less vital for a democracy to survive (as an Italian citizen, I unfortunately know what I am talking about);

b) in almost no European country the nation-building process and the building of a national identity has been a "natural" or "spontaneous" process.

Individual European states today cannot cope with globalisation. In order to survive in the global world and in order to assert our interests, values and principles, Europe must have a say. In order to have a say Europe must have an international policy. In order to have an international policy it must have a European political system capable of effectively deciding one. Common policies require common politics and common institutions. We are in the middle of a crisis of European integration, everything is obviously even more difficult after the French, Dutch and now Irish referenda, but the alternative is acting as Snow White and the Twenty-seven (not just seven) Dwarves. Just think of what the consequences would be if the Italian foreign policy had to be decided, step by step and unanimously, by the twenty Italian regional governments, or if the German foreign policy had to be set, in the same paralyzing way, by the sixteen Länder governments.

By the way, a European pillar of the Western world, if one is to survive, is also necessary to the US, as, among others, the pitiful Iraqi story tells.

Third point: any European common identity must and can only be a civic one.

The above mentioned historian Federico Chabod outlined a scheme of the main ideas of nation that arose in modern Europe. He described a mainly German naturalistic and romantic idea dating back to Johann Gottfried Herder: the nation as a large family based upon blood descent and upon

the relationship between land and stock; and a rival cultural and voluntaristic idea, that he saw typical of the French and Italian tradition, embodied by Ernest Renan and Pasquale Stanislao Mancini: the nation as an everyday plebiscite, based upon the will to share a common destiny and a common culture. The first notion is of no use today, after the ultimate tragedies we faced when the myth of ethnical uniformity ended in the Shoa and in ethnic cleansing. But the second too is outdated in the pluralistic societies we live in.

Much more useful to us is Jürgen Habermas's idea of "constitutional patriotism". This idea was born when Germany was still divided. Habermas thought that Western Germans should consider their 1949 Grundgesetz, their post-war liberal, democratic and federal constitution, rather than any of the previous ideas of "little" or "greater" Germany, as the core of their political identity.

This is far from being an artificial intellectual construction: as Maurizio Viroli, a Princeton Italian historian, has recently shown in a philological research, the very idea of love for one's "patria, patrie" was originally meant as the love for the liberty typical of that nation's institutions.

If not a patriotism of the, unfortunately not yet existing, European constitution, we should in essence build up a patriotism of the European Grundnorm: forcing somehow Hans Kelsen's idea of the Grundnorm (the basic norm of a constitutional system), that is the ultimate political decision on which every constitution is grounded and built upon. In order to do this, we should make our fellow citizens much more aware of the relevance and peculiarity of the system of liberal democracy, rule of law and human rights that is today a common heritage of our countries.

In our pluralistic societies, enriched by the most diverse individual cultural and life-style choices, and where integration of foreigners and former immigrants and their offspring in the rules of liberal democracy is paramount, is there any other road to integration? Of course, ethnic identification, or the establishment of a narrowly national perimeter inside which traditional customs become almost compulsory for everybody, are of no use today: not at the European level only, but also inside each of the old individual European nation-states.

Inside such a political and ideal civic framework many – not all of course – misunderstandings could perhaps be avoided. Think for example of the German controversy on the idea of a national Leitkultur, prompted by a German intellectual of Syrian origin, or think of the speech made there by Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan, who labelled integration as "a crime against humanity" (a translation mistake, it was said, he meant assimilation...).

As a conclusion let's come to the core of this series of seminars discussion: our idea of a common European, and civic, identity needs secular public institutions.

It is not, of course, because our societies have now grown more religiously pluralistic due to immigration, that liberals prefer religiously neutral public institutions. The fight for religious freedom is at the very roots of European liberalism – and European liberties. We often forget that this fight for religious freedom was from the start a fight against the intolerance of established churches, and just in the end a fight against the state atheism of communist countries or against the surge of Islamic fundamentalism. Indeed, non religiously neutral public institutions are always an infringement of the equal social dignity of individuals.

But in multireligious societies it is also unrealistic and fanciful to advocate for any sort of religious supremacy and expect integration at the same time.

Religious freedom is not just the freedom to practice the religion of one's ancestors (the issue as such would never have been even raised in post-Reformation Europe). It is also the individual freedom to relinquish one's ancestors' religion.

One thousand years ago, Europe could have been described as synonymous for Christendom. No longer since the process that lead to the birth of the modern idea of individual in the late Middle Ages, in Northern and Central Italy, in the Flanders and in England, and to the Reformation, possibly its most relevant consequence, that lead in turn to the first embryo of a political system based on (partial) religious freedom, rule of law and representative democracy, after the Great Rebellion and the Glorious Revolution in XVII century England.

It is this individual that has been for possibly more than four centuries now the subject of religious freedom, as of all the other liberal liberties, as has always been very well known by the freedom fighters belonging to religious minorities oppressed by established churches.

The biggest challenge of our time is the paradoxical erosion of the precious civic and historical values typical of our identity by populist politicians that, in the name of what they call "our roots", "our identity", would like to cage all of us back into closed homogeneous and mutually hostile communitarian enclosures, the smaller and the more controlled the better.

And, once again, new threats came from religious intolerance, both autochthonous and imported. Let's be clear: our freedom was first established not only by those free-thinkers and libertines who wanted to get rid of any religion that they deemed always superstitious, but also – also – by those believers who wanted to be free to worship their God in a different way.

But there is a temptation, once again, even in some Christian churches – and most of all in the Vatican hierarchy – to take advantage of the "revanche de Dieu" that has spread out since the Islamic revival that became manifest with the Iranian revolution thirty years ago: a temptation to counterbalance the Islamic surge not by strengthening the alternative values of open and free societies, but, on the contrary (where they can: the Spanish state is obviously not the case today, but Italy, Poland or Ireland are), by relegating non-believers in a position of second class citizens, by imposing on all of us, by law, benefits or disadvantages depending on personal behaviours only consistent with a faith many of us do not share – and that even fewer share in its strict traditional interpretation, as it is the case of millions of Catholics believers; or at least by imposing on all of us to pay more taxes in place of those whose faith is not strong enough to contribute financially to the life of their own churches; by requiring that religious faiths and religious people and leaders be given a privileged rank in our secularised societies. In Italy the Critica liberale foundation has been performing a yearly survey that now covers more than fifteen years: it shows that, the more the actual behaviours of the Italian population become secularised, the more power and public resources are given by politicians to the Catholic hierarchy [ii].

And it is a matter of controversial ethical issues, an area where no liberal society can allow religious people to have public institutions interfere in the lot of those who do not conform to their wishes and who do not want be imposed behaviours that are inconsistent with their own principles,

opinions and beliefs in the domains of education, marriage, divorce, family law, abortion, sexual life, freedom of scientific research, living will, euthanasia.

But it is also a matter of equal social dignity and freedom for every single individual, even those who choose, like heretics and reformers in our history centuries ago, to object, to reject or to relinquish the faith and the traditions of their ancestors.

Even more, it is a matter of individual freedom and non discrimination for those on whom public institutions are led by some religious leaders and by populist politicians to impose behaviours or regulations inconsistent or disrespectful of their own ascribed identity (as is the case of homosexuals), or are even imposed by public institutions an officially ascribed identity that no one knows whether they accept or not (as is the case of our younger fellow citizens who are the offspring of immigrated families).

I can't see how liberal values and principles can be enforced in any institutional or ideal framework different from our great and successful liberal tradition of religious neutrality and separation – as large as practically feasible – between religion and political power.

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Percentage of gross world product: WMF 2005 data. Goldman Sachs 2030 and 2050 projections.

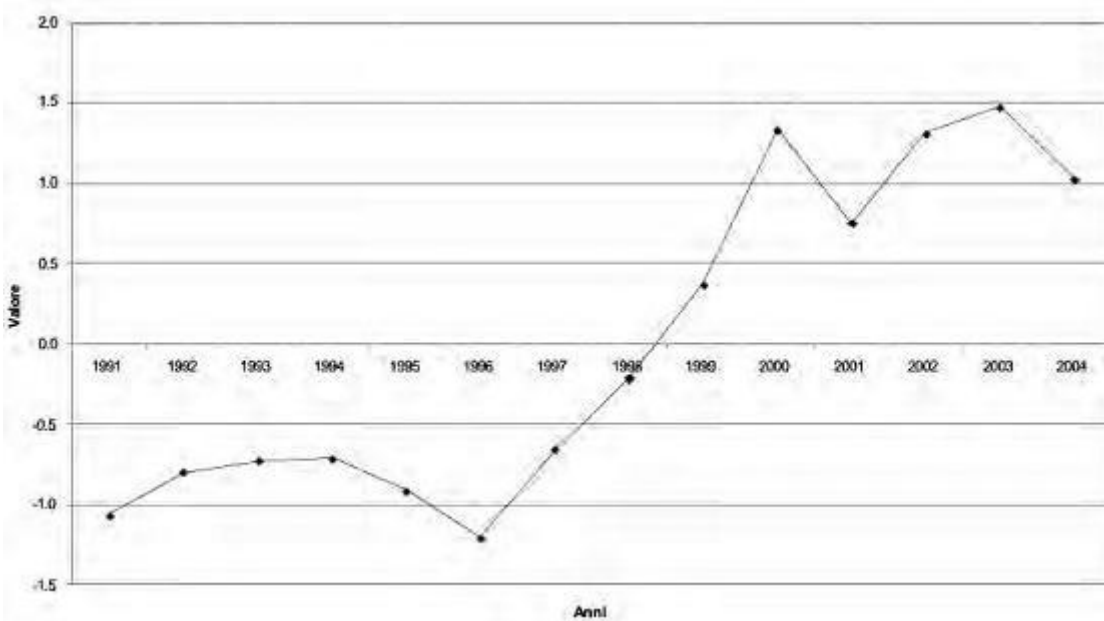| Countries | 2005 | 2030 | 2050 |
|-----------|------|------|------|
| China | 4.3 | 13.5 | 19.1 |
| India | 1.5 | 4.6 | 12.0 |
| Usa | 29.4 | 19.6 | 15.1 |
| Germany | 5.0 | 2.5 | 1.5 |
| Uk | 4.2 | 2.5 | 1.6 |
| France | 3.7 | 2.1 | 1.4 |
| Italy | 3.1 | 1.6 | 0.9 |
| Ue-25 | 29.5 | 18.2 | 10.6 |

Source: Renato Ruggiero, *Equilibri globali. Le economie stanno bene. i governi un po' meno*, Il Sole 24 Ore, February 10th 2007.

Secularisation Index
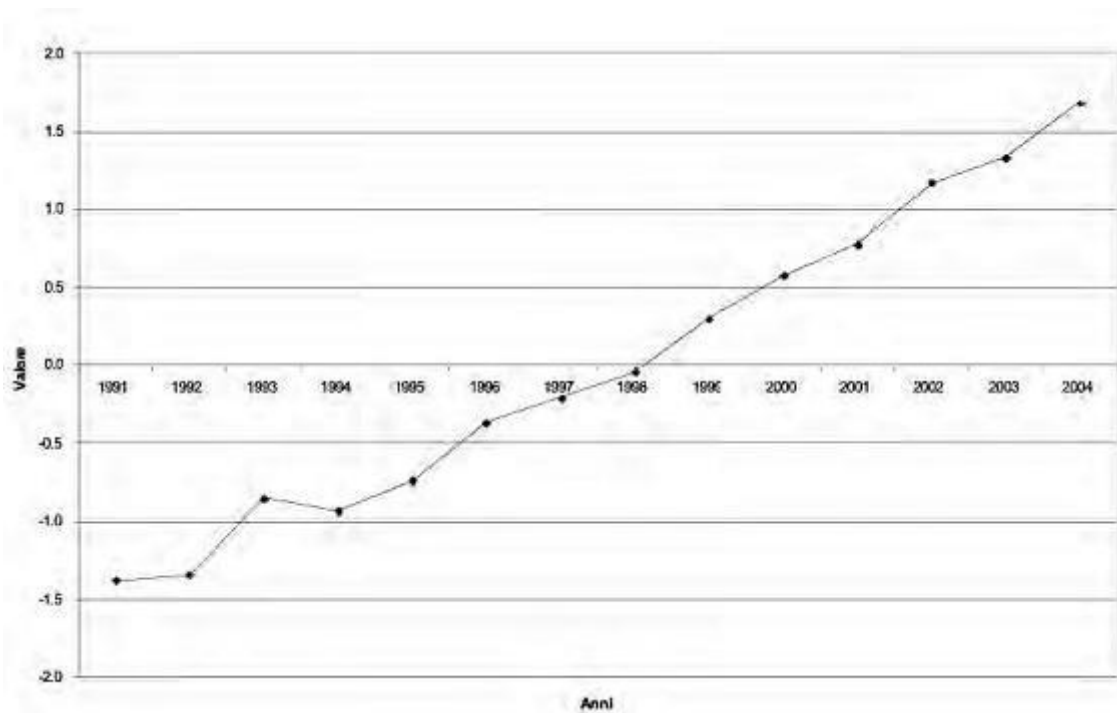


Institutional presence of the Roman Catholic Church



Source: Renato Coppi, Laura Caramanna, *L'indicatore di secolarizzazione*, Critica liberale n.135-137, Jan.-Mar. 2007.

# Church and state in the civic identity process

By Ingemund Hägg

**Summary**

1. A secular state is a necessary (but not sufficient) condition for a common European civic identity. A secular state can coexist with both religious and secular civil society

A secular state is not the same as a secular society.

2. Identity – one single dimension/characteristic, for example religion

Identity – an individual has more than one identity

Identity is a problematic concept, here interpreted as "group" that an individual feels identification with

A common European civic identity should be developed "from below" in civil society. As each individual has several identities the common European civic identity will be one of several identities.

3. The road forward

A secular state is a theoretical model for liberals. Cf. figure 1 below. Efforts are constantly needed to approach this "ideal" state, even if it will never be achieved completely. New problems and challenges will arise which will have to be handled. Some liberals attach such efforts as a way to combat fundamentalism. For other liberals (including myself) consistent efforts would have been needed even if the fundamentalist threats had not existed.

Freedom to choose ones belief or non-belief system is a fundamental right belonging to the private sphere, within civil society. The state has to be neutral.

**Identity processes**

Identity is a problematic concept given different meanings for different use. Maybe we can today try to identify something that can be interpreted as aspects of a common European civic identity even if it is rudimentary.  Professor Kjell Goldmann in his chapter in this report uses available empirical data for two phenomena for which he identifies indicators: First, A sense of community among Europeans. Some of the indicators are positive, some negative.  Second, A community of values in Europe. He finds a reasonable consensus on democracy. All in all data do not give clear pictures and he concludes "European identity is limited but not non-existent, that the need for it may not be quite as overwhelming as some have presumed, and that there is some

reason to expect that the sense of community and the community of values will become stronger in the long term." He sees some possibility for the European Union with its parties and elections to promote the development of a European demos.

In my view a common European civic identity cannot be imposed from above. It must grow from within civil society. But there might be possibilities to remove obstacles to the development of such an identity. In the present ELF project it should be an aim to identify obstacles and discuss possibilities of removing them.

One very important obstacle is the situation of states not being secular. It can be argued that the state (not the same as the society) must be secular (l´état laïque). This is a necessary but not sufficient condition. If state institutions, political institutions, are not neutral to religions and religious movements and religious communities the chances for developing a common European civic identity are nil.

Let us take a look at the concept and phenomenon of identity and the related concept and phenomenon of identification in a liberal perspective. It is common in the world today to categorize individuals according to one single dimension. And the most important dimension is then religion. Expressions like the Christian world (the West) and the Muslim world are common .What this type of categorization implies is ignoring all other kinds of identities that an individual can have. An individual can be a Muslim, a professional, a woman, a British citizen to mention just a few groups to which an individual can belong. To choose just one implies diminishing the individual to a one-dimensional creature. And important is also that the popular idea that one has to find out what is our real identity is ignoring that individuals can make choices. – the world is not deterministic in a liberal perspective. Liberals will not be able to accept religious movements that claim that the only identity worth considering is the one they stand for. It is true that the alternatives open to an individual is limited and context-bound. It is frightening when states (governments) in some countries more recognize religious communities as groups with right to be the sole representatives for individuals in a country. Amartya Sen formulates this in the following way:

*"the confusion between multiculturalism with cultural liberty .on the one side, and plural monoculturalism with faith based separation on the other. A nation can hardly be seen as collection of sequestered segments, with citizens being assigned fixed places in predetermined segments. Nor can Britain be seen, explicitly or by implication, as an imagined national federation of religious ethnicities."* (Sen 2006, p 165)

What he says has important implications when we analyse the separation of state and religion in different areas and matters.

When we turn to common identities and a common European civic identity it is important to recognise that such an identity must build on the insight that individuals have more than one identity and that the set of identities common in one country might be different from the set in other countries due to richness of different historical developments, richness in ethnic and religious backgrounds. For liberals it is important to stress that it is up to the individual to define her or his identities. The challenge to a common European identity is that such an identity must build on such a diversity and also find its place among other identities that an individual might have. A common

European civic identity has to build on individual identities and be one of many identities of European inhabitants

**The public sphere**

We see that liberals adhere to a état laïque which is neutral to all religious (whether believing in one or more gods, whether small or large in number of adherents) and non-religious beliefs (including agnostics and atheists). With freedom for the individual, religion is referred to the private sphere. Sometimes "private" is interpreted as a demand for individualism in the sense that organised religion in civil society should be rejected. Nothing could be more wrong. Liberalism welcomes people joining together in voluntary organisations for different important issues, like religions. Without a vivid civil society with a large variety of organisations and associations we do not have a liberal society. The issue of what role religion could have in what is sometimes called "the public space", sometimes "the political public space" is controversial and unclear in the debate about l´état laïque.  Cf figure 2 below. We also admit that the concept of the state is unclear and that it is often fruitful to recognize that the state is not a monolith. In a speech on Religion in the Public Space (Habermas 2005) Jürgen Habermas states that "government has to be placed on non-religious footing". At the same time he recognises "an informal public sphere" apart from "parliament, courts, ministries and administration."  He stresses the need for religious voices "in the political public sphere" and advocates a "pre-political" discourse with both religious and non-religious voices. As I see it he allocates an important role for the civil society. See also Habermas & Ratzinger (2006) where Habermas and the future pope agree on needs for dialogue, but probably disagree on how dialogues should be held.

**Moving towards a secular state - a necessary condition for a European civic identity**

The idea of l´état laïque is not the actual world. Cf enclosure 2 below on Sweden. Not even in France you can find a real l´état laïque nor can it be found elsewhere in the world today and probably it will remain an idea in the future. But that should not prevent liberals from trying to go in the direction of such a state. In enclosure 1 a resolution adopted by the Liberal International shows that this ambition is agreed upon by liberal parties all over the world.

A secular state is thus a theoretical model for liberals. Efforts are constantly and continuously needed to approach this "ideal" state, even if it will never be achieved completely. New problems and challenges will arise which will have to be handled.  Some liberals attach such efforts as a way to combat fundamentalism. For other liberals (including myself) consistent efforts would have been needed even if the fundamentalist trends would not have existed.

Freedom to choose ones belief or non-belief system is a fundamental right belonging to the private sphere, that is to civil society. The state has to be neutral.

Without such a neutrality we run the risk of developing Europe into a federation of religious ethnicities – to use Amartya Sens words – contrary to the development of a common European civic identity.

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# Enclosure 1

**Resolution adopted by the Liberal International at the congress in Dakar, Senegal, 2003**

"The Liberal International

- Re-emphasises that the freedom of conscience and religion is a basic and universal rights. Every human being has the right to practice his or her religion freely within the confines set by the law and human rights. Every human being has the right to choose the religion they prefer without being subject to any form of oppression, negative discrimination or suppression in any part of the world.

- Advocates the clear separation of organised religion and the state institutions. While many people have religious beliefs and are involved in politics, attempts to establish theocratic governments leads to increased social and political conflict and injustice.

- While advocating a secular state also warns against the misuse and misrepresentation of the term"secularism". The Liberal International stresses that to liberals, "secularism" does not mean anti-religious government, but neutral government, that is, a government that treats equally those of all faiths and those of no faith who adhere to the law and does not support any of them in any manner."

# Enclosure 2

**State and church in Sweden – a mini example**

France is said to have a secular state while Frenchmen declare themselves to be "religious persons" to a large extent.  Sweden is said to be a secular society with Swedes to a lesser extent than other

Europeans declare themselves to be "religious persons" at the same time as the state is not really secular. In France separation between state and church took place in 1905 while Sweden made a separation only in 2000. In France the law about separation has been amended a lot of times and other regulations has over time tried to solve upcoming problems for a secular state and lately it turns out that some of the basic statements about the secular state are reinterpreted.. In Sweden it can be noted that the separation was not so far-reaching and that state – church relations continue without being really questioned

When the state and church in Sweden separated in 2000 the former state church was replace by a new legal form "registrerat trossamfund" – registered religious association., regulated in a special law about "the Swedish church" (Svenska kyrkan, the name of the organisation). Other religious associations can apply to become registered religious associations regulated in a separate law. This law is similar to the legal regulation of voluntary associations. A state agency (Kammarkollegiet) is responsible for guarding this law and admits members. And the government can decide that some of them can get help in raising the membership fees (which is automatically done for the Swedish church)

This means also that the state will have registers of the members of, for example, a catholic or muslim association!

# Secularism and liberalism with a focus on Belgium[1]

By Thierry Coosemans

I would like to make some general comments on the historical convergence of liberalism and secularism. I will then very briefly present the situation in Belgium before giving you a few topics to think about to stimulate our discussion.

But, first of all, I would like to draw your attention to the semantic problems of our discussion: the French term "laïcité" is not the exact equivalent of the English "secularism" or of the Dutch "vrijzinnigheid" or German "weltlichkeit". The word "laïc" itself contains an intrinsic ambiguity as it refers to both the members of the Catholic Church who are not clergy and, since the middle of the 19th century, anticlerics or those who support the secularisation of the state. This is an excellent argument in favour of maintaining French as a working language in the ELDR Party...

Beyond our different historical experiences, the liberalism which we share is deeply rooted in the intellectual ferment of the Renaissance, when liberty and individualism, which had remained the privilege of the few, became accessible to the many.

In the face of religious obscurantism, liberalism asserts its faith in reason, not only as an ideal, but also as a tool for understanding nature. Its optimism in science challenges Christian Providence and the search for happiness in the afterlife. From the start, this liberalism led the struggle in favour of emancipation by releasing man from the transcendence and authoritarianism of religion. It therefore merged with the policy of tolerance.

But this liberalism was not monolithic. Thus, although Voltaire's rationalists (for whom *the Church is in the State, and not the State in the Church*) and the Philosophers represent the anticlerical faction of liberal thinking, wilfully contemptuous of religion (this last point distinguishes it from the "Aufklärung"), we should not forget that a form of de facto liberalism emerged from the division of Christianity into several denominations in the 16th century. Attracted by the Glorious Revolution in England and the constitutional monarchy which it instituted, liberals were to find arguments for their struggle against absolute royal power in Protestantism.

Finally, although state religion (whether Catholic, Anglican, Calvinist or Lutheran) was erected everywhere into a system until the end of the 18th century, the Enlightenment and the French Revolution played a decisive role in asserting religious freedom.

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[1] This report includes elements from the study entitled "Is Belgium a secular state?" by Mr. Hervé Hasquin, the Administrator of the Jean Gol Centre and a member of Belgium's Royal Academy

Having mentioned these historical and doctrinal markers, I would now like to describe the situation in Belgium, a state often considered as an example of coexistence between communities, whether linguistic or philosophical.

When Belgium gained its independence, the constituent power wanted to ensure the independence of the civil power from ecclesiastical authority and avoid dictatorial-papist temptations in this young state, strongly permeated by Catholicism. The Belgian constitution of 1831 does not explicitly refer to any state "secularism" - the expression was not yet in common usage - or even to any separation of state and church. However, several articles in the new fundamental law highlighted the "political secularism of the state" or, more specifically, the state's "neutrality". It is remarkable that these articles have never been amended to this day.

Although the state's neutrality implies that the church's laws do not apply and have no civil force, it does not for all that constitute a system of strict separation since the state recognises a certain number of religions and gives them public aid.

Recognition of a religion is granted supremely by Parliament and, although there are no formal rules, five criteria for recognition are used: a religion must have a fairly high number of members, it must be structured and have a representative body who will be the civil authority's contact point, have been established in the country for a fairly long period of time, have a certain social value, and not carry out any activities contrary to public order. Currently, the Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Anglican, Islamic and Orthodox religions are recognised. Meanwhile, secularism was recognised in 1981 under the heading of "non-denominational philosophical communities". This enables it to maintain administrative representatives.

Despite society's increasing secularisation and the noticeable decline in religious practice, this device has not really affected the weight of the "pillar" on which the Catholic Church continues to rely. The latter still benefits indirectly from the existence within Belgian society of a pillar of unions, mutual insurance companies, schools, insurance companies, hospitals, etc.

The logic of this system for "recognizing" religions on the basis of the unofficial criteria I have just listed implies that, sooner or later, the question of recognizing other religions such as Hinduism or Buddhism will arise. This being the case, political, or even geopolitical, considerations will also need to be taken into account.

During the second half of the 20th century these constitutional provisions have been accompanied by the conclusion of "pacts" between the different political groupings, aimed at ensuring harmonious and politically balanced cohabitation between the different philosophical movements. Thus, the "School Pact" of 1958 allows public financing of the different education networks according to generally identical standards (notably the payment of teachers' salaries). It meets secularism's demands by placing classes on morals on an equal footing, in state schools, with the religious instruction classes of one of the recognized religions. A "Cultural Pact", concluded between the main political groupings in 1972, ensures respect for philosophical and ideological trends, and therefore of minorities, in the public authorities' cultural policy.

At the same time, after the Second World War, the liberal grouping understood that, in a society in the process of becoming less religious, it was time to go beyond philosophical differences and, in 1961, the Liberal Party abandoned the anticlericalism which had characterised it since it was founded in 1846 and opened up to the Christian world. Since then, the Belgian liberal grouping, both French and Dutch-speaking, has been open to people of all denominations and beliefs. Anyone can join a liberal, humanistic, open and tolerant project which respects each individual's philosophical and religious convictions. This opening up has translated in particular into freedom of conscience and this is recognised for liberal members of parliament when voting on morally sensitive issues such as abortion, bio-ethics and even homosexual adoption and marriage.

The semantic ambiguities, the diversity of our historical experience and the sometimes subtle balances which allow convictions to coexist within our member states generally explain the problems faced by the authors of the European constitution when they wanted to introduce the concept of secularism.

Too often, the debate on "secularism" has referred only to the French example, where "Republic" is presented as being substantially the same as "secularism". However, in recent years, European democracies have seen the emergence of a "laicity-secularism" which relativises the French case considerably. Thus, in a good number of areas, England has played a role which some will describe as "progressive" in terms of contraception and homosexual marriage but which actually translate the arrival of a post-religious society or a secular society which has not for all that renounced religion. This is all the more true since, as we have seen, the Belgian example shows that, in practice, a state can be secular without the principle necessarily being enshrined in its fundamental law.

Beyond legal considerations, which tend to be essentially simplistic, should we not encourage values which confer on a state its "secular" nature? I believe that this "value secularism", in which European liberals will recognise themselves, will easily ensure the independence of state and church and the state's non-intervention in church affairs, the respect of fundamental freedoms, including the freedom to believe or not believe, or even to be irreligious, and also the non-discrimination of types.

Today, our democratic and secularised Europe is faced with the challenge of redefining the place and role of religion in public life in the face of the religious assertiveness of immigrant populations who have become full citizens of the states where they live. This issue opens a debate about the choice between, on the one hand a "coexistence secularism" with its dangers of communitarianism and, on the other hand, an "integration secularism" which does not refuse to deal with cultural and religious problems but makes them subject to critical discussion and contradiction.  Hard and fast "assimilation secularism", closed to any form of cultural diversity no longer has a place.

# Local democracy attitudes – the case of Finland

By Peter Ekholm

Democracy is an essential part of European thinking and of the European Union. Local democracy is even more of a corner stone because local institutions are close to the citizen. Local democracy represents the subsidiarity principle in practice.

I'll first describe the Finnish system – there are 27 patterns in the EU – and it is good to know what I'm trying to analyze. Then I present some of the key results from a national survey concerning local democracy made by e2, a Finnish liberal think tank. In the third part of the presentation I try to discuss what these results bring into one's mind.

*The Finnish system*

Transparency and access to information are basic principles of Finnish local government.

The Local Government Act emphasises the importance of representative democracy and of residents and service users taking part in and influencing local affairs.

Local authorities provide members of the community with information on current issues in process, or plans affecting them, their progress, decisions reached and their effects.

Residents are also advised how to submit questions about local affairs and to express their views to those in charge of planning and decisions. Every municipality has a homepage in the net.

Members of the community have the right to propose initiatives in municipal issues. Referendums can also be arranged.

In Finland live a bit more than five million people. They share the local governing between more than four hundred communalities. So on average public authorities are pretty close to the citizens. From the democracy point of view it means good possibilities for the citizens to influence in the decision making.

Finnish local and joint authorities employ about 17 percent of the country's workforce. About four-fifths of municipal employees work in health care, education, and social services.

Women account for the vast majority of the municipal workforce; only two out of ten employees are men. Finland has always been proud of the power of women in democracy and working life. From that point of view the municipal system is important, indeed.

The subsidiarity principle or the laws cannot however order people to interest in local affairs.

*The system is good, in theory*

In a country where leap from an agricultural society to an urban society have happened quickly and where your local community lives your life aside you from cradle to grave it ought to be likely that interest in local affairs is high. However it is not so.

The turnover of voters is low and getting lower. During the seventies we were close to 80 percent level and now we are closing to the 50 percent level. The society has changed or developed drastically but citizens are more and more passive.

According to our survey it is clear that the Finns think voting is the utmost best way in influencing the local affairs. At the same time, however, they think that their individual votes have no effect. So they are not voting.

We asked the citizens what are the reasons for not to vote. The most important reason is that people do not trust the politicians. The next important reason is that they do not believe that a single vote can affect. It is paradoxical that people think that their votes have actually no affect in municipal affairs but still they believe that giving a vote is the best way to influence. The third is that all the political parties are alike.

Finns do not agree that reason for not voting is the fact that things are alright. In Finnish local democracy we find a paradox. People think that their votes have no effect. But most of the inhabitants are happy indeed to how their home community is functioning. In other words they are happy with the local services but unhappy with their personal influence.

*Explanations*

There are several explanations for this outcome. It is very typical for Finland to reach a consensus in political issues. Every citizen appreciates education, health care not to speak about the night watchman duties – produced by local authorities. And all of the political parties understand what is important to voters. Opposing would mean only loosing votes.

On a state level as well as on a local level it is typical that different kind of political parties are in power together. You can have campaigns from the leftist and from the conservative parties but the conclusions may be a surprise – they are sitting in the same local government. So why the voter ought to vote if the vote doesn't have a real affect?

The consensus thinking has taken us into a situation where parties have learned to act together. Even on a state level we have had conservatives, greens, social democrats and communists in the same government. The explanation is clear – the left is pink, the greens are light green and conservatives rather grey than black. Nowadays we find the same phenomenon everywhere else as well – it is better to be in political centre.

*Is there any alternative for the present power sharing?*

During the Cold War political parties were the actors. Although we had in Finland over one hundred thousand civic associations, they didn't have much power or influence. We still have more than 120 000 associations and they are now having some power but practically all the societal decision making is taken by the political parties. On the other hand political parties are the very core of the pluralism. And pluralism on Finland's local level means acting together.

One of the benefits of a small country is the fact that decision makers are not far from their fellow citizens. Finland is not a country but a country club – all the decision makers know each

other – or at least they have common friends. And that is the fact ordinary citizens are worried about.

The Finns seem not to trust the local politicians. We asked in what are they trusting?

People seem to trust the local media as a source of information, much more than they believe in local party activists. People are following political discussion without taking part in it.


*Some conclusions from the results:*

Firstly: I think that we do have the same situation in politics that we do have in religion. It is called secularism.

For centuries the Church was the source of values. The political system took the role after that.

Most of the citizens believe in something but they are alienated from the church. In principle, however, religion is good. Democracy is good as well and almost everyone appreciates it in principle. But citizens are alienated from political parties.

On a European level we do have many Christian churches. They are like political parties in the democratic system. Religion is an ideology like democracy is as well. We have churches and political parties on an operative level. Ideologies are shifting away so why should people attend services or vote?

After market economy dominance there is a return of politics, a return of societal discussion. It doesn't mean the same as return of party politics. Issue-based politics seems to be more likely. You can act for the local school or the local hospital, but not use political parties as a vehicle.

Secondly: I think we are going back to Habermasian world. On the one hand there is the system, being it the EU or your own county more and more complicated and on the other hand Lebenswelt or our everyday life. We ordinary people live in the latter. It is the same who is in power. Power world is too complex for ordinary people.

There is a shimmering light at the end of the tunnel. Our survey shows that the Finns seem to believe that internet could narrow the gap between decision makers and voters.

Thirdly: We have had a vivid discussion about the democracy deficit in the member countries. Democratic deficit is in this discussion a synonym for the EU.

The EU is still an alien in Finnish institutional life. However if you have a well-planned system like I described the Finnish local democratic model, it doesn't help if people are not interested in societal affairs. Instead of democratic deficit I'd rather speak about interest deficit. If it so, the crisis in democracy is even worse.

# Conclusions and policy implications

By Giulio Ercolessi and Ingemund Hägg

**Secular institutions is a necessary condition for a common European civic identity**

As far as civic identities are concerned, their existence is, at every possible level, a matter of comparison. We think that a common European civic identity should be recognizable if European liberal democracies were compared to parts of the world that have more authoritarian and less individualistic customs, traditions and institutions. At least from this point of view, some kind of common European identity already exists to some extent. Maybe such an identity can be further promoted. We found that a necessary condition for such an identity is a secular state within a society where the civil part of the society (civil society) can have secular or non-secular (religious) ingredients.

**Eight frequent misunderstandings about secularism and secular institutions**

We identified a number of misunderstandings about the meaning of secularism and of a secular state. In particular we found the following.

1. It is often claimed that Europe has become secular. This obviously depends on what we mean with "secular". Established churches have certainly lost much of their traditional strength. State institutions in some countries have become more secular – and in others they have become more clerical due to successful lobbying even if the society was moving in the opposite direction – but whether civil society has really become everywhere more secular is doubtful. Maybe religion has for some decades not been so visible as today but whether religion has ever been in practice marginalised is questionable.

2. Populist politicians and superficial media reporting often seem to suggest that identities of individuals are and should be one-dimensional and based on ethnicity or religion – "you are a Christian, you are a Muslim". This implies a view of identity as something attributed to individuals from above, for example from families, communities or religious organizations and in that way collective: it implies a necessary, or at least expected, coincidence, between the individual and the collective, cultural and/or religious, identity. For liberals this is not acceptable. Identities are, for the most important and significant part, individual, chosen by individuals themselves, and not one-dimensional. In the liberal world an individual can say that she/he is a European, a professional, a Muslim, a golfer and a liberal.

3. It is also claimed that identities are learnt in and given by the communities the individual happens to grow up in. For liberals identity is something you can choose to leave or go into.

There is room, among others components of individual identities, for a common European civic identity: it is made of the principles and values that provide a common framework of freedom in

the public European sphere, hopefully experienced by most citizens as a precious good to be enhanced and preserved, that becomes at the same time a part of their own heritage and identity and the guarantee for the respect of all the other several parts of everybody's own multi-folded personal identity.

4. It is claimed that secular states are void of values and norms. This is wrong – states have to stand for human rights and values that are neutral to different religious interpretations and values and norms.

5. It is claimed that states (state institutions) should recognize religious movements, enter into dialogue with them and foster them. This would be counterproductive to any form of social cohesion and common identity as it favours certain movements in the civil society to the detriment of others and creates divisions in the society.

6. It is claimed that secular institutions imply that religion has to be limited to the private, individual sphere. This is not true as a secular state is compatible with a civil society where religious and other voluntary organisations can act freely.

7. It is claimed that inter-religious dialogue is needed in Europe and that the state should take part in such dialogue. For liberals inter-religious dialogue is fine but should take place in the civil society without state participation which would mean recognizing some movements and not others.

8. It is claimed that privatization of religion means that religion is put outside public space, outside the space where societal and political matters are discussed. This is not true as the civil society is the proper arena for developing policies where voluntary organizations also meet political parties. Religious arguments should not enter state institutions like government, parliament, ministries, administration.


**Policy implications for liberals and liberal parties**


Taking steps in the direction of separation of state and churches (religion) is necessary also in order to promote a European common civic identity.

This has in our opinion some important policy implications.

* Non discrimination on religious ground: this also implies that public institutions should never make assumptions on any individual's religious belief.

* Neutrality to all belief and non-belief systems in public services.

* No financial privileges in reason of the religious character of private bodies, institutions, groups and associations. Religious and non-religious cultural, philosophical, charitable, non-profit bodies should be treated equally.

* Non-confessional education systems where education to become a citizen is of critical importance in our increasingly pluralistic societies.

* Respect for every kind of individual choice in the citizens' own private lives and life-styles: rejection of any claim to provide or deny public benefits for those that do or do not comply with behaviours consistent with religious obligations.

* Freedom of expression also in the domain of religion.

* Rejection of any claim to restrict the freedom of scientific research on the basis of religious or religiously grounded reasons.

# Annex I

## The Bucharest document

This document from the Bucharest seminar (see Annex II) is based on a presentation paper by Ingemund Hägg. Parts of the text were drafted during and after the seminar by Giulio Ercolessi. Some parts were agreed upon by all participants, some others have been written or rewritten afterwards in an effort to formulate what we – Giulio Ercolessi and Ingemund Hägg – thought could be acceptable texts. There was one clear controversy which related to public financial contributions to confessional education, which is common practice in some countries and some participants saw as acceptable.

*A liberal contribution to a common European civic identity*

1. The deadlock in the process of ratification of the European constitutional treaty compels us all to strengthen the understanding of the reasons of the European project and to rethink the very basis of the European political integration. Every project of integration requires a high degree of awareness of the significance and the scope of such endeavour, both in the population and in national political classes. A unified, liberal and democratic Europe cannot be built upon a common ethnical descent, a uniform linguistic or religious heritage, a unique comprehensive cultural tradition. But we have often underestimated the importance of our common constitutional heritage in building a shared civic identity, based upon human rights and liberal democracy, a heritage that already makes our European civic identity recognizable by non-Europeans. This should also be clear in the eyes of Europeans.

2. Also inside the individual national states, this common identity is now shaken by the upsurge of communitarian identity claims, often based upon religious adherence, and demagogic response by populist politicians. One of the main contributions of liberals to the fabric of European political unification, now more necessary than ever, stands in our centuries-long fight for separation between secular government and religious influence and power, and in our idea that human rights are a prerogative of every single individual, rather than of organized groups.

3. The liberal society is an open society where respect for the individual, his or her dignity and integrity is fundamental. The individual cannot be reduced by anyone other than him/herself to his/her cultural, political or social adherence, citizenship – or: to his/her religious adherence. Even less to the religious heritage of his/her family or community: religious freedom, if taken seriously, implies that the religious adherence of any individual should never be assumed as implicit by public institutions.

4. For liberals the human being is not one-dimensional but much more complex and has not one but several adherences or identities. To define a human being to be mainly a Christian, a Muslim, an Atheist or belonging to any other specific religion is a mark of disrespect for the individual, which

is foreign to liberals. Respect is shown by acknowledging every human being to choose his or her religious or non-religious conviction. Religion is in this respect a private matter.

5. In the liberal society a dynamic civil society is natural and necessary. Organised religion can have a place and a voice in this public space. Further, in a liberal society the state has to be neutral to organised religion, not discriminating, not favouring, and not giving them a role in state affairs.

6. The neutral state is not at all void of values – on the contrary. It must stand up for individual rights and freedom and democracy. It must guarantee all children who are capable of forming their own views an education that be respectful of the rights granted by the international convention on the rights of children, including freedom of expression and freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Within those limitations, religious movements wanting to educate children in their religions can do that in forms of their choice but it should not be considered part of the educational system and with no subsidies from the state. A society is not equal to a state and that part of a society called civil society is open for organised religion.

7. Thus liberals recognise and respect individuals' choices of beliefs - religious and non-religious. The state is a guarantee for freedom for religious movements to act for their interests in civil society. The state is also a guarantee for the rights to freely debate, analyse and support or criticise all religions and other belief systems, which is not in conflict with respect for the individual.

8. In a liberal society the state cannot impose on individuals any obedience or conformity in the private sphere to behaviours or prohibitions that are specific of religious beliefs.

9. Religious traditions, however deeply rooted in a country's tradition, can never be considered as an excuse for any violation of freedom of expression or of individual rights, especially if perpetrated on individuals who escaped not only from poverty but also from less free societies than ours, or on their children. Public institutions should never assume "inter-religious dialogue" as the instrument for the integration of immigrants (and of immigrants' children) in the values of liberal democracy.

10. Not one single country in Europe has reached a satisfactory situation in view of the requirements for a real liberal society. And the roads forward will not be easy and smooth.

# Annex II

## The project and its seminars

### The Bucharest seminar in October 2006

This seminar on "Secularism in Europe", October 12th 2006, was held in connection with the ELDR congress in Bucharest. The document representing the informal start of the entire project is presented in Annex I.

### The Berlin seminar in October 2007

This seminar with the title Secularism in Europe was held in connection with the ELDR congress in Berlin on October 18 2007. A paper was presented by Ingemund Hägg: *Identity: A secular state as a necessary condition for a common European civic identity.* This paper was amended and presented in a thoroughly revised version at a later seminar in Barcelona.

Another paper was presented by Thierry Coosemans and is a chapter in this report.

### The Brussels seminar in January 2008

The seminar was held in Brussels with Centre Jean Gol as host,on January 24, 2008. It was in connection with the General Assembly of the European Liberal Forum and dealt with identity issues and European civic identity in particular.

Kjell Goldman presented a paper which is a chapter in this report.

Further, Peter Ekholm presented a paper which is also a chapter in this report

The political philosopher Luuk van Middelaar from the Netherlands and professor Pascal Delwit from Belgium gave speeches.

### The Barcelona seminar in June 2008

This seminar was held in Barcelona on June26-27 2008 with the Trias Fargas foundation as host and had the title "Churches and states in the civil identity process".

Giulio Ercolessi presented a paper which is a chapter in this book.

Also Ingemund Hägg presented a paper which is a chapter in this book.

Number of prominent speakers gave their views on the subject, including Dr Lluis Duch, Dr Jean Francois Mayer, Dr Alex Seglers, Dr Josef Boehle, Dr Juan José Tamayo, Mr Félix Martí, and Rev. Donald Reeves.