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The cultural Frontiers of Europe. Introductory Study

Alina STOICA, Mircea BRIE

The scientific debates about the European culture are either grouped around the concept of *cultural homogenization*, phenomenon found in a strong causal relationship with what the globalization and mondialisation really are, or designate a reality that exists beyond denial or demolition – *cultural diversity*. The universalization and uniformization of values, of images and of ideas submitted by media or cultural industry are not the only ways of expression. One has to consider that the cultural diversity records a plurality of ideas, images, values and expressions, within the coexistence of parallel cultures (national, ethnic, regional, local, etc.). Moreover, in this context, some authors speak of the “identity rematch” and the “feeling of turning back to the historical, national and cultural identity” especially in a space like Central and Eastern Europe and during such historical time that the national specificity and identity would have to redefine themselves by being open to the new configurations – geo-political, historical and cultural (David, Florea, 2007:645-646). The national and regional cultures do not disappear under the immediate acceleration of globalization, and this is also due to an increase of interest in the local culture. Mondialisation, seen as a broader process that includes globalization, is “characterised by multiplying, acceleration and intensification of economic, political, social and cultural interactions between actors from different parts of the world” (Tardif, Farchy, 2006:107-108). Beyond the epistemological relative antagonism, it can be seen that the cultural cooperation space tends to become “multipolar”, the debate incorporating the new concept of “cultural networks”. Such networks have started to confuse the old structures, providing a step forward in terms of identity, communication, relationship and information (Pehn, 1999:8).

Beyond the physical border, whatever the view of the conceptual approach, within or bordering the European Union, one can identify other types of “frontiers”. Among such frontiers the cultural borders have a special spot. What is the place of the cultural border within such conceptual perspective? The particular cultural border makes a clear distinction between Europe and non-Europe. This perspective that brings into question the idea of a European unity and gives the image of a European cultural whole (true, divided into cultural “subcomponents”), is taken apart by the supporters of national cultures of European peoples. The statement “culture of cultures” (used also in the pages of the current volume), although admitting the unity on the whole, stresses the specificity of cultures. The cultural borders are basically contact areas that provide communication and cooperation, without being boundaries between European peoples or cultures. The ethno-cultural borders may overlap those of a state: inside the majority of the European states we can identify “symbolic” borders. Such cultural areas can become real models of interculturality, but also can be discontinuities that more or less separate human communities based on ethnic or cultural criteria. The European space is in its nature a pluralist society, rich in cultural and social traditions which will further diversify” (Tandonnet, 2007:50).

Europe, seen from such angle, may seem as a conglomerate of cultural areas that are separated by “cultural borders”, more or less overlapping with the nation-states borders. These cultural areas can be easily labelled as subcomponents of a unitary European culture as expression against the extra-European spaces. Europe can be

conceived as a unified cultural whole, despite some discontinuities that occur between elements that make up its complex structure. Thus, the European culture is built on a complex system of shared values that characterize the European cultural space. We mainly refer to the common cultural values, thanks to which we can confirm today the existence of a cultural reality, specific to the European space (see Rezsöhazy, 2008).

The volume *The Cultural Frontiers of Europe*, brings together some papers presented during the *Nouvelles Approches des Frontières Culturelles* Conference, held in Oradea, at the Faculty of History, Geography and International Relations, in March 2010. The event was coordinated by Prof. Ioan Horga PhD., in collaboration with the Nancy II University, within an international project (NAFTES) initiated by the latter; the event targeted to debate on the permanence of borders in a moment when Europe is facilitating the free movement of persons and property. Such orientation is far from being an exclusive one, but stresses the cultural issues, the multidisciplinary of the cultural border idea.

“The idea of cultural border has often been used to justify, change and challenge the establishment of political borderlines between states or regions”, stated Prof. Didier Francfort during the conference.

With this volume we attempt to answer a few questions:

So what is the Europe of culture?

What are the contents, the meaning, the project?)

The current *Eurolimes* volume is divided into three sections. The first section, *The Birth and Evolution of the Intercultural Frontiers Concept*, presents an explanatory approach to the idea of cultural border, chosen by the authors to follow its evolution in time. The cultural phenomenon in Europe has long preceded any form of definite political organization. If before the emergence of the nation-state in XIX century the culture had been an element of European unity, after the intervention of the political organization this “European conscience” was compromised. Nevertheless, a certain cultural cosmopolitanism has been kept across the centuries through elites, notwithstanding the existing borderlines and the necessity of being in control of people and states (see Maria Manuela Tavares Ribeiro, apud Jacques Rigaud, *op.cit.*). “L’Europe de la Culture n’est pas, ne peut pas être, une “euroculture”, mais est, ou doit être, une communauté de cultures, ou pour mieux dire, une pratique de l’interculturalité” (see Maria Manuela Tavares Ribeiro).

But, according to specialists, the question on the meeting of the cultural with the geopolitical approach to Europe is raised for the first time after World War II, as a result of the internal ethnocentric crystallization of Europe and, at the same time, of the danger that the European Powers may turn into an appendage of the new hegemonic complex (see Georges Contogeorgis).

In this context, the role of the refugees in Europe can be observed within the cultural frontiers as well (see Sharif Gemie). Nevertheless, great importance has been given to the dimension of Georgia's cultural border with Europe and the European Union (see Marine Vekua), making the transition to the second section, *The Europe of Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue*, that is based on several study cases that covers the dimension of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue. It is therefore reviewed the case of interwar Romania and Portugal, two Latin countries located at Europe’s western and eastern frontiers, which found the way of dialogue during the centuries and developed it at large after World War I when the very first Portuguese Legation led by Martinho de Brederode, Count of Cunha, was set up in Bucharest (see Alina Stoica, Sorin Şipoş). On the other hand, the cultural border dimension is discussed from the perspective of the

traditional rural world culturally contaminated during past years with elements of the European dominant urban. There are a few areas left where the traditional culture has survived, keeping elements of archeocivilization. The existence of such elements does require knowledge, alongside with their preservation and exploitation not only as cultural heritage of the entire Europe, but also as local, national, regional and European identity elements (see Barbu Ștefănescu).

A different approach to the concept of cultural border belongs to UNESCO. For more than 50 years, UNESCO has been questioning the delimitations and the reality of cultural borders. Contrary to the opinion of some specialists who consider that cultural borders are factors of conflict, UNESCO has been attempting a synthesis between universalism and multiculturalism. The universalist idea is supported by the East-West Major Project (1957-1966), project that encourages the cultural unity. It reveals a progressive turn around in UNESCO's cultural politics, which led UNESCO to develop a more synthetic conception, allying promotion of cultural unity and cultural diversity. Therefore, since the 1960s, UNESCO has tried hard to safeguard the world cultural heritage, notably in Africa, where it appeared to be endangered, and undergoing extinction (see Chloé Maurel).

Apart from this, another perspective of the cultural border is given by the enlargement of the European Union and implicitly, of the accessions and integration of the European states. This context has generated vivid discussions on what defines the "Europeanness" and what its main features are. Who is entitled to embark in this process? What defines in a European context a certain type of political action? The current volume has attempted to move beyond the sheer political and economic considerations and to go to the core of the whole effort of building a European Union based on the intertwined processes of integration and enlargement. The study case reviews Turkey and the process of Turkey's accession to the EU, stressing the cultural border issues (see Nicolae Păun, Georgiana Ciceo).

The last section, *Artistic Intercultural Expressions*, states that the cultural difference appears as a legitimation of territorial-political structures. The cultural practices are "instrumentalised" as markers, as an authentication. The cultural specificity gives the two sides of the border an irreducible uniqueness. In such context, the differences in representative food practices (see Denis Saillard), music, dance and choreographies (see Jean-Sebastien Noel) bear a great significance for the construction of crossborder cultures. Therefore, the cultural border is the fruit of a solid construction, but not as defined as the political border (see Didier Fracfort).

The paper *Europe: A Cultural Border, or a Geo-cultural Archipelago*, signed by Ioan Horga and Mircea Brie, is a conceptual - epistemological analysis of the European cultural borders. The main idea is that of focusing the scientific debates onto two types of European cultural-identity constructions: a "culture of cultures", i.e. a strong-identity cultural space within particular, local, regional and national levels, or a "cultural archipelago", i.e. a common cultural space interrupted by discontinuities. With reference to the identification of cultural borders, the authors note that the "areas of cultural contact belong to at least two categories: internal areas between local, regional or national elements; external areas that impose the delimitation around what European culture is. Both approaches used by the authors do not exclude each other, in spite of the conceptual antagonism. The existence of national cultural areas does not exclude the existence of a common European cultural area. In fact, "it is precisely this reality that confers the European area a special cultural identity", and its own cultural specificity, respectively. (*La culture au cœur*, 1998:117-133).

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