



The European Union between Religious and Political Language

Human society as a whole is profoundly religious in nature, as it is filled with objects which function based on their symbolic role, powered by a specific meaning. More than that, we communicate via symbols, and rituals are among the most important means of communication, which in their turn “reflect the manner in which the symbolic side makes its way into the political side”.¹ In the words of Clive Kessler, we can say that “the symbolic does not represent a residual dimension of the so-called real politics [...] The symbolic is real politics, expressed in a very particular and cunning manner”.² A ritual, even in its strictly religious, restrictive perception (which puts it next to the supernatural), is ever-present in the social and political life, even if within the paradigm of the dominant ideology – we ought to attribute it a secondary – if not irrelevant – place. Thus, “prestigious political analysts are hard to convince to pay more attention to the ritual part and to allow themselves to be distracted from what they see as the real contents of politics – group interests, economic forces or production relationships”.³

Despite this paradigm, it is however *impossible to have social relationships without symbolic events*, or, as Kertzer phrased it and rationalized the matter, we can analyze the means by which the ritual contributes to the creation of political organizations, or the ways in which the ritual is manipulated in order to create political legitimacy, or the

means by which the ritual contributes to the increase of political solidarity when a political consensus is not reached, or the way in which rituals help mold the humans' acceptance of their political universe.

In such a context, political discourse represents an almost religious repetition of a set of beliefs and experiences, helping to focus the affective side within groups which seek political advantages and helping political spectators to get a feeling of safety within a complex environment. Additionally, a legitimizing political discourse represents a means of unification of the social space via *key signs* by “annihilating or minimizing those who are discontent”⁴; it is a *privileged text* which groups together with a soteriological purpose specific elements such as the myth, the ritual, the decorum and the language which promote consent. Such symbolic forms serve to reconcile systems of beliefs on the one hand and behaviors on the other hand, increasing the weight of one or the other with a view of creating a society which is viable both socially and politically.

This brief overview of the reports between religion and power, between religion and legitimizing political actions by means of symbols transmitted through language, aims to provide an analysis of the phenomenon of European integration, an analysis which will highlight, at least from a twofold perspective, the osmosis between political and religious aspects at the level of the European continent, because “in all actuality, there is no such thing as a purely religious fact. A religious fact is always a historical, sociological, cultural and psychological fact as well”.⁵ Thus, we will present on the one hand some of the great projects conceived for the unification of the European continent – one conceived by one of the major personalities of 18th century religious life – as well as the importance

of religious aspects in the approaches chosen by the founding fathers of contemporary Europe.

European unity is a concept which has been used obsessively by the mass media of the present day, as well as in a university environment and within the European environment in general. The idea of European unity is not new, and it is not a contemporary creation, but rather, its roots go deep within the history of our continent. However, what connects these traditions of *unification of the European continent* is the attempt to identify a scenario aimed at avoiding conflicts between the states of the Old Continent. In any case, social security and well-being have been preserved to this day as the main moving forces of European integration. But the very essence of European integration, which only represents the essence of the idea of *a united Europe*, has found its footing in the idea of cultural and intellectual unity of the European continent; in this respect, Jean Monnet, the architect of the contemporary European construction, said that “if I were to start over, I would start over using culture” (religion, Christianity in particular being an integral part of European culture).

The process of achieving European unity can be interpreted using two main perspectives, both using the Second World War as a point of reference; thus, the end of the Second World War marks the end of the *prehistoric age* of attempts to achieve European unity and the beginning of the *history* of European unification, a history which is still in full swing.

The prehistoric age of European unification – or at least its first part – is almost exclusively based on religious aspects, and the beginnings of the actual history of this process are marked by a sort of *laicization* of the integration scenarios; however, this laicization can rather be perceived as hiding the religious aspects rather than eliminating them, something which is pointed out on the one hand by the status of the so-called founding fathers and their relationship with the religious space, and on the other hand by the set of values hailed as common European values. Thus, when European unity entered history, this did not mark a definitive break between the political and the religious, but rather an interpretation / reinterpretation of the prehistoric religious fact.

Plato was the first thinker to uphold the idea of peace by organizing confederations. At the time, the confederation of Greek city states had common religious and political institutions, and the institution which dealt with finding solutions for the various conflicts which rose between cities was the *Amphictyonic League*.

During the Roman age, due to the prevalence of war and the desire to make conquest, the idea of arbitrage was abandoned, as the Romans could not conceive any other solution but war to the conflicts which arose between themselves and the peoples they considered “barbaric”: *pax romana* – Rome’s ideal – aimed to achieve the unification of the entire Europe under Roman rule.

The emergence of a series of increasingly serious fissures led to the replacement of political unification with a spiritual unification – unity of the Christian world – based on the idea of Christian universality.

However, the Great Schism of 1054 brought about the destruction of this form of unification and increased political rivalry, as the Christian Church proved unable – with some small exceptions – to become a true temporary power, although it used its spiritual force to claim its theocratic aspirations. There have been many theoretical projects for peace organization.

In his 1303 paper *De monarhia*, Dante Alighieri proposed a federal type solution for the organization of Europe, a universal peace achieved by the subordination of European monarchs to a supreme ruler, to one, unique and legitimate authority. Thus, for Dante, the idea of European unification is represented by a unique monarchy, inspired by the Roman world.⁶

Pierre Dubois, in his work *De recuperatione Terrae Sanctae*, proposed the organization of a *European federation* which aimed to “conquer the Holy Lands which had fallen under the rule of the Muslims”⁷; Dubois suggests to the French King Phillip the Fair the creation of a Christian Republic (*Republique tres chretienne*), with a monarch’s council which had the power to adopt conciliatory decisions.

At the beginning of the 18th century, the Abbe de Saint-Pierre bound his name to that of the *Project for Perpetual Peace* (1713) – the best-known project aimed to achieve general peace, and which became a very important landmark for the generations of the Age of Enlightenment. This *Project* aimed to eliminate war as a means of solving conflicts and replace it with peace treaties which could guarantee commercial and territorial borders and ensure a balance of forces; moreover, Saint-Pierre even draws up the image of a European Senate / Congress, which would have law-making and judiciary competences⁸.

The religious conception of the Abbe de Saint-Pierre is the first to ever mention the need for a functional supra-national political structure, which should intervene only when necessary, based on a formulation which has presently evolved into the *principle of subsidiarity* (as Saint-Pierre himself put it: “The European society shall not become involved in the government of a State unless when it comes to keeping its fundamental form and to render swift assistance to the Princes of the Monarchies and the Magistrates of the Republics against any Instigators and Rebels”).

Yet another *Project for Eternal Peace* was devised by Kant in 1785, and which will heavily influence President Woodrow Wilson. Kant anticipates the establishment of a “Society of Nations” based on an international “Rule of Law” and thus sketches a veritable international peace theory: he is the first one to ever try to study the causes of war in a scientific manner. He proposes the requirement of constitutional conformity of the member states and ties democracy and internationalism together for the first time.⁹

Starting from these contributions, the idea of European unification will become congruent to that of bringing peace to the European continent.

In the 19th century, Madame de Staël announces a veritable exultation of the European idea, when she writes: “from now on, we must be European in spirit”; in other words, the fact that the very idea of Europe consists of a European conscience, given by cultural and intellectual unity based on Christian universality is starting to turn into certitude.

The agitated period which followed the French Revolution led to the apparition of several projects of European integration, some of which never made it past the idea stage, while others yielded a series of ephemeral results. Thus, important figures of the European culture will find themselves among those who will try to provide solutions in order to turn into a palpable reality that which existed already – a common European heritage; among the remarkable personalities involved in this phenomenon we can mention Joseph de Maestre, Pierre Leroux, the Count of Saint-Simon or Victor Hugo.

Immediately after the First World War, the problem of organizing Europe as a continent, a specific region of the world, is starting to be clearly perceived following the fundamental change in the political configuration of the world: after 1914, the USA become the main international pole of power, in the aftermath of the “outbreak of the first *European civil war*”.¹⁰

Within this context, two separate concepts regarding Europe’s organization emerge:

- a simple cooperation which will protect existing state sovereignties;
- going beyond state sovereignty by a process of unification, of European “integration”.

The second concept, which is clearly federal, is first of all upheld by the count Richard Coudenhove - Kalergi, born in Tokyo in 1894. His father was ambassador of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and his mother was Japanese, a citizen of the young Republic of Czechoslovakia following the Saint-Germain Treaty. Coudenhove - Kalergi published in Vienna in 1922 a manifest called “Pan-Europa”¹¹ in which he showed that “the European problem can be described in two words: unification or collapse”.¹² *The New Europe*, the Europe conceived by the pan-European movement, had to eventually generate “a union of all European states, which can and want to achieve such an endeavor, into a political and economic state union, based on equality of rights and peace.”¹³

However, not until the end of the Second World War did the road to European unification open, due to the profound modification which occurred in the relations between the Western European states; for the very first time and as a result of the effects of the two world wars, these states start to become willing to collaborate, becoming aware of the fact that “isolation has not only become a cause for weakness, but also a cause for downfall”¹⁴; it is now that the *idea* of Europe starts to become a reality, an idea which “will not be built in one single day and without difficulties” but “this idea, *Europe*, will reveal to all the common basis of our civilization and will slowly create a connection

similar to that which in past times gave birth to each national identity. It shall be a force that will help break any obstacle”.¹⁵

Thus, towards the end of the 1940s, the idea of a United Europe makes history and seems to lose any religious significance. However, this profoundly laic image can be overcome by a simple analysis of the contribution made by the founding fathers to the beginning of the process of European unification: Jean Monnet (1888-1979), Robert Schuman (1886-1963), Konrad Adenauer (1876-1967) and Alcide De Gasperi (1881-1954). Monnet was the “inspiration” and the “visionary” and the rest were representatives of the political will regarding integration. They all had common characteristics which proved vital in the late 1940s and the early 1950s. They were all Christian-Democrats, which lent a certain political coherence to the beginning of the process of European unification. At the same time, they were all close to the “men in black”, the Catholic prelate, and the idea of Christianity added substance to the connections between people and nations; we also have to remember the support granted by the Vatican to the integration process. All these men were “men of frontiers” – Schuman was from Lorraine, Adenauer was from Rhenania and Gasperi had been born in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which means that they were familiar with multilingualism and multiculturalism, being prone to understand “otherness”. Finally, they all shared a *lingua franca*, German, which greatly facilitated direct communication and personal closeness among them.¹⁶

What is more, once the process of European integration kicked off by the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951, it evolved to the stage where the European

Union emerged, which promotes and defends a series of values and objectives for the entire continent: peace and stability, reunification of the European continent after the fall of the Iron Curtain, safety and security or economic and social solidarity.¹⁷

As a result, the European Union wishes to promote humanitarian and progressive values and guarantee that human beings are the masters, not the victims of major changes which occur at global level. The needs of the citizens cannot be satisfied only by means of market mechanisms and they cannot be dictated unilaterally. This is why the EU pleads in favor of that vision of mankind or of that model of society which is upheld by the majority of its citizens, a model based on tolerance, and the European Community “seems to bring to all its member states the advantages and tensions which stem from multiculturalism”.¹⁸

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- ¹ David I. Kertzer, *Ritual, politică și putere* (București: Ed. Univers, 2002), 21.
- ² Clive S. Kessler, *Islam and Politics in a Malay State* (Ithaka: Cornell University Press, 1978), 244.
- ³ David I. Kertzer, *Ritual, politică și putere*, 25.
- ⁴ Murray Edelman, *Politica și utilizarea simbolurilor* (Iasi: Ed. Polirom, 1999), 123.
- ⁵ Mircea Eliade, „Religiile”, a study of the work „*Interdisciplinaritatea și științele umane*” (the translation from French of the work with the same title that came out in 1983 under the patronage of UNESCO), (București: Ed. Politică, 1986), 386 – 387.
- ⁶ Marin Balan, „„Monarhia universală” a lui Dante, un proiect european? ”, *Sfera Politicii* 125 (2222): 222 – 222.
- ⁷ Andrei Marga, *Filosofia unificării europene*, (Cluj-Napoca :Ed. Fundației pentru studii europene, 2003), 147.
- ⁸ According to the Abbe de Saint-Pierre’s *The Project of Perpetual Peace* (1713), “The present cosignatory rulers agree on the following articles: there shall be from this moment onwards a Society, a permanent and perpetual Union between all Christian Rulers in order to ensure Peace in Europe, and for this purpose, the Union shall conclude, if possible, treaties with neighboring Islamic sovereigns to keep the peace. [...] The sovereigns shall be represented by Deputies in a permanent congress of Senate in a free city.”
- ⁹ Charles Zorgbibe, *Construcția europeană. Trecut, prezent, viitor* (București: Ed. Trei, 1998), 5-6.
- ¹⁰ Charles Zorgbibe, *Construcția europeană. Trecut, prezent, viitor*, 8.
- ¹¹ The first three volumes of the work of Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi, *Kampf um Paneuropa*, were published between 1925 and 1928.
- ¹² Charles Zorgbibe, *Construcția europeană. Trecut, prezent, viitor*, 9.
- ¹³ Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi, *Weltmacht Europa* (Stuttgart: Seewald Verlag, 1975), 115.
- ¹⁴ Robert Schuman, *Pentru Europa* (București: Ed. Monitorul Oficial, 2003), 24.
- ¹⁵ Robert Schuman, *Pentru Europa*, 18.
- ¹⁶ Peter Calvovoresi, *Politica Mondială după 1945* (București: Ed. Allfa, 2000), 221 – 244.
- ¹⁷ http://europa.eu/abc/12lessons/lesson_1/index_en.htm
- ¹⁸ Michael Waltzer, *Despre Tolerare* (Iasi: Ed. Institutul European, 2002), 46.