

The European Hamlet: To *Be* or *not to Be* a Political Subject?

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Paul Valéry, *The Crisis of Spirit* (1919)/1

«Standing, now, on an immense sort of terrace of Elsinore that stretches from Basel to Cologne, bordered by the sands of Nieuport, the marshes of the Somme, the limestone of Champagne, the granites of Alsace...our Hamlet of Europe is watching millions of ghosts. [...]

Every skull he picks up is an illustrious skull. Whose was it? This one was Lionardo. He invented the flying man, but the flying man has not exactly served his inventor's purposes. [...] And that other skull was Leibniz, who dreamed of universal peace. And this one was Kant...and Kant begat Hegel, and Hegel begat Marx, and Marx begat... [...]

Paul Valéry, *The Crisis of Spirit* (1919)/2

Hamlet hardly knows what to make of so many skulls. But suppose he forgets them! Will he still be himself?...His terribly lucid mind contemplates the passage from war to peace: darker, more dangerous than the passage from peace to war; all peoples are troubled by it..."What about Me," he says, "what is to become of Me, the European intellect?...And what is peace?...Peace is perhaps that state of things in which the natural hostility between men is manifested in creation, rather than destruction as in war. Peace is a time of creative rivalry and the battle of production; but am I not tired of producing?... Have I not exhausted my desire for radical experiment, indulged too much in cunning compounds?...ambitions?..."

Paul Valéry, *The Crisis of Spirit* (1919)/3

«“Farewell, ghosts! The world no longer needs you – or me. By giving the name of progress to its own tendency to a fatal precision, the world is seeking to add to the benefits of life the advantages of death. A certain confusion still reigns; but in a little while all will be made clear, and we shall witness at last the miracle of an animal society, the perfect and ultimate anthill.»

Message to Europeans

(Denis De Rougemont, The Hague, 1948)

«Europe is threatened, Europe is divided, and the greatest danger comes from her divisions. Impoverished, overladen with barriers that prevent the circulation of her goods but are no longer able to afford her protection, our disunited Europe marches towards her end. **Alone, no one of our countries can hope seriously to defend its independence. Alone, no one of our countries can solve the economic problems of today.** Without a freely agreed union our present anarchy will expose us tomorrow to forcible unification whether by the intervention of a foreign empire or usurpation by a political party. The hour has come to take action commensurate with the danger.»

Message to Europeans (The Hague, 1948)

«Between this great peril and this great hope, **Europe's mission is clear. It is to unite her peoples in accordance with their genius of diversity and with the conditions of modern community life**, and so open the way towards organised freedom for which the world is seeking. It is to revive her inventive powers for the greater **protection and respect of the rights and duties of the individual** of which, in spite of all her mistakes, Europe is still the greatest exponent.»

Message to Europeans (The Hague, 1948)

«Human dignity is Europe's finest achievement, freedom her true strength. Both are at stake in our struggle. The union of our continent is now needed not only for the salvation of the liberties we have won, but also for the extension of their benefits to all mankind. Upon this union depend Europe's destiny and the world's peace.»

Message to Europeans (The Hague, 1948)

«(1) We desire a **United Europe**, throughout whose area the **free movement of persons, ideas and goods** is restored; (2) We desire a **Charter of Human Rights guaranteeing liberty of thought, assembly and expression as well as the right to form a political opposition**; (3) We desire a **Court of Justice** with adequate sanctions for the implementation of this Charter; (4) We desire a **European Assembly** where the live forces of all our nations shall be represented; (5) And pledge ourselves in our homes and in public, in our political and religious life, in our professional and trade union circles, to give our fullest support to all persons and governments working for this lofty cause, which offers the last chance of peace and the one promise of a great future for this generation and those that will succeed it. »

What is a Political Subject?

*The conditions for the emergence of a collective political subject in the full sense are: - **economic** unity,*

*- **defence** unity,*

*- **legal** unity and*

*the **political will** to make this unity an independent entity*

The European Hamlet

More than a century later, with the reappearance of war on the scene of the European continent and after 75 years of legal, economic and social integration of European states, the question arises as to whether the European spirit is now capable of giving rise to a genuine European political subject.

G.F.W. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right* (1820)/1
Individuality of the State (§ 322)

Individuality is awareness of one's existence as a unit in sharp distinction from others. It manifests itself here in the state as a relation to other states, each of which is autonomous vis-a-vis the others. This autonomy embodies mind's actual awareness of itself as a unit and hence it is the most fundamental freedom which a people possesses as well as its highest dignity.

Hegel/2

Sacrifice of property and life (§ 324)

The individual's substantive duty (is) the duty to maintain this substantive individuality, i.e. the independence and sovereignty of the state, at the risk and the sacrifice of property and life, as well as of opinion and everything else naturally comprised in the compass of life.

Remark: An entirely distorted account of the demand for this sacrifice results from regarding the state as a mere civil society and from regarding its final end as only the security of individual life and property. This security cannot possibly be obtained by the sacrifice of what is to be secured - on the contrary.

Hegel/3

Ethics and Politics (§ 337)

Remark: At one time the opposition between morals and politics, and the demand that the latter should conform to the former, were much canvassed. On this point only a general remark is required here. The welfare of a state has claims to recognition totally different from those of the welfare of the individual. The ethical substance, the state, has its determinate being, i.e. its right, directly embodied in something existent, something not abstract but concrete, and the principle of its conduct and behaviour can only be this concrete existent and not one of the many universal thoughts supposed to be moral commands. When politics is alleged to clash with morals and so to be always wrong, the doctrine propounded rests on superficial ideas about morality, the nature of the state, and the state's relation to the moral point of view.

Making Europe

If we are to consider the establishment of Europe as a political entity, how can we achieve this goal? Historically, the processes of establishing political entities have often been marked either by processes of differentiation from external entities (processes of independence) or by processes of unification of smaller entities through the leading initiative of one state over others. There have been material conditions and conditions of international politics that have favoured the process of unification, but also grassroots political and social movements that have pushed in this direction. For the construction of a Europe as a unified political entity, all the material and international conditions seem to be in place, even more so than in the past, but the political will to take a further step is lacking. How do we intend to ‘conceive’ this process, both in terms of the necessary political actions and the necessary institutional reforms (e.g. a European architecture of concentric circles)? How can we contribute to this?

The European Spirit

In order to be consistent with its own history, a European political unity must keep the European spirit alive, characterised by the three fundamental forms (Guizot) of

- freedom,*
- plurality and*
- (responsible) legitimacy*

European Identity

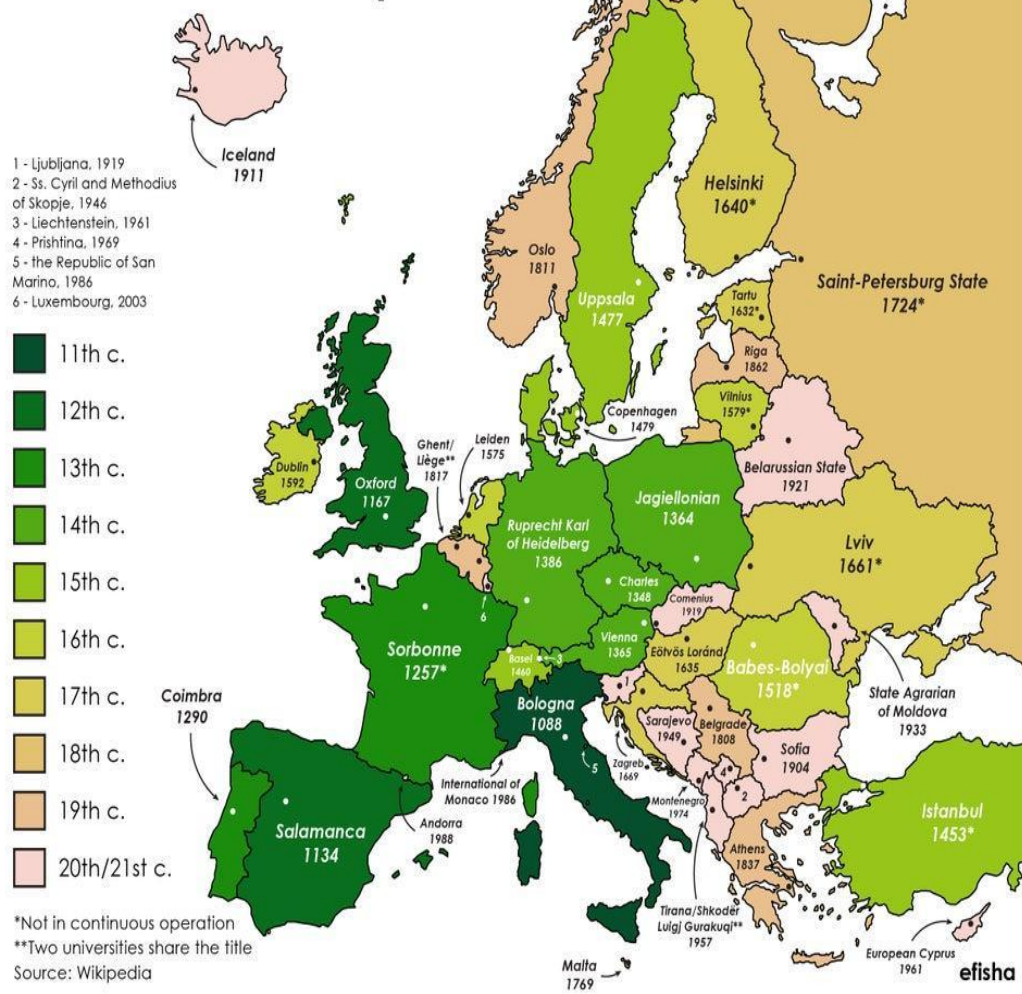
One of the greatest challenges facing Europe is to remain true to its achievements, even the most recent ones, and to its model of civil coexistence based on respect for fundamental rights, freedom, equality, democracy, the social rule of law, the secular nature of political life, gender equality, respect for all minorities, and respect for the environment. How can we ensure that this heritage is not lost in the construction of a political entity that engages with international political actors characterised by different models of coexistence (not only China and Russia, but also the United States in its recent developments)? How can we revitalise this heritage in the face of the evident cultural challenge posed by fundamentalist and supremacist ideologies that seem to accompany the new international prominence of other powers? What is the role of European philosophy and culture?

What can we do?

What can European intellectuals do in terms of

- thought,
- action,
- the formation of an enlightened European ruling class,
- and
- the civic education of new European citizens?

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As guardians of European unity we must enhance the role of European culture. In performing this task, we must form an alliance with the world of culture, schools and universities. The university is a typical European creation, and has made a massive contribution to the creation of this shared culture. For this reason, we should mobilize all European universities around the values of this European humanism and the defense of human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

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