

Formal Europe and vital Europe. Tradition as ground of identity

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Many centuries ago and for a very long period, Europe was divided between an *actual or real Europe* and an *ideal Europe*: on the one hand, it was the Europe of empires, kingdoms, nations, principalities, and dynasties, in constant conflict with each other or at most in an "equilibrium" that was an ephemeral pause between wars; on the other hand, it was a united and peaceful Europe as conceived by seminal thinkers (including political exponents like Charlemagne) who looked beyond material contingencies and political needs, to reveal a potential, deeper sphere in which Europe essentially shows the spirit, the culture, in a word, the European soul. In this way the original foundation of Europe would come to light, the European spirit hidden by contingent interests but always alive and active.

In real Europe, this spirit was subordinated to national or personal needs, which placed it in a sort of oblivion. The Europe of reality - institutional and political - hid an impalpable Europe because it was spiritual, but concrete both because it represented a project, a vision in great style, and because it expressed a sense of tradition. It was not just a bizarre dream, but the vision of a possibility, which was opposed to reality but not totally opposed.

The expression *ideal Europe* does not indicate an imagined entity but rather a *potential* Europe, that is to say, a Europe that has not yet been realized but is possible. If, as Scholasticism taught, essence truly precedes the thing itself, then the possibility is, according to Heidegger, higher than actuality. The *ideal Europe* is therefore not unreal but potential, and a potential Europe would represent the higher degree of European being, the higher level of Europeanness. This ideal Europe was supported by a tension of the soul but it was not an abstraction, an imaginary place, a fiction of the mind. It was an aspiration founded on the peculiar concreteness of the spirit.

Among the multiple forms that have modeled this ideal or potential Europe, the religious tradition stands out for its intensity and pervasiveness, as it determined Europe before its political articulation and accompanied its social construction. This tradition, deeply intertwined with the political power of the various national states and their dynasties, and despite the fact that religious wars were commonly waged in Europe, has at times exercised a unifying function and more frequently a function of defense not only of European identity in the abstract, but of Europe in its concrete territories, and on some occasions it has also exercised this function by opposing the fratricidal struggles that for centuries have divided the states and torn the continent apart.

An extraordinary example of this function dates back to 1683. On September 11 of that year, a decisive battle for the fate of Europe took place to defend Vienna as it was under siege from the Ottoman army. The Ottomans were defeated by a coalition led by the King of Poland Jan III Sobieski, set up at the behest of the Vatican, and animated by an Italian Capuchin friar, Marco of Aviano, who stirred up the enthusiasm of the Christian soldiers with his fiery preaching.

What happened on the Kahlenberg and on the plain around Vienna that September 11 was not simply a war; it exemplifies a political and metaphysical event that enabled the power of the spirit to unite Europeans in fighting together against a lethal threat. It is not by chance that in 2003 Marco of Aviano was declared blessed by another great defender of the European spirit, Pope John Paul II, who, in doing so, clearly intended to reaffirm the power of faith and liberty and to corroborate the successful alliance between Poland and Christianity that saved Europe in 1683. It is therefore also in these

underground intertwinings where the deep sense of European identity and tradition flows, which, beside the religious dimension, consists of a common ancient cultural heritage that is constantly renewed.

Today the conflict between a real Europe and an ideal Europe is different. While there have been a few intra-European armed conflicts in the last seventy years, such as those in the former Yugoslavia and the Balkans, or more recently on the border between Ukraine and Russia, they have been limited although painful. Other rifts, however, have emerged in the last century.

In the twentieth century, after the gigantic lacerations caused by the two world wars, yet another destructive result of a conflict between states that was also exacerbated by the toxic action of ideologies and savage nationalisms, and after the defeat of National Socialism, which posed a mortal danger to the European soul, Europe was divided into a free Europe and a totalitarian Europe, a division that forced more than one-third of Europeans into a sort of large Sovietic prison.

For almost fifty years after 1945, Europe was cut in two by the Iron Curtain, a hateful border splitting the European peoples who, despite their differences, particularisms, nationalisms, and even wars, for the most part wanted to live together freely and peacefully, an overwhelming majority of whom, both in the West and in the East, rejected the Communist ideology because they understood its dictatorial and criminal essence, because the East was unfortunately experiencing it.

The rift here showed a *normal Europe* (the western part, liberal-democratic) and a *dystopian Europe* (the eastern part, subdued by communist tyranny). In the first area, from the point of view of freedoms and respect for personal rights, people found a relative coincidence between their historical conscience and national political and administrative institutions; in the second, that is, in the part of the continent under the communist influence, the people were crushed, detached from their historical identity and traditions, primarily from the Jewish-Christian religious one.

During the Cold war, the “Church of silence” (an expression representing a paradox for the Christian and Jewish traditions, which teach that the truth will make humankind free) was a practice employed in Communist countries, whose leaders wanted to remove religion from the sphere of government and from the conscience of people. By eliminating the religious tradition, Marxist-Leninist ideology intended to disable the continuity of the European historical-cultural tradition, in favor of new values and a completely different world. Communist ideology also attempted to create a new type of man: the “homo sovieticus,” who produced misery and destruction and caused the death of more than one hundred million people. This same type of man conceived the Gulag camps; they are, therefore, not different from the Nazis who conceived the concentration camp.

Even that division, a relatively short one from a macro-historical point of view, has been overcome with the decisive contribution of Pope John Paul II, who in my view can be seen as the Marco of Aviano of the twentieth century: the former saved Europe from Islamic invasion, the latter saved the continent from the communist plague. There are several obvious differences between these two figures, namely that every effort made by St. John Paul II marked a whole era at once, that the Communist armies were incomparably stronger than those like the army besieging Vienna in 1683, that John Paul II had powerful and loyal allies such as Ronald Reagan and Helmut Kohl, and above all that he was a great man of faith as well as a great theologian, philosopher, and political and moral personality who deeply shaped the last quarter of the twentieth century.

The reunification of the two halves of Europe - the most emotionally effective symbolic image is the demolition of the Berlin Wall and the consequent German reunification - was a milestone in the long

itinerary of struggle against Communist totalitarianism and inaugurated a long process of intra-European reconciliation. From then on, it seemed that the dream of a united Europe could become a reality, the new European reality, one that could finally reconcile not only the division between the free Europe and the Europe that was a victim of communism, but also the gap between the real and ideal Europes. The pioneering work by Adenauer, Schuman, and De Gasperi, the pioneers of unification and major contributors to European unity, seemed likely to bear fruit: European integration of peoples and collaboration between nations.

Since a united Europe is a dream of more than a millennium, the need for integration is therefore not, in itself, a slogan of the bureaucracy or of the Europeanist ideology, but derives from an identity that precedes any ideology and which is irrepressible *despite* bureaucracy and ideology. Conceived in this way, integration would not be negative - quite the contrary, it would be a way of achieving an underlying identity and a purpose on the horizon.

Since 1990, there has been a great acceleration in the integration of European states, which has brought important achievements from an institutional perspective but which has, unfortunately, not involved the spiritual sphere except in an occasional, external, and extemporaneous form. These engineering results, although valuable in terms of organizational and operational levels, have not yet been able to connect with the tradition, spiritual dimension, and ontological ground of our civilization.

As a consequence, a new, third rift has appeared: the split between what I call a *formal Europe*, the Europe of institutions, and a *vital Europe*, the Europe of life. This latter is not an imaginary Europe: it is much more real than Brussel's Europe. It is the Europe of real peoples, nations, their traditions and history. This gap separates the political-bureaucratic class and the citizens, who, often unconsciously, are the real heirs of a long-standing European tradition. Until this gap is bridged, it will continue to produce suffering and restlessness. European citizens long for a vital Europe and feel dissatisfied with the formal Europe and the current institutional situation. We can look at this pain or not, we can hear its lament or not, but the reality remains present, and it is incontrovertible: Europe is *tragic* today because it is traversed by pain and torn in its soul; and Europeans are, more or less consciously but mostly silently, suffering from this laceration.

The current gap between European institutional actors and citizens is deepening and may never stop widening. Nations should care for their own citizens first. National governments should act as shock absorbers against tensions and protect Europeans despite all their cultural differences. Nations can protect their respective peoples and, consequently, the peoples of Europe in their plurality and their union. The dichotomy between a formal, legal, or institutional Europe and a vital Europe, which reflects the tradition and common history shared by its citizens, is dramatic and concerning.

Those centralistic and tendentially autocratic institutions, however, wanted to weaken the nations, depriving them of many of their traditional prerogatives, attacking and delegitimizing the very idea of nations, so that nations can no longer fulfill their natural function, while the fracture between the Euroinstitutions and the people is increasing and may become irremediable. The portrait of the present time reveals to us a dichotomy between a formal, purely institutional Europe and a vital Europe that directly expresses the history and existence of its peoples.

And since peoples are made up of citizens, and since citizens today are people aware of their political rights, institutional Europe must initiate a great process of self-criticism and be in direct and close connection with citizens and their nations. Indeed, if action is not taken immediately and decisively, the fracture is destined to widen, causing further disorientation in Europeans, with two consequences, both catastrophic: on the one hand, the definitive entrenchment of institutional Europe in the

bureaucratic and political ivory tower; on the other hand, the overreaction of the peoples who will reject Europe as a political entity and take refuge in nationalistic excesses.

And it is precisely to avoid these two outcomes that we must recover *a new European thought* that abandons the path of postmodern technocratic positivism. This way of thinking rejects the rhetoric of Europeanism with which the Eurobureaucracy tries to deceive the peoples, and also restores the nations as individual homelands belonging to the greater *European homeland*, enhancing their spirits without falling into nationalism.

Only in this way can the sense of belonging to Europe be resurrected in the conscience of its citizens, and only in this way can the identity of Europe as a union of the identity of its peoples be preserved and strengthened. A united Europe is an ancient dream that must not, however, become a contemporary nightmare. It is a noble dream that must materialize in an equally noble reality, in order *to keep up with both tradition and the challenges of the current age*.

Today, after the integration process that led to the construction of the European Union (EU), the continent continues to be divided by a less visible but no less concrete gulf that *separates consciousness from function*: on the one hand, the consciousness of being European, and on the other hand the function of governing the Europeans. In the conscience of Europeans there is Europe, but not the administrative systems of the EU.

Let me explain: the institutional order of the EU is a necessary step toward better integration among Europeans, and is a useful tool for regulating important economic issues, but it is equally necessary and useful for Europeans to feel those institutions are their own, and for this purpose neither demagogy (empty Europeanist rhetoric) nor imposition (the maniacal regulatory network that catalogs and harnesses every aspect of its citizens' lives) is needed. What is needed instead is empathy and reflection, awareness of identity, and revitalization of tradition. Formal Europe is in fact distant from the sentiment of citizens because it is distant from their identity, which is not expressed by the European passport or by the right to vote in elections for the European Parliament, but is contained in the symbols and practices of tradition, in the sedimented consciousness that is culture, understood not as erudition but as existence and historical experience.

The EU has replaced *the sense* of being European with *the pragmatics* of administration, which has become the dominant form of institutional, social, and civil relations and even invades personal ones. Bureaucratization is the most evident reality of the European institutions, but it is also the negation of the European soul. Of course, the state administration also arose from this same soul structure, but the bureaucratic mentality is a deformation that spread with the twentieth century, with the affirmation of both totalitarianism (Communist and Nazi) and statism in liberal democracies as a pathological hypertrophy of management and control.

Today, bureaucratic European policies even try to invade the citizens' consciences, but the bureaucratization of consciences is an oxymoron and therefore an impossible undertaking. Conscience cannot be reduced to administrative management, so it will always remain a territory that is not completely conquerable. And so the fracture I am talking about is produced, and although they are not fully aware of it, Europeans feel this fracture painfully.

Formal Europe and vital Europe are two opposing entities: we could say that the first is factually the *legal representative* of our continent, of which it is the institutional and official face, but legal Europe is only the simulacrum of the vital, spiritual one, which contains and preserves the living tradition of the continent itself, and which is crushed or even disintegrated by legal Europe. And since tradition

is not only a force behind it, which brings energy from the past to the present, it also enables the future, that is, a power that allows us to plan. To neutralize or paralyze it means limiting the potential of the future; it means asphyxiating the life project of the entire community of destiny that is Europe.

Europe, Romano Guardini said in 1946, will have to be Christian, or it will never exist again, because if it abandons its founding nucleus, "what still remains of it does not have much more to mean." Europe "is a living entelechy, an active spiritual figure," Guardini continues, and since its religious core is Christianity, without Christianity it will not exist or will become something else¹. At the end of the eighteenth century, Novalis similarly linked the identities of Christianity and Europe. Now, in the wake of Pope John Paul II and the movement to mention European religious tradition in the Treaty for the European Constitution, I speak of *Jewish-Christian roots*, of the Judeo-Christian tradition. But the meaning of the discourse remains the same: detached from its cultural and religious tradition, an institutional structure withers, and can survive only as an inanimate form, as a pure technical construct.

This Treaty, signed in 2004, is an excellent example of the almost pathological dissociation between the two Europes. It was from the beginning an anomalous constitutional text; in fact, there was no concrete nation (and state) to which this Carta was to refer. It was not just a political deficiency, but also an institutional shortcoming, a separation between citizens and institutions, a failure to involve society in political decisions and, therefore, did not develop the essential prerequisite for the creation of a constitution: the popular will.

A constitution must in fact be rooted in the tradition of a people and in the history of a nation, because a constitution (as a *politeia* and as a fundamental charter) is an expression of the historical and ontological identity of a people, as in the first words of the Constitution of the United States of America, "We the People." But to clear the field of a possible misunderstanding, I specify that my theory (and therefore my use of the concept of people) has absolutely nothing to do with populism, which I consider a negative ideology, which flatters the people, deceives and uses it for purposes that are alien to their material historical and spiritual interests.

Therefore, if a constitution is drawn up starting from a break with the tradition of a people, as happened in the twentieth century with the constitutions of many countries after their fall into the Soviet sphere of influence, that constitution, even if legally sanctioned by a legislative body, will be illegitimate in terms of the spirit of the people, that is, in terms of history and national identity.

Ignoring or fighting this identity means doing violence to the history and sovereignty of a people. Sovereignty is a concept that can be defined according to perspectives and convenience, and therefore it is ambiguous, which risks leading to nationalism (such as the German idea of *Grossraum* for which the Nazis invaded half the continent) or, paradoxically, even in communism (in fact, think of the sovereign rhetoric with which communist ideology has subjugated Cuba). If you combine it with the idea of a constitution, however, if you think of it in foundational terms of constitutional respect for the identity of a nation, without thereby losing respect for the identity of the others, then *constitutional sovereignty* becomes a good premise for developing a national identity in the context of European integration.

What I call constitutional sovereignty differs from the "constitutional patriotism" theorized by Jürgen Habermas, which marginalizes the idea of a nation in favor of an idea of a superstructural homeland:

¹ Cf. R. Guardini, *Damit Europa werde. Wirklichkeit und Aufgabe eines zusammenwachsenden Kontinents* (Mainz: Matthias Grünewald, 2003).

if, Habermas says, the conception of the people as a cultural identity (and, to some extent, an ethnic identity) is pre-political, it must be reshaped to more of an exclusively political and therefore also multicultural vision of a homeland. What this and similar theories overlook is not only the concept of a people but also that of a nation (and its sovereignty), which would be absorbed by a universalism that makes the concept of identity meaningless and formalizes the idea of a constitution. This is exactly what happened when the anomalous majority formed of the European People's Party and the European Socialist Party drafted the Treaty for the European Constitution: the formalism of the rules crushed the vitality of the people; *institutional supranationalism* seeks to cancel *national sovereignties*.

Much could be said to refute the validity of the supranational approach the EU takes, but I choose to quote Pope John Paul II, who in his 1980 speech to UNESCO passionately defended the ideas of nation and sovereignty. “I am the son of a Nation which has lived the greatest experience of history, which its neighbours have condemned to death several times, but which has survived and remained itself. It has kept its identity, and it has kept, in spite of partitions and foreign occupations, its national sovereignty, not by relying on the resources of physical power, but solely *by relying on its culture*. This culture turned out in the circumstances to be more powerful than all other forces. What I say here concerning the right of the Nation to the foundation of its culture and its future is not, therefore, the echo of any ‘nationalism,’ but it is always a question of a stable element of human experience and of the *humanistic perspective of man's development*. There exists a fundamental sovereignty of society which is manifested in the culture of the Nation. It is a question of the sovereignty through which, at the same time, man is supremely sovereign. [...] In the name of the primacy of the cultural realities of man, human communities, peoples and Nations, I say to you: with all the means at your disposal, watch over the fundamental sovereignty that every Nation possesses by virtue of its own culture. Cherish it like the apple of your eye for the future of the great human family. Protect it! Do not allow this fundamental sovereignty to become the prey of some political or economic interest. Do not allow it to become a victim of totalitarian and imperialistic systems or hegemonies, for which man counts only as an object of domination and not as the subject of his own human existence. For them, too, the Nation—their own Nation or others—counts only as an object of domination and a bait for various interests, and not as a subject: the subject of sovereignty coming from the true culture which belongs to it as its own.”²

Here the great Polish Pope showed his commitment to the idea of national identity and sovereignty, exhorting the world to protect and cherish the idea of a nation not merely as the sum of its heritage, but also as a homeland (*Heimat, patria*), nurturing a community that includes the values that make up the culture of a nation. Twenty years ago, John Paul II observed that European countries were in a “post-identity” phase. Today more than ever we should try to understand the far-reaching implications of the evolution of this post-identity process for Europe as a cultural and civic polity. For EU-level institutional actors, for Europe as a whole, *identity*, deprived of the ideological dangers of cosmopolitanism and nationalism, should be the most authentic value to implement, protect, and nourish. Identity reflects a collective awareness. It connects heritage and memory and drives our actions, as it helps us to rediscover and tend our own roots. The EU needs to rediscover and value the concept of cultural identity, as its institutional structures are *hyper-bureaucratic* and *hypo-spiritual*.

² John Paul II, *Address to UNESCO* (2 June 1980). English translation available online at: <https://inters.org/John-Paul-II-UNESCO-Culture>. Original French available at: http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/fr/speeches/1980/june/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19800602_unesco.html.

Pope John Paul II was perfectly aware of this need. When he looked at Europe, he saw not only political and administrative structures, but overarching spiritual outlines, the features of the European soul, and therefore made an extraordinary effort (not crowned by immediate success but later proven prescient) to mention Jewish-Christian religious roots in the Constitutional Treaty, because he knew that without that explicit mention the European project would be doomed. He knew that any social construction intended for lasting results and general purposes must be founded on the cornerstones of his religious faith, if the latter is, as in the Jewish-Christian tradition, separated from the secular institutional body and respectful of its decisions. In fact, this approach, if applied with a religion like Islamism that absorbs the state into itself, produces fundamentalist effects that veer away from liberty.

Supporters of Europeanism seen as the bureaucratic centralism practiced by EU institutional actors promote the theory of post-identity, which I believe will destroy our various national identities. Post-identity will replace European traditional identity with human rights theories: the concrete traditional European identity will be progressively replaced by formal theories of human rights that have become politically correct dogmas. Here too, regarding the concept of a nation, the rift between the formal and the vital becomes clear: on one side is the EU with its formal supranational role, on the other side are the individual nations as vital cores.

Not only does the supranational defeat of national identities dismantle the idea of a nation, but it also damages Europe as a continent. It destroys each nation as well as the wider European sense of identity and conscience. It eradicates people's love for their native lands. Sovereignty is increasingly ceding ground to a supranational order, and there cannot become a love for the European homeland without the respect and love for each country that comprises the EU.

Pope Wojtyła was clear in defending the rights of nations. He never tired of reminding us that a nation is a natural community, because his ecumenical-evangelical anthropological vision does not disregard the human social structure, from the original foundation, inherent to humans, that is expressed in the minds of the nation as an institutional love for the homeland. He said that the cultural and historical identity of any society is preserved and nourished by all that is contained within this concept of "nationhood." As each nation creates a repository of culture, it enriches the treasure trove of national cultures we all enjoy. His emphasis on people and their real-life problems reveals the phenomenological character of his system of thought: Pope John Paul II used the framework of phenomenological thought (particularly as formulated by its founder, Edmund Husserl) aimed at the meaning and direct experience of life, in its immanence and transcendence.

In this context, the conflict between Europeanist and Euroskeptic arguments have intensified and spread. "More Europe" is the Europeanist slogan, meaning more concentration of power in the hands of the centralized political-bureaucratic structure; in contrast, Eurosceptics would like to see "less Europe," that is, less intervention by the centralized bureaucratic supranational structure. I add that "More Europe" should mean rebuilding a true European identity and decreasing the functional mechanism of the institutions: more thought and less positivism. Today, having yielded to the administrative-technocratic vision of centralistic institutions, culture has become an amusement park attraction, a tool for electoral advantages, while culture must instead be an aim in itself and not a means for other purposes; in any case, it is the soul that allows institutions to flourish. Every institution, even the coldest and most technical, can be virtuous if it respects this soul.

Relevant here is what Leibniz did in 1715 following the devastating War of the Spanish Succession between European powers. Instead of declaring war against the state, which would have violated federal clauses, Leibniz proposed establishing a European constitution. With a diplomatic and

strategic vision, Leibniz chose efficiency and stability: a European central bank. He wanted a federal financial guarantee for any European central bank because certain nations could be powerful enough to disregard the European tribunal. For Leibniz, a financially backed agreement is an incentive to cooperate, while he recognized the political impossibility of establishing perpetual peace. Leibniz's vision for Europe forms a unity in virtue of the general societal goals it pursues and the intellectual ethics that govern it, an ethics of reciprocity and moderation. He saw the urgent need for stable peace in Europe, based on a less volatile foundation than the fragile treaties that were constantly violated, throwing the region off balance each time. Leibniz suggested a European deposit bank in order to establish a punitive mechanism: "[...] if two or three of the most powerful young monarchs grew tired of the prescribed laws and wanted to infringe them, what other way could this be prevented than by a war of doubtful success? This could be resolved by the General Council controlling the largest bank in Europe, in which all monarchs would have to deposit (proportionally) large sums of their money, which would remain there as safely as in their own coffers and even earn interest. Thus their capital would be productive and would serve as a kind of 'bourgeois bond.'"³

Leibniz's proposal is revolutionary and worthy of a realistic politician who knows that control strategies must be implemented to prevent power from becoming despotic. Hence the need to restore dignity to faith and morals, and to create strong bonds such as economic ones, without, however, reducing the life of a group of peoples to a simple financial contract. In fact, the life of conscience, the life of the spirit, must rise above everything, as it is the only force that is never depleted and that, by virtue of the freedom that inspires it, is the source of every authentic human creation. This was the European Bank of Leibniz; this could be the European Central Bank today.

The current Europeanistic rhetoric proclaims: fewer nations, more Europe, compromising the only remaining possibility for the continuation of the EU, that is, the free will of the nations that *decide* to unite and act together. Probably, this anti-national obstinacy is not only motivated by intentions that are authoritarian design and, within the limits of bureaucracy, totalizing, but also by a bleak and embarrassing ignorance, a dramatic inability to understand the historical-conceptual. In fact, the Europeanistic ideology does not realize that in destroying the national spirit, it is also eliminating the only effective antidote to nationalism understood as national supremacism.

Despite the current scenario and the large crisis the EU is facing, I do not support the disintegration of the EU, which would indeed be perilous. Such a disintegration would leave a power vacuum that could easily be filled by brutal forces and driven by narrow-minded impulses, even external actors or Islamic integralism. A Balkan scenario is the most probable reality for a EU that has been dismantled without preparing a realistic, effective alternative.

Bureaucratization and centralization has produced a *Europe without identity*; Euroskepticism will only generate a sense of *identity without Europe* if not properly mediated. The first path should be fully rejected; the second must be reconsidered in view of broader aims, which should be *European* and not *Europeanist*. All supporters of a united Europe should start hearing the voices that the politically correct reject as sovereign, isolationist, and xenophobic, that is, the appeals of those who want to be European without becoming a puppet of the institutions, the peoples and nations who want

³ C. Roldan, "Perpetual Peace, Federalism and the Republic of the Spirits: Leibniz Between Saint-Pierre and Kant," *Studia Leibnitiana* 43, no. 1 (2011): 92.

Europe without losing themselves. This way, perhaps we could have a less abusive and more authentic Europe.

But precisely for this reason, authentic Europe cannot be understood, much less built, with the postmodernist and deconstructionist thought that, along with political correctness, forms the dominant paradigm in European questions. Everything in the EU procedures is postmodernized and postmodernizing, taking such an unconscious, internalized, and automatic form as to influence and determine every attitude, analysis, deliberation, and act. The EU is an agglomeration of twenty-seven nations that coexist within the institutional framework of a formally representative bureaucratic structure, but one that substantially lacks contact with citizens. In this space, an ideology has emerged that has erased the sense of nations and national identity. Identities are no longer valid, only procedures; there is no historical responsibility but only the contingent opportunities. This is precisely as deconstructionism wants: everything must be mixed up and confused, deprived of identity and emptied of meaning, to allow the new European sophistication to play its game undisturbed: this new class of administrators and bureaucrats constitutes, as Shmuel Trigano states, “the very example of the new post-modernist elite.”⁴ This is the ideological-political connection on which the European institution is based.

I therefore oppose a formal or official Europe in favor of a vital Europe, not in order to destroy the former, but to connect it with the latter and, even more, to bind them together in a historical-cultural pact that is incomparably more solid than any treaty and any constitutional charter. It is this renewed alliance between elites and peoples, between institutions and nations, that we need today.

Instead, we mostly see empty rhetorical displays, as in formula I mentioned earlier: more Europe. It is heard on every occasion, pronounced with the sacredness of a commandment or with the arrogance of a threat, depending on the circumstances. "More Europe" is the medicine for every ailment, the solution for every problem. Is unemployment increasing? More Europe will decrease it. Are people rejecting immigration? More Europe will make them accept it. Does bureaucratic centralism distance citizens from European institutions? More Europe will bring them closer. Does the pandemic hurt and kill people, damage and destroy the economy? More Europe will overcome the health emergency.

With this formula, ideological and instrumental goals are passed off as ideals of European civilization. This, however, risks destroying an intangible asset that was forged and rooted over centuries, one that may disappear due to a deadly mixture of political opportunism and spiritual sloppiness. The certainty of Europeans in their identity has disintegrated and the trust that they had in their *continental homeland*, despite all the conflicts, has been destroyed.

More Europe, then? If by Europe we mean the bureaucratic-technical structure, certainly not. But if by this abused yet noble word we mean the two-thousand-year history of the spirit that, while splitting into many peoples, forged the continent's general identity and the particular identities of its nations, then yes, we need it. Altered in character and transformed in meaning, this expression would affirm the opposite of what it now designates: that is, it would recover the identity value of Europe, of the historical and concrete existence of our peoples. Thus, with a completely different meaning, "more Europe" indicates an objective that all Europeans, as bearers of a national and continental identity, share: to reinvigorate original and forgotten sources, to regain the pride of our history, to reaffirm its values and recalibrate our practices to defend them. It does not mean the disintegration of the EU, but, on the contrary, its reconstitution on a nobler and more solid basis, its concrete *regeneration*.

⁴ Cf. S. Trigano, *La nouvelle idéologie dominante: le post-modernisme* (Paris: Hermann, 2012).

I conclude by presenting two examples of empty formalism in the current era marked by the coronavirus epidemic: the first concerns the socio-economic sphere, the second, public health. Since coronavirus first emerged, the prolonged pandemic has spurred endless headlines about the virus: charlatans, deniers, and conspiracy theorists of every cultural orientation and every political color have been denouncing phantoms and hazily defined conspiracies as the basis of the epidemic. Ravings made possible by the neglecting authoritativeness (which is not mere authority) derived from a thesis, a theory, or a principle and spread by the capillarity of social media. We have witnessed a collective logorrhea, the result of ignorance and arrogance, that poisoned public opinion and polluted relations between individuals and social groups, producing a psychological destabilization and a political disorientation that will not be easy to remedy. In this situation, scientists too have increased the chaos by talking non-stop, often out of wrong context and a inconsistently.

On the other hand, this degradation of thought and language is accompanied by distortions and manipulations in economic and social theory. For instance, the World Economic Forum, headquartered in Switzerland but deeply linked to EU institutions, launched the so-called Great Reset, a technical initiative aiming to shape the global economy not according to peoples' real needs but molded on strong ideological tenets. I argue that the Great Reset combines and renews two nineteenth century left-wing ideologies, and influences ruthless financial practices responsible for this savage new era. These are not authentic capitalism but rather a degenerate form that creates a dangerous practical and theoretical hybrid. This scenario signals the return of the shadows of utopian socialism and the specter of Marxist communism adapted to the mental and operational schemes used by contemporary technocracy, the global players in the media and information technology, robotics, and artificial intelligence.

This global project supports and is a powerful ally of the formal Europe's goals and fights against the vital Europe: precisely like socialism/communism, it aims to defeat Western tradition and especially Western religion, reducing Christianity to a mere civic survival manual. Further, it aims to reduce the Church (both Catholic and Protestant) to an organization that simply provides social support. Judaism and Jews are tolerated only to avoid accusations of antisemitism, while they are attacked when Israel is criticized and boycotted, revealing that anti-Zionism is a form of anti-Semitism. This type of attack on Israel is symmetrically similar to those that various far-right and far-left conspiracy groups launch against the international Jewish world, believed to be heading a conspiracy, of which the Great Reset would also be part, to establish a new world order. To sum up, confusion, distortion, and conspiracy theories create chaos and are not worthy of any further attention here.

Along with this socialist/communist and anti-Judeo-Christian resurrection, the Great Reset initiated a technocratic farce managed by global elites. This scheme enforces political correctness and thus sympathizes with global left-wing stances. They bellow at us that only machines can save humanity and therefore we must rely completely on technology, or rather on technoscience, which will replace man not only in mechanical operations but also in more sophisticated ones, to the point of replacing thought and consciousness. It is just a short step from *post-modern* to *post-human*. This is the direction that global projects like this type pull us. They are the exact opposite of what Martin Heidegger thought (and which, fortunately, many still think) when, referring to the technique and its dangers, he said, "only a God can save us" ("nur noch ein Gott kann uns retten"). The second example of empty bureaucratic formalism I would like to discuss is the EU's slow and disorderly response to the pandemic emergency. While the Great Reset features the dissolution of the Jewish-Christian religious tradition into a new *religion of technology*, in the pandemic spotlights the bureaucratization that paralyzes public health responses, both institutional and individual. In fact, it should be noted how European institutions handled the health crisis caused by the pandemic. Without judging either

the arguments for vaccination or those opposing them (with respect to both, I argue that it is fundamental to guarantee freedom of treatment and a free personal choice of accepting or rejecting treatments), I will simply note that the United States, Israel, and England, after deciding that in order to limit the number of victims as much as possible, to protect production systems and the economy in general, and not to provoke dangerous social entropy, mass vaccination was the most effective measure in the short term, they acted quickly and effectively, following the principles of freedom of initiative and without the brakes of bureaucracy, producing vaccines and quickly procuring the doses necessary to safeguard the population and to restart not only the economy but also a positive psychosocial dynamic.

The EU, on the other hand, has moved in ways typical of bureaucracy: slowly and awkwardly, issuing abstruse regulations and imposing abstract rules, prescriptions, and restrictions. My interpretation in this case is that technical formalism has replaced living tradition, because the European rulers have chosen, once again, the path of centralization, instead abandoning the traditional approach to social and managerial issues: subsidiarity in which an agency higher in the hierarchy replaces a lower-level one *only when* the latter is unable to perform its duties, and vice versa: lower-level agencies can legitimately operate and therefore operate freely in all areas and for all problems in their purview, including the decision-making freedom of the family as the original nucleus of communities and that of individuals as the original nucleus of conscience. The idea (and the consequent practice) of subsidiarity is perhaps the most significant sign of the fruitful union between conservatism and liberalism that has characterized, albeit sometimes in a subterranean and discontinuous way, the anti-totalitarian and anti-statist thought of twentieth-century Europe.

Subsidiarity has been the fundamental concept of the Church's social doctrine for more than a century, founded in 1891 by Pope Leo XIII's Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* and then fixed by Pope John Paul's Encyclicals *Laborem Exercens* (1981) and *Centesimus Annus* (1991) II. It therefore represents one of the most influential expressions of the European tradition in the socio-economic field. And since subsidiarity arises from the idea of freedom, the EU should have simply, within the limits imposed by an exceptional situation such as the pandemic, allowed and practiced freedom, from the individual level to the highest social level. Instead, once again the bureaucracy, the administrative form of positivist thought, has destroyed tradition, deactivating the historical conscience and its living thought.

Almost a century ago, in 1930, José Ortega y Gasset warned that Europe is decaying because of the massification of consciousness, and this decay is linked to the progressive bureaucratization of life, and bureaucratization is the face of the statehood, of the state control of society. It is not the idea of the state and the virtuous state that I question, but the distorted notion of state produced by a statist ideology. This kind of state can become the worst enemy of society, communities, and peoples.

Starting as a means of achieving positive results for the development of society as a set of individuals, families, communities, professional associations, and interest groups, the state becomes an end in itself, and people become the means to ensure this end: the state no longer plays a service function for its citizens, but quite the contrary: the people are at the service of the state. Thus, when formal Europe, that is, the institutional structures of the EU, wanted to become a super-state, a mechanism was produced by which the citizens, peoples, and nations of Europe themselves are at the service of the European super-state, whose end is no longer a vital or ideal Europe as the only acceptable condition for European citizens, but is the state itself. Eventually, Europe becomes a means of strengthening this state, which is increasingly alien and distant from its citizens.

When the formal Europe, that is to say the EU's institutional structures, decided to become a super-state, it generated a mechanism whereby European citizens and nations become a means for the super-state to achieve its aims. The EU institutions are a powerful tool for furthering the power of this super-state. Only memory allows the roots to continue to be alive, because memory allows identity to be transmitted through generations. Since a dead root is a fossil, a mere archaeological find, the European identity must always be revitalized. And since it is plural and pluralistic in itself, we can speak of an *inter-identity of Europe*, an identity in which different forms of identification participate, all nevertheless bound by a common essence consisting of an original institution of meaning as the basis of all the cultural, religious, political, and juridical affinities between the European peoples. It is an original and metaphysical space from which all the structures of our civilization have arisen in an infinite series of branches.

But identity also involves transcendence, planning, and freedom. Here identity is combined with truth, with a self-awareness that derives from the search for truth, from a tension toward the other and toward the beyond, toward the limits of one's own being while giving us the criteria for our actions. Therefore, since vital Europe is the expression of the peoples of the continent, and since peoples can continue to live only if their national and continental tradition survives, Europe as such will only be able to live and progress if it again becomes an asset for its peoples, for its own community; if it is felt as a homeland, as a *European homeland* that continues to be founded on its nations, on its tradition, on its original values and on its authentic and founding principles, revitalizing them and thus regenerating itself. Otherwise, Europe will be only able to *continue to formalize itself* as an institutional bureaucratic entity, until it becomes a lifeless mummy, a mummy of itself or, at best, a museum of a perished tradition.