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Astonishment as starting point for the European Studies

By Enrique Banús

In my last visit to Madrid I was telling to my mother that I had been invited to travel to Australia. And she said to me: when you were a kid you were dreaming to travel to Australia. I had forgotten this part of my past dreams probable because I had the impression I never would be able to realise them.

And now I am here on a very curious way: coming from Perú, from outside Europe, to Australia, outside Europe. And this thanks to the European Studies!

Does it mean that the European Studies will help you to realise your dreams? I don't know but in my case this situation provokes "astonishment"

Most of you are recognised experts in EU-Asia/Pacific relations. I am not. Therefore, I will present something about the astonishment or at least my astonishment in front of the European Studies and their fundament, the European integration. And to amaze, Astonishment is according to Aristotle, the starting point for philosophy.

And I do this not as a native in European integration Studies but as a migrant, someone who at a certain point of his academic life discovered this field. As you know, my first scientific love, to which I remain loyal, was Comparative Literature. Europe is an excellent laboratory for comparative literature studies. And looking to this laboratory you see hopes and suffering of human beings, expressed in poems, dramas and novels - and in music and visual arts. And you realize that suffering very often was connected to wars and destruction and death caused by wars.

Studying Philology you also realise that wars are born on disdain, prejudice and enmity to the other who becomes a threat, the enemy. In Germany there was created a specific word for designating the French neighbour, it was the *Erzfeind*, the enemy par excellence. And war is born also at universities, not directly but with the creation of intellectual categories that are then the soil for nationalism. Reading academic texts from the 20ies of the last centuries for example with the reception of Romanticism you may at the end understand why the resistance to Nazi Germany was so weak at universities. It is not the case that most of the Professors were Nazis (some of them in fact were) but that some of the Nazi messages were connected to the thesis developed by German philologists, about the German specificity, the roots of the own Culture and a certain mystification of the nation.

But then you also realize that after World War II there is a new approach for stopping the dynamics of war and peace treaty and the impossibility to stop the next war and the next peace treaty in an perpetuum mobile of death and ruins. And this change supposed also to overcome the ideology of *Erzfeind*, of superiority, of being threatened by the neighbour.

This was the first point at which I stopped astonished. Astonished not by realising that after a war there is a dominant feeling that war has not to come again, that it has to be avoided. Not by realising that politicians are promising peace, but by realising that here some of them have invented something new, a new paradigm (you know that my scientific generation is a bit fascinantes by Kuhn's idea of the shift of paradigm) that has worked.

Of course, we know that this new paradigm was prefigured in the writings of some thinkers from previous times and we use to mention Immanuel Kant in this context, but in political life it was in fact new the idea of a supranacional Community to which *souvreignty* is transferred, a Community with specific institutions and a specific methodology.

Very often I have asked myself why at that moment of history, exactly then the shift of paradigm was done. Many factors could of course be mentioned but I guess the personality of the so called "founding fathers" plaid a major role.

I think in European studies it is needed to go once and once again to the origins. Of course, the European Union as it is today is not the prolongation of the origins, but if we really want to make understandable the European integration the understanding of what happened in the 50ies is a must, a starting point.

I often ask myself what the reasons are why these politicians have been able to invent such a new world. The more I read and study about them the greater is my admiration. The practical sense of a Jean Monnet came together with the decision of several politicians to realise what society was desiring: not to promise peace but to guarantee peace.

Hans Robert Jauss, one of the founding fathers of the literary theory of reception distinguished between fact in history and event (*Ereignis*). The European integration is clearly an *Ereignis*.

Sometimes I try to understand this historical step from a biographical point of view and I realise that three of the decisive decision makes from the first hour share at least three elements (I am referring to Robert Schuman, Konrad Adenauer and Alcide de Gasperi):

- *hombres de frontera*, Schuman muy claro (nacionalidad francesa a los 32 años), De Gasperi: Ticino Alto Adige, parlamentario en k.u.k. Monarchie; quizá menos claro Adenauer, pero hay que recordar Rheinland, más cercano a Bélgica, Holanda incluso París que Berlín

- deeply rooted in catholic faith and close to the social doctrine of the Church. Principle of

subsidiarity, expressly mentioned only in Maastricht Treaty but experts say it is implicit contained from the very beginnings

- all of them suffer under an authoritarian or dictatorial state. This experience of looking freedom, political and professional positions (Adenauer ceased to be Mayor of Cologne, De Gasperi has to start a new professional life in the Vatican) was I think a key experience for the idea to create spaces outside of the State influence (the market) and moreover to think that precisely via these spaces the goal of guaranteeing freedom can be achieved.

For sure this is not the full explanation for what happened in the post-war years till March 25th at 5:48 pm in Rome. But the coincidences are at least astonishing. And the result of these and many other factors is also astonishing.

Crises and enlargements, empty chairs and the radical change of the international landscape, unprofiled politicians, long periods of lethargy, weaknesses and failures of member States, and tensions between the partners sometimes with fix positions in which compromises are impossible. All these panorama was able to generate troubles and doubts, but the project continues... Also this is astonishing.

Now the danger is a different one: the distance by the citizens, the lack of identification, the broken understanding of the advantages and the perception of the weaknesses and failures. The two cancers that threaten so many democracies (the mediocrity of so many politicians and the impression that the world of politics is corrupt and takes care only for itself not for the apparently forgotten ideal of a bonum commune) and the consequent scepticism of the citizens is also threatening the European Union.

I insist that this crisis of the lack of commitment of the citizens (for example, a high percentage of non voters is expected in the next elections to the European Parliament) has to do not only with the general distance to the World of politics but also with the loss of the capacity to admire the results of the revolutionary ideas of the 50ies and their consequences, with the impression that there was not a revolution but an evolution: what happened was more or less the logical consequence of history.

This is not the case. And let me bring only one example. If you deal with the history of Europe or - in my case- with its literatures, you can easily be aware how strong the national feeling was. Studying for example the Italian literature it is impossible not to realise that the realisation of the unity was a dream for many people. The nation-state has been seen as the best possible realisation of social desires. We could have the impression that nowadays this feeling is not anymore as vivid. And undoubtedly, the State has lost protagonism and glamour. But having stayed for six years in Barcelona I can assure you that for a relevant part of the population the own state has the same aura as it could have for Garibaldi and the other leaders of the Italian unification.

To a state traditionally belong the borders. And at the borders the state demonstrates sovereignty. Coming to Australia I had to cross the United States and in Miami I was confronted with the well-known scenes of long lanes and, at the end, a representative of the state asking me what purpose I have when crossing the border. And it remains his or her decision whether it is allowed to me to do it or not.

Last december, I was travelling from Perú to Ecuador by car. Both countries are members of the Pacto Andino and have agreed to simplify the border controls. New control stations have been built, and officials of both countries control at one place. Nevertheless, it took more than two hours to cross the border. And I was realising that to another travelling with two adolescents kids the crossing was denied. Her bus has passed away only months before and she was needing a document certifying that she was in fact responsible for the kids. So she had to wait there at the border, in the middle of nowhere, for the next bus going back to her city in Perú (and nobody knows when it will arrive), ask for the document and come back....

It's only one border story among so many every one of us has experienced. You know that the crossing of ten borders nowadays in the Schengen space has lost any romanticism, but also all the time lost when waiting for the decision that now you are allowed to go to the other side. This is a revolution. The States have decided not to exercise sovereignty at such a sensitive point like frontiers are.

This is astonishing and each time when crossing a border I try to be aware about this fact and to renew my admiration that this happened during my lifetime. And "this" is a cultural change. There are many different theories to social transformations. They agree that a social change is much more complex than a political or economic change is. But a cultural change, that implies a change on mentality, is even more difficult.

And now we have more than 8,000 experts (if we take only the members in the different associations belonging to ECSA World) dealing in research and teaching the new paradigm and its consequences. Also this is extremely astonishing. It is easy to understand that in the member States the university is interested in transmitting knowledge in a field that belongs to daily life of the citizens but also to the professional life of many of them. But what is the motivation for so many colleagues from other parts of the world?

Since a long time I am looking for answers to this question and I brought a very simple questionnaire with me looking for colleagues who are willing to answer to this question, for sure the professional possibilities for graduates play a role: given the fact that the European Union maintains relations to the whole world, some job possibilities are given. And some mutual influences that deserve to be studied. In a globalized or globalising world of course what happens in Europe has consequences also in the Asia-Pacific area.

In other cases the European integration is seen maybe not as a model but as a reference for the creation of other integration areas. This is the case for example in Latin America, where most of the intended integration organisations have failed. Mercosur is maybe the most relevant example. And some scholars there recommend to have the European experience in mind in order to guarantee the success of the next efforts.

Is this all? Are more or less pragmatic reasons decisive for dealing scientifically, in academia, with the European Studies? Or is there also place for the astonishment that in Europe, a continent marked by divisions and wars, a model has been successful? Model not in the sense that it has to be imitated or that Europe, once more, is trying to give lessons to the World, but in the sense of the laboratory, in which some experiments are successful and others not.

So, dear colleagues, help me understand why you are so interested for the European integration and that you are devoting your academic life to this subject. Because it is highly astonishing.

To Jean Monnet is attributed the sentence that he would start his culture if he had to start again the European integration project. Jean Monnet never said this. But in fact in Europe a new culture has been created. And this is astonishing.