EUROPEAN IDENTITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

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The very first issue which should be bring to the light when discussing the problem of the European identity is an understanding of the term. There is no agreement on the semantic meaning of the European identity as well as on research methods [1, 12-13], [2, 13]. It is possible to outline two approach to the concept of European identity - cultural phenomenon and psycho-sociological one [3, 297]. The second issue which needs clarification is the meaning of human rights. The main idea behind them is that a human being is entitled to enjoy them only because he/she is a human being [4, 7] [5, 132]. Each of this dimensions will be evaluated later on.

The first step to define what European identity is identify Europe. European borders were usually crossed not be its geographical area but taking into consideration historical, religious and cultural indicators [3, 298] [7, 65]. It was said that Europe is more mental construct than geographical or social territory [6, 314]. Currently it is underlined that what makes Europe unique is the common culture code [3, 298]. It is possible to accept methodological directive based on cultural criteria to define Europe and Europeanness. The next step is to outline what specific features characterize the aforementioned phenomena.

There is a distinctive characteristic of Europe – it is an entity which on one hand sight constantly evolves, on the other side has some permanency, and both of them are tightly bounded with the cultural heritage [3, 299]. What researches emphasize are Judeo-Christian roots commonly with Greek and Roman. To justify this thesis some arguments will be presented. Firstly, all of the three accentuate the only one of its kind position of a human in the world – they refer to anthropocentrism. Those elementary cognitive beliefs and attitudes are manifested in the classical heritage of European culture [3, 301]. It is said that we do draw from the ancient Greek tradition intellectual life sphere [3, 301]. Mostly they are clustered around philosophical conceptions and political thought as well as values which were theirs base – criticism, pursuit of truth and excellence [3, 301]. The Roman culture is a kind of European source of basis of general social and economic organization of Europe [3, 301]. The Roman legal system, as well as management strategies, political efficiency and a pattern of a state...
organization became model and inspiration for the next generations of Europeans [3, 301]. The Judaism gave Europe not only the monotheistic religion approach but also respect for human life and consolidation of the idea of equality and brotherhood [3, 301]. Also the Arabic input in European culture is brought into consideration by some researches [3, 303]. What they underline is openness and dialog opportunities and indicated the Toledo translations school as the exemplification of it [3, 303]. Gathering all of above mentioned approaches it is possible to try to enumerate meta-characteristic of European culture. In this catalogue can be: human dignity, anthropocentrism, acceptance of the human striving for freedom and democratic standards of life [3, 303], [8, 149-150].

The next term which understanding should be briefly presented is identity. There are many different approaches in the context of European identity [3, 303-305]. It is worth underlining that the European identity is classified as collective identity. Generally, it can be said that any collective identity is created on common factor – similarity of its members on some levels [cf. 3, 304]. Such a thesis is based on a statement that in the process of identity formation critical factors are objective ones that characterize individuals as members of a specific group and the community itself [9, 45]. It is postulated by some researches to find a core of each identity [9, 45]. The core is defined as “product of the process of assimilated intersubjectivations which are conscious and externalized by individuals in a given community significant characteristics and properties of culture, sanctioned and established in the form of various products of cultural and social institutions” [9, 53].

To discuss the issue of interpenetration of the European identity and human rights it is crucial to define what the latter is. Any attempts to define the concept of human rights should start from determination of their essential characteristics [4, 10]. Researches indicate that human rights are: universal, inalienable, equal, interdependent, indivisible and the human dignity is theirs source [cf. 4, 13].

The very first feature is inherent dignity of each and every human being which is also recognized as the main source of all human rights [4, 14]. It is also underlined that the concept of birthrights [4, 15] is crucial in defining them more generally. It is worth clarifying that human rights are not the same as human rights law [4, 15]. To show the interference between the European identity and human rights what should be take into consideration is that “In the European cultural tradition for the basic demands arising from the recognition of the dignity are considered: non-instrumental treatment of a human being and - positively speaking - demand of a treatment of a man as a goal itself, not a good reducible to be useful or pleasant” [10, 43]. As it was presented – human dignity can be pointed out also as one of the features of the European identity itself.
There is a kind of tension in the human rights conception based on the opposing terms – guaranteeing the primacy of an individual rights and a community dignity as an environment to ensure human development [4, 30]. In the same time human rights guarantee life in a community which should be also under legal protection [4, 30]. This approach also can be find in one of the European identity indicators – anthropocentrism which place a human being in the centre but parallel respect a community.

Equality is pointed out as one of the most important elements of human rights conception [4, 22]. The concept of equality is included in inherent dignity of all human beings [4, 22]. Different characteristics of each and every person is irrelevant in that case. Equality is more precisely defined by the term of prohibition of discrimination [4, 22]. Those aspects are included in tolerance and dialogue which is also one of the European identity characteristics.

To conclude, the interfusion of the European identity and human rights is pretty strong. Both concepts are built on similar values such as human dignity and openness. Human rights are included in European culture based on humanism and anthropocentrism.

Sources:
2. Gołembski F., Tożsamość europejska (aspekty teoretyczne), [w:] F. Gołembski, Tożsamość europejska, Warszawa 2005