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Globalization and Cultural Diversity

Cultural-Linguistic Globalization in the European Space

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Abstract: Europe is a reality not only in economic and political terms mainly. The impact of globalization on contemporary European area is a contested subject in political debates, media or academically. Although occurring in the economic field with multiple meanings (the increase in economic interdependence of countries worldwide through increasing volume and variety of goods and services transactions across borders), in linguistics, globalization illustrates a particular facet of the relationship between the dynamics and needs of society communication. The impressive contemporary transformation processes triggered by globalization can be fully understood only if read in a cultural key, only if analyzed from a cultural perspective. At the same time, the multiple transformations modify the very structure of the cultural experience and affect the way we understand culture in the modern world. Globalization is the core of modern culture and cultural practices are the core of globalization.

Keywords: cultural dimension of globalization; language; identity; life style; European Union

A symbolic rendition of the world, a reading of existence, an interpretation of the world, a way to translate the experience into symbolic languages ...it is a possible definition for the term "culture". (Lucian Blaga's view in the paper *The Trilogy of Culture*). Globalization, as defined in dictionaries, is considering the determination or production on a global scale, meeting in an increasingly disparate elements, in whole or prosecution of a problem given the universal nature of things. Culture, on the other hand, represents all the material and spiritual values created by humankind and the institutions needed to communicate these values. When we speak of culture we think about meaning, value, norm. For over 10,000 years, mankind has left us an important legacy. If we adjust and animate this inheritance, we can benefit from the experience they treasure. A genuine culture leads to flourish true inner values, such as, inter alia, order, justice, truth, equality, honor and freedom, values of nature among individuals approaching them.

The man assumed the human condition when it was able to see things beyond appearances, to show imagination, to compare and create symbols. Faced with a crisis of identity that the individual lives of our century, culture creates new dimensions of social, moral, philosophical and spiritual and prepare younger generations to consciously build effective and what should be the XXI century. From the dream of total culture, the world awakens to the reality of multiculturalism, global culture without any cultural tradition. When we speak of culture we mean all the products of human activity and living for perfection.

Strict boundaries between countries have made to define them only in relation to themselves, without taking into account the issues and concepts beyond. So many cultures have appeared closed, only

returned to themselves. Nations have always stubbornly to keep the specifics, or better said, "cultural identity"; this phenomenon is becoming more varied threat of globalization, a phenomenon that will lead to cultural uniformity. At first (XX century) cultural uniformity occurred only at the continental level, we have heard such talk of European culture, the oriental and American culture.

The impressive contemporary transformation processes triggered by globalization can be fully understood only if read in a cultural key, only if analyzed from a cultural perspective. At the same time, these transformations modify the very structure of the cultural experience and affect the way we understand culture in the modern world. Globalization is the core of modern culture and cultural practices are the core of globalization. Globalization is a multi-dimensional phenomenon and culture can be regarded as a dimension of globalization.

The two concepts of globalization and respectively culture are closely interconnected. If we have in mind the cultural dimension of globalization we discover that globalization has a dialectic (two-way) character: globalization is not a uni-directional phenomenon within which events are determined and influenced by vast global structures; local cultural features and local intervention is also present in what is called globalization.

The relationship between globalization and culture is a very special one; it does not resemble the economic, political, social, etc aspects of globalization. While material exchanges tend to localize, political exchanges institutionalize, the cultural ones - which are symbolic exchanges – globalize. The result is that the globalization of the human society is conditioned by the extent to which cultural relationships have an effect in relation to economic and political arrangements. Political and economic processes tend to become global to the extent to which they are circumscribed to culture that is they are seen as symbolic processes. Due to their symbolic nature, cultural exchanges can occur anywhere and anytime as there are few constraints in terms of resources.

The cultural dimension of globalization is of the same importance as the political or economic aspects of globalization. The reasons of this importance are obvious: language, identity, life style are not abstractions but fundamental elements of our private and public existence. Where and how we live, who are those that influence us, why and how they influence us which are the vehicles of change in today's world, which are the values we believe in – all these are unavoidable questions for any reasoning inhabitant of the global village which our planet has become. In this context, one of the main issues raised by researchers is that of the existence, the emergence of a global culture.

To what extent the uniformization of the life style, the growing importance of the English language, the migration of the labour force, the imposing of technological and infrastructure standards allowing global interconnectivity can determine, together, the emergence of a global culture?

We believe that at the level of the European Union globalization can be perceived in two different ways which do not exclude each other. On the one hand, the European Union can be perceived as a successful model of globalization. Culturally speaking it offers an original model of a space which has been trying to implement a common cultural legislation whose main purpose is to preserve cultural diversity, a space which has been trying to implement common linguistic guidelines while assuming and asserting the existence of 23 official languages. On the other hand, precisely due to regarding themselves as belonging to a mutual cultural space sharing main features, Europeans tend to resist globalization mainly conceived as Americanization.

Most Europeans believe that the European Union can protect them from the downsides of globalization - and they're right. Many Europeans decided to vote against the European constitution

draft which was in effect, a vote against globalization. While supporting European integration, these Europeans felt that the constitution did not sufficiently protect Europe and its workers against job losses due to globalization. This negative vote is just an example of what appears - on the surface, at least - to be a built-in European resistance to globalization. Whether in the form of populist political rhetoric, anti-globalization street protests, or the destruction of genetically-modified corn fields, this activity gives the impression of a continent determined to resist the integration of global markets and cultures. That impression, however, is wrong, or at least highly misleading. Many Europeans worry about globalization's effects on jobs, economic equality, European culture, or political independence vis-à-vis the United States. But the prominent anti-globalization movement is actually a small if vocal minority. In fact, a clear majority of Europeans accepts that increasing global economic, political, and cultural exchange can enrich their country and their lives. They believe that a strong European Union can help them take advantage of globalization's benefits while shielding them from its negative effects.

However, globalization and economic liberalization bring greater challenges for Europe than for the United States. One reason is that the state plays a greater role in EU economies: State spending in the EU averages 48 percent of its Gross Domestic Product, compared with only around 36 percent in the United States; social expenditures average over 25 percent, compared with just 15 percent in the United States. Europeans are also more attached to equality and collective rights than are most Americans, who have a proud tradition of individualism. The problem is further complicated by relatively inflexible European labor markets. EU citizens are almost six times less likely than Americans to move from one region to another, and workers are less likely to accept wage or benefit cuts in order to preserve jobs threatened by trade. Finally, many Europeans fear that globalization - in the form of "Americanization" - will threaten their local culture.

The past 25 years certainly provide evidence of EU adaptation (versus resistance) to globalization. As late as 1980, the major European economies were still highly regulated, capital movements were restricted, and hundreds of non-tariff barriers prevented true economic integration even within the EU. Today, while much progress remains to be made, the internal EU market is complete, most industry has been privatized, and many state subsidies and obstacles to cross-border mergers and acquisitions have been removed. How does the EU play this role? First, by providing a large, single market, the EU allows its member states to take advantage of many of globalization's benefits among relatively like-minded countries at similar levels of economic development. Europeans find it easier to accept European integration than global integration because of their similar value systems and common commitment to generous social and environmental provisions. Second, Europeans count on the EU to protect them from the inequalities that globalization can create.

The generous provision of "structural funds" (aid to its poorest regions) and a social safety net make the Union safer for globalization. Third, by aggregating the separate member states' strength, the EU increases leverage in international negotiations - whether on trade, environment, food safety, international finance, foreign policy, or culture. None of the individual states could ever hope to stand up to the United States in any of these areas, but with economy and population comparable to the United States, the EU has increasingly done so.

Finally, Europeans turn to the EU to regulate certain sectors, such as agriculture or culture, that would be dramatically transformed by unregulated globalization. Without the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), for example, globalization would entail the destruction of much of European farming, especially small farms. From the standpoint of global efficiency and production, that would be a good thing. But Europeans (and not only the farmers) apparently would rather pay a significant price - including higher food prices - in order to maintain this aspect of their traditional culture. The EU will

eventually have to scale back its agricultural protection, but Europeans expect the EU to manage that process without causing the pain associated with living in an entirely unregulated world.

Many Europeans will, no doubt, continue to protest against globalization - and sometimes for good reason. Growing international interdependence challenges many basic aspects of traditionally European political and economic systems, threatens aspects of national cultures, and leaves the continent vulnerable to new and unprecedented hazards. But globalization also has many positives, including prosperity, development, and cultural diversity. Much of it, in any case, is inevitable. In the EU, Europeans have found a tool to help them manage these processes, taking advantage of their many benefits while protecting citizens from some of globalization's more negative effects. The EU remains a tool for managing globalization, but it is also an indispensable one. As far as the issue of linguistic globalization is concerned, it is given a deserved importance within the European Union. Linguistic globalization cannot be conceived without talking about the world-wide spread of English. In many member states of the European Union English has become (or is in the process of becoming) the most popular foreign language in terms of acquisition and in its use in many domains. Various sociolinguistic perspectives are adopted to account for how English has successfully consolidated its position as the chief language of interaction between speech communities that would not traditionally have employed it.

Although English is so widely used and nobody can deny its role as a globalizing factor and its role for global communication, Europe remains a privileged space of multi-culturalism and multi-linguism. It acknowledges the importance of language for preserving national identity and as a consequence, in Europe, linguistic globalization has come to have, in our opinion, a special and original form, that of interaction, of preservation of diversity, not of uniformization. Translations are an example of this special phenomenon.

The great importance given to the translation of communitary texts on the one hand, the cultural programmes created to support the translation of literary texts so that they could be accessible to the whole European space on the other hand contributed to the creation of what we could call a global cultural Europe. Globalization has created awareness of the variety increases the force of democracy, portraying an individual able to choose between more than possible alternatives. Also, this individual can defend handling, as has the possibility to identify. Globalization has a big role in our opinion, to annihilate the distance between cultures. The world becomes a single place, and we are all neighbors. We should never lose sight of a core truth, a truth of key importance – that first of all, before being an economic or a political whole, Europe is a cultural construction and while economically and politically Europe's age can be measured in decades, from the cultural point of view it is a centuries old reality.

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