

Europe, A New Narrative

HOW TO WRITE A NEW NARRATIVE FOR EUROPE?

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Oddly enough, the consultation of a certain number of bibliographies reveals we still do not have a European history of European peoples.¹ In France, since 1995, the programs of secondary education are put in a European perspective. But one of the rare attempts at a European history of Europe by Frederic Delouche was quickly forgotten.² As for the Franco-German textbook of 2008, it is still an embryonic history at the European level.³ This gap justifies the research project of the College of the Bernardines in Paris which should lead to the publication of a *European history of Europe* in 2016 with more than 40 European historians and intellectuals in cooperation with the “New Narrative for Europe” launched by president Jose Manuel Barroso and the European Parliament. This international project is in continuity with a centuries-long reflection on the history of Europe.⁴

1) The contribution of European memories

There are, of course, many histories of the European Union – which is the most common instance – or of Europe in general, even of the European peoples. We can mention, haphazardly, a few great pioneer attempts (without pretending to be exhaustive) be they works of historians, political scientists or philosophers. Among those who wrote prior to World War II, we can cite the works of Paul Hazard, *The Crisis of European Consciousness*, 1935; of Edmond Husserl, *The Crisis of European Humanity and Philosophy*, Vienna, 1935; of Christopher Dawson, *The Making of Europe*, 1932 and also *Understanding*

¹ <http://www.aede-france.org/medias/pdf/bibliographie-europeenne.pdf>

² F. Delouche (éd), *Histoire de l'Europe*, Paris, Hachette, 1992

³ Manuel d'histoire franco-allemand. *L'Europe et le monde 1814-1945*, Paris, Nathan, 2008.

⁴ Cf *Vingtième siècle. Revue d'histoire*, Paris Presses de la FNSP. Par ordre chronologique : Nicolas Roussellier, "Pour une écriture européenne de l'histoire de l'Europe", avr.-juin 1993, p. 74-89 ; Serge Berstein, Dominique Borne, Jean-Clément Martin, "L'enseignement de l'histoire au lycée", janv.-mars 1996, p. 122-142 ; Jean-Pierre Rioux, "Pour une histoire de l'Europe sans adjectif", avril-juin 1996, p. 101-110 ; Jean-Clément Martin, « Pour une histoire principielle de l'Europe », janv.-mars 1997, p. 124-128, janv.-mars 1997, p. 124-128 ; Serge Berstein, Dominique Borne, Philippe Joutard, François Lebrun, Jacques Le Goff, Jean-Clément Martin, "Enseigner l'histoire de l'Europe", nov.-déc. 1993, *Le Débat*, Paris, Gallimard, p. 158-187 ; *Historiens et Géographes (Revue de l'Association des Professeurs d'histoire et de Géographie)*. Particulièrement le n° 347, fév. 1995, avec les contributions de Jean-Pierre Titz, "Comment enseigner l'Europe ?", p. 457-463 ; Jean-Jacques Becker, "Comment écrire l'histoire de l'Europe ?", p. 465-469 ; Jacques Aldebert, "Naissance d'un Euromanuel d'histoire", p. 471-474 ; *Irehg (Revue des Instituts de Recherche pour l'Enseignement de l'Histoire Géographie et groupes associés)*, "L'Europe", déc. 1995.

Europe, Washington, CUP, reedited 2009. After World War II, several generations of intellectuals continued the reflection, such as Denis de Rougemont, *28 Centuries of Europe*; Jacques Le Goff, *Europe Explained to the Young*, Seuil, 2007; Remi Brague, *Europe, the Roman Road*, Criterion, Paris 1992; Krzysztof Pomian (in collaboration with Elie Barnavi), *The European Revolution. 1945-2007*, Perrin, Paris, 2008; Jean and Andre Sellier, *Atlas of the Peoples of Central Europe*, Paris, La Découverte, 2007; Georges Corm, *Europe and the Myth of the West*, Paris, La Découverte, 2009; Veronique Auzepy-Chavagnac, *Europe at the Risk of Democracy*, Paris, L'Hamattan, 2006, etc. These works are remarkable in many ways but, once again, these are only isolated efforts or parallel narratives, never concerted histories or intersecting accounts. We must also be grateful for the translation work that takes place in Europe especially that of some pro-European historians such as Jacques Le Goff who published his collection *Making Europe Work* in 5 different languages. But up until now, in spite of the quality of the books which were translated, it has essentially been a question of sharing research work and not intersecting narratives – a factor which limits the reception – and thus the legitimacy – of these works.

2) An effort to understand

We can start by explaining this absence of a European history of Europe by the very organization of the research which is still, in the field of history, very national in Europe. Moreover, the dominant academic historiography limits to the maximum any research which endeavors to reflect on notions judged outdated or divisive of common values. Most often, therefore, historians focus essentially on the short term of European integration, both politically and economically. There exists research on European culture such as the great *History of European Literature* under the direction of Jean-Claude Polet, of the University of Louvain-la-Neuve.⁵ The difficulty here is the same as in the previous situation. Most often it is a question of very savant projects which do not take into consideration the broader horizon of the political, economic and religious history of European civilization.

My thesis is that if, in the end, there has been no European history of Europe up to the present, this is because the sovereignty and Eurosceptic historiographical schools prevailed in Europe in the debates between 1990-2000. The European historiographical schools favor the national novel over the cosmopolitan novel. Even in Germany, the quest of European heritage is being shifted from the teaching of history (remaining optional in most Lander) towards political education.

So it is that, in Europe, the historians who deny the specifically European nature of the history of European nations are dominant. But, as Jean Leduc has written, to consider that the events of 1848-1849 were “European”, is not less legitimate, a priori, than to consider them as “coincidental”. But, above all, history as a reconciliation of memories can no longer ignore the divergent accounts of a same event in the era of globalization and the global village. Historical knowledge can no longer be individual and national. Finally, the historiography, after the event of “places of memory” (*Les Lieux de mémoire*, edited by the French historian Pierre Nora at Gallimard in the 1990s), can no longer be strictly conceptual and positive. It must make itself symbolic and personalist, consensual and interactive. Here we find the personalist intuition of the first theorists of European integration, Nicolas Berdiaev, Denis de Rougemont and Christopher Dawson who understood the concept of person as the basically free subject of rights and, at the same time, a being in relationship, capable of finding its accomplishment in a communion of values and hope.

⁵ <http://www.arlfb.be/ebibliotheque/communications/guissard090193.pdf>

3) The importance of methodology

The historiography of Europe has been an important object of debate in France for the last 30 years as evidenced by Jean Leduc in his 1998 article on the status of the teaching of history in Europe.⁶ The historiography we are defending today is a synthesis of two great currents. It is dialogical, plural and symbolic. It is therefore a continuation of “the places of memory” of Pierre Nora, in that it shatters the sovereignism of the nation-state and, with it, the objectivizing historiography dominant in European universities up to the 1980s. But the rehabilitation of symbolic history, of the place of memory, did not come at the expense of the shared and coherent narrative, of the theological-political union of the head and the body, which all the European countries are experiencing for at least two centuries. Thus this European historiography is, in definitive, close to the communicational, symbolic and reconstructive historiography defended by Paul Ricoeur and then Jean-Marc Ferry.

The new European narrative should, first of all, make the European peoples aware of their post-modern, plural identity, of their capacity to be, at the same time, Breton, French and European or be from Prague, be a Czech and be a European, or Turk, Berliner and European. But because of its personalism, it does not deny the meta-historic vocation, the capacity to tend towards the universal incarnated in each one of these identities. The history which writes itself is very evidently one of the most powerful levers which has been used in the history which makes itself in order to bring about this sentiment of belonging to a same nation and a same people. As Gerard Noiriel wrote: “For a nation to reformulate its history, to share its reading of the past, is like sharing a bit of its soul”.⁷

This is why, so that he might obtain the largest possible objectivity, the historian should be aware of the great luminaries of the present times, sincerely admit the values which correspond to the historical dynamic he wants to depict, assume through an ego-history the limits of his own inscription in time, avoid erasing what annoys him or what is not coherent with the overall project, remember that history is not tele-guided, but, on the contrary, strive to present the wounds and failures in such a way as to better illustrate the divergent memories, to make evident the contrary logics at work in history, to warn against all the possible political manipulations of his work and, ultimately, to remember that the big story, the one to which men erect temples and pantheons, is never the narrative of a debt but wondrous acknowledgment for a shared humanity.

⁶ Jean Leduc, « Enseigner l’histoire de l’Europe : un débat », dans *EspacesTemps*, 66-67/1998, p. 34-42.

⁷ Gérard Noiriel, *Les fils maudits de la République*, Paris, Fayard 2005.