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INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE: IDENTITIES, DEMOCRACY, BORDERS

Barbora Olejárová*

On the 6th and 7th of April 2016, the Faculty of Political Science and International Relations of Matej Bel University hosted an international conference organised within the framework of the Jean Monnet European Research Network entitled *Identity, Culture, and Multilingualism Exchanges (EUROMECC)*. In times of identity crisis in the European Union, the conference aimed to analyse situations, perceptions, attitudes and activities of the citizens of the European Union with respect to identity dynamics and exploration of the bottom-up community building. It also aimed at analysing the impact of policies, programmes, cultural, educational, social, economic, geopolitical, and geoeconomics activities of the European institutions on the identity mechanisms of the top-down identity building.

Conference brought together scholars, experts and scientists from Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, France, Georgia, Poland, Slovakia and Taiwan. They met at this prestigious forum to present their research, to discuss actual problems of international relations and to exchange ideas and opinions on these issues. Conference lasted for two days and the working languages were English, Slovak and French. The opening remarks were held by **Vladimír Hiadlovský**, Rector of the Matej Bel University; **Ján Koper**, Dean of the Faculty of Political Science and International Relations and **Peter Terem**, Vice-Dean of the Faculty of Political Science and International Relations. The speakers welcomed the participants and emphasised importance of the conference topic in times when the European Union strives for survival of its fundamental values.

First day of the conference was divided into two thematic sessions. First of them – *Build a democratic space*, was hosted by Radovan Gura and Gilles Rouet from the host faculty. Contributions presented by **Marine Vekua**, **Daniela**

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Škutová, Patrícia Artimová and **Serge Dufoulon** were dealing with the topic of democratic values and identity in Europe with regard to the national, cultural, political and also security problems the European Union has to face nowadays. After a short discussion, **Ramaz Lominadze**, **Niké Wenthold**, **Wiesław Breński** and **Ana Paula Fernandez** followed up on the previous speakers and pointed out to the practical issues connected to the aforementioned topic of democracy and identity. They presented the examples from Georgia, Bulgaria, Poland and France either based on the relations of these states with the European Union – top-down identity building in Georgia and Bulgaria; or regarding the national minorities living on their territories - bottom-up community building dealing with the Ukrainians of Polish origin from Donbas or the groups of Brazilians in France. The first session was concluded by **Mei-Lan Huang**, **Nikolina Tsvetkova**, **Louis-Caleb Remanda**, **Peter Terem**, **Ivana Slobodníková** and **Marek Lenč**, who presented the results of their research. The speeches dealt with a theoretical approach to the topic of identity-building and democracy crisis in Europe by discussing the issues of interculturalism; importance of education as a result of investigation conducted at Bulgarian schools; functioning of the European institutions using institutional embeddedness' analysis and, finally, the importance of periphery for the European identity building as shown on the example of Ukraine.

The second session of the first conference day entitled *Identities and Values*, was hosted by **Maria Rostekova** from the host Faculty, and **Serge Dufoulon** from Université de Grenoble Alpes. The session opened with the speech of **Dušan Chrenek**, Head of Representation of the European Commission in Slovakia, who appreciated the conference topic in times of identity and democracy crisis in the European Union regarding the situation of migrants in Europe or the disintegration tendencies of the particular European Union's member states. **Pierre Bauby**, **Mária Holubová**, **Mária Rošteková**, **Marta Zágoršeková** and **Jacek H. Kołodziej** focused in their presentations on the interconnections of the formation of identities and values of the single European states with the development of the European cultural identity itself. More specifically, analogy of the historical aspects of the Slovak and French identities' evolution were analysed, as well as the critical points of incorporation of the European values into the Polish society. The other part of this block comprised presentations of **Magdalena Sitek**, **Miloslava Borošová**, **Michalcová**, **Zuzana Grúňová**, **Kaloyan Haralampiev**, **Radosveta Drakeva**, **Anton Fogas**, **Viktor Verba**, **Maya Grekova** and **Petia Kabakchieva**. The

speeches manifested variety of aspect of the topic of European identity and values. The researchers approached the subject-matter from the legal point of view, dealing with the protection of human rights; but also from the cultural point of view analysing fine arts as a means of studying the identity issues. Practical meaning of identities formation was also outlined concerning the current migration crisis. Furthermore, application of the Q-method in social surveys was introduced, not only as a theoretical framework, but also as a practical tool applied when studying identity formation among the Bulgarian university students.

The first day of this conference concluded with an official reception that created a platform for an informal discussion covering different topics of international relations as well as provided an opportunity for establishing professional relations and partnerships among the participants and their sending institutions.

The second conference day continued with the third block, entitled *Crisis, boundaries and identities*, which was hosted by **Maria Stoicheva** from the Université de Sofia St Clément d'Ohrid and **Thierry Côme** from the Université de Reims-Champagne-Ardenne. As the refugee crisis is becoming more and more severe, **Grzegorz Pozarlik** and **Natasza Styczynska** introduced in their presentations basic concept of the issue of drawing civilisational boundaries in the European Union as an elementary problem to the solution of the crisis in the context of identity building. The conference proceeded with the address of **Juliette Rolland** and **Agnès Bergeret**, followed by **Etienne Ciapin**, **Matúš Štulajter**, **Ján Fil'akovský**, **Martin Solik**, **Soňa Svoráková** and **François Schmitt**. The speeches were very concrete, addressing the topic of identity formations in the particular regions such as selected metropolitan areas of France and the boundary areas in the Transcarpathia. Another point of view was brought by the authors who emphasized the importance of churches and religious aspects for identity formation in Belarus and Ukraine.

After a brisk discussion, the conference was concluded by **Gilles Rouet** of the University of Reims-Champagne-Ardenne and Matej Bel University, who summed up the results of the both conference days; expressed his sincere gratitude to the participants, guests, observers and organizers for their contributions; wished the researchers success in their future career and invited all of the participants to continue in the successful cooperation in the events to come. The conference proceedings of the selected papers will be summarised in the coming months in France and/or in Slovakia.