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## Bulgarian Identity In the European Cultural and Educational Sphere

Ass.prof. dr Liliana Todorova  
SWU - Blagoevgrad

We are on the threshold of the common European home. Sooner or later we will become citizens of Europe with all the rights and obligations accompanying that. What unique thing will we bring with us when we join the family of the "multinational country?" Will our nation preserve its national culture in the general stream of global standards and values?

One of the basic tasks of the science of pedagogy is to lay emphasis on the general directions and means of forming and preserving the Bulgarian national identity. It is necessary for our graduates and descendants to know their origin and language, to acquire and carry through time our culture, which we can be proud of and which distinguishes us as a nation.

Today the notion *identity* is widely used in ethnology, social psychology, and cultural and social anthropology. In its most general interpretation it means one's awareness of their belonging to a certain group. That gives one the right to find their own place in the social and cultural environment and to adapt to the surrounding reality.

In social sciences philosophers, sociologists, social psychologists and others examine the issue of identity quite intensively. Pedagogues are not actively engaged in research on this topical phenomenon. And yet they should be - while the rest of the scientists analyze and clear up the problem, it is the pedagogues who are able to develop the content, the means and methods, by which, theoretically well grounded, young people's identity to be built up.

In general, identity is defined as ethnical, national and cultural. The **ethnical** one is connected with people's belonging to a collective proper name, with the myth of their common ancestors, with shared historical memory, with their common culture and with the feeling of solidarity. The link here is the common origin that forms the core of this identity.

**The national** identity is based on common historical territory; common myths and historical memory, common culture, common legal rights and responsibilities of all members of society, common economics and territorial mobility, etc.

The **cultural** identity includes elements from the ethnical and the national one plus co-experience, willingness for cooperation and mutual aid, etc. The central component is *co-experience-of-the-otherness*.<sup>i</sup>

The **ethnical** identity is first of all connected with the historical past, the national - with present times, and the cultural one is directed to the future,

**This is the most important educational task today - on the basis of the present and yet without forgetting our past, to build our relations with the world upon the cultural, ethnical, and national differences between nations which inhabit and will inhabit the common cultural sphere in a 'country' like the European Union.**

Each person belongs to a certain ethnical group even if they do not realize that. The newborn child can not choose its nationality. When it is born in a certain ethnical environment, it develops according to the predispositions and traditions of its surroundings. This is called **enculturation** - when the child unconsciously adopts the behavior patterns of the surrounding culture. The ethnical self-awareness is formed easily when both parents belong to a certain ethnical group and the life of the child passes in this group only. Naturally the growing person identifies himself with his ethnical group as far as limitation is a basic mechanism for building up the ethnical predispositions and stereotypes. Thus, in everyday life one acquires the language, culture, traditions, the social and ethnical standards of the ethnical environment, and the habits needed for communication with other nations and cultures.

*A certain person's belonging to a certain ethnical group has to do with his necessity of being safe and having sense of solidarity with the other members of that group. Here each person is among friends and that gives rise to a special kind of experience, memories, positive emotions, pride.*

The content of the **ethnical identity** is based on knowledge, images, notions, shared to a certain degree by the members of a certain ethnical group: the notions of birthplace, historical memory, common language, values and standards, religion, national traits, the myth of the common ancestors, the folklore. A great part of this knowledge is a result of a common history, culture, and traditions- It is influenced by opinions, convictions, beliefs, and ideas, which are preserved mostly in myths, legends, in the casual forms of thinking and behaving. The central place in this intellectual and emotional mixture is taken by the image of one's own ethnical group and by the ones of the other groups- All this knowledge unites the members of a certain ethnical group and forms the basis for its distinction from other groups?<sup>ii</sup>

Identity can be individual and group. The **individual identity** is a combination of one's knowledge and notions of their place and role as a member of the social or ethnical group, of their peculiarities and personal qualities. *The group identity* is one's need by all means to feel themselves as a part of the whole, a part of "we". Many people enter such groups where they expect to feel comfortable, safe, among friends, expect to receive a confirmation that they do belong to the respective community, to be there "at home". That is not always possible. But people's ambition to such a union always exists.

In the globalizing European environment a new phenomenon occurs -multiculturalism. It gives the contemporary man the opportunity to make his own choice - which cultural community to join. This is how the 'poly-cultural' person forms, i.e. a person who combines the elements of different cultures in his own image. But it is possible for him to choose the cosmopolitanism and to part from his roots and national belonging.

One of the psychological reasons for Intensification of the significance of ethnical identity today is the search for reference points and stability in the full of information and unstable world.

On the other hand the intensification of the interethnic contacts is considered to be a consolidating reason - not only of the direct interethnic

contacts (work migration, the millions of emigrants and refugees, tourism) but also the indirect one (through modern means of mass communication). The repeating contacts 'update' the ethnical identity since comparison is the only way through which "the national" could be accepted as something special and distinctive.

**Today more and more social factors cause inevitable changes in the whole organization of the scholarly educational work with growing-up generation.** In general this requires renovation, enrichment of the content of education according to the realities, to the differences in the ethnical culture and originality, and to the direction of forming of an ethnical and cultural tolerance, of "co-experience of the otherness".

The educational initiatives should be guided by the common aim *for brining the representatives of different ethnical groups together by means of the universal and national values.* Yet one should not underestimate the impressive power of people's faith as an identifying factor under conditions of foreign political and religious oppression - for instance faith had a great role in the struggle of our people for church and national independence. The participation of the whole population in this sacred work united the Bulgarian people in the name of the national ideal and defined them as a united nation which gained its own independent church, its own government, and flowering of education and culture<sup>iii</sup>

**Bulgarian pedagogy and historical practice<sup>iv</sup>** have used many effective methods, means and forms of preservation of our identity having carried it through the hard times of Ottoman Yoke in spite of the repeated attempts for assimilation and nihilism. This is connected mainly with the Christian values, with national customs, traditions, and rituals, with people's love for their country and language, with all this that distinguishes one from people of different faith and from aggressors and gives one the opportunity to identify himself as a part of this national community.

In response to the keen interest in national specificity, in the historical fate and the ways Bulgarian culture has gone through, T. Zhechev states persuasively: "Only in the cosmopolitan atmosphere of Istanbul one could feel with such a bright and unique power what really the homeland is, the soil, the family, the tribe, the roots."<sup>v</sup>

Our task is to create modern, new, civil and humane society in which the leadership is taken by the cultural, religious and ethnical tolerance, the respect to the traditions of "the other", and the protection of the basic values of society.

**Here are some ideas for the basic reference points hi the content of education** of contemporary young people in the context of our contribution to European culture.

Regarding the **national identity** - the education should be directed to acquiring and retaining the most precious things which national memory has preserved through the centuries of historical past: about the heroism of the fighters for freedom and independence, about one's right to profess their own religion, about the traditions and legends, about the folklore - all that which is the 'living connection' between the past generations and the ones that are to come. It

is the intransigent in Bulgarian educational ideal that should be carefully chosen and emphasized on - as a content of Bulgarian national identity and its preservation and implication in the entire educational process.

It is necessary to lay emphasis on:

- *Our typical family values* that have gone all the way from the patriarchal family and its manners and customs to its contemporary aspect and the new type of relations between the generations - attentiveness, concern, equality, right for freedom of speech both by children and adults, equality of husbands and wives, love and affection between the members of this social group which is the basic cell of society;

- *Our typical traditions* (secular and religious) connected with the celebration of national holidays, with Bulgarians' attitude towards faith - which is predominantly connected with work, with harvest, with gaining prosperity by working hard;

- *Our typical attitude towards education.* There is no other nation so deeply devoted to education and culture, as Bulgarians are. That's why until recently we were the only ones who celebrated May 24<sup>th</sup> as a holiday of education and we had one of the best effective modern educational systems;

- **Bulgarian educational tradition** that created so capable and highly responsible generations who kept the Bulgarian through all obstacles and dangers of foreign interference;

- The contemporary achievements of Bulgarian culture in Europe and the rest of the world gives us cause for being proud and self-confident - music, art, science, inventions, sport, our unique nature with the richness and charm of forests, valleys, lakes, the sea, varied flora and fauna, the multitude of natural reserves;

- Our contribution to the world is also the **Bulgarian ethnical model**, which did not allow bloodshed and a trenchant opposition between the native population and the national minorities and this was also based on the century-old traditions for welfare and mutual aid among the citizens with different ethnical roots;

- We are proud of our young people who are the **intellectual wealth** of Bulgaria. They amaze the world in international competitions - in mathematics, computer science, programming, dancing, singing, etc. They reach European and world heights in many spheres of modern civilization in cooperation and rivalry with other nations.

Besides, in the process of education it is very important to overcome a number of negative aspects, which even more tangibly will prevent us from achieving high educational aims:

- The syndrome of low self-confidence. It has appeared during the period of foreign domination and if we don't overcome it we could hardly feel as equal members of the European community. There are various ways of erasing it from the national consciousness and for proving its groundlessness.

- Another negative feature is our nihilism towards the perspectives for prosperity in the sphere of economics, culture, for entering the European 'home' on equal terms. Having in mind our difficult everyday life, prerequisites for such predispositions really exist. They could also Income steady and be transferred

through generations like the positive national values. If we continue to neglect the danger of expansion of this problem, we will fall deeper into cosmopolitanism. One of the most difficult tasks of the science of pedagogy is to develop adequate methods and means, to apply educational patterns, which can divert our consciousness from such views or convictions.

Besides, today education faces new tasks, a new type of values, which are to be acquired and preserved through generations. The most topical among them are *the European values* - preservation of life, rights and freedom, equality and non-discrimination, justice and solidarity, social responsibility.

There are attempts for introducing Euro-integration in the curriculum for compulsory preparation in high schools. The European tendencies in this field are being generalized and analyzed. We are working on the European Union's initiative "Europe in School" and the project "Education for Democratic Citizenship".

It is necessary to lay emphasis also on the educational possibilities of the extra curricular and out-of-school activities. Nowadays students are being more and more fascinated by computer technologies and use Internet as educational and cultural environment. These means of communication give us many perspectives to attract our young people with the values of the modern globalizing world and make them participate more actively in many international projects via e-mail or Internet. Our young people can be stimulated to participate in international initiatives, solve ecological and other universal problems, to participate in competitions and contests, to communicate with [their] peers all over the world.

Recently in the European cultural and educational sphere an international programme about heritage is being organized. Even a special branch of pedagogy - heritage pedagogy - is being developed. European months of the cultural and national heritage are held in our country too. The participants are free to choose various forms and means to help for the achievement of the basic goal - entering the European cultural sphere, with our own national and ethnical identity, with the heritage, entrusted to us by our ancestors in order to preserve it for our children and in that way to enrich the European and universal cultural values. The goals, content, means and methods of this new area of pedagogic knowledge are priority mainly to the science of education. The theory of education is responsible for developing the heritage pedagogy, to help it take its proper place in the family of pedagogic sciences and to cooperate for our joining the Pan-European family on the basis of our national distinctive features and our uniqueness because we have also given something to the world.

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<sup>v</sup> Жечев, Т. Българският Великден или страстите български. Пловдив, 1985, с. 10