

Cultural vs. Linguistic Bonds: Diversity – but Which Unity?



Bruno Bizeul¹

“As one cannot fall in love because of a growth rate or a great market,” said Mr. Jacques Delors, former European Commission Chairman, in a speech in Lille in 2002, “we must, thanks to clear language based on limited objectives, create and reinforce (our) willingness to live together.”

The title of this speech was *Our Ideal and our Priority: to Unify Europe*. For him, three main goals had to be reached:

- Render Europe a space of peace and of security as we have managed since the creation of European institutions;
- Build a framework for fair and sustainable development;
- Provide for enriched expression of our diversities.

Jacques Delors, who used the phrase *ciment émotionnel* (emotional bond) in his “Memoires” (2004), also compared intra-European relations with a wedding.

I will not reach that point, because for new generations, a wedding can no longer be decided by the previous generation. I will rather try to compare our relations to two legal notions, *jus fraternitatis*, a Latin expression meaning “friendship right,” and *affectio societatis*, another Latin notion meaning a will to associate.

It is obvious that to reach all the goals that M. Delors has pointed out is a difficult task, because many real differences remain between our cultures: language, humour, food, commercials, and literature, among others. And it is also a given that friendship cannot be imposed.

But *jus fraternitatis*,” and *affectio societatis* are interesting because they can give us some clues to the way we are able to exchange, by both respecting our diversities and becoming stronger together.

¹ Dr. iur. Bruno Bizeul war Direktor der EPSCI, Groupe ESSEC, Cergy-Pontoise

From a legal point of view *affectio societatis* is required of all members involved in starting up a corporation in France. It has several definitions:

- a common active, willingness with equality between partners and a mutual interest;
- a union of willingness with convergence of interests.

Jus fraternatis goes further. Initially from the concept associated with a consortium between brothers, it also implied equality amongst all parties taking part in an operation.

Both of these notions encompass shared components:

- Real willingness to exchange,
- Common interests,
- Active projects carried out jointly,
- Equality between partners.

1. Real Willingness to Exchange and Common Interests

One of the major concerns of our current path in European construction is that it seems too complex for many. If our own students and citizens do not fathom the reasons why we must build Europe together, we will not be able to make any significant progress. This means that “ordinary” European citizens will not get involved in the process.

We, as professors and learning institutions, but also social organizations as well as the media, have to make serious effort to explain where the interests of building Europe together lie.

This has to be done not only from social, institutional and economic points of view, but also from personal and human points of view, taking in:

- The discovery of others’ differences and, through these diversities, to gain awareness of one’s own particularities, strengths and weaknesses better;
- The wealth of others countries cultures and the importance of exchanges on that point; many examples can be given on that point :

- In literature, how to appreciate Goethe without having any idea about Hugo, Shakeaspeare, Cervantes or Dante ?
- The same can be said about Max Webber and Claude Levi Strauss in sociology or ethnology, about Rousseau, Descartes, Kant or Hegel in philosophy, De Vinci, Renoir and Van Gogh in painting, Mozart and Berlioz in music...
- The authors and artists often have taken into account what the others have written, painted or thought to build their own point of views or creations
- In history, Fernand Braudel’s approach, of a long term based analysis might be a good approach
- The importance of respecting the differences between these cultures : to create a common space, to agree on common values does not mean to forget the particularities of others countries and cultures.

Many of the fears or reasons people from different countries do not understand each other and misrepresent reality (i.e., “The French are always late.”) are linked to the fact they do not know the others’ cultures and particularities.

2. Active Projects Carried Out Jointly

Some existing common cultural projects, such as Arte, Erasmus and the Deutsch-Französische Hochschule (Université Franco-Allemande) can be highlighted as successes in joint projects having gone from the drawing board to actual viable European institutions.

Nevertheless, we have to go further and earlier on in building common platforms, activities, forums, team building projects, and even weekends or common sports tournaments (e.g. : ESSEC *Tournoi des 5 Ballons*, a tournament involving students with 1000 participants from different countries).

The important aspect is not necessarily the scale of common operations, but how often they happen. To quote Aristotle: “Nothing is more characteristic of friendship than common life.”

3. Equality Between Partners

One of the main difficulties often encountered when exchanging in an intercultural environment might be the lack of trust. This is often linked to a feeling of lack of equality between partners.

This equality has to be respected by all the partners, and the activities realized must consider this element as one of the main aspects.

Intercultural management, business ethics, win/win operations inevitably imply a profound sense of respect for equality and tolerance. Power and profit, as seen in the current worldwide situation, cannot be the only driving forces we offer our students and the European new generations for the future. The common values we can choose to defend together must take it into account.