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Perseverance of eurowhiteness. Review

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Europe and its particular institutional expression, namely the European Union, have once again come to the fore. This has happened after various interpretations of European Union, which has long been the subject of even university studies. Of course, increasingly intensive and noticeable, interdisciplinary European studies have significantly contributed to profiling the dynamics of Europe in recent decades. However, the eruption of the crisis (2007/2008), the pandemic and especially the Russian-Ukrainian war, gave a new impetus to the reflection of Europe, which, due to its indeterminacy, obviously represents an inexhaustible hermeneutic subject.

The shaken stability of Europe, fierce competition between the USA and China attitude regarding hegemony, the weakening of Germany as a flawless economic machine that

simultaneously determines the framework of European foreign policy, the possibilities and scope of green transformation (that Europe has high ambitions for) in a constellation where even the Chinese have started with indigenous changes and when the post-Trump, Biden USA also declared its own Green New Deal, intensified technological competition in the field of AI, and military Keynesianism with burning interest in the affirmation of the arms industry – these are the elements in short which characterize the situation in which Europe should reconstitute itself.

Inferiority of the European Union, uncertainty regarding the formulation and presentation of its strategic interests in a period marked by transitoryness, discomfort in the constellation when the elements of security policy are rapidly changing, provoke attempts to re-understand Europe. Undoubtedly, the fluidity of modernity is manifested in the fact that we are always in a state of transition, but it cannot be denied that the current situation is fraught with tendencies that penetrate deeper into the structural determinations of society than earlier crisis situations.

We have heard various criticisms of both Europe and its self-idealization that traditionally belongs to it (Kundnani is not a pioneer but a successor). And this, of course, should not be considered as extraordinary: the fact that the actors of world politics ideologize their performance, that there is, for example, the self-ideologization of the messianic-liberal USA and its corporatist elites is not something new. Just as it is no surprise that ideology functions in the form of self-rationalization, that it creates a series of blind spots and tacit assumptions regarding the one who practices the ideology in question. Even the way European Union perceives itself, its practice of „soft” power, is not a form of some developed uniqueness. In this way, she just joins the other actors on the world scene where everyone perceives themselves as the bearer of something special/unique. No actor thinks that he implements an ideological matrix that he himself practices a certain ideology, and with that he tries to present answers to the questions of particularity and universality.

Therefore, the only question is the *modus* of self-idealization of Europe led by the European Union, that is, its institutional apparatus. And *Eurowhiteness*...should be considered within this context. It is written by a man whose father is Indian and whose mother is Dutch: of course, identity (regardless of the type) is not an a priori guarantee of acumen, but at the same time it is an opportunity to see relevant aspects. Kundnani has to accept some already expressed criticisms towards Europe, but he processes them giving us an original and robust approach to European problems. There are also some moments of the genesis of the EU in the book (this is inevitable), but the point is still in a conceptual covering, that is, a critical articulation of European self-understanding.

The European project manifests the ambitions of consistent anti-particularism. That is, cosmopolitanism and intentional anti-nationalism belong to the EU's self-definition. The characteristics that describe it are „diversity, inclusion and openness”. The author of this book, however, shows that there is a „Eurocentric fallacy”, that is, the EU realizes a typical ideological gesture: despite its particularity, established borders, and „closedness” projects itself as „debordered”, that is, it represents its „normative power” as a genuine representative of universality. The criticism of the cosmopolitan discourse of Jürgen Habermas and Ulrich Beck (and others) develops in the sense that the EU is constantly sliding into a dichotomization in which the EU appears as the most consistent institutional form, that is, as a pattern of anti-nationalism.

Kundnani believes that the EU should not be seen as the finalization of anti-nationalist normativity, or as a teleology of anti-nationalism, but as an expression of regional logic or a

particularistic discourse. The EU, as regionalism, is not on the opposite side of the logic of the creation of nationalism, but develops just as the dynamics of the nationalism. Hannah Arendt is one of the important witnesses of this. However, the ongoing dialectic of inclusiveness and „exclusivity” proves this: the expansion of EU aims at expanding inclusiveness, but at the same time, the EU remains a proponent of exclusivity in relation to the „outside” world. Kundnani’s provocative idea, which he draws both implicitly and explicitly through the argumentation, is that „far right tropes” are hidden behind European normativism. One of Kundnani’s examples is that during covid-19, the EU criticized France and Germany, which implemented intra-European restrictions against the country that was severely affected by the pandemic, but it enthroned restrictive measures against certain *non*-European countries. Furthermore, Germany as the EU Presidency (2020) promoted almost the same slogan as the often criticized and hated Donald Trump: „Making Europe strong again together”.

Following this, the author analyzes the well-known distinction between ethnic and civil nationalism by Hans Kohn, although it is quite clear to him that the normative hierarchization between these forms of nationalism is inadequate. His idea is that the same distinction *ad analogiam* can be applied in relation to regionalism. Accordingly, one can talk about civil and cultural (European) regionalism taking into account the fact that even here possible hierarchization should be eliminated and the genesis and institutional infrastructure of the EU should be observed as a dynamic synthesis between the elements of ethnic/cultural and civil regionalism. Of course, EU ideology considers only the civilian dimensions of its own model, but the reality is much more complex. Finally, our vision is not sharpened even if the EU is understood as an expression of some imaginary European „destiny”; this term belonging to the pre-modern repertoire of terms, systematically deforms the processes of identity development of Europe.

The described regionalism as a combination of ethnic/cultural and civil ingredients can speak much better about the formation of identity in Europe, because the standard forms for Kundnani are reductive and are based on „linearity”. In fact, in accordance with the fact that European regionalism is built analogously to nationalism, the identity of Europe can also be understood on the basis of differentiation from others: of course, here it is only evident that self-identity is impossible without Others. However, the idealistic understanding of „European universalism” (Wallerstein) hides this moment, which is otherwise standard in the analysis of identity.

Furthermore, the analogical usage of the term civil/ethnoregionalism allows the author to deal with too quickly derived dualities such as „liberalism and illiberalism” or „globalism and nationalism”. The deconstructive tone hits particularly the frequently used phrase, namely „national populism”, which was commonly used as a universal negative assessment, an a priori derived condemnation of deviance – despite the deep contradiction of that term and the certain emptiness that determines it.

Kundnani is particularly interested to explain the discourse of the far right in Europe –with an indication that, due to the deficit, the canonized European discourse does not at all understand how the logic of the same orientation develops. Obviously, he thinks that recognizing the discourse of the far right is not only a particular problem, but hits the very essence of the EU’s self-ideologization. And the main point of the book is that the European project has made an transformation in the last decade („pro-Europeans” are especially apostrophized here; Kundnani consistently puts the term in question in quotation marks, emphasizing that it is a standardized

trope) and, under the influence of various tendencies, has reached the situation of „defensive civilizationism”. The author of this book attributes a significant role to the concept of „civilization” (we often remember the infamous distinction between civilization and culture), it appears in different contexts in the text („*mission civilisatrice*”, e.g. what characterizes the European mythical self-interpretation).

Kundnani turns to another dimension to prove the mentioned viewpoint, namely, the dimension of memory in the genesis of Europe with its geographical and Christian elements. More precisely, Kundnani’s effort to problematize the past of Europe in the perspective of that moment that cannot be avoided is revealed here as it flows into the present, namely, in the perspective of race. Finally, we should not forget that the very name of this book refers to race.

The project of Europe is also a project of „memory”, that is, the creation of a community based on the past. In other words, the problem of Europe’s relationship with its past emerges here, which is important for the consideration of its identity. Europe experienced two world wars on its soil in the 20th century, and many designers of Europe define the post-war situation as the beginning. However, European frameworks existed before, and they can be seen as a movement from religious to racial constellations. That is, European self-definition is imbued with elements of racial concept and its „whiteness” strategy, and it is an organic part of European self-differentiation.

Kundnani has to argue with „Pro-Europeans” who reject the importance of race for today’s self-interpretation of Europe and refer to the original Enlightenment literature of Kant and others, which was consistently universalist in intent. In other words, he is receptive to all those attitudes that warn that the Enlightenment has not thrown off the deposits of racial discourse, that colonialization is not just another unfortunate sequence in the history of Europe. Accordingly, he widely receives earlier criticisms (Frantz Fanon, etc.) against „European universalism”, which emphasize what the already mentioned Immanuel Wallerstein emphasized, namely, that it is the medium of „rhetoric of power”.

The aftermath of World War II marked a departure from the past, characterized by dark dimensions. It began with a vision aligned with Kant’s universal/eternal peace: by learning lessons from two world wars, and stabilizing relations among key states such as Germany and France, the war was considered to be victorious, at least on European soil. Europe has learned its lesson although the past few decades show disruptions in this attitude, for example, the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, or the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine. However, post-war Europe, with its acquired catharsis, externalized wars: it was not thought that war would disappear as a whole, but that it would be relocated to those fields of the world that had not yet accepted the constitutive aspects of European „normativism”.

Kundnani rejects the viewpoints that, according to the already recognized binary logic, drew a strong demarcation line between the emerging EU and colonialism. On the contrary, the Europe in question, during the genesis of the EU, exhibited tendencies reminiscent of colonialism. We should not indeed forget that post-war Europe (or its key countries) wants to keep colonialist matrices and develop political autonomy, the aforementioned civilizing mission characterized by mentorship and paternalism. In many of today’s interpretations, the concept of „Euroafrica” is often overlooked, as if it never existed: Kundnani has the right to remind us of this and illustrates the interweaving of the original European project in the continuation of colonialism using different means. The claim that

the prospect of the continuity of colonialism played a vital motivational role in European integration is not exaggerated at all. The sublimity of the EU, with its proclaimed anti-nationalism extending beyond the 'pathological' dimensions of nationalism, explains at least one of these underlying motives.

Kundani is, therefore, right in highlighting the 'colonial origins' of the EU; even then he diverges from Alan Millward's well-known perspective that the EU was formed to save deteriorating nation-states, and he presents the thesis that the birth of the EU is a sign of the renewal of European „imperialism". Here we must return to the phenomenon of Europe as a „civilizational" project. While Kundnani does not search through the semantics of this term, scholars in the social sciences starting from Max Scheler to Norbert Elias, have extensively explored it. Civilization, which is much more than a mere term, is also a carrier of differentiation; through it, Europe not only establishes itself but distinguishes itself from others ('othering'). However, it is most important for the author of the book to connect only those meanings that explain the persistence of the EU on civilizational determinism.

We start here with the promotion of Europe as a Christian civilizational project; Winston Churchill said it, moreover, declared it immediately after the war. The Christian Democrats play an important role in promoting the modernization of Christianity as an authentic post-fascist orientation. Within the European framework, the concept of social market economy and welfare state is introduced (remember the different determinations that emphasized the uniqueness of Europe compared to the USA precisely on the basis of this aspect) with the aim of mitigating class conflicts in the then Fordist capitalism – although Kundnani stresses that the same concept was initially shaped in national states, the EU only adopted the concepts in question only in its rhetoric. Attributing the welfare state to European instances leads us astray.

Following the above-mentioned distinctions, if we could say that the EU represented itself as „civil regionalism" (although even this characterization is a critical expression; we could even talk about civil universalism), then the development of the EU can be observed as continuous hybridity between ethnic and civil regionalism. The balance is impossible to achieve. Kundnani claims that civil regionalism is the intention of the Europeans, yet it has always been framed in the context of such elements when the 'civility' in question could not be consistently performed. The lack of success in North African countries' attempts to join the EU is no coincidence; The EU maintained European particularity despite advocating for civil universalism.

Notably, Kundnani finds it appropriate to highlight the difference between the EU and Europe at one point. In the post-war context, Europe defined itself in opposition to war, with the memory of the war serving as an integrative factor. However, as the probability of peaceful relations between Germany and France increased, the motive in question weakened, and instead 'Europe' was more emphasized than the 'EU'. This important nuance, i.e. differentiating the significance of Europe versus the EU reveals much about the self-interpretation of European actors.

Regarding the significance of memory, Kundnani highlights the growing importance of attitudes towards the Holocaust in the 1960s. The integration of this profiled memory was, of course, influenced by the West German performance. Nevertheless, Kundnani argues that the memory of the catastrophic events of the Holocaust expanded even beyond the framework of European interpretations. In this regard, he accepts the position that the memory of the industrialized extermination of the Jews is actually as much a constituent element of the constitutional

structure of Europe as its civilizing mission. The Holocaust serves as an incentive for moral reflexivity and forms the foundation of the European anti-war project, which should civilize not only Europe but the entire world.

However, Kundnani notes that the same memory is linked with a certain selection regarding the past – but the concept of Europe as a 'community of memory' involves the suppression of its colonial history. More precisely, the Holocaust as a channel for memory is represented as a unique sequence of history, and the connection between certain aspects of modernity, colonialism and the Holocaust is lost – Hannah Arendt again emerged as a key witness. Consequently, polemics is opened here again with 'Pro-Europeans' attempting to widen the gap between the European project and racism, and claiming that a strengthened Europe embodies anti-racism. European officials, in their historical reflections, emphasize intra-European atrocities, but subconsciously relegate the externalization of European violence. As Kundnani states: the European project has entered a state of „imperial amnesia”.

Kundnani also discovers other traces of unrecognized European particularity. What is the background of this is the belief that the European project is not just a finalization of peace, grounded only in the recollection of horrors of war, instead, it is more of an institutional realization of an imagined 'civilizing mission' that seeks to influence and convert the world. This civilizational intention is also manifested during the so-called expansion phase, particularly during the creation of a single market where search engine elements operate *in potentia* without any restrictions.

This is where Kundnani's narrative on the neoliberalization of Europe unfolds. His important observation is that the market-driven modeling of Europe coincided with the emphasis on the concept of 'value' which has the function of balancing the nihilistic aspects of the market and emphasizing the qualitative-substantive determination of Europe. Kundnani's reflections on the inevitable conflict between post-authoritative European engagement and civilizational intentions, as well as his statement that neoliberalization, perhaps carried out with the intention of framing it with authentic 'value' patterns, is linked with an excess of technocratism and a lack of democracy, are not new. However, they complement the argumentation well. In addition, neoliberalization suppressed the previously mentioned engagement concerning the social market economy, leaving it in only rudimentary forms.

This provides perspective regarding the accession of Central and Eastern European countries to which Kundnani focuses his attention in his analysis concerning the EU's civilization expansion. Notably, the interplay between openness and closedness is evident here again: the EU opened up to the East, complying with its civilizational goals, but remained closed to the South. The EU has monopolized the interpretation of Europe by integrating the mentioned countries (in other words, the states of the former real-socialist bloc), emphasizing that it transcends geographical constraints, implying that the era of geopolitics that summarizes numerous dark moments of territorial ambitions and unbridled power ambitions, belonged to the past. In contrast, Kundnani identifies a „geopoliticized” Europe¹ that still believes to be the privileged bearer of soft universalism but adheres to the geopolitical logic of competition and rivalry. The inhabitants of the former real-socialist countries with the Soviet stamp were led to believe that they had returned to the homeland of Europe, but as the above-mentioned shows, they found

¹ Hans Kundnani, Europe's Geopolitical Confusion, <https://ip-quarterly.com/en/europes-geopolitical-confusion>.

themselves in an ambiguous framework and must ideologize in order to suppress elements conflicting with its normative purity. Notably, unlike Westerners, these inhabitants of Central and Eastern Europe have never had a colonialist past, which causes a series of misunderstandings. This does not sterilize their past: after all, they have also had civilizational fantasies like their Western counterparts: it only emphasizes the historical divergences that were often overlooked.

The exclusivity is that the notion 'Eurowhiteness' (let's not forget that it is a term introduced by József Böröcz) employed in the definition of institutionalized Europe does not deny that there are moments of inclusiveness in its fabric (Kundnani follows the migration of foreign workers within and outside Europe, examining how the same processes changed the frameworks), but emphasizes the background fact that has been overshadowed by ideological practices. The missionary spirit, evident in the implementation of the norms of civilization and the epoch-making intention of 'civilizing international politics' tends to obscure the view concerning opportunism and the lack of commonality in the field of European foreign policy.

Even the EU, viewing the integration of respective countries as an expression of extraordinary success, thought that this was a paradigm with the potential to be expanded. Kundnani observes the growing significance of the concept of civilization in the European discourse in the second decade of the 21st century. He identifies this period as the emergence of a 'defensive Europe', which becomes insecure due to intensified migration processes and caught in the stark division between 'pro-European' centrism and 'eurosceptical populism'. In addition, the already disrupted balance between ethnic/cultural and civil regionalism was further affected and the pendulum shifted towards the importance of ethnic elements. Kundnani critically asserts that whiteness is playing an increasingly significant role in redesigning the European project – to be clear, he does not attribute this to the alleged 'populist aspirations' promoting an anti-European *Stimmung*. In essence: Kundnani aims to highlight the convergence between Angela Merkel and Viktor Orbán rather than their divergence.

A significant aspect is that Europe maintains civilizational ambitions but is gradually losing confidence in presenting itself as a 'model'. According to Kundnani, it slips into the position of a 'competitor', which is less than a 'model'. Accordingly, various political and economic events in Europe, including the war in Ukraine, are examined and lead us to the present day. This way, he has only strengthened the image of a geopoliticized Europe that has its own civilization reservoir which is being dried up as a paradigm.

Kundnani dedicates a specific section to Brexit, which is also a personal challenge for him. In fact, Brexit serves as a case study testing the conceptual statements presented so far. This section also extends the criticism of 'centrist post-Europeans'. There have been different interpretations of Brexit. Although Kundnani has advocated for the UK to remain in the EU, he presents Brexit as an 'opportunity' and 'possibility' emerging from the results of the referendum. He accepts the conclusion (Paul Gilroy's) regarding the failure of the UK to process the loss of its empire and contends that the EU membership has only intensified the consequences of avoiding this acknowledged loss. Therefore, his argument suggests that the post-Brexit scenario could help the UK to escape the inherited Eurocentrism.

Kundnani's relevant book on the effects of demystification contains a variety of interpretive approaches featuring both polemics and positive receptions from different authors. It is a book that leads to many directions offering provocative perspectives on European self-interpretation.

The criticism of such non-reflexive concepts as „national populism” and critical articulation of the ideological foundations of the conceptual framework effectively clear the analytical ground for understanding the EU.

I can notice that the description of neoliberalization, along with some contextual descriptions, somewhat lacks depth in addressing the determinants of capitalism in Europe. I do not dispute that these descriptions are authoritative; I even believe that without them the argumentation of the book would be insufficient. However, the persistence of colonialism, 'neoliberal cosmopolitanism' or the redefinition of welfare, and the 2007/2008 crisis require an explanation that goes into the dynamics of capitalism. It would be interesting to explore how diverse ideological trends such as competitive ordoliberalism and French dirigism contributed to the perpetuation of Eurowhiteness.

This, however, does not question the importance of the book in enhancing European self-understanding.