

1 • Introduction

Dominique Schnapper and Will Kymlicka have raised two issues that are both of theoretical and of political importance. The first issue concerns the relationship between linguistic pluralism and the future of democracy. The second issue concerns the relationship between multiculturalism policies and the future of the Welfare State.

I would like to approach these issues by exploring the implications of the two papers for a topic that has not yet been investigated here: that of the future of the European Union. Indeed, most of the time these two questions of multiculturalism inside the borders of the nation-state, on the one hand, and of multinationalism at the European scale, on the other, are interlinked. They are connected since the arguments used to deny the possibility of both a European democracy and an ambitious European social policy are often the same as those used to contest multiculturalism policies inside the borders of the nation-states. This is particularly obvious in France, a country in which the most fervent opponents to multiculturalism policies are also the most fervent opponents to the European integration process.

The point I would like to make is precisely that it shouldn't be so since these two questions are very different, both theoretically and practically.

2 • Linguistic pluralism and democracy

Regarding the relationship between linguistic pluralism and democracy, Dominique Schnapper has raised a question that is too often neglected by European political scientists. While much has been

Comments on Schnapper and Banting & Kymlicka

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written to celebrate the “cultural diversity” of the European Union, the relationship between language and democracy has not been worked out properly by the advocates of a “post-national model”.

Dominique Schnapper’s paper has the merit of reminding us that linguistic unity within national boundaries was one of the imperatives of modern nation-state building process since it facilitated communication between people and elites, the acquisition of skills essential for social mobility and the diffusion of a homogeneous public culture. Above all, Dominique Schnapper’s paper recalls us that a common language is not only a means for economic development and human mobility. It is also a means for the democratic process. This is the reason why the issue of “language” cannot be relegated to the private sphere, as religion has. A common language should not be reduced either to a purely instrumental or to a purely ethnic dimension. A common language also has a civic aspect, since it is a necessary condition for a deliberative democracy. Indeed, if political decisions are going to be made in a genuinely democratic way — i.e. through public discussion in which all sections of the society have their voice heard — one crucial requirement is the existence of a common language. No one can doubt that compromises and deliberations have little chance of taking place among people who do not understand each other.

This is precisely the reason why public recognition of several languages inside a given polity could, according to Dominique Schnapper, threaten democratic life itself. History has shown that very few countries have succeeded in dissociating cultural loyalty from political loyalty. Dominique Schnapper thus remains pessimistic about the possibility of combining the plurality of cultures and languages in a common public sphere with the minimum political unity necessary for a genuine democracy.

However, we should be careful to avoid a misunderstanding regarding the implications of linguistic pluralism. More precisely, I think that Dominique Schnapper’s paper raises, though implicitly, two different questions which should be clearly distinguished from each other.

- The first question concerns the hypothesis of a public recognition of the regional languages *inside* the borders of the existing nation-states. A recognition that could threaten the “republican” (in the French-speaking world) or the “liberal” (in the English-speaking world) conception of citizenship.
- The second question is that of the official recognition of all the national languages in the European Union. This latter type of linguistic pluralism — i. e. the continuing existence of lan-

guage divisions among the peoples of Europe — could, still according to Dominique Schnapper, threaten the possibility of establishing a genuine democracy at the European scale. Although negotiations inside the European institutions are increasingly carried out in English, these debates will remain opaque to a vast majority of citizens. Consequently, Schnapper emphasizes, that only a minority of people will consider themselves “citizens of Europe”. Hence a democratic deficit for the European Union.

I believe that these two types of linguistic pluralism are too often conflated. They have both different causes and different implications. Indeed, there is no connection between them. What I would like to argue is that Dominique Schnapper’s second proposition — i.e. a European democracy is difficult to conceive because there is no European common language — cannot be inferred from the first proposition — i.e. the public recognition of several languages inside the national states could threaten democratic life.

More precisely, I fully agree with Dominique Schnapper that a democratic society is characterised by a tension between the rational, formal and abstract principles of citizenship and the communitarian and ethnic reality of civil society. Therefore, I do not deny that a common official language has played, and should continue to play, a key role in fostering the democratic values.

However, while I am prepared to admit that the first type of linguistic pluralism (inside the borders of the nation-state) could indeed threaten democratic life, I don’t think that linguistic pluralism is a problem for the European Union.

Why? Simply because the European Union is not a nation and has no vocation of becoming one. Indeed, one should not confuse the nation-building process which took place in the XIXth century — and which was characterised, as Dominique Schnapper has recalled us, by the imposition of a common language and the “invention of traditions” (Hobsbawn, 1997) — with what is taking place at the European level.

Far from being a federal state, the European Union should be viewed as a federation of democratic states. According to this latter perspective, the Union has no vocation to replace the national bonds and loyalties and democratic life should continue to take place primarily at the state level. Alexis de Tocqueville considered this situation — in which the local state or the nation remains the primary focus of political identity and allegiance — as the fate of a true federalism — one founded on the association and not on the subordination of the different states.

Hence a frequent misunderstanding regarding the implications of linguistic pluralism for the European Union. If one considers the European Union as a federal state or as a nation-state writ large, there is no doubt that the language divisions among the peoples of Europe have to be overcome — since this linguistic pluralism undermines the possibility of a genuine European democratic life. This might be the reason why Jürgen Habermas, one of the advocates of this “federal state model” has suggested the imposition of English as the “first second” language for all future European citizens (Habermas, 1995).

However, there is another way of conceiving the European Union in which the democratic debates will continue to be carried on in the vernacular language of each national community. If one considers the EU as a federation of democratic states, the European debates could perfectly be “translated” by the national representatives into the language and the symbolic references of their respective states. According to this perspective, the European Union should be founded on an indirect democratic control by which the representative of each country receives its instructions from a national executive elected directly or through a parliamentary vote. If one wants to overcome the democratic deficit of the European Union, one should look not so much towards a hypothetical European public opinion but rather to separate bodies of public opinion that could nurture the negotiations at the European level. What matters is to relaunch the national political debate on Europe and to consolidate democratic political control inside the nation-states rather than reinforce the accountability of the European Union.

The debates on the Maastricht treaty which took place in France and in Denmark ten years ago or, more recently on the Nice treaty in Ireland, have all illustrated this logic. These referenda provided an opportunity for lively democratic debates on the European future. They thus reinforced democratic life. Yet, they were national and not European debates.

Should we deplore it? I don’t think so since the aim of the European construct is not to reproduce the democratic and the identification logic, which prevails inside the nation-state. The constitution of a European *demos* united by a common language should thus be considered neither as a pre-requisite nor as the aim of European integration.

Moreover, the absence of such a *demos* united by a common language should not be considered a weakness for the European Union. Indeed, this linguistic pluralism reinforces the unique character of a polity founded on an open deliberation and confrontation

process among distinct peoples and distinct political identities. According to this perspective, mutual recognition among the peoples of Europe — what Joe Weiler calls a “multiple *demoi*” model (Weiler, 2001) — ought to be equated neither with a sense of common identity nor with a common language.

Once again, my aim here was not to understate the importance of a common language for democratic life. The only point I wanted to make is that the problems raised today inside the borders of European states by the emergence of “multiculturalism” should not be conflated with those raised at the European level by the development of a multinational co-operation.

3 • Multiculturalism policies and the welfare state

The second issue is that of the relationship between multiculturalism policies and the future of the Welfare State. On this topic, Will Kymlicka has discussed in details the argument according to which multiculturalism policies would make it more difficult to sustain social solidarity. Hence Will Kymlicka’s and Keith Banting’s effort to test whether multiculturalism policies have or not in fact eroded the welfare state in those Western countries that have adopted them. Their conclusions are fairly clear since, according to them, both the data and the case studies suggest that there is no general connection between adopting multiculturalism policies and changes in the Welfare State over the last two decades of the XXth century.

Once again, I don’t intend to approve or to contest this specific conclusion. I would rather like to come back to an argument used against multiculturalism policies which is very similar in its content to those used to deny the possibility of a genuine social solidarity at the European scale. Will Kymlicka has called this argument the “corroding effect”. According to it, multiculturalism policies would weaken redistribution by reducing trust and solidarity among citizens. Indeed, citizens have historically supported the Welfare State and been willing to make sacrifices to support their co-citizens because they viewed these citizens as “one of us” bound by a common identity and a common sense of belonging. *Contra* this argument, Will Kymlicka has argued that multiculturalism policies could actually help to strengthen the trust and solidarity needed for a strong welfare state since by adopting multiculturalism policies, the state can be seen as trying to encourage minorities to trust the larger society.

However, Kymlicka agrees with David Miller that multiculturalism policies should be supplemented with policies that nurture an overreaching political identity and hence should be combined with nation-building policies. In other words, Will Kymlicka does not contest the argument according to which the pursuit of social solidarity presupposes national communities in which mutual trust stem from a shared identity. If he has shown that multiculturalism policies do not necessarily undermine national identity, he seems to take for granted that a shared national identity is the only basis for substantiating aspirations towards social justice.

It is precisely this assertion — so often used to contest any possibility of a European solidarity — that I would like to discuss rapidly. More precisely, as far as I can see, this argument relies on two distinct premises: (1) trust and mutual identification are actually linked to nationality; (2) mutual identification, hence a common identity, is a necessary condition for social solidarity.

Regarding the first premise, I wonder if there is so much evidence that mutual identification and trust are still linked to nationality. As far as Europe is concerned, I would be tempted to think that educational, class and political cleavages matter as much as national differences. For instance, does a British political scientist really have more in common with, say, a British farmer than with a French political scientist?

More seriously, it seems to me that in our modern liberal democracies, our social obligations arise in the first place from belonging to a specific social security system. I thus agree here with the argument made by Brian Barry (1996): the primary reason why he has to contribute to the pension of an unknown person living in Rotherham and not to that of another person living at equal distance but in Rennes is that he belongs to the same social security system as the former, but not as the latter. Even if it is true that he most probably shares the nationality of the former and not of the latter, one should not confuse these two facts by concluding that our social obligations are necessarily connected to a shared nationality.

Regarding the second premise, I wonder about the concrete meaning of the claim that a national feeling, or belonging, is a necessary condition for social justice. Would that mean for instance that the foreigners living and working in our nation-states should be excluded from social and unemployment benefits? If there is no doubt that the Welfare State was established within the borders of the nation-state, the social rights differ precisely from the political rights in that they are granted to all those who live and work in a given territory, whatever their nationality.

Regarding the European Union, the very same argument makes it difficult to explain the redistributions that have taken place in the last decades among the richer and the poorer regions of the European Union. These redistributions are often understated. Yet, historically they have played a key role in stabilising the young Spanish and Portuguese democracies and in anchoring them to the European Union.

This fact implies that the argument to the effect that there cannot be any form of social solidarity where there is no common identity could easily be reversed. Could there be any sense of a common identity where there is no social solidarity? Rather than denying the possibility of any genuine solidarity where there is no common identity, one can hope that some kinds of redistribution among different nationalities could help foster mutual identification.

Once again, this is not to deny the importance of the national level. For many reasons, it still is as the most appropriate place both for a genuine democratic debate and for effective social justice. But it should be so for instrumental and not for normative reasons.

4 • Conclusion

Dominique Schnapper's paper begins with a famous quotation by John Stuart Mill (1999: 394) "it is in general a necessary condition of free institutions that the boundaries of government should coincide in the main with those of nationalities".

However, one should not forget that Mill immediately added "but several considerations are liable to conflict in practice with this general principle" (Mill, 1999, p. 394 quoted by Varouxakis, 2002, p. 21). Mill spent more than half the chapter explaining the difficulties which oblige people of different nationalities "to make a virtue of necessity, and reconcile themselves to living together under equal rights and laws" (Mill, 1999, p. 394). This consideration is preceded by this emphatic declaration: "If it be said that so broadly marked a distinction between what is due merely to a human creature is more worthy of savages than of civilized beings, and ought, with the utmost energy, be contended against, no one holds that opinion more strongly than myself" (Mill, 1999, p. 393).

Mill thus considered that national feelings were facts of life that had to be taken into account but "certainly not ones that should be promoted or encouraged" (Varouxakis, 2002, p. 31). Put differently, the link between nation, liberty and democracy was for him inevitable given the circumstances of his time, "in the present state of

civilization” (Mill, 1999, p. 393) but was neither eternal nor conceptual.

Hence this question: have circumstances now changed to such an extent that democracy and social justice can be pursued not only inside but also beyond the borders of the nation-state?

R E F E R E N C E S

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