

***Sticking together in tough times?* – Kick-off-Conference of the Research Funding Call „*Cohesion in Europe*“ as part of the German EU Council Presidency**

Keynote: Europe as a transnational space of interaction

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Why does “cohesion in Europe” sound, as Gandhi would have put it, “like a good idea”? Why does it sound different from “oxygen in Europe” or “history in Europe”? A Europe without cohesion is in fact impossible to imagine; but even so the notion of European cohesion is a desideratum, a thing to ponder and to probe, rather than an axiomatic starting point.

There are two reasons for this. One is the complexity of defining “Europe”. This complexity has often seduced people into thinking that Europe is undefinable, a chimera. I shall briefly argue that this is a mistake: complexity is not the same as impossibility or randomness.

The other reason is that Europe has a strong competitor when it comes to cohesion and that is the nation-state. The nation-state, despite strong tensions between city and countryside, centre and periphery, and culturally distinct regions, claims what amounts almost to a monopoly on cohesive forces. To a large extent this is justified. The state, with its fiscal and governmental sovereignty as policy-maker, establishes a strong institutional uniformity on society within its borders.

But the state has no monopoly on communication, and as Lévi-Strauss reminds us, it is communication that establishes cohesion. In my talk I shall explore some communicative patterns which throughout history, and also at the present day, establish cross-border communication and cross-border communicative networks. Besides culture at large (an opera like *Nabucco*, a novel like *Der Zauberberg* or a film like *Jules et Jim*) there are important transnational structures at work in Europe such as religion, the university, and the legal profession (which, despite its state-defined remit, all share Napoleonic and Justinian roots and have an international component, e.g. in the sphere of human rights and international law, and the regulation of cross-border traffic). All this forms the intellectual mycelium which connects all of Europe.

In addition, all European states are defined by the fact that they all have European neighbours and that their fates and histories have been shaped, not separately or autonomously, but through their interaction with those neighbours. European history consists of wars and conflicts, but by the same token also of alliances, diplomacy and treaties.

So why, given all this, does European cohesion not sound like stating the obvious? My response is that the monopoly claimed by the nation-state is above all an ideological one, an ingrained world-view; and this world-view has also affected the default assumptions of our scientific procedure.

“**Methodological nationalism**” has over the last decade been problematized: the default idea that we gather our data, and look for our causative explanations, primarily at the level of the nation-state, sidelining all transnational phenomena to the status of afterthought or “contributing factor”.

I will therefore conclude by asserting the ongoing importance of the comparative method and its transnational analysis of multinational dynamics, to purify our scientific vision and counteract methodological nationalism.