

The Idea of Europe

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The Finnish National Committee of the European Cultural Foundation organized The Idea of Europe: Continuity and Change -seminar in Helsinki 19-20.4.2007. There were over one hundred participants all over the Europe and outside the continent. The target of the seminar was to bring back to the memory the European Union's basic idea of peace and co-operation, and to commence the discussion in the Finnish society of European values, identity and civilisation and their connections to economic prosperity and welfare.

Mr. Leszek Jesien, Head of the European Integration Chair in the Tischner European University in Kraków, was asking what is the spirit of Europe? He described it as a co-operation between member states, transgovernmentalism, institutions like European Parliament and attempt to build a community of Europe. After EU-enlargement many of Polish people have migrated to Ireland, UK, Spain and Sweden, and this development has created a demand for labour force in Poland. Poland has gained new labour from Ukraine.

Mr. Paavo Lipponen, Speaker of the Parliament, pointed out under the topic of Future of the EU – Governance and Diversity that the enlargement is single most important tool of European Union. De-

mographic development and population ageing are major problems and EU is losing dynamism. Population of the U.S. is growing up and in EU it is going down. Lipponen was asking more open immigration policy since more brains and hands are needed. According to Ambassador Hans von Ploetz, Germany, spirit of Europe is diversity including language, culture and geography. Diversity can be interpreted in the action of freedom and tolerance. He was also asking does the EU has foreign policy of her own, and the reply was no, not yet, but there is the need for common foreign policy.

Professor Agnes Heller in her presentation of Spirit of Europe was first looking master narratives. She mentioned concepts like progressive Europe, Europe is developed, Europe is pluralistic, Europe of culture and freedom narrative is the most important. She pointed out that values can be effective or non-effective. Certain values must be accepted like freedom and equal opportunities. Professor Heller stressed that Europe is a nation state and our continent is not so good in integration, which can be seen in ethnic problems and great amount of insecurity. She mentioned that for immigrants moving from South to Europe our continent is a paradise but being

here it is not a paradise. There are challenges for Europe to do something for it.

Reetta Meriläinen, Editor-in-Chief, Helsingin Sanomat, had a paper under title Media and the Future of the European Integration – Developing a Truly European Forum. She said that the pan-European audience is not yet found. Newspapers are national, regional and local. Good question is that are readers interested in pan-European issues as she was asking. Further question in her presentation was pan-European website. Who owns it and who creates it? Could it really function?

Paula Lehtomäki, Minister for Foreign Trade, named some challenges for the EU. According to her opinion, there is the need to succeed in competition, combat climate change, reliability of the EU in the eyes of its citizens, and population ageing. There is the need to full use of economic integration, and openness for global economy is important for internal development. She was encouraging to turn threat into opportunity. Europe has to proceed in modernization, China and India are catching up us. Finally Minister Lehtomäki was pointing out the importance of multi-speak Europe and hoping for improvement of mobility of labour.