

## **XIXth Summer University**

### **The Realities of Borders in Europe, 10 - 30 September 2001 in Strasbourg (France)**

Transeuropéennes (Paris) ; Organised with : University Centre for Journalism Studies, ARTE Television, Marc Bloch University (Strasbourg). With the support of: The French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Council of Europe, The European Foundation for Culture, The Regional Council of Alsace, The General Council of the Lower Rhine, The Charles Veillon Foundation.

### **General Assessment**

The French-language summer university organised in conjunction with the television station ARTE and the University Centre for Journalism Studies is intended for students in journalism, communications, political science, etc., planning to go into journalism, as well as for young journalists already working professionally in the field. It deals with professional practices and their techniques, as well as on content and the impact of the messages and opinions spread by the media on the social imagination and political life. It places an emphasis on meeting professionals and on producing a collaborative project at the conclusion of the summer university.

Transeuropéennes' nineteenth summer university was held in Strasbourg from 10 - 30 September 2001 and brought together twenty-five young French-speaking journalists or journalism students from twelve different countries in the region to collectively reflect on the theme of borders in Europe. The level of French was generally satisfactory, which encouraged certain students in the direction of a more assiduous practice of the language.

Differences in knowledge, in the relevance of analyses and, in some cases, in terms of fields of interest, between the different students with regard to the sensitive issues concerning the Balkans and Europe in general was particularly striking this year. For the majority of participants, sustained reflection (three weeks) on the theme of borders and territory was a novelty, even if variously visible and invisible borders are often part of their daily realities. Geographical reflection was no less novel, as came out in the presentations given by Jean-Christophe Victor (on the development of borders in Europe, relying in particular on cartographic analyses) and by Luc Gwiazdzinski (on the borders which exist in cities: how urban organisation reflects social realities, but also overall social projects, the idea and practice of "living together", and thus why taking account of the organisation of cities is an eminently political issue).

The programme sought to tackle borders and the territories they demarcate in a variety of ways: in their exclusionary, "securitarian", and sovereign dimensions, but also as offering the possibility for transgression and co-operation: highlighted by the European

and Franco-German dimension of a border region such as Alsace, and a city such as Strasbourg; a visit to the Council of Europe; a visit to the SWR – Fribourg (German regional channel, involved in developing television programmes with France and Switzerland); a visit to the Laiterie (artistic co-operation).

The common denominator of these different aspects of borders and territories was to carry out a reflection on the relationships between borders and otherness, borders and difference in Europe: do borders guarantee difference? Does their erosion necessarily lead to homogenisation? Does difference necessarily lead to establishing borders, to breaking off all ties? Are visible and “established” borders really more relevant than invisible borders? What are the dynamics and the relations between the idea of “living together” and the borders in Europe?

Prior to their arrival in Strasbourg, the students had prepared projects whose objective was to present the group with either a personal experience of, or an inquiry into, crossing a (visible or invisible) border. The quality of the projects (texts, video documentaries, photographs) and the reflection behind them was generally good, and the results highly varied (both in terms of subject matter, regions, scale and approaches chosen). Most of the students sought to describe, and analyse borders without genuinely seeking to “transgress” them. Others dealt with actually crossing a border, with an opening up, but in no case did the students relate a personal experience as the basis for their reflection on borders. Though this “detached” viewpoint is above all journalistic, it is revealing of an attitude which was to be recurrent throughout the first part of the summer university, and which was surmounted only gradually: the difficulty, and, at times, the actual fear of becoming personally involved so as not to provoke confrontations – as was the case in the first two days, when, as they themselves pointed out, the borders between them overwhelmed their good will.

The beginning of the summer university was indeed stormy, and the discussions (following the students’ presentations) tended to veer off toward the conflict in Macedonia, and toward (what some participants perceived as) the haughty attitude of “Western” countries and institutions, and, lastly, toward the events that occurred in the United States on the first day of the Summer University.

Though the discussion dealing with this subject were very dispassionate and constructive, the major impact of the events of September 11 on the programme was, firstly, the cancellation of a key theoretical course (“Borders and Human Borders”, by Daniel Riot, director of the European news team of France 3 Television, scheduled for 12 September), and, secondly, a certain focusing of people’s attention, often leading to informal and even formal discussions on the subject.

In the light of the pluridisciplinary character of both the students and the programme itself, two tendencies were noticeable in how the work process and discussions progressed: the difficulty some participants had in positioning themselves in a debate, and, at the same time, the complementary nature of their approaches.

The difficulty in taking a stance in a debate may stem from the way certain students were taught in the schools of journalism or of communications where they studied, for there would seem to be great discrepancies from one country – and even one university or school – to another. Certain students (particularly those from Istanbul) had a highly diverse and rich intellectual background, whereas others seemed more specialised in the method or in-depth practice of a discipline (sociology or philosophy), adopting a

deductive rather than an inductive approach. This diversity in terms of approaches, and of intellectual baggage, was underscored by the group work (five students per group) on the borders in the city of Strasbourg, which was carried out in several stages: one afternoon of fieldwork, going from the centre of Strasbourg toward five peripheral neighbourhoods of the city, followed by the writing of a text – accompanied by photographs – dealing with their observations, their encounters, and the analyses they arrived at collectively.

This work was beneficial in several respects:

- It made it possible to emphasise – and complete – the group's diversity, as already mentioned.
- It made it possible to get away from the group dynamics which had been created in the course of the summer university.
- It enabled the students to become aware of the social realities which the majority of them did not imagine existed, and particularly of a form of "diversity" within "Western" Europe that some had imagined as a homogenous whole.
- It enabled the students to engage in reflection on a social, economic or political question by dealing with the notion of borders, and thus to shed light on an invisible border, one "that can be felt".

The content of the students' projects on the borders in the city of Strasbourg enabled two fundamental traits to emerge.

The first validates the relevancy of the compulsory theme. The point was to endeavour to identify borders that were internal to a society supposed or thought to be homogenous. The projects dealing with Strasbourg made it possible to apply the notion of invisible borders – not those which divide different states (which, ironically, separate neighbours who are usually alike) – but rather differentiated populations living in the same neighbourhood, generally a poor suburb of Strasbourg. The state postulates unity in creating its borders. However, the internal reality is entirely different; it is comprised of diversities. The students who worked in the Hohenheim quarter noted the extent to which people living there stick close to communities closed in upon themselves. They are all conscious of being rejected from French society through discriminatory attitudes, but reveal this same type of attitude themselves through the contempt they show for one another on the basis of characteristics linked to their origins. They behave similarly toward the more wealthy inhabitants of the city centre.

Contrary to what one might be inclined to think about these neighbourhoods, there is no real esprit de corps amongst the populations living there. In reality, these territories are beset with fragmentations linked, amongst other things, to origin. But not origin alone. Social recompositions take place on a very small scale through the phenomenon of "territorialised" gangs, as noted by the group which worked in the neighbourhood of Haute-Pierre.

The trip of one group from the city centre toward Neuhof also put social issues at the centre of the debates. The point was not so much about dealing with the origins of the inhabitants – the majority of whom, indeed, had only recently arrived in France – but their poverty and the means they had at their disposal to break away from it. In fact, most of them consider that they do not have the same opportunities as inhabitants of the neighbourhoods in the centre to attain a certain level of affluence. Employers are even alleged to tend to disqualify them more easily. They therefore have the impression

of being forced to live in a social ghetto that many would like to leave behind them. However, a second trait underscores not so much the young journalists' difficulty in *apprehending* (to be understood here in the double sense of the word as both "fearing" and "discerning") but in *giving voice* to these phenomena. They did not avoid shifts in meaning in their attempts at "naming". First off, the suburbs were strange and foreign, and the students acknowledged they felt somewhat ill at ease in them. Consequently, normalcy was assumed to reside in the city centre. Yet this distinction was not questioned. In the same way, the line drawn between "French and immigrants", "young and old", etc., was accepted at face value. One group referred, in quotation marks, to the predominance of "dark skinned" populations – not that the observation itself is misleading, but it does point out the difficulty in naming. Another group predicted the upcoming juvenile delinquency of a ten-year-old. Amongst other items in the catalogue of received ideas, was the idea that one of the neighbourhoods visited was "certainly not France but a dangerous mix of every nationality".

Of course, journalists in France and the European Union are not exempt from these sorts of caricatural perceptions. And, expressing themselves in French – which was for them a foreign language – discovering a country and a world which was utterly foreign to them prior to their arrival, the students from the Balkans had some difficulty in finding just the right distance. They subsequently mentioned this difficulty in the sessions of critical thought focusing on their research.

Lastly, an optimistic note in a somewhat disquieting overall picture, the young journalists pointed out that, at times, integration seemed to be bearing its fruit and that changes in mindsets were possible, as was an adhesion to common norms and values, whatever the various populations' origins. It is also true, however, that this hopefulness came from the group that had visited a suburb where inhabitants living in expensive villas mixed with those living in neighbouring social-housing complexes.

This group work was broadly acclaimed and even sought after. One of the things pointed out to us was that there was no time to carry out other similar projects. Though most of the texts were largely descriptive, they were, on the other hand, very well written in terms of the "journalistic" style used by some, as well as in terms of the remarks and observations they make.

Some emphasised the opportunity that these projects provided for them to express themselves, and share their points of view, without at the same time being judged by the other participants. The space of free expression, free from the pressure of judgements – intrinsic to summer universities – was similarly appreciated, although it was difficult to establish at the outset. This desire for exchange stemmed particularly from the students from Belgrade, as if to envisage new perspectives and a new openness. The Kosovo question was, in this respect, one of the more frustrating aspects of the summer university, due more to a question of persons than of positions. The war in Bosnia and the situation after Dayton came up more often – and was the object of painful debate (above all after the screening of the documentary *Gorazde, the psycho-geography of a border*) – and had the advantage of leading to something and breaking the ice of the participants' emotions. This, however, did not occur with regard to the war in Kosovo, no doubt because of the numerical discrepancy between participants from Kosovo (only one) and from Serbia (three), whereas there was no lack of attempts at, and spaces for, discussion. This shows once again the need to get through the painful

stages of the debates and discussions to arrive at a working atmosphere that is more constructive and where those partaking come together. Nevertheless, in comparison to previous years, we had the impression of a more accentuated fragmentation within the group: the overall atmosphere and the group projects were generally good, but linguistic affinity often won out, leading some small groups to behave at times like “delegations”. It is noteworthy that with regard to these small groups (five or six persons all told), the need to grasp onto political or intellectual certitudes (not to say truths) was one response to the learning and integration of tools that were critical of this same notion of certitude or truth (and this came out as much in the theoretical courses as in the group projects or discussions). This attitude should nevertheless not be perceived as a failure: it shows that Transeuropéennes’ idea and approach do not leave people indifferent. “The learning of difference”, and individual self-assertion are at times more difficult processes for some than for others – and this is linked, above all, to the students as individuals, and only secondarily to their different temperaments. The setting up of groups is no obstacle to dialogue, either, though it may influence the dialogue in those cases when certain participants seek refuge behind “national” protection and present themselves to the group as “representatives”. This position is no easier for the students who adopt it, though for them it is, apparently, the least uncomfortable.

These young future (or current) journalists from the region, who find or will find themselves in a direct position to shape public opinion, thus engaged in a joint effort of recognising differences, but also similarities on several levels: between themselves, as well as between their respective countries and Europe, which appears as a definite though faraway aspiration. Getting to know the other and coming to acknowledge difference were perceived by all as a first step toward dialogue and constructive collaboration on a common footing: making visible and invisible borders into places for exchange and co-operation more than ramparts to communication. Moreover, proposals for projects of this type did emerge: the desire to create a local structure for exchange, dialogue and reflection in Istanbul; the idea to put together a cultural and political event for reflection on borders in Belgrade.

*Assessment prepared by Sébastien Babaud and Christophe Ingels.*

## Speakers

*Jean-Pierre Bouteiller*: Journalist with the Dernières Nouvelles d’alsace (Strasbourg) ; *Alain Chanel*: Director of the University Centre for Journalism Studies (Strasbourg) ; *Guy-Pierre Chomette*: Journalist (Paris) ; *Xavier Delcourt*: Journalist, instructor at the University Centre for Journalism Studies (Strasbourg) ; *Ghislaine Glasson Deschaumes*: Director of Transeuropéennes (Paris) ; *Luc Gwiazdzinski*: Assistant Professor in geography at the Louis Pasteur University (Strasbourg) ; *Jean-Marie Haeffele*: Editor in Chief of L’Alsace (Mulhouse) ; *Michael Haertle*: Journalist with SWR Fernsehen (Fribourg) ; *Jacques Laurent*: Director of the documentary section, ARTE television (Strasbourg) ; *Thomas Morawski*: Journalist, Bayrischer Rundfunk, ARD (Münich) ; *Frédéric Sautereau*: Photographer (Paris) ; *Svetlana Slapsak*: Anthropologist, professor at the Institutum Studiorum Humanitatis (Ljubljana) ; *Jean-Christophe Victor*: Professor of geopolitics at

the Collège Inter Armées de Défense, University of Paris I, director of Lepac, host of the television programme “Le dessous des cartes” (Paris) ; *Jean-Pierre Worms*: Sociologist (Paris) ; *Zelimir Zilnik*: Filmmaker (Novi Sad).

## Partners

University Centre for Journalism Studies ; Director: Alain Chanel.

ARTE ; Director of the documentary unit: Jacques Laurent.

Marc Bloch University, Department of Philosophy, Linguistics, Computer Science, and Education ; President: Daniel Payot.

Co-directors: Ghislaine Glasson Deschaumes, Alain Chanel, Jacques Laurent.

Project co-ordinators: Silvie Camil, Sébastien Babaud, Emeline Simien.

Extramural programme: Sanja Lucquet-Basaric.

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