

Luisa Passerini,

European University Institute, Florence

WHAT DO WE OWE TO MITRINOVIC?

Abstract: The author argues that Mitrinovic's legacy to us includes a cluster of crucial concepts: the unity between the East and West of Europe in its various forms; a European federation; the elimination of barriers; the role of Britain in Europe and of Europe in Britain; the role of the individual in a global context and in a universalistic perspective; and the value of youth and the role of the young.

Keywords: East and West of Europe; individual and universal; unity of Europe in a political, psychological and emotional sense; citizenship; Italy; young and youth.

I am delighted and honoured to have been invited to this conference and to listen to well informed and documented communications on his figure and activities. I have not researched this topic since the years when I wrote *Europe in Love, Love in Europe* (now more than twenty), having devoted my time to the study of how Europeanness can be defined from both the theoretical and the practical points of view, with particular reference to the mobility of populations and individuals towards and across Europe. However, I have kept in mind the question – which I believe is still of relevance today – of what is our debt towards Mitrinovic in intellectual and moral terms. In the words adopted by the title of this conference, I have been asking myself what we can say about Mitrinovic's legacy to us. I recognize the necessity to re-interpret his thought, and to bring certain aspects to date on the basis of the needs of our time. Therefore I welcome this occasion to express my thoughts in this respect.

First of all, I believe that Mitrinovic's ideal of a Europe uniting East and West, the Eastern and the Western cultural traditions, is still topical for the current state of affairs. In particular, I appreciate the importance of his legacy in the effort to combine the political, psychological, emotional and existential aspects of such unity. He worked to promote the awareness of this complex type of unity, opening a route on which we still have a long way to go.

Similarly, we could make a good use for the Europe of today of his idea of eliminating custom barriers, as well as passports, and creat-



Scrapbook-style draft of the sole issue of *New Europe* (September 1934)
with Mitrinovic's notes on Thomas Masaryk and the contemporary political situation in Europe,
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ing a real federation. My recent work on mobility and migration in/ to Europe has fostered in me a strong feeling that the barriers between Europe and the rest of the world, as well as within Europe, continue to be a great problem. I live in a country stretching in the middle of the Mediterranean, which has become a tragic sea, a country where this problem is particularly acute. Mitrinovic's idea of eliminating barriers within a European federation appears to me as a part of his legacy that should be resurrected and relaunched. In the same direction of thought, his idea of making the British actively aware of Europe has appeared in recent years as something that should be revisited and revived profitably for all of us.

Another important feature, as others have already mentioned in this conference, is that Mitrinovic's perspective on these questions is set in a global context. There has been a debate recently among historians on the fact that globalisation is nothing new. Certainly, the global dimension is always present in Mitrinovic, and in some of the people around him, with the notion of the 'evolution of mankind' in a harmonious union between individual and society. So, we have here the first cluster of political concepts that are part of the debt we owe to Mitrinovic: the unity between East and West in its various forms; the European federation; the elimination of barriers; the role of Britain in Europe and of Europe in Britain. All this we could re-appropriate from this legacy.

We can add to this list the issue of citizenship. It has been mentioned by Andrew Rigby that, in the steps of Mitrinovic, one can even think of a cosmopolitan citizenship. This seems particularly significant because a European citizenship does not even exist legally, since until now only national citizenships have been recognised. Thus, the idea of opening up citizenship to a European dimension in a cosmopolitan context is a primary aspect of the legacy that we can take up. This global outlook represents a link with the interest Mitrinovic had for things Italian and especially for Giuseppe Mazzini's vision – as it has been pointed by Slobodan Markovich – understood in the sense that national unification is part of a wider unification that in the end should lead to the unification of the world. This context was global in a special way: not only did Mitrinovic advocate self-change as the means toward world change, but he established a close link and reciprocal correspondence between the self and the cosmos, thus evoking the spirit of the Italian Renaissance in a universalistic perspective.

Another point I would like to stress is Mitrinovic's universalistic formation. Today we would call it a transdisciplinary formation since it in-

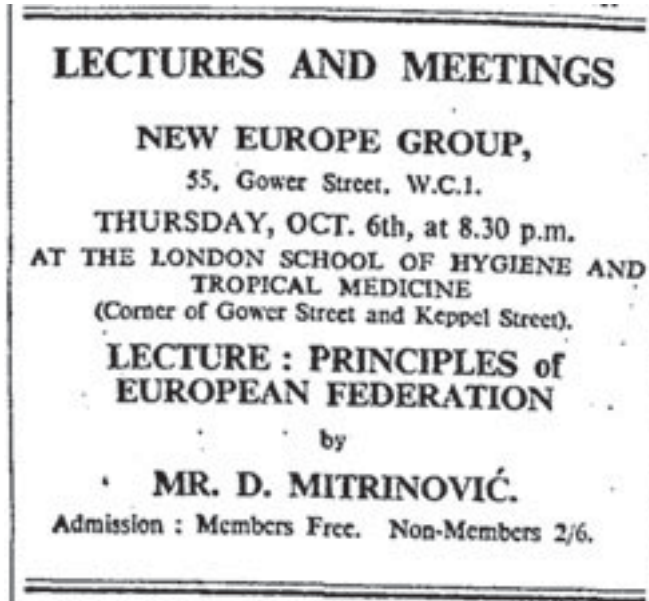
cluded epic poetry and folk music, European classical literature, philosophy, psychology and logic. He taught himself Greek and Latin so as to be able to study the classics directly. He practised and appreciated music and art, pleading for their democratisation and the breaking down of separation between artists and consumers. As it has been pointed out – among others by Guido von Hengel – Mitrinovic absorbed a lot from the Futurists and their ideas about what today we call artivism, meaning the activism of artists. (Research on links between Mitrinovic and Italy could be usefully pursued, and it is to be hoped that it will be undertaken.) I think that the legacy of Mitrinovic in understanding art and using art for our present is really essential. In my recent experience of research on migration in/to Europe, I have found that crucial contributions have been brought to this field by video artists, photographers and other artists who have tried to document the mobility of people within and towards Europe – not with mediatic images, but with images and words showing the real situation at the borders of Europe.

The spiritual and religious legacy of Mitrinovic was part of his eclecticism, which often today is a fashionable attitude. But, in his case, these beliefs were combined with a strong conviction that the esoteric and mystical aspects – for instance, of the relationship between the feminine and the masculine – were supported by the claim to a full recognition of women's role in history and politics.

I would also like to mention what may seem a secondary aspect, but it is not such for me, who have been an oral historian for many years: Mitrinovic's legacy includes his capacity for oral expression. He was a very 'oral' person, able to speak in a way that was foundational for his relationships with others.

I have kept what I deem is perhaps the most important aspect of his legacy for the end of my comments (I stress the fact that they are simply comments born out of reflections stimulated by this conference, and do not constitute a proper paper). This aspect concerns the role of the individual: the individual without individualism, which implies the individual without narcissism and complacency. This seems to me an innovative contribution. To stress this point, on the one hand, means to balance the social organicism that Mitrinovic shared with Alfred Adler, and on the other, it is a way to come closer to our time, when the individual has taken up a particular value as a concept and as a reality.

I would like to stress this point and not in an abstract way. I had the privilege to meet and interview Violet MacDermot and Ralph Twyman. I was Doctor MacDermot's guest in her cottage and very much en-



Announcement for D. Mitrinovic's lecture on the "Principles of European Federation", The Times, 10.06.1932, p. 8 e

joyed our conversation and appreciated her competence and availability. Having met these people, I can rightfully say that the specificity and the value of the individual was not only an important theoretical principle in Mitrinovic's entourage, but it also found a reflection in the actual practice and experience of the people around him, each one very special in their own way.

If we couple this idea of the individual with Mitrinovic's eclecticism and syncretism, so that the individual is seen as a central point where multiple ways of thinking and acting intersect, we give primacy not only to subjectivity but also to intersubjectivity. This is a notion that I cherish and that I believe I have contributed to developing, having done history of memory through interviews for many years. In my interpretation, special attention to intersubjectivity is something that can safely be attributed to Mitrinovic.

I would like to conclude with a final consideration. I believe that it is worthwhile adding to the list of concepts that can represent a valid legacy of Mitrinovic today, while of course needing to be updated and transformed, the ideas of the role of the young and the value of youth. In fact, these too come from Mazzini. In the last year and half, we have been immersed in a pandemic in which the young and the old have been pitted against each other like in warfare, especially by the media. The notion of

young and old has been reduced to the biological, to the numbers of age, and to a counter-position on the social and cultural level. On the contrary, terms and ideas such as ‘Young Bosnian’ and ‘Young Italy’ had a different and more complex resonance in Mitrinovic’s thought, not a biological one, and were not necessarily in opposition. As Slobodan Markovich has pointed out, his thought is multifarious and dilemmatic. Keeping this in mind, I would definitely add the idea of youth and young to the cluster of terms defining Mitrinovic’s legacy.