Europe's uncertain identity

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Introduction

The launch of the euro is a success of historic proportions.[1] It is also the ultimate vindication of the method first sketched out nearly fifty years ago in the Schuman memorandum. That memorandum—the work of Robert Schuman and Jean Monnet—sought to promote economic integration in order to attain a political objective, while avoiding a precise definition of what that objective should be. Today, as we witness the birth of the euro, this "method" is still very much alive. Uncertainty has thus all along been an innate feature of the European integration process. And ambiguity has undoubtedly helped the process, by offering its opponents a moving and ill-defined target.

[1] *A French version of this text, "L'Europe des incertitudes", appears in "Commentaire", Spring 1999*

As time goes by, however, uncertainty has begun to create increasingly serious problems for European integration. To start with, the nature of uncertainty has changed. Amidst the ruins of post-war Europe the problem was maintaining peace, and the solution seemed clear. The nation-state, responsible for the ills of the twentieth century, had to be weakened by the progressive transfer of competences to a supranational level—starting, symbolically, with steel and coal, the main industrial resources of mass warfare.

In today's reconciled Europe, however, the case for the "peace through federalism" approach is significantly weaker. Indeed, the problem now for Europe is the very weakness of the nation-state rather than its excessive power. Yesterday's uncertainty was acknowledged by the founding fathers of the European Union as a political tactic. Today's uncertainty is creating real problems for their successors, who strive in vain to define the strategic objective of European integration. Even Jacques Delors was unable to define the European project as anything other than an "unidentified political object".

Now that uncertainty is no longer a tactic on the part of the political elite, demands for clarity have become more insistent. Can European integration carry on as a ceaseless dynamic towards an indeterminate objective? Should not a disbelieving public be provided with an explanation of what the end goal of the process will be? But then how far can that end-goal be described, and how?

Furthermore, in the years which have followed the fall of the Berlin wall, several new sources of uncertainty have enveloped the European Union. Where would the borders of an enlarged EU lie? Is action at the EU level still relevant in an age of both greater globalisation and further devolution? And, an increasingly vital question, what is the nature of European identity?

Five sources of uncertainty

Maastricht: the last word of Jean Monnet

The section of the Maastricht treaty dealing with economic and monetary union (EMU) represents the apotheosis of the "Monnet method", which is to choose a symbolic aspect of national sovereignty and transfer the exercise of it to the Community level. In fact the EMU project is inspired by another dominant feature of the conceptual father of the European community: a deep suspicion of politics.[2] Taken away from sovereign states by the Maastricht treaty, monetary policy was also largely to be taken out of the hands of the EU's political institutions and handed over to the independent technical expertise of European central bankers.

From the Maastricht treaty negotiations to the agreement on the Euro-11 council at Luxembourg in December 1997, this fundamentally apolitical conception of the single currency has divided France and Germany. The French held the view that the independence of the central bank, while necessary, should co-exist with a system of co-ordination, by the member-states but at EU level, of macro-economic policies—a system named, not coincidentally, "economic government" by the late Pierre Bérégovoy. It would include the control of euro exchange-rate policy by the council of finance ministers (Ecofin) and would provide the European Central Bank with a strong political interlocutor in the form of the Euro-11 committee.

Over the same period the Germans took the opposite view. They were suspicious of the concept of "economic government". They wanted to restrict, via Mr Waigel's Pact on Stability and Growth, the budgetary leeway both at national and European levels, and they only reluctantly accepted the creation of Euro-11. By seeking to extend the "automatic pilot" approach, implicit in the EMU process, to fiscal policy, Germany was inspired by a fundamental mistrust of politics, whilst France continued to exalt the "primacy of the political", albeit a primacy that was more theoretical than practical.

These divergences are deeply rooted in different national traditions about

[2]In its original formulation the European Coal and Steel Community only contained one high authority, independent of the constituent states (the Council, in which they sat, was only added in during the course of negotiations)

what "politics" can achieve. They were, however, more symbolic than real. An underlying consensus has always united the two countries on what, in practical terms, the euro should be: a sound, if not strong, currency, underpinned by cautious fiscal and monetary policies. The advent of a new coalition in Germany has left this consensus essentially intact, with the German social democrats sharing more of the "political" hype about the euro, hitherto a preserve of the French.

Furthermore, there has always been consensus between France and Germany about another aspect of the euro: namely a conviction that the logical corollary to economic and monetary union should be much deeper political union. It is this conviction that makes the single currency project undoubtedly political. As a strategic response to German unification, it reflects a Franco-German assessment that parallel and decisive progress in European integration was imperative.

Yet while EMU resulted in the actual transfer of concrete powers to the EU level, political union has been largely stuck in the realm of words. Little progress has been made on the question of how Europeans might "do politics" together. There is a conviction that "something will have to be done" on the political side, if only for the economic viability of the single currency, but what needs to be done in this respect and how has remained, to a large extent, an unanswered question.

Although the birth of the euro is an historic event, in one sense EMU is not much different from previous stages of European integration. Currency was dealt with much as Jean Monnet had dreamt of dealing with coal and steel—relegated to a supranational, technocratic level and protected from the vagaries of politics. It was the 1980s consensus over the necessity of the independence of central banks that provided Jean Monnet's heirs with—by an almost miraculous stroke of fortune—a new symbolic domain of sovereignty, and one whose exercise not only could be, but should be largely preserved from the dangers of political deliberation and decision-making.

The authors of the Maastricht treaty did not, however, adhere to the Monnet method of integration throughout. In other sections of the treaty, such as the sections dealing with political union, European citizenship and foreign policy, there was a qualitative advance towards a new method of integration that the founding fathers of the European Community would undoubtedly have disowned. This is what I call nominal integration.

Maastricht: a realm of words

This new method, which could be described as "European nominalism," consisted of loading the European project with the symbolic attributes of state sovereignty without transferring to it the corresponding powers. A depoliticised EMU with real powers was therefore mirrored by a political union consisting mainly of words.

The very term "political union", under which the second Maastricht intergovernmental conference took place, implied the aim of creating a political society on a European level—what in political theory would be called a polity. Such an aim presupposes a debate on the conditions under which power might be exercised in this society: on the society's political organisation; on its different agencies, and their attributes and competences; on the democratic control which will be exercised over them; and on those agencies' legitimacy. In its true sense, the very expression "political union" should have provoked a constitutional debate, just as the European Parliament did with the Spinelli Report in 1984.

The negotiators at Maastricht had an entirely different approach, however, using political union in the much narrower sense of a union of the foreign policies of the member-states.[3] So the concept of "political union" referred, in the context of Maastricht, to an undoubtedly laudable project, but one which fell far short of what the expression pretended to designate. Even under the limited Maastricht definition of "political union", the negotiators failed to deliver. As it was, the chapter of the treaty on common foreign and security policy (CFSP) provided for nothing much more than the same inter-governmental co-operation already in use for twenty years. All Maastricht could do was formalise the existing mechanisms at the cost of great complication, and without defining either the objectives or resources of the CFSP.

[3]This definition was not new. It had been used in the 1975 Tindemans Report

The same nominalist approach prevailed under the heading of European citizenship. If the aim was to create a political union, the question would soon emerge as to how Europeans might become "citizens" of this political entity. But the issue was not raised at Maastricht. Instead, the "citizenship" debate focused on specific measures such as enabling citizens of one member-state to benefit from another's diplomatic protection, and the possibility of their taking part in local or European elections while residing in other member-states. Yet diplomatic protection is one of the oldest concepts in classical international law, and the right of foreign residents to vote in local elections

had long been the practice in Britain. Those measures were not particularly new, nor of great interest to Europe's citizens. Neither did they provide them with anything that could improve their participation in, or their sense of belonging to, a European political entity.

Finally, the very change of name of the European institutions, from Community to Union, was a product of the same nominalist approach. It suggested a qualitative change in the nature of European integration which Maastricht did not truly provide for. The term "union" provided an inappropriate analogy with the United States of America, a misconception reinforced by a number of details, notably the Commission's state of the union address before the Parliament. It gave the impression that the European project was reaching its anticipated end goal. After all, union had been declared the ultimate objective of integration in the preamble to the Treaty of Rome. A union was indeed proclaimed, but it immediately became clear that Maastricht was by no means the end of the process.

In one sense perhaps this is unimportant. After all, the long-term trajectory of European integration has been one of tremendous progress towards unity over forty years, including the undeniable successes recorded at Maastricht. Yet the fact remains that loaded terms—such as "political union", "citizenship" and "European Union"—which until then had been set aside to describe the final objective of European integration, had been deployed prematurely, irremediably devaluing their future use in the European context.

Thus Maastricht exacerbated Europe's uncertainties. It left the European Union unclear about its own political identity. It had used a method of adorning the European institutions with the nominal attributes of sovereignty. It implied that the Union was about to embark on a new constitutional approach to integration, and that the final goal of the process of ever closer union was in sight. In fact neither of these were within reach.

A Europe without frontiers

Expansion into eastern Europe presents the EU with unprecedented uncertainties. The disappearance of all the geopolitical landmarks which had structured post-war Europe has forced the EU, for the first time, to consider spreading across the entire continent. Yet the lifting of the iron curtain leaves the European Union without any indisputable geographical, political or cultural criteria with which to define the limits of Europe.

Europe is relatively well defined in geographic terms. Its eastern border is formed by the Ural mountains and river. It includes the most populous part of Russia, the Caucasus and European Turkey. In itself this definition begs more questions than it answers. Is Russia European? Will the western republics born out of the former Soviet Union ever be able to join the European Union? This applies not only to Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova but also to the three Caucasian countries, Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan. Is Turkey a European country? And what strategy of enlargement should be adopted with regard to the Balkans?

The instinctive reaction of the western Europeans to the events of 1989-1991 was to proclaim that the EU should eventually encompass the whole of Europe—but also to try to defer the most intractable problems stemming from such an ambition. For a while, the EU toyed with the idea of a Europe of concentric circles: the European Union of the 12; the European Economic Area or EEA (Austria, Finland, Iceland, Sweden, Switzerland and Norway); and the new democracies in central and eastern Europe. Promoted by Jacques Delors, this construction failed take into account the European Union's very appeal. The member-states of the EEA refused to accept its implied junior status. The central and eastern European countries rejected the idea of a process of collective transition to European Union membership which, they feared, would relegate them all to a second class European circle.

The European Union has now decided in favour of the accession of the six central and eastern European states, the three Baltic states, Slovenia and Cyprus. In reality this list covers vastly different geopolitical situations and does not correspond to any overview of the final shape of the Union. Slovenia, for example, was extracted from the dissolution of Yugoslavia whilst no broader solution has been found for its other successor states. The accession of Cyprus was promised, in principle, as a concession to Greece, part of a package deal that was supposed to unblock EU aid to Turkey. But relations between the European Union and Turkey are currently in a stalemate, which casts very serious doubt on the ability of the Union to make good on its promise to Cyprus any time soon. Finally, the selection of the three Baltic states can be understood on moral and legal grounds. Even though most European countries never recognised their forced incorporation into the Soviet Union, the accession of three countries that have been under Russian suzerainty for most of the time since Peter the Great cannot be the conclusion, but only the start of a reflection on the European identity of the historical Russo-Soviet area.

The eastern limits of Europe are therefore yet to be determined. There are many unsettled questions: Turkey's demand to be treated on the same basis as the other countries involved in the current process of accession; the future of Ukraine and Moldova; the European identity of Russia; and the strategy for any future enlargement in the Balkans. None of the cultural, historical or geopolitical concepts which could enable us to identify the borders of the European Union has, up to now, been decisive.

The idea of a cultural and historical divide between Protestant and Catholic Europe, and Orthodoxy, is no longer tenable. It had already been subverted by Greece's accession to the Union. And, in the former Yugoslavia, it would only go to exacerbate a cultural divide between Serbs and Croats which the Union must endeavour one day to overcome.

The idea of an insurmountable frontier between the Christian and Muslim worlds is scarcely more acceptable. Europe and Christianity have, admittedly, long been synonymous. But what is more essential to Europe's identity today, its Christian roots or the fact that religion has faded away from politics and society, turning it into the world's least religious continent? It is not so much Christianity which makes Europe's relationship with Islam problematic than the question of whether, in the future, an authentically European and secular brand of Islam will develop.

Precluding that possibility would create a division, for a start, in French society, in which Islam is the second religion. It would exclude Bosnia and Albania from the circle of European nations. And while Islam is one of the political, cultural and social factors in Turkey's identity, it cannot, in itself, solve the debate about that country's European identity.

If Charles de Gaulle defined Europe as stretching from the Atlantic to the Urals, it was probably in order to reflect the dual identity of Russia. Its history and culture have given it a split personality, partly looking towards Europe but also something else. Its political and cultural history has created a very particular tradition, which is both impossible to distinguish from Europe and unabsorbable by it. Ukraine developed in close symbiosis with the Russian world but fell cruelly victim to it in the 1930s. It will recover its identity by flourishing alongside the Russian world, whose history it shares, and by asserting its independence from it. This will lead it, inevitably, to look towards the European Union. While Belarus's claims to a separate political identity are much less convincing, she nevertheless shares some of

Ukraine's features as a stepping stone between the Russian world and Europe. The idea that the European Union should not reach beyond the frontiers of the former Soviet Union does not do justice to the particular identity of a country such as Moldova.

As for Turkey, historically it could not be part of Europe as long as Europe and Christendom remained synonymous. Its European vocation is recent. Today's Turkey is the product of a Kemalist state which forced the country to modernise, but against the background of a much deeper religious, cultural and strategic affinity with the Moslem and Middle-Eastern worlds than many Turks would wish to admit. However, Turkey's European yearning exists and can the European Union ignore it?

Europe therefore lacks a clear eastern frontier and indisputable criteria, whether geographical, religious or cultural, with which to define itself. Europe is more likely to find its frontiers by developing its own identity than by questioning that of its eastern neighbours. It is by defining its own political project that the EU will be able to present other countries with the conditions of their eventual adhesion, in the true sense of the term, to this project.

In fact, the determining criterion for EU membership will be political. Any European state whose abiding commitment to the substance of the common project is proven will be able to join the European Union, always allowing for the Union's ability to take it in without doing itself major damage. This political criterion has an internal and external dimension in each country.

Internally, it not only singles out democratised societies, which have developed market economies and are at peace with their minorities, but also those that are willing to adhere loyally to the rules of the European game. Those rules are a willingness to place limits on national sovereignty and to make concessions for the healthy functioning of the European project.

In its external aspect, the criterion favours states free from nationalist temptations which adhere to the western European vision of the international system: a multilateral society in which interdependence is both consented to and codified.

These criteria do not exclude the prospect of the accession, in 20 or 30 years, of a democratic Russia, cured of its imperial fantasies and with a society which had made true progress towards the European model. Nor does it

exclude the possibility of a truly democratised and secularised Turkey in which the Islamic Party has a role equivalent to that of a European Christian Democratic party. Nothing can be ruled out. As the Treaty of Rome makes clear, all European states can join. So the European Union must be permanently on guard so as to avoid conflating a state's "European vocation"—which cannot be denied to any country in Europe—with its eligibility for accession in the foreseeable future, which would require the most vigorous consideration.

These conditions have two drawbacks. First, they are very difficult for the EU's governments and institutions to evaluate, since they essentially depend on the political attitudes of the applicant countries rather than any objective criterion. Second, they are hard to explain to public opinion. So their fulfilment relies almost entirely on the vigilance and sense of collective interest of the European governments. It is thus understandable that the process of expansion which, at first sight, looks like the culmination of the EU's historical destiny, is in fact a venture of dizzying enormity. To make progress, the Union will have to rely upon a permanent exercise of political judgement and on an ability to defend its common interest which it has, until now, rarely been able to display.

The double uncertainty of globalisation

In the mid-1990s, global economic, political and cultural interdependencies intensified and entered the public consciousness as never before. Logically, globalisation's first victim ought to have been the nation-state rather than the European Union. Globalisation has effectively limited national decision-making in a series of domains, such as macro-economic policy and the control of financial flows and investments, simultaneously weakening the political and social consensus which had dominated post-war Europe. As globalisation cast doubt, once again, on the relevance of the nation-state, it appeared, post hoc, to vindicate the principle behind European integration. It demonstrated that, in a global world, certain competences could only usefully be exercised at a supranational level. That is essentially the aim of the single currency: to regain, at a European level, a measure of the sovereignty that individual states have lost in the conduct of their monetary policy.

But the European Union has been no less a victim of globalisation than its member-states. Globalisation has encouraged people to withdraw into an inward-looking quest for identity, to be suspicious of the outside world and to lose confidence in established political leaders and parties. This has proven

particularly true of the European Union. The negotiations leading up to the Treaty of Amsterdam, and the discussions on Agenda 2000, reveal a general decline in *communautaire* spirit among member-states. This has even affected Europe's regions, which had previously sought emancipation from central government through a tactical alliance with Brussels. In Germany the *Länder* now claim to defend their rights as much against European encroachments as against those from Bonn.

With their governments unable to regain control over the management of macro-economic policy or to maintain adequate levels of social cohesion, people have grown much more suspicious of politics in general, and of European politics in particular. The EU now embodies, more than any individual member-state, the shortcomings of government in a globalised world: distance from those that it governs, and an ever deeper gulf between political rhetoric and reality (even though the latter has been caused partly by national governments consistently blaming Europe for their own failures). One example of that gulf is the constant pretence of the European Union—from Jacques Delors' 1993 White Paper to the special summit on employment in Luxembourg in 1997—to tackle unemployment, although it has even less capacity to do so than national governments. This has only served to raise greater doubts as to the Union's efficiency and ingenuity.

Finally, the uncertainty over the European Union's identity can only fuel mistrust of the outside world in general, and of international co-operation in particular. Europe's citizens, attempting to regain some measure of influence on their destiny, find an easy target in the mechanisms of international decision-making, which are inevitably subject to indirect and imperfect democratic control, and which rely on procedures even more opaque than those prevalent in national decision-making.

As well as casting further doubt over the efficiency of European decision-making, globalisation has added a second fundamental challenge to the project of European integration—that of the validity of a European level of decision-making in a global world. Globalisation has left individual governments unable to control the effects of global economic and technical forces. But how has it affected decision-making at a the European level? Are EU institutions and policies really better placed to influence the course of events than national governments?

Two policy areas provide instructive examples. The single currency, which will

turn Europe into a much more autonomous monetary zone, is less sensitive than any of the individual European national currencies to external shocks. But this model of regaining, at a European level, the authority lost at national level does not necessarily apply across the board. Even EU-wide legislation cannot always keep up with the pace of technological change. An EU-level audio-visual policy may be a logical response to the development of cable or satellite TV, but it may be insufficient to regulate 'pay per view' television or the Internet.

From its inception, the European Community was assigned the defence of specific economic and commercial interests common to European states. What globalisation has demonstrated is the impossibility of establishing a tightly delineated sphere of European interests in a global world. It has also shown that there are shared interests with other large developed nations, or simply global interests, such as the environment.

This realisation is not entirely new. During the cold war, defence was taken out of Europe's control and entrusted to an Atlantic alliance which embodied the continuity of transatlantic interests against the Soviet threat. Today, however, there is both competition and convergence of interests between Europe and North America, and even Europe and the rest of the world, in virtually every domain over which the European Union has competence. Whether dealing with the free movement of capital, investment flows or culture and communication, Europe's actions are less often about the defence of narrow self-interest than about providing a stepping stone to more far-reaching rules and standards.

This is not to question the validity of EU-level decision-making. Everyone can understand the need to forge common European positions if its member-states wish to have a fair chance of influencing the final outcome. It does mean, however, that the process by which the positions are defined, and the political and economic negotiations which the Europeans carry out in order to reach them, cease to be an end in themselves and become a means to exerting greater influence at a global level. It also means that the exercise of a competence at EU level does not necessarily ensure the recapture of sovereignty that has seeped away from nation-states.

The EU cannot be a shield against the effects of globalisation. Rather it exposes its members to globalisation, while they seek to discover a necessary continuum between the single market and the global market, between European integration and a growing interdependence with the wider world.

What identity for Europe?

There will be no European unification if Europeans do not develop a sense of belonging to Europe, nor if the European political project fails to evoke in them that mixture of memory, desire and loyalty that defines belonging to a political society. This European sentiment need not be of the same nature or intensity as the national bond, let alone attempt replace it. The empires of the past, today's federal states and even unitary states with strong local identities such as Spain or Italy demonstrate the possible coexistence of regional and national allegiances, varying in relative strength, but not mutually exclusive. The development of a comparable European identity, even in a Europe of nation-states, should therefore be regarded as a real possibility.

Such a European identity is, nevertheless, developing only in a slow and patchy way. In fact—beyond perfunctory references to European "values" or "culture"—European identity is, if anything, becoming less apparent in a Union that is unsure of its institutional nature and frontiers, and exposed to the effects of globalisation.

The primary feature of any future European identity must be diversity itself. The countries which together form the European Union are made up of various languages, cultures, religions and historical experiences. Apart from diversity, are there any unifying traits applicable to all Europeans? No doubt, but it may be said that these are either so refined as to be appreciated only by a narrow elite, or so commonplace as to be almost irrelevant as a means of developing a distinct European identity.

There is a world of difference between being a cultured Frenchman, German or Italian and of rising to a truly European level of education. It is still possible, in France, to complete secondary schooling with honours without having come into even the most superficial contact with Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe or Dickens. To be a European intellectual like Stefan Zweig—who, in *Memoirs of a European*, provides an emotional account of a once-free and culturally united Europe—is to speak languages, to be intimate with several cultures, to travel.[4] It is obvious that the development of an elite intelligentsia on this model is necessary for European integration, and that progress is in fact being made in Europe, with the learning of languages and foreign cultures and with student exchanges. It is also to be encouraged. But on its own, culture cannot be the source of a broad European consciousness. Europe has not been

[4] *Stefan Zweig, Austrian essayist and novelist, 1881-1942*

able to develop its own mass popular culture. Culture in Europe remains either national or American. The United States has given European countries a sizeable proportion of their truly popular cultural references. Even America's ghetto counter-culture has provided Europe's socially excluded with unifying symbols.

Neither can memory be the source of a broad European consciousness. Europe has a history but no memory. Memory is, to paraphrase the writer and historian Ernest Renan, that mixture of historical truth and lies, of remembrance and forgetfulness, which binds a human community around the great things achieved together in the past and around the desire to accomplish more in the future.[5] The creation of a common memory is essential for the European project. Will it construct itself, as Polish foreign minister Bronislaw Geremek has suggested, around two poles of European history—the periods of unity such as those achieved by medieval Christianity and monastical Europe, and the moments of division and fratricide such as the Reformation and the great tragedies of the twentieth century? It is possible, but the fact is that the periods of unity lie in the distant past. As for the tragedies of the twentieth century, even if Europeans can be united by a shared will to overcome them, they remain, in spite of everything, divisive factors. In the interest of European unity they evidently require "a duty to remember", but also the ability to forget.

[5]In his famous 1882 lecture "What is a Nation?" Renan defined a nation as a community freely adhered to through a "permanent plebiscite" as opposed to one defined by language, ethnicity or religion

The exaltation of Europe's historical unity, the medieval spiritual unity, the intellectual unity of the Enlightenment, the cultural and artistic unity of the beginning of the twentieth century, is a necessary sentiment, one particularly fervent in those countries which were able "to return" to Europe after 1989. But can it be as powerfully evocative and unifying as the founding myths of national memory? It is a narrowly held sentiment, perhaps useful for developing a sense of belonging to Europe among a cultured elite, but insufficient to sow the seeds of a widely held European identity.

If European identity can be only partially based on a culture or memory which would be truly common to Europeans, is the EU project condemned to be the creature of simple reason and interest, and never of passion and emotion? It is evidently reasonable that a Europe which represented 12 per cent of the world's population two centuries ago and 5 per cent today should unite to punch its weight in the world. It is natural that geography should

dictate political and strategic interests which do not necessarily coincide with those of America. It is logical and honourable that the memory of past conflicts and the respect for European diversity should encourage Europe to defend its own conception of international relations, which tends to be more egalitarian, tolerant and respectful of international law than that of the United States.

Can these common interests produce an identity? As Europeans defend them together, will they have to wait for a single shock which would reveal Europe to itself, much as the revolt against British tax demands catalysed American aspirations towards independence in the Boston Tea Party? Even if it were useful for Europeans to develop an awareness of their shared interests, that would probably not be enough to forge a common political identity. The Europeans lack what had brought together the original American settlers: a common experience of religious dissent. Interests are no longer defended in the epic mode associated with the founding moments of national identity, but through influence and persuasion. And in a globalised world, and particularly in the developed nations, economic, technological and cultural trends make it more likely that conflicts of interest will place diverse and changing segments of fragmented societies at odds, rather than pit national blocs against each other as in the past.

Memory, culture and interests can contribute to the formation of a European identity. Its heart, however, must be of a different nature. How can one justify Europe's project of establishing a new political society? How can one nourish a sense of belonging and active participation within it? These questions are fundamental to any deepening of European identity. They are crucial because in Europe neither history nor culture has managed to establish a social community as the basis for the political community the Europeans have set out to form. We know that the Union is riddled with fragmentary interests which generate neither dream nor passion, nor the emotions which brought about the formation of nation-states—and which nation-states, despite their weakness, continue to arouse.

A European identity can therefore only be political.

16

Towards a European political identity

The Europe of ancients and moderns

Before attempting to identify some of the features of a possible European political identity, it is useful to assess the meaning of the term "political" in today's Europe.

In *De la liberté des anciens comparée à celle des modernes*[6] Benjamin Constant distinguishes between two sorts of liberty. First, that of the ancient republics, which consisted of "the collective but direct exercise of several parts of full sovereignty". This collective liberty implied "a complete subjection of the individual to the whole…The objective of the ancient republics was to share out social power between all the citizens of the same country or homeland. That is what they called liberty".

[6] *In "Benjamin Constant polémiste", JJ Pauvert, 1963, pp. 92 et seq*

The object of the moderns, however, "is freedom to enjoy private pursuits". To ensure this freedom the moderns chose a form of government—the representative system—founded on the "delegation of power to a small number" and characterised by "respect for the customs, affections and independence of the individual". This means that the citizen cannot exert real influence over public affairs. "The individual, independent in private life, is only sovereign in appearance, even in the freest states."

This does not mean that to be a modern citizen is to enjoy the tranquillity provided by limited government in a passive way. Constant argues that "the two liberties must be combined…institutions must complete the moral education of citizens. While respecting their individual rights, allowing for their independence and leaving them to their own affairs, institutions must nevertheless foster their influence on the public sphere, calling upon them to take part in the exercise of power through their votes and their will, and guaranteeing them a right of control and surveillance via the expression of their opinions."

This text could be taken to summarise the dilemmas of a contemporary Europe which appears to dither between the two options. On the one hand,

politics can be conceived as heroic, and citizenship as a means to provide unity, collective identity, and direct influence on public affairs on the "ancient" model. Such a conception has numerous followers in France. Many are hostile to the European project since they deem it undesirable, or, at best, impossible to arrive at a European citizenship based on that model. But this conception also inspires a truly French desire to build Europe, particularly the hope that Europe could become a fully fledged power, or, as the French put it, *une Europe puissance*. On the other hand, there is a belief, most dominant in countries which have been the victims of "great power politics", that European integration is altogether the best antidote to the misdeeds of politics, and will provide liberty in the "modern" sense of the word. Contemporary Europe appears to be deadlocked between these two opposing notions, which could somehow be taken to have inspired, respectively, the French and German positions in the debate over the single currency.

Nonetheless, the central question posed by Benjamin Constant—how to continue to be a citizen while enjoying the benefits of modern liberty— may provide a route out of this deadlock. The analogies between contemporary European integration and the concept of representative government advocated by Constant are striking. Both consist of a system of delegation of power characterised by "self restraint in the exercise of authority" and a priority given to the private sphere over participation in public affairs.

To be a citizen in such a political society does not require, as in the mode of the ancient republics, the identification of the individual with the whole, leading to an "active and constant participation in collective power". Rather, as in the modern era, to be a citizen of the EU is to influence and to exercise a "right of control and surveillance" over a system which should be regarded as a provider of political services—and whose competence, efficiency and in-built limitations are the best guarantees of legitimacy.

Constant's theory encourages us to think further about the establishment of a real yet utilitarian, rational yet limited, civic link between Europe and Europeans. To a greater extent than the link of classical citizenship, such a civic link in modern-day Europe would be based on the relationship between the delegate and he who has the power to delegate. That is a link stemming from the Anglo-Saxon duty of accountability rather than on traditional democratic responsibility.

A federation of states

It is Jacques Delors who, with his expression "a federation of states", has provided the most convincing political definition to date of the European institutions. This phrase reflects two basic and uncontested facts. First, the European Union is a society of states. The constitution of the Union, its powers and resources are unanimously defined by the member-states. Even when a decision is taken by majority voting, the vote is less the expression of the democratic principle of majority rule than a pragmatic mechanism to prevent member-states from obstructing consensus. The second fact is that the member-states are united by far stronger links than in a classical international organisation. The use of the term "federal" to define this reality, however, has been the source of much of the confusion, which has come to dominate the European debate.

The term "federal" can be defined in three distinct ways. In the general eighteenth-century sense, for instance in Emmanuel Kant's "project for perpetual peace", it simply designates a permanent association of states, united by the same objective; in this instance that of renouncing war. In a legal sense, the primacy of Community law, its direct effect and the role of the European Court of Justice point to a federal legal system, that is a "new legal order whose subjects comprise not only the member-states but also their nationals"[7]. However, from a political and institutional point of view, the existence of a federal state is recognised by its ability to define its powers at the expense of some of its federated members, without their unanimous consent. This ability is the corollary of the existence, within the framework of a federal state, of one sovereign people. This third definition cannot, however, apply to the European Union, which is made up of a variety of states and sovereign peoples.

[7] *European Court of Justice, "Van Gend en Loos" ruling, 5 February 1963*

According to the first two definitions, the federal nature of the European Union is undeniable. But the use of the term "federal" in the political and institutional sense risks equating the EU with a federal state (as opposed to a federation of states) which it evidently is not nor will be. Those federal states that do exist today are indeed evolving towards negotiated and consensual relations[8] between the component states or regions and the central government, taking them closer to the EU model of political organisation. Even so, it remains inconceivable that the EU could become a sovereign entity, the ultimate arbiter of its areas of competence vis-à-vis the member-states.

[8] *See Jean-Louis Quermonne "Le nouveau fédéralisme européen"*

This is even less conceivable because the EU differs from federal states in at least two respects. In the treaties, the EU's powers are expressed not so much as spheres of competence devolved to it, but rather as objectives to accomplish. This means that, in practice, the powers of the Union are usually shared with the member-states. Moreover, the Union resorts most to federal legal mechanisms in those areas of traditional Community competence, such as free movement of goods and services, and common economic policies. This has two consequences. First, it means that the EU generally operates in a more federal way the further it steers clear of those areas seen as the natural prerogatives of federal states, such as foreign affairs and defence. Second, it implies that any notion of reorganising the Union into concentric circles with a federal core and a looser, inter-governmental single market, as Valéry Giscard d'Estaing first suggested, is a contradiction, since the operation of the single market is already by far the most federal in legal terms.

It has been known for a long time that the Union is not in the process of turning into a federal state.[9] But the tiresome debate between supporters of a Europe of nation-states and federalists has not helped to further new thinking on the institutional nature of the European Union. As a hybrid, both inter-governmental and federal, the EU is described in a way which breeds confusion. It also leaves the debate on the future of European institutions in a conceptual void. This was a major factor in the failure of the Amsterdam inter-governmental conference. The weakening of the federalist vision means that the Commission can no longer seriously be treated as European government-in-waiting, nor the Council as an upper chamber. At the same time, most supporters of a Europe of nation-states have given up their attempts to relegate the Commission to the role of mere "technical agency". They also no longer deny any role for the European Parliament, which in fact turned out to be the big winner of the Amsterdam negotiations. Apart from these advances, however, we still lack a conceptual overview of the system, and therefore a clear idea of the essential functions that each of its bodies is supposed to carry out.

[9] *See Pierre-Henri Teitgen "Droit communautaire européen", Les Cours de Droits, Paris, 1977*

The European Union is a union of states. It exercises limited powers delegated by them. Nevertheless—unprecedented in the international order—it exercises them in ways designed to compensate for the danger of paralysis and division inherent in all multilateral activities. The Union combines three principles:

★ defence of the collective interest —this gives the Commission the double role of initiator of action and censor of the shortcomings of the European Union's member-states;

★ efficiency—this obliges member-states to influence rather than oppose the final decision, notably through majority voting, and makes blocking strategies costly and therefore the exception;

★ authority of Community decisions and uniformity of application—expressed through legal mechanisms borrowed from federal systems.

The European Union is a representative system whose citizens are states. However, they are not its masters. The role of the Commission, majority voting and the authority of European law characterise a union of states whose rationale is not to represent a sovereignty distinct from that of its member-states but to exercise effectively, and with their concurrence, the powers which they have delegated to it.

An indirect democracy

One preliminary observation is that the primary democratic deficit from which the European Union suffers is probably a deficit of efficiency. In the Community field alone, we have witnessed the weakening of the Commission's supposed function as incarnation of the collective interest, and an inefficient Council whose decisions are fast losing authority. Worse still, the new spheres of EU action, in particular foreign policy, have been characterised by an almost total lack of thinking about how these policies are to be carried out. Without simply duplicating the Community method, it would have been worthwhile to ask who would be in charge of expressing the collective interest and how the efficiency and authority of the decision-making process would be guaranteed. The Union still has to address these issues five years after the Maastricht treaty came into force.

Even if the Union's unpopularity originates to a large extent in its inefficiency, there is a real need for debate on how the EU can take decisions democratically. At Maastricht and Amsterdam progress in this area consisted mainly of expanding the Parliament's powers (in a way reminiscent of the development of national parliamentary prerogatives during the nineteenth century), for example by allowing it to vote on the investiture of the Commission and of its president, and by extending the scope of the co-decision legislative process.

Assuming that the EU is a union of states, and that the essential decision-making body is the Council (rather than the Commission), why has the role of the European Parliament been expanded in this way? There are natural limits to the Parliament's powers. It is most improbable that the right to

initiate legislation and to raise taxes will be added to them. The European Parliament will therefore remain incomplete in comparison to the prerogatives of national parliaments. Although its new responsibility to approve the appointment of the president of the Commission is useful in terms of reinforcing the Commission's authority vis-à-vis the Council, it does not transform the president into the leader of a parliamentary majority. Neither would Jacques Delors' recent proposal to make the choice of president the subject of European elections: he has invited the parties in each country to identify the candidate they would support in the investiture vote.

There is no single European public opinion that can be translated into a pan-European parliamentary majority. There are, rather, 15 partisan systems, 15 political traditions and 15 different debates which inform electoral choice. That a figure embodying a common European choice, able to win a majority of European votes, might emerge from such a process, or for that matter any other, would not only be implausible but dangerous. The Parliament was not established to express any European general will. Even if this were possible, which is unlikely given the absence of a European public opinion, such a role would instantly put the Parliament at odds with what has been the essence of the Union's decision-making process. Decisions within the EU are essentially made in a transactional way, a progressive compromise between national, sectional, economic and social interests, which are part and parcel of the Commission's initial proposals and influence the decision-making process throughout. In the course of that process, these interests progressively balance each other out. It belongs to the Commission to bring about such a balance, and to oversee the unfolding of the process. In that sense, it is the guardian of the Community interest. Even with Parliament's support, however, the Commission would be unfit to embody a general, directly-elected European interest, as distinct from the various and often mutually-exclusive interests that interact during the decision-making process.

Indeed the principal virtue of the Community system is its capacity to integrate this diversity of interests. Once again it was Benjamin Constant who remarked that, in contradiction to Jean-Jacques Rousseau there is a continuity between particular interests and the general interest. The general interest, he argued, is only "the transaction which occurs between particular interests".[10] The expression of a general will, distinct from particular interests, cannot be the order of the day in a global world in which societies are threatened with fragmentation and in a Europe which is irredeemably diverse. Instead, Europe needs a strengthening of the Community

[10] *Benjamin Constant "Principes de politique", La Pleïade, 1979 p. 1103*

method: that means promoting the recognition of an inevitably diverse array of interests, and encouraging a state of permanent transaction between them.

If the European Union must remain a place of permanent negotiation—in which the principal actors are the states and interest groups, and its framework the Commission and the Council—where does democracy lie and what useful role should a parliamentary institution play in the process?

Following Constant's argument on the continuity between particular interests and the general interest, and in defence of indirect elections, one might regret that the European parliament was not composed of members of national parliaments. This would be in no way contrary to the expression of a European political identity. Rather it would have the benefit of eliminating the mutual frustration suffered since the introduction of direct elections, by national parliamentarians worried about the emergence of a European rival, and by European parliamentarians concerned with their own legitimacy and inherently unsatisfied with their current level of influence.

In reality, the European Union is a system of indirect democracy in which the European Parliament must nevertheless play a role of ratification, transparency and control. It is natural that at the end of the necessarily opaque negotiating procedure in the Commission and the Council, the Parliament should be called upon to verify the content of the agreement. As a corollary to the direct application of Community law, parliamentary consent plays, at that final stage, the role played by national parliamentary ratification in the context of classical international law. That is to confirm a decision which has already been made, to undertake a critical review of the agreement and to publicly expose its contents and the balance between the interests represented—a balance which until then has been only implicit. Finally, the function of the Parliament is to pass a judgement on the proposal, a decision which can legitimately be expected to be positive, barring a monstrous and manifest policy error.

This parliamentary role is useful, not least because of the transparency which it introduces into the decision-making process. One might hope that this approach will prevail with respect to the European Central Bank, so as to bring it closer to the Anglo-Saxon culture of open debate over monetary policy, as opposed to the more secretive tradition of continental central banks.

It is in this way—by obliging the holders of European authority to explain themselves and by verifying their decisions after having debated them in

public—that the Parliament will contribute to the growth of a European democratic culture. It will not come through any pretence to express the will of a legitimate parliamentary majority on a European scale. This would at best be an illusion and at worst a step backwards.

On European citizenship

If one were to look for the "principle" which would correspond to the European Union's particular political nature (in the case of a republic, the principle is virtue, and for a monarchy, honour, according to Montesquieu), this principle would probably be that of compromise. Indeed nothing could be more vital to the proper functioning of the Union than tolerance in the face of diversity of opinions, and the ability to resist pushing too far a particular position for the sake of arriving at a common agreement.

Compromise represents the essence of the community spirit. It is the perpetuation, in a style no longer heroic, of the founding principle of the European enterprise, namely post-war reconciliation. It is also the pre-condition for its enduring success.

France, which is always quick to complain about the lack of community spirit shown by more recent or peripheral member-states (and not always unjustly), would be well advised to look more closely at what has helped to build a stronger commitment among other partners. Most obvious are the natural affinity felt by federal states with the European project, or the recent formation or internal weakness of others. These explanations are valuable. Nevertheless they would be incomplete if one did not note that the community spirit is more deeply rooted in member-states with a political tradition of compromise. How else can its strength in Holland—a unitary country with a proud historical identity and character—be explained?

Contemporary Germany demonstrates that federalism alone does not guarantee a strong community spirit. In trying to reorganise the distribution of competences between the Union, the member-states and their component regions, in the name of subsidiarity and according to their own federal model, our German partners are in danger of undermining the *acquis communautaire* itself. This confirms that the structure of national federal systems is not transferable, as such, to the European level. Neither is the federal principle necessarily the main factor underpinning their consistent adherence to European integration.

On the contrary, if a number of historical factors may be called upon to explain the distance Britain has maintained from Europe, its internal political culture has also contributed to it. It is a political culture only partially based upon tolerance. The depth of social cleavages, the alternate hegemonies of large, often homogenous parliamentary majorities and the strength of ideologies (with Thatcherism, Britain produced the last one of the century) also contribute to a culture of confrontation. In the European sphere, this was illustrated by John Major's sorry portrayal of the conclusion of the Maastricht treaty negotiations as "game, set and match for Great Britain".

The European Union is not merely an institutional and legal structure. For it to thrive, the EU needs to develop a common political culture which does away with isolationism and obstructionism. This culture is all the more necessary since the society of states which make up the Union is not exactly a society of equals. It rests on an equilibrium between the rights and duties of large and small states which can only be very implicit.

The workings of the EU seem to confirm de Toqueville's judgement that democratic societies are passionate about equality. At the same time, however, not all states can pull the same weight. Indeed it is in the common interest that the large states should play a leading role in some areas, notably in foreign policy. Other states find it difficult to accept, however, that this role should be explicit, as was seen during the last inter-governmental conference. Mechanisms which formally distinguish the heavyweight countries from their smaller partners (for example, the second commissioner and the proposed re-weighting of votes in the Council) are the object of growing resentment on the part of those states which, rightly or wrongly, are qualified as small.

It is for this reason that the distinctions between large and small states should in most cases remain implicit. The larger states need to exercise discretion and moderation in return for acceptance by the smaller states of the existence of certain unwritten limitations on the influence that they can exert within the system.

In the European Union, civic attitudes must first develop among the member-states, before they can spread into public life. And that will not happen without the visible manifestation on the part of national governments of a culture of compromise, in relations with their partners. It is that culture of compromise which can, in turn, encourage citizens to adhere to the European

project. European civic responsibility, like European democracy, has to develop through indirect methods.

The need to consolidate a political culture of compromise is particularly crucial in the light of the enlargement of the EU. Whether as a result of their own internal political traditions, or from their experience as part of the Soviet bloc, many of the countries that seek EU membership lack a political culture that values tolerance and compromise. It is therefore vital that current EU members practice and actively promote that culture, as the central and eastern European countries move towards membership.

It has long been a custom to say that European integration only makes progress during crises. This is no longer necessarily the case. The public's negative reaction to the chaos surrounding attempts by heads of state and government to nominate the ECB president demonstrates that such decisions should no longer be taken in marathon, confrontational mode. The European Union is expected by its citizens to display serenity and conciliation, and it is time to enforce rules of civic behaviour among states in order to meet those expectations.

Internal tolerance, external strength

How can a Union, whose fundametal principles are based on compromise, whose members have renounced the use of coercion (through force or bullying) and which is founded upon the rule of law, be strong and respected by the outside world? How can an internal civic sentiment of tolerance be reconciled with the necessity of defending one's interests in the world; and with the acceptance of, when inevitable, the use of force?

This dilemma is not unique to the European Union. No political society can escape it. Numerous authors have sought to resolve it by suggesting that there is a fundamental divergence between the internal attitudes of a democratic state and its behaviour vis-à-vis the outside world. That is, principles of democracy and conciliation apply only within the country's borders, at which point democratic law breaks down and a different world takes over, dominated by the unruly confrontation of interests. Hence the arguments of Locke, who hands the conduct of foreign policy to a distinct authority, the "federative power", which is immune to the mechanisms of limited government he conceived of for internal affairs. De Tocqueville similarly conceded that democracies are bad at diplomacy.

The European Union's problem is, however, particular. The principle of

compromise which enables the EU to function should necessarily spread through the democratic culture of its member-states. It is their internal laws which underpin the authority of Community law. In the case of the European Union, any divergence between internal democratic principles and those governing external affairs, would occur on its external frontiers. This would force EU member-states to pursue schizophrenic foreign policies, following entirely different principles for relations among themselves as opposed to relations with the outside world.

Yet such a rupture is in fact inconceivable for a Union whose frontiers are not established by past or present conflicts or by the certainties of an island geography. Thus the ambition to make Europe into a power in its own right (*l'Europe puissance*) is unwise, for it would focus Europe's foreign policy ambitions in a direction where its relative advantage is feeble, and which is fundamentally incompatible with the principles of the European project.

This project is, by its nature, universalist. Europe cannot, without contradicting itself, indulge in crude power projection elsewhere in the world, at the expense of the virtues of self-limitation, compromise and submission to the laws that underpin European integration. Rather, it must seek to export these virtues. It is no coincidence that Europe's foreign policies have met with their rare successes mostly when European positions expressed values of engagement, respect for the rule of law and multilateralism. Take for instance the creation of the World Trade Organisation, resistance to American unilateral trade sanctions or the success of the Kyoto conference on global warming. In each case Europe prevailed not because its power enabled it to promote narrowly defined self-interests, but because its position echoed a widely held aspiration for a more egalitarian and less arbitrary world.

That is why the priority for the European Union vis-à-vis the United States should not be to establish itself as a mirror power of comparable weight and style, but rather to help the US accept the multilateral constraints which are necessary for the co-operative administration of a global world.

That does not mean that the European Union should renounce all pretension to power. The Union should be prepared to resort to military force, and should seek to provide the capacity to decide and act within the EU framework. But it should regard power as a means to be used rarely and deliberately rather than as an objective of its foreign policy, and it should discard traditional power politics as the measure of its success.

Conclusion

Is there a remedy for the uncertainties which beset European integration? How will Europeans manage to act together politically, caught as they are between a de-politicised monetary union and a nominal political union? Where will greater Europe's frontiers lie? What competences can the EU validly exercise in a global world? On what can a European sense of civic duty be founded?

These issues are all related. All these uncertainties stem from the indeterminate political nature of the European Union. This is why the EU seems to hesitate between two equally illusory incarnations, that of the technocratic exercise of powers stolen from the states, and that of the creation of a European general will. This is what makes it impossible to set a precise time-table, and sufficiently rigorous conditions, for large-scale enlargement. This is also what increases uncertainty over the European Union's desirable sphere of action, and what prevents the building of a truly European political identity.

It will be impossible to overcome these uncertainties without finally clarifying the political content of the European project. Between admitting that it is sui generis, which is obvious, and resigning oneself to its being "unidentified", there is all the space, left vacant by the Maastricht and Amsterdam negotiators, for an authentic institutional and political debate on the conditions for the legitimate and effective functioning of the exercise of power at the European level.

It would be presumptuous to second guess the results of such a deliberation. It is possible, however, to suggest certain prescriptions about its method.

Stop playing with words. The European Union should not be endowed with authority it cannot exercise. It should not be adorned with the symbols of sovereignty. Nor should it merely reproduce the governmental mechanisms of the nation-state at a European level. As well as devaluing the terms employed, such an exercise devalues Europe itself by pitting it against the nation-states in futile competition. Europe will remain the setting for an indirect democracy, exercised by delegation and according to new and innovative political concepts. It will never possess either the intensity of solidarity, the range of means or the relative institutional clarity associated with the nation-state.

Make a virtue of necessity. In a world marked by the erosion of sovereignties and the interdependence of nations it would doubtless be better for Europe to make more of its de-politicised and consensual form of government. Its inability to play power politics, to force the hand of destiny, is perceived as a weakness. Instead it should be seen as a sign of welcome caution, coming from a continent ravaged in the past by an excessive faith in great power politics and by damaging, over-reaching ambitions. More positively, Europe's implicit preference for soft forms of regulation over formal legislation, the interplay of interests rather than the prevalence of general will, and consensus-building rather than the rule of the majority is perhaps also a political style more attuned to the contingencies the modern world.

Praise past achievements. What European integration has achieved in half a century is of historic proportions. To deepen Europe's understanding of its own success and to celebrate the reconciliation between nations that it has made possible is not to mire oneself in the past. Rather it is to foster that part of European memory most vital for the development of a European political identity. It is an attitude that must be encouraged continuously and with vigour.

Take Europe seriously. European governments cannot at the same time affect to deplore the weakness of Europeans' loyalty towards the Union and at the same time display the poorest European civic sense themselves. Without the development on their part of an attitude of mutual tolerance and compromise, without the observance between European governments of some kind of basic code of good conduct, how will it be possible to create any feeling of loyalty to the Union now or in the future?

Do not despair. It may only be a small step from today's Europe to EU institutions and political processes that are able to generate the loyalty of Europeans—and to provide them with the framework for a decent political life at the European level. Better efficiency, delivery mechanisms, institutional clarity and accountability would do much to endow the European project with the credibility and respect it is lacking today. What is no longer possible is to continue to describe the EU as an indeterminate object, a perpetual motion, a process without an end-goal. One must convince oneself and do one's utmost to persuade others that we are not far from reaching that goal.

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