

A PLEA FOR MEMORY: DO WE REMEMBER ANYMORE WHAT THE EUROPEAN IDEA STANDS FOR?

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ABSTRACT:

FROM THE RUINS OF THE OLD CONTINENT ROSE HIGH IDEALS TO UNITE AS EQUALS AND PURSUE THE COURSE OF MUTUAL INTEREST VERSUS NATIONAL INTEREST, DEMOCRACY VERSUS TYRANNY, MULTILATERALISM VERSUS UNILATERALISM. IN THIS RESPECT, THE POWERFUL SPEECH OF WINSTON CHURCHILL OF 1946, CALLING FOR THE UNITED STATES OF EUROPE, IS WELL KNOWN...IN ITS BUILDING AND EVOLUTION, THE EUROPEAN UNION OBSERVES, IN A VERY STRICT MANNER, THE PRINCIPLE OF MULTILATERALISM EVEN IF SOMETIMES THIS APPROACH MAY SEEM BUREAUCRATIC AND INSUFFICIENTLY TRANSPARENT. FROM ITS BEGGINING, WITH THE EUROPEAN COAL AND STEEL COMMUNITY IN 1951, THE SIX THEN MEMBER STATES AT THE VERY CORE OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE EUROPEAN RECONSTRUCTION AIMED AT DEVELOPING A MECHANISM TO INCREASE EUROPEAN UNITY THROUGH COOPERATION, INITIALLY, AT THE ECONOMIC LEVEL.

KEY WORDS: EUROPE EUROPEAN IDEA, EUROPEAN UNION, REFORM, INTEGRATION, ENLARGEMENT

WHAT THE EUROPEAN IDEA REALLY STANDS FOR

What the European idea really stands for? We could say it's all about strengthening the European Union, making its institutions more effective and bringing them closer to European citizens. To a certain extent, these can be regarded as fundamental objectives of the European construction. The question of defining the ultimate objectives of the Union, *sa finalite politique*, which poses certain difficulties and risks for the current debate, coincides more or less with agreeing on the fundamentals or *les raisons d'etre* of the European establishment further into the future.

One must believe that as a consequence of the new international context, Europe is called to deliver more at the global level and to assume greater responsibilities in the world. This appears to be the main *raison d'etre* of the Union for the next generations. In a general view, the European Union can do so by creating a re-united Europe, a Europe "whole and free", as we hear very often, and to provide to the world its unique model of society and civilization, based on diversity, freedom and solidarity. Unlike in the past, in the future, the European Union will have to focus to an equal extent on external affairs, be they in the area of security and defense, in that of economy and trade or in development. This process should develop in synergy with the process of creating the most dynamic and modern economy in

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the world. The main instruments through which the EU can promote its identity and the values of the European model, the Political Union and the Economic and Monetary Union must be completed in one way or another.

Europe's illustrious leaders have agreed that an enlarged Europe will have the necessary weight to play an active part in a new phase of our history². However, neither its size nor its economic resources will suffice if it is unable to strengthen its policies and reform its institutions, if it fails to express the will to reaffirm its sense of unity. It will be up to us to decide: whether we wish to continue along the path of integration so as to give Europe the strength to resist threats and respond to the challenges of today's world or whether we would prefer to allow Europe to be gradually emptied of its content.

We can exemplify with the case of the ongoing Eurozone crisis. The "Eurozone crisis" began as a sovereign (or public) debt crisis in Greece in 2009-2010. Over the previous decade, the Greek government borrowed heavily from international capital markets to pay for its budget and trade deficits. This left Greece vulnerable to shifts in investor confidence. As investors became increasingly nervous in 2009 that the government's debt was too high amid the global financial crisis, markets demanded higher interest rates for Greek bonds, which drove up Greece's borrowing costs³.

European leaders and EU institutions have responded to the crisis and sought to stem its contagion with a variety of policy mechanisms. In order to avoid default, Greece, Ireland, Portugal, and Cyprus received "bail-out" loans from the EU and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Such assistance, however, came with some strings attached, including the imposition of strict austerity measures. Other key initiatives have included the creation of a permanent EU financial assistance facility (the European Stability Mechanism, or ESM) to provide emergency support to Eurozone countries in financial trouble; a decision to create a single bank supervisor for the Eurozone, under which the ESM would be able to inject cash directly into ailing Eurozone banks; and ECB efforts to calm the financial markets by purchasing large portions of European sovereign debt and providing significant infusions of credit into the European banking system⁴.

The Eurozone crisis has also had significant political implications, resulting in the fall of some national governments, and forcing EU leaders to grapple with both the euro's future viability and the desirability of further EU integration. Some view EU efforts to address the crisis as too timid and too slow in part because of political differences among EU member states and between those in and outside of the Eurozone. Key points of tension have arisen over the proper balance between imposing austerity measures versus stimulating growth, and whether and to what extent the Eurozone countries should pursue closer fiscal integration⁵.

In January 2012, 25 of the EU's then-27 member states agreed on a new "fiscal compact" aimed at strengthening fiscal discipline within the EU, providing for a more

² The terrorist attacks which struck the United States of America on the morning of 11 September propelled the whole world into a new, unknown and dangerous dimension. That morning marked the real beginning of the twenty-first century. Romano Prodi, *An Enlarged And More United Europe, A Global Player - challenges and opportunities in the new century*, SPEECH/01/528, College of Europe, Bruges, 12 November 12th, 2001. http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-01-528_en.htm?locale=en

³ The 19 members of the EU that use the euro are: Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Spain. Kristin Archick, "The European Union: Questions and Answers", *Congressional Research Service Report*, January 13th, 2015, accessed July 11th, 2015, p. 4. <http://fas.org:8080/sgp/crs/row/RS21372.pdf>

⁴ Kristin Archick, "The European Union: Questions and Answers", *Congressional Research Service Report*, January 13th, 2015, accessed July 11th, 2015, p. 4-5. <http://fas.org:8080/sgp/crs/row/RS21372.pdf>

⁵ Kristin Archick, "The European Union: Questions and Answers"..., 4-5

automatic imposition of sanctions should a country breach EU fiscal rules, and improving the coordination of national economic policies; this pact entered into force in January 2013⁶.

Too many of the European citizens regard Europe as a distant, abstract and complex entity. But how could this be otherwise when major speeches on the future are followed by nights of bargaining to defend privileges and the future advantages of established positions?⁷ Yet ordinary citizens, according to opinion polls, still want Europe to work for peace, security and social justice. But every time there are fewer of them and this should be a factor of concern for the advised subjects. Still, a recipe for a form of integration which is both supranational and also respectful of the nations and states that is composed of, however large or small exists: the Community method. Only this method, based on common institutions, allows member countries, large and small to contribute on an equal footing to carry out a joint project⁸.

THE EUROPEAN PROJECT AS INVENTION AND NECESSITY

All over Europe, we have parliamentary buildings speaking the same language. The architecture of our legislatures is inextricably linked to the architecture of our states and to the emergence of our national consciousness. None of European political systems was built without some portion of national romanticism which - at different times for different countries - contributed greatly to our political, social and cultural cohesion and to the solidarity underlying the welfare state. We do well to remember this when we see the ugly and aggressive side of nationalism. In excessive doses, anything can be poisonous. But identities as such - the sense of roots or the sense of belonging - are normally benign and they are also the very foundation of any political community and without such communities, there can be no individual freedom. As we go through the 21st century, the predominant political unit in Europe is still the sovereign state. To organize our societies and to meet the challenges facing us, the state continues to be both indispensable and insufficient. *Indispensable*, because it remains our principal political community. Europeans keep identifying very strongly with their own country and its well-entrenched institutions. *Insufficient*, at the same time, because collective problems come in so many shapes and sizes. Some are far too small for the state and can be handled much better at the local level, by regions and municipalities, or by civil society. Others are far too big for the sovereign state and require common approaches in different forms, ranging from concertation and cooperation to full-scale coordination or joint decision-making.

And this is where Europe comes in.

In a famous book⁹, the anthropologist Benedict Anderson has analyzed our nations as "imagined communities"¹⁰. Clearly, that is how they started, and some nations are still in the making. Europe began in the same way, as an idea, an invention, a construct (*ion*).

⁶ Rebecca M. Nelson (coord.), Paul Belkin, Derek E. Mix, Martin A. Weiss, "The Eurozone Crisis: Overview and Issues for Congress", *Congressional Research Service Report*, September 26th, 2012, accessed July 11th, 2015. <http://fas.org:8080/sgp/crs/row/R42377.pdf>

⁷ Romano Prodi, *An Enlarged And More United Europe...*

⁸ Romano Prodi, *An Enlarged And More United Europe...*

⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised Edition ed. London and New York: Verso, 1991. Benedict Anderson's book first appeared in 1983. Since that time it has become one of the standard texts on the topic of nations and nationalism. The following definition is one of the most commonly used by scholars in the field.

¹⁰ "In an anthropological spirit, then, I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently *limited and sovereign*. The nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic boundaries, beyond which lie other nations. No nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind. The most messianic nationalists do not dream of a day when all the members of the human race will join their nation in the way that

Underlying, of course, are physical realities. The breathtaking landscapes and cultural riches of this continent do not lack objective existence, they are quite tangible and there to discover and to enjoy. But the cohesion and unity of all this comes about only in our minds.

It is there that Europe is born. It is born out of the traumas of our past and out of the fears that they may repeat themselves, but above all out of a set of convictions that may have taken a long time to mature but that have also grown very strong in the last half-century.

Convictions about human dignity and the need to recognize and defend fundamental human rights and freedoms.

Convictions about the uniqueness and equal value of the life-experience and opinions of each and every individual, which rule out all forms of government except pluralist democracy.

Convictions about the need for political authority but also about its inherent dangers, a dilemma only to be resolved through division of power and the rule of law.

Convictions about the need for reconciliation both inside and between our countries and enlightened strategies to overcome ethnic frictions.

Convictions, finally, about the need to adapt to our growing interdependence. Living together side by side in a small continent and a small world, there is simply no way in which we can isolate ourselves or close our eyes to the fate of our neighbours, be they immediate or more distant.

When we speak of these convictions as "European values", we do not at all entertain the illusion that Europeans unanimously subscribe to these principles, or even less that they live by them. Some manifestly do not and have not done so, whether you think of the last century or the last week.

The concept of European values is unabashedly normative¹¹. Its purpose is not to describe the sordid reality around us but the civilized order we seek to establish. Indeed, the order we must establish if we wish our children and grandchildren to live in peace and prosperity, because that goal is no longer attainable within the borders of one single state.

It requires Europe.

it was possible, in certain epochs, for, say, Christians to dream of a wholly Christian planet. It is imagined as *sovereign* because the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimate of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm. Coming to maturity at a stage of human history when even the most devout adherents of any universal religion were inescapably confronted with the living pluralism of such religions, and the allomorphism between each faith's ontological claims and territorial stretch, nations dream of being free, and, if under God, directly so. The gage and emblem of this freedom is the sovereign state. Finally, it is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings". Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (Revised Edition ed. London and New York: Verso, 1991), 5-7.

¹¹ "However, I will further claim that the developments of the 1990s in international relations lead us to rethink both notions of military power and civilian power in order to consider the EU's normative power in world politics. My argument begins by briefly surveying the conceptual history of civilian power and military power Europe over the past 20 years in order to locate these traditional conceptions of the EU's international role. I will then introduce the idea of normative power Europe, including the EU's normative difference, the EU's normative basis, and an explanation of how EU norms are diffused. In order to demonstrate the value of considering the normative power of the EU, I will then look at the case of its international pursuit of the abolition of the death penalty. Finally, I will conclude by arguing that the concept of normative power represents a valuable addition to our understanding of the EU's civilian and military power in world politics. Thus, the notion of «normative power» when applied to the EU is not a contradiction in terms, as the ability to define what passes for «normal» in world politics is extremely rich". Ian Manners, "Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 40, no. 2, 2002, 235-258 (236).

Europe may be an invention - it is an invention - but it has also become a necessity. Take one glance at the region that is uppermost in our minds right now, at the Southeast of our continent, and you will see immediately that the only solutions with any remote chance of success are European solutions, mobilizing European solidarity and self-interest, integrating the whole area into wider European structures while safeguarding, at the same time, the appropriate degree of sovereignty and self-government.

THE EUROPEAN ESTABLISHMENT ON THE INTERNATIONAL STAGE

Let's turn to the role that Europe can play on the international scene. The main challenges of the second half of the last century were the confrontation between East and West, first, and the consequences of the disintegration of the Soviet empire thereafter. In both cases Europe succeeded in playing a key role. The main challenge of the new century seems to be the relationship between the northern and southern parts of the world and that, here too, Europe will need to play its part in contributing to stability.

Europe's history, its experience of political integration under democracy and its cultural experience of respect for diversity will be equally important in the dialogue with countries in search of more stable structures capable of stimulating development.

Although each country has its own particular characteristics, European societies share a vision of human rights and the rights and duties of citizens and institutions that is based on a sense of solidarity. It is natural for Europe and Europeans to understand how the formation or, worse, the exacerbation of inequality - and here one must think primarily of Africa - creates tensions and possible breakdowns in world equilibriums.

It is also natural that Europe and its citizens, who have always had to cope with a scarcity of natural resources, have developed and indeed sharpened their awareness of depredations to the environment and their interest in what we have learned to call sustainable development.

The role played during the difficult discussions on the Kyoto agreement, the initiative entitled "Everything but arms"¹², which unilaterally opened up European markets to exports from the poorer countries, and the efforts made to relaunch negotiations at the World Trade Organization after the failure in Seattle are clear proof of Europe's ability to act authoritatively on the international stage, while taking account of the interests of others.

But Europe, as we have seen many times in the past and, unfortunately, will probably see again, will not succeed in contributing to peace and stability in the world, nor will it be able to fill a political role that matches its economic stature, or indeed be accepted in such a role, unless it is united in its actions.

This problem will be resolved once and for all only if the necessary adjustments are made and the entire foreign and security policy of the Union is brought inside the Community system.

Experience teaches us that when the Union presents itself in a piecemeal fashion, its influence is limited. On the other hand, in the case of trade, where the Union has authority to represent the Member States, or competition, where it has clear powers to intervene, it is perfectly capable of making itself heard. One could be thinking rather of all the down-to-earth decisions that can and must be taken, starting right now, to ensure that Europe is effective.

The process of European integration is complex and will probably remain so. However, let us strive to make the Union appear a single entity to the outside world.

¹² Lucian Cernat, Sam Laird, Luca Monge-Roffarello and Alessandro Turrini, "The EU's Everything But Arms Initiative and the Least-developed Countries", WIDER (World Institute for Development Economics Research), Discussion Paper No. 2003/47, June 2003, United Nations University

A lot can be done in this direction.

Accordingly, we ought to be aware of just how original a creation the Union is. All the European lasting achievements, from the single market to the euro, with successive enlargements along the way, have been brought about through a completely innovative structure based on a delicate balance between institutions. The innovative character of the Union derives directly from the attachment of Europeans to a community of peoples and of states. This innovative character is something we must maintain.

But no reform will have achieved the objective, if it does not succeed in ensuring that the Community has a real capacity to take decisions.

Respect for the basic rule of democracy, and the fact that the Union has to have real decision-making power, require that majority voting become the general rule¹³. In the big Europe created by enlargement, there can be no more room, except possibly in special and clearly defined circumstances, for a right of veto.

Enlargement must not mean paralysis.

In the same way, we will also have to consider the question of the Union's own resources. The time has come to ask questions about sources of revenue and the necessary discretion to decide spending. This is not a technical question: it is a political question, and must be given full attention in the debate on the future of Europe.

I have to ask myself whether it is not contrary to the principles of openness that more and more of the Union's revenue comes from the Member States themselves, rather than from the citizens direct, so that the relationship between the taxpaying citizen and the Union is growing constantly more confused.

Ultimately, if we want enlargement to be a success, if we want Europe to keep the solidity, the weight, the capacity to decide and to act which are needed in order to respond to the demands of its citizens, we need a new common impetus that cannot be provided by the Commission alone. It has to come from the joint action of all the institutions together.

CONCLUSION

Decades after the creation of the Council of Europe and many more years after its expansion to encompass the whole continent, we have established an excellent framework for common European undertakings, not only through this experienced and efficient organization, but also through others, such as the European Union and the OSCE. What we need now is the courage to use this framework, and the foresight to act not only under the pressure of immediate constraints.

Some of our leaders are afraid to extend European cooperation for fear of its high costs. Let's offer them some friendly advice: it will cost our citizens much more not to extend European cooperation, or to push it too far into the future. And the citizens are of course the final decision-makers or they should be anyway. Europe will not succeed unless it becomes a common cause.

After Italian unification it was said: "*So now we have Italy, but it remains to create Italians*"¹⁴.

¹³ Kübra Dilek Azman, "The Problem of «Democratic Deficit» in the European Union", *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, vol. 1, no. 5, May 2011, pp. 243-250,

<http://www.ijhssnet.com/journals/Vol.1.No.5;May.2011/27.pdf>. See also, Marcus Höreth, (1999), "The unsolved legitimacy problem of European governance", *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 6, no. 2, June 1999, p. 251, and Emil J. Kirchner, "Thirty Years of the Journal of European Integration: Reflections and Outlook on European Integration Studies", *Journal of European Integration*, vol. 31, no. 2, Winter 2009, p. 159.

¹⁴ Uncertainty over whether Italy has really managed to forge itself into a viable nation-state after unification, goes wider, recalling a famous remark by Massimo d'Azeglio, a 19th century statesman, who shortly after said: «We have made Italy. Now we have to make Italians». Metternich, the Austrian master-diplomat, was

We are in similar situation today. We have built Europe, or at least its foundations, but it yet remains to create Europeans. At one time, there was certainly a wide-spread apprehension in our different countries that a stronger sense of European identity might undermine the national identity, and thus weaken the citizens' attachment to their own states.

Today, we know that this is not true. We have learnt that identities are not mutually exclusive. They can be cumulative. These issues are indeed sensitive, but if they are handled with care and common sense they need not at all be disruptive. Regional, ethnic, religious and other identities can very well flourish without posing any threat to the national identity.

And so can the European identity. But much more than that. Strengthening the sense of European identity in all parts of the continent is a means of laying old fears and old conflicts to rest, of dispelling the evil phantoms from our collective past, and of replacing inherited prejudice by a spirit of respect and cooperation. So many problems can be solved only if hundreds of millions of us learn to think and act as good Europeans.

How can we develop this common consciousness, this attachment to our fundamental values? If that is now the main challenge, the CoE has much to contribute. What has been achieved through our cultural cooperation and our work in the field of education may serve as miniature models for the full-scale action now needed.

Creating Europeans - that should be the agenda for the times to come. If European leadership fails in that task, it will fail in many others also. But if it succeeds, as it should or must, it will bequeath to future generations a much better Europe than the continent that we inherited from our ancestors.

scathingly dismissive in his assessment of the young country: Italy, he said, was nothing more than «a geographical expression». At least a century and a half on, the cultural, linguistic and political fault-lines exposed by the 150th anniversary of unification are evidence that Italy is still a work in progress. Nick Squires, *Italy divided over its unified history*, “The Telegraph”, March 13th, 2011 at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/italy/8378166/Italy-divided-over-its-unified-history.html> (accessed 07.07.2015). See also, Susan Stewart-Steinberg, *The Pinocchio Effect. On making Italians 1860-1920*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2007.

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