The Future of the EU: A Need for a New Vision

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The EU – The Limits of Historical Experience

The EU today looks very much like a medieval European cathedral. Such cathedrals were erected over several centuries by different builders, under the supervision of different architects, enjoying the protection of different sponsors and following the instructions of different customers. Even if the first architect had a coherent vision of the construction, in the end the cathedral was the result of endless changes, additions, reductions and innovations, of conflicting decisions and unexpected accidents. Today such buildings are very picturesque and very much admired by visitors. They are not necessarily very comfortable and their architectural concept is not particularly coherent, but they are visited by many enthusiastic tourists, though unfortunately by ever fewer believers. Even the priests have forgotten the significance of the various symbols carved in the walls or hidden in the building's various forms. If one wanted to bring new believers into these old churches and to repopulate the cathedrals with people of conviction and not only with tourists in search of entertainment one would have to give birth to a new faith and to organize it as a new religion. In the process the building itself would have to be modernized, rationalized, and provided with updated facilities. Undoubtedly, this would require a new vision and, based on that, a new blueprint.

Few people today remember, when looking at the overdeveloped bureaucratic institutions in Brussels or reading the thousands of pages of treaties and the »acquis communautaire,« that at the beginning the EU – or its grandmother, the European Community of Coal and Steel – was borne as a »Union of Fears« rather than as a »Union of Values.« The founding values had their source in fear of war, first and foremost, and subsequently in fears of poverty and starvation. Whenever people are scared and unhappy with their situation they seek to evade the future by projecting an »ideal city« – an ideal society – whether metaphysical (a religion) or material (an ideology). When the fears reflected by the found-

ing fathers of the EU vanished their followers started to lose faith in their values. To the extent that they are happy with the present they do not need a new ideology; but to the extent that they are unhappy with it they would need a project which reflected the new reasons for this new dissatisfaction. In both cases the old EU has reached its limits.

This »de-ideologization« of the EU is aggravated by two other phenomena: the resurrection of »national egoism« and globalization.

The EU and »National Egoism«

»National egoism« was overcome in the middle of the twentieth century as a result of the failure of the nation-states to preserve peace in Europe. Thus national governments were forced to admit that without a transnational organization and a pooling of national resources for strategic development, they would be unable to maintain peace and sustainable prosperity. Likewise, the people of Europe themselves realized that they might obtain more satisfaction and security if at least some components of national sovereignty were held in common by transnational political bodies. This approach has been very successful: so successful, indeed, that fifty years later its rational had almost been forgotten.

Nowadays, both the political elite and ordinary people have begun to believe that the EU is not a common project aimed at building a transnational democracy guaranteeing peace, freedom, prosperity, development, dignity and security, but a mere arena in which free competition based on the logic of the zero-sum game between national interests can take place in a civilized manner. Consequently, national politicians very seldom, if ever involve themselves in a public debate at the national level on issues concerning the European process and the building of transnational European democracy; or when they do, they only stress the superiority and even unavoidability of national governance. The credit for any favorable effects of EU policies on people's daily lives is always claimed by national governments. Thus, it is not surprising that Europeans see no relation between EU policies and their standard of living.

Moreover, so-called »national interest« almost always takes precedence in political action for obvious electoral reasons, despite the fact that, logically, common European decisions taken in the common European interest should prevail. The attacks of the German government on the Stability Pact (intended to consolidate the economic and financial health of the Union by keeping the budget deficit within certain limits);

the attacks of the French government on the Bolckenstein Directive (which aimed to liberalize the services market), together with its resistance to any change in the Common Agricultural Policy; the refusal of the British government to revise its financial rebate: all were simply nationalistic acts which undermined the »European logic« in the eyes of European citizens. It is no surprise that citizens have tended to perceive their nation-states as protecting them from the market-oriented policies of the EU and its naturally unpopular macroeconomic measures.

Consequently, we are witnessing a schizophrenic development within the EU: on the one hand, people (national citizens) support political integration within the EU (according to the polls public support for a Common Security and Defence Policy is high) but are for the renationalization of economic and trade policy; on the other hand, governments by and large are ready to support deeper economic integration while rejecting the idea of transferring more competences to the EU in the area of external action. The former are looking for a better life at the expense of the Union's economic security; the latter are looking for more power at the expense of the Union's political security.

The EU and Globalization

The European Union is now confronted by the great challenge of globalization. Globalization constitutes a double blow against the classic postwar European process. On the one hand, in addition to the fears deriving from the memory of the Second World War, the European sense of solidarity was constantly maintained by the threat posed by the USSR: once the bi-polar system ended one of the main motivations for an ever more closely integrated Occidental Europe disappeared. On the other hand, one would have to admit that any progress achieved so far within the EU was ultimately based on the sovereignty of the nation-state and the logic of the Westphalian system. Globalization has brought the world – especially the nation-state – into a post-Westphalian order. The EU must therefore answer the question of how Europe should be organized in an environment in which nation-states are no longer ethnic states and sovereignty is no longer absolute and indivisible.

Globalization makes both the enlargement and the deepening of the Union imperative. It is a mistake to view enlargement as mere »compensation« offered to the Central and Eastern European states abandoned to Soviet totalitarianism at the end of the Second World War. Instead, en-

largement is imposed by the need for historical and geographical reconciliation. Without such reconciliation the EU will be unable to take full advantage of its human and natural resources. As a result, it would have no chance of achieving pan-European economic, social and territorial cohesion, and would be unable to face up to the competition from other centers of a multi-polar globalized world; overcome its demographic problems; cope with its structural weaknesses; or obtain recognition for its global actor status, which is a precondition for meeting its major geopolitical obligations.

On the other hand, the deepening of EU integration should be regarded not merely as the consequence of enlargement. It is true that a Union with more members needs political institutions better able to harmonize and coordinate national agendas, options and actions, as well as a decision-making procedure able to reach reasonable majorities which generate legitimacy for action. Nevertheless, deepening is needed even without enlargement: global competition requires more efficient management of the EU Member States' common interests and therefore the transformation of the European market into a political Europe.

Within the framework of globalization's risks, challenges and opportunities, EU enlargement will be shaped by Europe's cultural and geopolitical identity. This identity is the result of a combination of Europe's geographical and historical characteristics and people's aspirations, constrained by those characteristics.

The EU's Cultural Identity

Building a united Europe is not an exercise of the imagination, but a vital attempt to ensure sustainable security and prosperity for all Europeans. In order to make security sustainable one must use one's power to develop a particular life style. This means building a common identity for a »Great Europe« based on common values and compatible institutions integrated in a system of government unitarily conceived at continental level. The European process is, therefore, a question of power and culture. If different cultures can be integrated within the framework of a single civilization then sustainable internal security is likely to ensue. And if this cultural-identity paradigm can be exported then external security is likely to be consolidated. From this perspective, the acquis communautaire is in fact an acquis identitaire.

The problem is not so much that it is not yet clear what the geographic limits of the Union are but rather what its cultural limits are. Does Europe culturally mean only Greek philosophy, Roman law and Judeo-Christian religion? If the answer to this question is simply »yes« the limits of the EU are at the same time narrow and vague. Turkey would be excluded but it would not be clear if Georgia, Armenia or Russia could be included. If Europe means tolerance, rationalism and positivism one could say that historical hardships have provided Europeans with the ability to build a model of cohabitation and a sense of pragmatic compromise which could form the basis for the development of cultural cohesion.

The future of Europe depends on the ability of Europeans to define »the other«, »the alien« or »the stranger«, and then to accept and integrate him, as well as to transform themselves from ethnic states into civic and multicultural states.

One can foresee the development of a decentralization process of nation-states along the lines of subsidiarity and devolution. Such a process would take place simultaneously with the emergence of a transnational order which would sometimes reconstitute old historical areas which have proved to be more adequate for social and economic activities liberated from the threat of identity conflicts and at the same time favorable for promoting national aspirations without linking culture to territory or borders. Local self-governments, together with nation-states (which will cease to be ethnic in order to become civic and multicultural) and transnational euro-regions, will be the indispensable bricks of a future pan-European political union (a federal EU). One must establish the necessary intermediate structures in support of the European integration process.

The EU's Geopolitical Identity

In the face of globalization, territorial contiguity and interregional cooperation are of paramount importance. In recognition of this truth the EU decided to develop a neighborhood policy. The choice or acceptance of this neighborhood whenever possible speaks in favor of the EU's geopolitical ambitions and responsibilities, which is to say, its global status. An EU contiguous with the Black Sea region differs in terms of geopolitical identity from an EU stretching only to the middle course of the Danube. Likewise, an EU with Turkey as its advanced post in the Muslim world,

and so having as direct neighbors countries like Syria, Iraq and Iran, is a global player in a more meaningful way than an EU for which Turkey is just a buffer zone separating it from the problematic areas of the Middle East or the Caucasus.

The Black Sea and Turkey constitute bridges between Central Europe, the Caucasus, the Caspian Sea and Central Asia, as well as Russia and the Western Mediterranean region. These are links of extreme strategic significance. Once the EU accepts such neighbors, it accepts a certain geostrategic identity and a certain role on the global stage. This is a question of vision and choice.

The transition from »European market« to »European power« depends very much on the EU's opportunities to take on more global responsibilities. This undertaking is not a simple matter of ambition but a matter of compulsion: the EU must either accept being a player or condemn itself to marginalization and ultimately perhaps even virtual disappearance.

The EU's Cohesion Criteria

On the basis of what criteria will European citizens find the motivation to develop loyalty towards European institutions? Undoubtedly, not a common language or common cultural traditions.

One could sum up these criteria in terms of a single concept with four connotations, »security.« The connotations are (i) »individual or personal security«, (ii) »collective or social security«, (iii) »cultural or national security« and (individual) »global or international security.« These ideas cover people's expectations concerning prosperity, national defense/safety from crime, freedom and dignity. If the EU cannot do better than nation-states in providing Europeans with such security, its political project will fail.

»Individual Security«

A common area of freedom, security and justice is needed. This involves merging the »third pillar« (third main policy area of the European Union) with the other two. Within this framework one should support a vision which articulates the European Charter of Fundamental Rights – which should become legally binding and establish basic political, social

and economic freedoms and rights – with European citizenship and a European judicial system (which must allow individual right of recourse to the European Courts after proceedings before national courts have come to an end). Merger of the European Court of Human Rights with the European Court of Justice is another alternative which should be considered. Thus, conflicts between European jurisdictions or standards would be avoided, as well as the à la carte approach in the field of human rights. Another worthwhile proposal would be the automatic recognition of judicial decisions from each EU Member State by the authorities of all other Member States. European citizens would feel more secure if Europol was strengthened, policing (at least concerning transborder crime) approached on a Community basis, and a European Prosecutor's Office (at least for fiscal fraud) created. A single European border-police, necessarily accompanied by a joint financing instrument, would be another step in the same direction.

»Social Security«

It seems obvious that without a Social Europe the very future of the Union is uncertain. From this perspective, economic and social policies should be harmonized and also become subject to a degree of coordination on a federal basis. Structural intervention is absolutely necessary to preserve economic and social cohesion in an enlarged Europe. Redistribution under the conditions of Economic and Monetary Union is vital, as is the principle of European solidarity. Along those lines a European Minister for the Economy and Development or a European Minister for Financial and Social Affairs would be beneficial, both serving also as vice-presidents of the European Commission. The harmonization, at least partial, of tax policy, the expansion of the open method of coordination and the liberalization of the method of enhanced cooperation are other priorities. The most recent enlargement of the EU is unique since it has brought unprecedented economic and social disparities. Within this new context the main principle to be understood is that the internal market and monetary union cannot function – or at least not to the satisfaction of European citizens – without a common economic and tax policy. This in turn is vital for a common social policy, and cannot be separated from the common internal policy and other policy areas.

»National Security«

One should regard a future united Europe as a single civilization inhabited by a multitude of cultures. In preparation for this, the European nation-states must transform themselves from ethnic states – as they were when the nation-state was born – into civic and multicultural states. At the same time, one expects that in an EU of »national minorities« two processes will take place simultaneously. On the one hand, the asymmetric relationship »national majority–national minorities« will be replaced by a new symmetric relationship between »national communities« based on a system of global subsidiarity. This will eliminate the natural frustrations of minorities and the tensions which unavoidably characterize asymmetric relations. On the other hand, if national borders become less relevant the de-dramatized reconstitution of old cultural nations will be facilitated, at the same time decoupling cultural rights from territorial rights. In this way the European multicultural and multidimensional sociocultural fabric will be strengthened, while geopolitical fears related to territorial claims for ethnic reasons will diminish. Consequently, one should seek the standardization and protection of cultural-national rights at EU level as a means of guaranteeing cultural diversity and avoiding resort to national communities' legitimate aspirations for geopolitical goals.

»International Security«

This raises the problem of the EU's geopolitical identity, which we have already discussed. It need only be added that in a globalized world the EU should develop its political, financial, technological and military capacities to enable it to cope with global threats and to have a say in the development and functioning of the global order. Negative rivalry with the USA will not bring more international security to Europeans, but the capacity to promote, constructively and in cooperation with other centers of global power, its own model for keeping the peace and consolidating security.

Re-founding the EU

The EU needs more than mere reform; it requires a re-foundation. Europeans today are relatively content with life »at home« but afraid of globalization. A post-national order and a transnational democracy should therefore be offered to Europeans in exchange for their loyalty towards the EU.

The misunderstandings and other obstacles which characterize the EU's current crisis mean that it will be difficult to make such a radical new start. The problem of the so-called democratic deficit is in fact a deficit in terms of what European citizens are being offered. This deficit will not be overcome before the EU's cultural and geopolitical identities are redefined within the framework of a broad public debate. The European institutions and their modus operandi should then be redefined in such a way as to meet popular expectations and also to make comprehensible the link between these institutions and people's everyday lives.

The old European building must be preserved, but at the same time modernized, provided all mod cons, and, above all, populated with the true believers of a new religion and not merely by reshuffled bureaucrats with a new liturgy. Otherwise, it will crumble after first becoming parochial, marginalized and irrelevant.