



THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

1775 Massachusetts Avenue, NW Washington, DC 20036-2188
Tel: 202-797-6000 Fax: 202-797-6004
www.brookings.edu

U.S.-EUROPE ANALYSIS SERIES

November 2005

THE REBIRTH OF VISION: A DYNAMIC COMPROMISE FOR EUROPE

Pierre Hassner, CERI-Sciences Po

Three visions of Europe's political-economic future emerged in the postwar years. The first, that of the Integrationists Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman, sought to build new institutions that might unite the peoples of Europe. It aimed, without destroying Europe's nation-states, to develop sub-national, supra-national and trans-national institutions that would effectively preclude the possibility of conflict on the continent. The vision allowed for diverse economic models, from the social market economy to the idea of "European planning" that envisioned Keynesianism on a European scale. It imagined various geopolitical configurations from a political union of the original six leading to a genuine federation, to Monnet's idea of a global expansion of economic integration and political democracy, with European regional integration serving as a springboard. But, in essence, this vision was always about combining political pluralism, economic interdependence and common laws in a manner that might consolidate stability and democracy on a base of regional economic integration.

The second vision, that of de Gaulle, was based on the independence of states rather than the interdependence of societies, on the permanence of nations instead of on their obsolescence, and above all, on the ambition to liberate Europe from the guardianship of the "two hegemonies" of the United States and the Soviet Union. Here too, there existed different versions: a three member "directoire" to run the Atlantic Alliance, a Franco-German Treaty to provide leadership for Europe, or a Europe of Nations from the Atlantic to the Urals. But the goal always remained the same: a continent of economically diverse states conscious of their identity and proud of their national traditions. This meant most directly a French France within a European Europe.

Finally, the third vision, that of the British, had in common with Gaullist Europe a concern for maintaining national sovereignty and a mistrust of federalism and European bureaucracy. But there the resemblance ended. Economically, the British vision described a vast free trade area in which market mechanisms would prevail. Politically, it imagined preserving the traditional British role of arbiter among the continental powers. Above all, the British vision saw the creation of European superpower as unrealistic and undesirable, preferring instead the role of wise counselor to the American superpower.

Each of these visions has value and even majesty: the Integrationists' hope that political and economic integration might allow Europe to avoid the dismal logic of power politics; the Gaullists' ambition to retain Europe's grandeur and global role, the Brits' adaptive acceptance of Europe's new economic and geopolitical realities. But, today, it is the negative side of each of

these projects that prevails, either because they have neutralized each other's best aspects or because they have shot themselves in the foot.

Mutual Obstruction

The Europe of the Integrationists has attained incontestable progress in the judicial and economic spheres. But these advances have become fragile because of the slowness and timidity of Europe's political progress. Europe did not long stay a small union of six countries that could have allowed for a true Federation. Nor did it enlarge with sufficient conviction or vision to explain to its populations that a growing Europe was an opportunity for national expression rather than a threat to national cultures. Now Europe seems on its way to abandoning enlargement half-way through, with serious consequences for the cause for democracy and peace on the continent. In the socio-economic sphere, Europe has become, if not ultra-liberal at least firmly capitalistic. The Keynesian and Social Democratic vision of the economy have been compromised by the failure of French, German and Italian national politics. On its left, it is being replaced by a new radicalism, largely based on opposition to "neo-liberal" globalization. These self-styled "alter-globalists" proclaim their fidelity to internationalism, and particularly to improving the lot of the world's poorer regions, while at the same time their attacks on free trade promote protectionism and their defense of the EU agricultural subsidies comes at the expense of the developing world. In the institutional sphere, the European Commission in Brussels is continuously losing power, but it has managed to maintain its mindlessly bureaucratic and intrusive appearance—a combination that makes it an ideal scapegoat for phenomena, like globalization or the failed economic policies of some of its members, which it cannot control.

Gaullist Europe remains an almost uniquely French vision. French Gaullists have often been able, as during the Iraq crisis, to find a message that (at the expense of France's relations with the United States and Great Britain) has won France a certain prestige with the broad audience of opponents to the policies of George Bush. But they have revealed the basic flaw in their position (the gap between words and deeds, intentions and accomplishments) by failing to maneuver to assure the support of a majority of Europeans and by leading a policy of incoherent enlargement. France had reluctantly resigned itself to this last fact and has, in the person of Jacques Chirac, been courageously engaged in favor of Turkish accession. But in the face of domestic resistance, the Gaullists appear to be turning on their heels, notably with the absurd idea of holding a referendum for every subsequent enlargement of Europe. In the meantime, the French Gaullists have alienated the new members of the EU, drowning them with contempt and refusing, for example, during the recent Ukrainian crisis, to speak of national independence and the rights of man to a powerful Russia, although these principles form a part of France's legacy that its leaders have never hesitated to deploy against the United States.

There remains, of course, the British vision of Europe. This vision is the most consistent with current economic and geo-political realities. It has the advantage of being led by Tony Blair, the most dynamic, visionary and eloquent leader in Europe. He has been strengthened by his recent re-election and by the success of his country in achieving economic growth and reducing unemployment and he currently holds the presidency of the European Council. He has also benefited from the path that was opened up by the defeat of the European Constitutional Treaty in France and the Netherlands, which both allowed him to avoid a referendum in Great Britain

and weakened the French position as the leader of European integration. On the other hand, Blair's role in the Iraqi adventure severely damaged his credibility, domestically as well as internationally. Moreover, his ability to lead in Europe is hobbled by the fact that he governs a country that remains deeply hostile to European unity. His intransigence at the recent EU budgetary summit confirmed the suspicions of many Europeans, including Chirac, that he is putting British national politics and interests above European ones.

A Dynamic Compromise

The hostility that has emerged in recent years between the Blair and the French and German leaders, regardless of whose fault it is, is without a doubt the most important reason that European leaders have been unable to resolve Europe's most recent crisis. Already in the area of foreign policy, one cannot but agree with Timothy Garton Ash to wish for a President "Blairac," that might combine the best parts of the British and Gaullist visions. Absent such genetic engineering, achieving sufficiently strong cooperation between Blair and Chirac would require them both to understand that they went too far—one in his alignment with the United States, the other in his opposition to it—and to remember that on the majority of subjects (Israel-Palestine, Iran, the International Criminal Court, Foreign Development Aid), British views are closer to those of France and of Europe than to those of the United States. Instead, the French and the British only seem to be cooperating in worsening Europe's crisis. The competition to see who can be most intransigent over secondary issues (the British over the rebate, the French over the Common Agricultural Policy) has meant that the EU has been unable even to agree on a budget, much less on a way forward for constitutional reform. The only hope for progress on the important issues that confront the European Union—including not only foreign and defense policy, but also economic restructuring, institutional reform and further enlargement—rests yet again in a rapprochement of Britain, France, and Germany.

Achieving that rapprochement will require a compromise between the three visions for Europe, a compromise that would bring them back to their original inspirations and, at the same time, would adjust them to current realities. This does not imply a backroom bargain based on the interests of the big powers, on the model of the Concert of Europe of the 19th century. Europe will not preserve its hard-won stability if it goes back to a time when it lacked regional institutions that protect the interests of the less powerful. Jean Monnet's vision of a continent beyond power politics remains both valid and vital. But similarly the implementation of that vision must not be reduced to a technocratic mechanism that rests solely on legalistic regulations for its power and legitimacy. The traditional nations of Europe remain the repositories of Europeans' identities and aspirations and therefore the dialogue among them remains legitimate and important. Finally, the British insight that European policy cannot be founded simply on *a priori* opposition to the United States must be understood to be compatible with a general European will for greater political independence and with resistance to specific American policies. In the economic and social spheres, a European policy must not reject the need for economic competition nor merely protect the status quo. Rather, it is imperative that Europe give itself the task, as Blair has done, albeit insufficiently, in Britain of attempting to save the Welfare State by reforming it.

Similarly, Jacques Delors' idea of a "Federation of Nation States" is not a current reality but a difficult and fragile long-term goal that would not suffice to manage Europe. Ultimately, the three notions of federation, the state and the nation are doomed, by their relation to each other, to permanent rivalry. Their co-existence can only be maintained by accepting this tension and by constantly and tactfully managing the institutional diversity of Europe—a diversity which can be simultaneously dangerous and healthy, but is in any case, inevitable.

It is up to the current leaders of Europe to achieve the necessary synthesis of these visions of Europe and above all to encourage the support of their respective populations. A legitimate Europe cannot be built against the will of its people. A strong Europe cannot be built in craven submission to its people's prejudices or to their fear of change. Only a Europe that is both legitimate and strong can deal with the modern world. Europe's leaders must understand, and make their people understand that the metaphor of the bicycle—that is to say, that Europe will fall off if it does not move forward—has (contrary to what Hubert Védrine has written) lost none of its relevance.¹ The *status quo* can only mean economic stagnation, unemployment, the end of the euro, and the acceleration of Europe's relative decline. These developments in turn would bring further growth of a potentially violent fundamentalism among those to whom Europe never had the courage to offer a vision of inclusiveness, and a consequent growth of nationalism, and potentially xenophobia, in the besieged fortresses of "Old Europe."

It is certainly difficult to combine compromise and dynamism, moderation and passion. Yet, that was the secret of the European spirit. Despite all their differences, it is from that spirit that the founding fathers of Europe never ceased to draw inspiration, each in their own way. It is by returning to this spirit and to them that Europe might have again the opportunities to rediscover new life.

¹ Hubert Védrine, "Sortir du dogme européiste," *Le Monde*, June 9, 2005.