

Conclusion: The Future of the Union

On 12 October 2012, the chairman of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, Thorbjörn Jagland, surprised the world with the announcement that the European Union was the recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize for the year 2012. The Nobel Committee justified its decision with the observation that this Union had contributed decisively to peaceful development in Europe over the previous six decades. Specifically, it cited the *rapprochement* and close bond between the two large Continental powers France and Germany; the promotion of democratic development in Southern Europe after the end of dictatorships in Greece, Spain, and Portugal; the integration of the states of East-Central Europe after the end of the Communist East Bloc; the promotion of pacification in the Balkan region after the wars of the 1990s; as well as the advancement of democracy and human rights in Turkey, a state seeking accession to the Union.¹ In the middle of an acute crisis in the European integration process, the Nobel Committee had thus offered a reminder that—despite all the crises—the history of European integration has ultimately been a success story. At the same time, the committee appealed to Europeans not to give up this success frivolously in the face of impositions stemming from the desire to preserve the Community currency.

In truth, crises have been a constant accompaniment to the emergence and development of the European Union. It has required and still requires a “daily plebiscite,” as Ernest Renan once formulated it in reference to the nation²—and this plebiscite is by no means taken for granted. This stems from the multidimensional nature of the driving forces at the root of the integration process: The desire for securing the peace, the efforts toward a solution to the German question, the quest for larger markets, and the concern for self-assertion in the world have not always been equally strong and have not always worked in the same direction. For example, the need for self-assertion as well as the unresolved German question made a union of Western Europe seem wholly appropriate; in terms of securing the peace, however, *this* form of union—perforce limited to Western Europe—became problematic. The common necessity of unification stood against the very different sensitivities and needs of the states to be unified; the overarching interest in a common market stood against the very diverse economic needs of the individual states and the differing interests of individual production sectors. Accordingly, Europe policy could not be a unitary policy; it has been and remains

¹ The Norwegian Nobel Committee, Announcement of 12 Oct. 2012.

² Ernest Renan, “Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?” in: *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. 1, Paris: Pierre Bordas et fils, 1947, pp. 887–906.

the continuation of disputes among different conceptions of order and different interests at the European level.

Nevertheless, it was a certain combination of these four impulses that led in the 1950s to the emergence of the first European institutions: the interest in incorporating the new West German state, which had become an indispensable partner in Western European security policy, combined with the Dutch interest in a rapid opening of markets, as well as the French and ultimately also German interest in self-assertion *vis-à-vis* the United States. After the decision for the European Economic Community as a modernization project cushioned by the social-welfare state, the economic motives steadily gained weight. At the same time, the development of the system of bipolar nuclear deterrence meant for a greater impulse to achieve European autonomy. The two projects did not necessarily correspond: This explains the sluggish pace of political integration even as progress has been made in realizing the internal market of an enlarged Community. With the end of the Cold War, the goal of a European nuclear force quickly lost significance; conversely, the European Community was now needed more than ever to incorporate the central power Germany. In place of the ambivalence of the European project in the peace question, there now arose new responsibilities on the European and the global level. In the meantime, economic productivity, social consensus, and democratic stability are now no longer conceivable without the bases of the Common Market; the common interest in securing the peace tremendously outweighs potential national rivalries, and the ability to act on the global level is more dependent than ever on a common front among Europeans.

The European Union thereby constitutes an attempt to preserve and further develop the civilizational achievements of the democratic nation-state under conditions of increasing globalization. It rests on the awareness of the common and complementary interests of the European nations and a knowledge of common values and traditions, which suggests that there are good prospects for taking up the common exercise of these interests.³ As a societal project, “Europe” thus exhibits characteristics corresponding to the nation-state projects of earlier periods in history.

This project has undoubtedly been promoted by the growing harmonization of economic, social, and societal structures that began in the wake of the enduring economic boom of the 1950s and 1960s; this is a harmonization with which the post-Communist states of the eastern half of Europe must now catch up via a

3 Cf. Wilfried Loth, “European Identity: Traditions, Constructions, and Beliefs,” in: *Du Luxembourg à l’Europe. Hommages à Gilbert Trausch à l’occasion de son 80^e anniversaire*, Luxembourg, 2011, pp. 549–555.

difficult process of adjustment.⁴ Likewise, the multifaceted interconnections in Europe tend to contribute to its implementation: market integration, professional and private mobility, transnational encounters and contacts, transnationally-operating enterprises, increasingly transnationally-active academic communities, and, finally, the internationalization of attitudes, fashions, and cultural production facilitated by the media. Yet, these linking processes do not encompass all parts of European societies to an equal extent; and Western civilization, which spreads along with them, extends far beyond Europe. Consequently, there is no direct path leading to the emergence of a genuinely European public sphere as a medium of self-reference for a European society.

Accordingly, the institutional development of the European Union up to now has primarily occurred in a technocratic manner without wide societal discussion or deep identification of the citizens of the European Union with its institutions. In light of the various possibilities for conceiving a united Europe, there were always majorities for affirming Europe *in principle* in the countries that had decided to join the European Community; at the same time, however, there was also always a lack of unequivocal support for the *form* of European unification that was feasible. The discrepancy between the Europe that was desired and the Europe that was achievable explains, *firstly*, the outstanding significance of individual figures in the decision-making process on Europe policy from Robert Schuman and Konrad Adenauer to Jacques Delors, Helmut Kohl, and Angela Merkel: Given the ambivalences in public opinion, strong leader personalities could clear the way via direct contact with their partners, circumventing the routine of the bureaucracies and pledging majorities for their projects. *Secondly*, the discrepancy between the Europe that was desired and the Europe that was feasible explains why a form of integration as seen in the European Coal and Steel Union as well as the Treaties of Rome could come to be, a form that placed little value on citizen participation and that withdrew the integrated political areas from public discussion: Only when one left the implications vague was it possible to prevent negative coalitions from blocking the continually-contested steps toward integration.

Thirdly, with this background, it becomes clear how the so-called deficit of democracy has in the meantime become the most pressing problem of the European Union: Given the expansion of the Community's responsibilities and the increasing regulation that is concomitant with it as well as the majority deci-

4 Cf. Hartmut Kaelble, *Auf dem Weg zu einer europäischen Gesellschaft. Eine Sozialgeschichte Westeuropas 1880–1980*, Munich: C.H. Beck, 1987; *idem.*, *Sozialgeschichte Europas seit 1945*, Munich: C.H. Beck, 2007; Günther Heydemann and Karel Vodička (eds.), *Vom Ostblock zur EU. Systemtransformationen 1990–2012 im Vergleich*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013.

sions made in the twilight of the various minister formations, the negotiations in COREPER and the European Council along with the low democratic legitimation of the Commission—all this is no longer acceptable to the citizen, independent of what is said by constitutional scholars who orient themselves on the category of the nation-state as a model. The technocratic roundabout route to Europe initiated by Jean Monnet in 1950 and successful over many years—most recently once again with the launch of the Maastricht program—has now reached an end. This was clearly seen in the intense public debates over the Maastricht Treaty and the difficulties in winning its ratification. Since the rejection of the Constitutional Treaty by a majority of the French and the Dutch, it is wholly apparent. The future of the European Union is thus to a very decisive degree dependent on the extent to which there is success in making the decisions in the European Union transparent, subject to oversight, and open to correction.

The referenda in France and the Netherlands have also demonstrated that this is not simple to achieve. Essentially, here was an attempt to provide more transparency and democracy that failed in its beginnings exactly because of a lack of transparency and democracy—a process that exhibits all the hallmarks of a Greek tragedy. The societies of the Eurozone quickly reacted to the threat posed by the European debt crisis with a revival of nation-state reflexes, and illusionists oriented on the nation-state along with unprincipled populists did not hesitate to make use of those developments for their own purposes. It is uncertain as to whether the coalition of Europe-policy realists in the net-payer and net-receiver countries will be strong enough and enduring enough to win approval for the combination of Community bonds and democratically-regulated access to national budgets that is necessary for overcoming the debt crisis.

Yet, the chances are good that in the course of the upcoming reform debate, the European dimension of identity will become more prominent in the European consciousness and that European society will become more articulate. Evidence for that is provided not only by the experience of ratifying the Lisbon Treaty, the European Stability Mechanism, the Fiscal Compact, and the bank union—instruments that even with all the delays and all the half-measures actually do help deal with the acute problems of the Union. It may also be of great importance that the current extent of economic and financial links in the Union as well as the realities of globalization permit of no plausible alternative to the further development of the Community, at least no alternative with a lower cost. Moreover, there is the fact that the common European tradition has at the ready wholly sufficient stimuli for the creation of a European collective.

Since the middle of the 1980s, the European Community has more and more come to be understood as a community of values committed to pluralism and democratic freedoms, the rule of law, human rights, and the protection of

minorities. To that extent, a common constitutional inheritance has evolved in the discussions of the previous decades, one that could lead to a constitutional patriotism on the European level. This European patriotism, which expresses an affirmation of a system of values rather than an emotional affiliation, is compatible with national patriotism. In times of dynamic transformation, it even contributes to stabilizing national patriotism, which is shaped by different historical experiences as well as different languages and cultures. In this respect, one can definitely speak of a European identity in the singular. It is not however a matter of an exclusionary conception of identity but rather a universal one that respects national identities and the achievements of nations.⁵

Hence, the “Europe Project” will not lead to the dying off of nation-states, at least for the foreseeable future. Instead, it constitutes the precondition for their survival, which can only be survival in a changed form and with restricted function, however. European identity will therefore not simply replace national identity in the foreseeable future. Instead, what seems to be emerging is that people in Europe are living with a multilayered identity, an identity in which regional, national, and European aspects are united. This is regularly apparent in *Eurobarometer* surveys when Union citizens are asked about their self-understanding. In May of 2012, thirty-eight percent of the citizens of the EU Twenty-Seven characterized themselves exclusively as members of their nation. Some forty-nine percent however saw themselves primarily as members of a European nation and at the same time in a wider dimension as Europeans too. Six percent even saw themselves primarily as Europeans and only secondarily as members of a nation too. Three percent regarded themselves exclusively as Europeans.⁶

Behind these aggregated numbers there are of course different levels of awareness in the different member states of the Union and also within each population. In examining the results more closely, it becomes clear that the orientation on Europe is correlated with a person’s age, level of education, and amount of societal responsibility. The younger, the more educated, and the higher in societal position, the stronger is the European dimension of identity. Accordingly, “Europe” is still a rather elite project; at the same time, however, the “pro-European” faction can reckon with further growth over the long term. With the increasing density of relationships within the Union, the strengthening of European institutions, the foreseeable increase in mobility beyond national boundaries, and the increasing

5 Cf. Wilfried Loth, “Regionale, nationale und europäische Identität. Überlegungen zum Wandel europäischer Staatlichkeit,” in: Wilfried Loth and Jürgen Osterhammel (eds.), *Internationale Geschichte. Themen – Ergebnisse – Aussichten*, Munich: Oldenbourg, 2000, pp. 357–369.

6 Standard Eurobarometer 77, Spring 2012: European Citizenship.

significance of professional qualifications, the European dimension of personal and collective identity will come to loom larger.

Whether and how long national identity can exercise stronger binding effects than European identity must remain an essentially open question. There is no plausible evidence for the claim made by Ralf Dahrendorf in 1994 that the nation-state alone is able to create deep-rooted bonds among societal forces.⁷ As the priority of European values and the increasingly transnational nature of life styles demonstrate, empirical evidence is already pointing in a different direction. It takes neither special courage nor excessive optimism to predict that the commonalities among Europeans will more strongly emerge with the expansion of social tasks and with the democratization of European politics, despite all the reactive flaring up of nationalism.

That which results on the level of constitutional law is what might be termed a “federation of nation-states,” in the words of Jacques Delors.⁸ It is true that in terms of constitutional law, this concept is not very exact; yet, it expresses quite well the ongoing tension between the nation-state and supranationality. This federation, which does actually exist now (even if hardly anyone dares to characterize it as such) will not dissolve or mutate into a mere free-trade zone, as many fear: That is because the benefit all participants receive from the current construction is much too great, which becomes clear again and again in cases of conflict. On the other hand, we cannot expect any qualitative leap to a Europe capable of acting on the world stage anytime soon in the way Europe enthusiasts such as Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Guy Verhofstadt have increasingly been calling for recently.⁹ This is because the nation-state remains too important for the overwhelming majority of Europeans and because the level of suffering occasionally caused by the unilateralism of the United States as a world power is overall too meager.

It was the case that the large European party associations and their contingents in the European Parliament succeeded in significantly strengthening the supranational level of the Union in 2014. As the Lisbon Treaty had increased Parliament’s right of participation in the appointment of the European Commission, the parties made use of that by putting up candidates in the European elections on 25 May 2014 who were willing and able to assume the office of the next president of the Commission. First of all, this meant that they had succeeded in politicizing the European election campaign. Whereas the average turnout of 40.09

⁷ Ralf Dahrendorf, “Die Zukunft des Nationalstaates,” in: *Merkur* 48 (1994), pp. 751–761.

⁸ Delors, *Erinnerungen*, p. 506.

⁹ Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Guy Verhofstadt, *For Europe! A Manifesto for a Postnational Revolution*, Munich: Carl Hanser, 2012.

percent was hardly higher than five years earlier, it did prove possible for the first time to debate on the first front questions of European policy – thanks to the Europe-wide campaign made by top candidates such as Jean-Claude Juncker for the European People’s Party, Martin Schulz for the Socialists, and Guy Verhofstadt for the Liberals. On election night, Schulz and Juncker agreed that the candidate of the largest faction—that was, Juncker—would be put forward by Parliament to head the Commission.

Parliament’s proposal brought British Prime Minister David Cameron onto the scene: For him, the appointment of the pro-integration former Luxembourg premier was exactly the wrong signal for an already anti-European British public. In order to keep Britain for the Union, the German chancellor Angela Merkel initially maintained a low profile on the issue of the Commission president. Her voters were angered by that, however, and so she finally had to give in, speaking out in favor of Juncker on 30 May. She also consented to dispensing with unanimity when the European Council decided on the proposed candidate. At the Council meeting of 25 and 26 June, Juncker was put forward by twenty-six heads of state and of government—against the votes of Cameron and Hungarian Premier Victor Orbán. Thus strengthened and with a broad majority in the European Parliament, Juncker was able to assume his new office on 1 November 2014. With a Commission firmly led by seven vice presidents, he was hoping to be able to break through numerous roadblocks to reform in the coming years.

Europe policy has always been the art of the possible, and top-level European politicians will in the future too be judged by the extent to which they master this art. It is possible that the introduction of Eurobonds will be added to the instruments for overcoming the current debt crisis after all and that as a *quid pro quo* a European-level authority legitimized by parliamentary means will receive the right to intervene when national budget discipline is violated. Yet, the prerequisite for such a step to a fiscal union would be agreement between France and Germany, the duo without whose cooperation progress in European integration is unachievable. That, in turn, presupposes that François Hollande can dispel the delusion of the French electorate that the French economy can be rehabilitated without painful cuts and without further without further collectivization of national sovereignty. It is also conceivable that the aggressive course taken by Russian President Vladimir Putin against Ukraine since February of 2014 will lead to a strengthening of the Common Foreign and Security Policy. In any event, the governments in Paris and Berlin developed a high level of unity in crisis management after the annexation of the Crimea and the support of pro-Russian separatists in Eastern Ukraine by the Russian Federation. The government in Warsaw was also included in this coordination. With the appointment of Donald Tusk—up to that point the Polish prime minister—as the new president of the European

Council on 1 December 2014, the heads of state and of government provided an example of the assertion of European principles in the face of revived Russian great-power ambitions.

It is very unlikely that Great Britain would participate in a fiscal union. It is instead possible that David Cameron's announcement of 23 January 2013 about holding a referendum in the year 2017 on Britain's continued membership in the Union will lead to the country's complete withdrawal. In contrast to the situation on the Continent, the number of British citizens who regard themselves as exclusively members of their nation has always been higher than the number who also perceive of themselves as Europeans (the figure was sixty to forty-two percent in May of 2012). After Tony Blair failed to summon the courage to go on the offensive against this, continental Europeans have been showing little inclination to help Cameron in overcoming the problems with EU opponents in his own ranks. In any event, continental Europeans will not be prepared to give up Community areas of responsibility merely to keep Britain in the Union. However, it could also be the case that Britons will begin to rethink the situation as soon as it becomes apparent where the priorities of the continental Europeans lie.

The more convincingly the members of the Eurozone succeed in reducing excesses of debt and in generating new growth, the more likely that may become. Nothing makes the European Union as attractive as success. To that extent, one can expect that success in overcoming the euro debt crisis will not only strengthen Community consciousness further. One would do well to keep the successes of the past more clearly in mind than is usually the case when fixating on current frustrations.