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**THE INTERNATIONAL VALUE
OF THE EUROPEAN EXPERIENCE**

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INTRODUCTION

There are several ways to speak of Europe. Enhancing its technical, scientific, artistic, philosophical and political achievements is one of them. Even in front of a non academic audience, mentioning Mozart, Picasso, Pasteur, Freud, the TGV train, the Airbus, the laser beam, the electronic credit card, De Gaulle, the human rights, the parliamentary government system etc. is of some significance. Angry tax-payers might suspect me of forgetting intentionally to add the VAT to the above list since I am perfectly aware that European inventiveness is not necessarily always much appreciated worldwide.

Nonetheless it is also possible to look at Europe in an historical perspective and to consider it as an entity slowly awaking to self-consciousness.

I – HISTORICAL INERTIA

Attempts to unify the disparate nations of Europe have preceded the modern nation states ; they have occurred repeatedly throughout the history of the continent since the collapse of the Mediterranean-centered Roman Empire in the 5th century.

The Frankish empire of Charlemagne in the 9th century and later on the Holy Roman Empire united large areas under a loose administration for hundreds of years, but they never succeeded in ruling durably over more than one third of Europe. A fellow Academician of mine, Jean Baechler, asserted last year in a conference that the specificity of Europe is due to the fact that it never was an empire. It almost always consisted of sovereign states which had in common only the references to Christianity, to the Roman law system and to artistic expression.

The 1800's customs union under Napoleon and the 1940's conquests of Nazi Germany had only transitory existence like all dictatorships and systems based on war. Given Europe's heterogeneous collections of languages and cultures, these attempts involved military subjugation of unwilling nations, leading necessarily to instability and ultimate failure.

One of the first proposals for peaceful unification through cooperation and equality of membership was made – not surprisingly – by the French poet and republican Victor Hugo in 1851 ... exactly 19 years before the first of three French-German wars started, drowning the poet's dream in fire and blood.

II – THE DEAD-END OF NATIONALISM

As a matter of fact I should have mentioned as another European achievement – hopefully never to come again – the capacity to boost nationalism and to set fire to the entire world through two catastrophic wars with millions of victims.

My time is too short for a complete history of nationalism in the 19th and 20th centuries and besides, this is not the topic of this speech. I would only like to point out the fact that nationalism first appeared as a response of the French people to the threatening revenge of nobility during the French revolution and, in the following years, as a response of Europeans – Germans, Italians etc. – to the invasion of their homeland by French armies. Therefore nationalism is obviously in first place a feeling of fear and revenge. As such it cannot be constructive. It is pure opposition to the surrounding world considered as threatening and radically different. It has led, as we know, to two highly destructive world wars and more or less to the decline of the European world supremacy.

III - EUROPEAN RESILIENCE

But I am not complaining about this last statement. In fact, thanks to the dialectical movement of History, the catastrophes of the First World War and the Second World War have turned out to be a useful requisite for the desire to build a Europe where there would be no possibility of another such war ever arising.

The European peoples were quite slow at looking at Europe as a whole. But a few politicians were able to foresee the necessary evolution as soon as the early 40s. An eminent European, the French Jean Monnet, wrote on August 5th 1945 to another great European, the French Robert Schuman:

« There will not be any peace in Europe if the states rebuild themselves on a basis of national sovereignty which infers a policy of prestige and economical protection. The countries of Europe are too small and therefore unable to guarantee to their peoples the prosperity made possible and necessary by modern conditions. ... Prosperity and the required social progress are impossible unless the states of Europe join together to a federation or to a "European entity" which would unite them economically. »

This sentiment eventually led to the formation of the European Coal and Steel Community by Germany, France, Italy and the Benelux countries. This was accomplished by the Treaty of Paris, signed in April 1951, and taking effect in July 1952.

The legal base of the European Union is indeed a sequence of treaties between its member states. These have been much amended over the years, with each new treaty amending and supplementing earlier ones.

The Treaty of Rome of 1957 is still in effect, though much amended since then, most notably by the Maastricht treaty of 1992, which first established the European Union under that name. The most recent amendments to the Treaty of Rome were agreed as part of the Treaty of Accession of the 10 new member states, which entered into force on May 1st 2004.

As you know, the EU member states have recently agreed to the text of a new constitutional treaty that, if ratified by the member states, would become the first official constitution of the EU, replacing all previous treaties with a single document. Although accepted by many countries, this document was rejected in a French referendum with a 55% majority on May 29th, and in the Dutch referendum with a 62% majority on June 1st.

I am aware that part of the audience might blame me for overlooking the crisis that Europe has been and is going through, especially with the postponing of the ratification of the constitution. But let me rather stress that in my opinion crises are a strong incentive to progress. Europe has always moved forward thanks to crises. The constitutional setback with the French and Dutch referendums is undoubtedly only transitory.

In this respect I would like to refer to a famous member of our Academy, Alexis de Tocqueville, the author of *About democracy in America*, written in the 1830s, who considered not without reason that the spreading of democracy is a durable trend of modern societies. This has become an evidence and the survival of dictatorship in a few regions should not be regarded as a refutation of this assertion but rather as an abnormality doomed to extinction. Obviously the democratic trend falls within the frame of the European Union.

IV – A NEW MODEL OF COEXISTENCE

In the last pages of his *Mémoires*, Jean Monnet whom I mentioned a few minutes ago wrote about the European Community to the emergence of which he had contributed decisively: “*The Community is only a step towards the forms of organization of the world of tomorrow.*”

This quotation might sound very arrogant, but it is not because it does not base on an hegemonic ambition. It bases on a moral one. The cause of the European construction is actually a fundamental ethical value. This value is called “reconciliation”. Only five years after the end of the most terrible conflict ever seen, the French leaders held out the hand of friendship to Germany. Since then the French-German couple has been acting as the core of the EU.

Once this good example had been set, difficult relationships between other European countries like England and Ireland, Spain and Portugal, Germany and the Benelux have become less tense. The same evolution is today noticeable between

Germany and Poland as well as between Greece and Turkey – who is not a member of the EU but who has been a candidate for membership for a long time.

I would dare saying that, unlike the United Nations which often appear as a place of confrontation, Europe is a place of cooperation. Peaceful and constructive solutions are found for arising problems not so much through diplomatic agreements than through common efforts to work together on practical issues. Let me mention for example, without going into details, the problem of fishing rights between Spain and France in the Atlantic. In the 19th century, it might have led to a war between the two countries. In the 20th century, it could have been settled only temporarily after long wearing conflicting negotiations. Nowadays it has been solved through discussions between the two neighbor countries who are aware 1°) that a solution must be found and 2°) that it can be found only if concessions are made – always in accordance with international law.

Respect for international law is actually another valuable asset of the EU. All EU members recognize explicitly the supremacy of law, provided that it has been duly interpreted by independent courts such as the European Court of Justice in Luxemburg or the International Court of Justice in The Hague.

Cooperation and the acceptance of law, of course, do not mean that the EU members give up their autonomy and that they would accept to disappear as States within a supranational entity. But it surely means that they have acknowledged the fact that some sovereignty transfers are necessary for a peaceful and useful coexistence.

A compromise solution has been found and clearly defined in the constitutional treaty. There are three kinds of competences concerning different issues: the first one is the Union's responsibility; the second one, the so called "shared competences", is the member states' responsibility in accordance with the Union ; the third one, based on the so called "subsidiarity principle" is the sole responsibility of each state. This appears to be a well balanced system where each state gives up a part of its sovereignty in order to enhance the Union's efficiency, but also where each state remains sovereign concerning interior matters.

V – A EUROPEAN WAY TO GLOBALIZATION ?

The juridical and institutional innovations which have been achieved so far in Europe with the intention of putting through a system of shared sovereignty have already proved their value by inspiring to some extent regional organizations like ASEAN, MERCOSUR and, more recently, the AFRICAN UNION.

Claiming that the EU institutions are an absolute model for the rest of the world would be pure conceit. I certainly do not share the idea that other regions of the world should acquire the same institutions. But it would be of some help if neighboring countries had to upcoming problems the same approach than European countries have had together. Wherever there is a potential conflict – between India and Pakistan, in sub-Saharan Africa and maybe here, in the Taiwan straits – the European attitude of progressing step by step without any nationalistic requirement would probably be positive.

Furthermore, is a transposition of the European model to the UN conceivable ? Though this working hypothesis might seem far-fetched, one can only wonder at the similarity between the problems facing the UN and the ones solved – admittedly unsatisfactorily – by the EU.

One of them consists in the conciliation of two opposite principles: 1°) juridical equality of all states and 2°) equitable representation of their citizens. After a long and slow evolution, the EU has reached a balance by putting side by side the European Council – which is an intergovernmental institution representing the states – and the European Parliament – which is an institution elected by and representing the citizens. In both cases, the representation of the states is not strictly proportionate to their population, but at least related to it so that the larger states count for more than the smaller ones in matters settled by a majority vote.

As a comparison the equal representation of all states in the UN Assembly – no matter if their population reaches a few thousand people or one billion – deprives most resolutions of legitimacy. Would it not make more sense to give more weight to larger states – without ignoring the smaller ones ?

One of the most original institutions of the EU is certainly the European Commission, whose members are mandated by democratically elected authorities and who remain independent from their governments. The Commission has four main roles: 1. to propose legislation to Parliament and the Council of Ministers; 2. to manage and implement EU policies and the budget; 3. to enforce European law (jointly with the Court of Justice); 4. to represent the European Union on the international stage, for example for trade questions in the framework of the World Trade Organization where the EU speaks in a unique common voice.

Due to her competences and her independency the Commission works as a protection for smaller states against an always possible risk of hegemony by larger ones. This again could be transposed to the UN where smaller states, particularly in the Security council, are not represented and seldom taken into account by larger ones.

To finish I would like to point at what can be considered as the most important achievement of the EU: the democratic conditionality. It consists in admitting new members in the Union only if they meet a list of democratic requirements. The attractiveness of the EU is such that a great many countries which did not match those democratic requirements have achieved democratization at good pace in order to join the EU. This has been the case for Greece, Spain, Portugal and also Central European countries. Truly democratic institutions are the main fee to pay for acceding to membership. This has proved to be a very strong incentive to democratization. No doubt that the progress made in Turkey and the political changes in Ukraine are widely due to the desire of these countries to join the UN.

The transposition of this principle to UN membership would be very useful. It would help spreading democracy – and hence peace and cooperation – all around the world. The consequences for Taiwan and the Far-Eastern region would be tremendous. The “rogue states” or “states of concern”, surrounded by democratic

countries with facilities of negotiation and cooperation, would certainly in the medium term change to democracy.

As one can see, there is no European patent. Neither is Europe entitled to give a lecture to the world. But just like the Western architecture or the Western economic system – and the VAT – have spread around freely, it can be hoped that the European way to democracy will become naturally a highway to a democratic globalization.

Thank you.