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# The Case for Euro-Optimism

A Conversation with Mark Eyskens

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*he role acquired by Europe on the world scene has accustomed people to the idea that any news from Brussels is news from the EEC. And indeed the EEC, through the authoritative voice of Jacques Delors, President of the Commission, has contributed in a constructive manner to the efforts of the West in facing the historical changes that are taking place in Eastern Europe, with his courageous approach to the integration of the GDR and the engagement to create an European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. Meanwhile, as the notion of a united Germany reappears at the heart of Europe, everybody—including those who have so far shown very little enthusiasm for a united Europe—turn their eyes toward Brussels as the centre of a system created to overcome the rivalries that led to two devastating European “civil wars”, and that has enabled the western half of Germany to reacquire all its power without rendering its neighbours excessively nervous.*

*Brussels, however, is not only the capital of Europe, it is also the capital of a small kingdom, proudly attached to an independence maintained throughout the centuries in a variety of political forms. Located between Germany and its historical rivals in a geo-strategical position comparable on the western front to that of Poland in the east, Belgium has twice during this century been the victim of German military might. One could therefore expect that confronted yet again with a unified Germany, the Belgians might harbour fears and preoccupations similar, in nature and intensity, to those expressed as diplomatically as possible by the Warsaw*

*Government, which for the first time in forty years may be deemed as being truly representative of national popular feeling.*

*From the conversation that took place on January 3, 1990, between Giuseppe Sacco, Editor of The European Journal of International Affairs and Mark Eyskens, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Belgium, it can easily be seen that the historical changes that marked the second part of 1989 are regarded from Brussels with serenity. The European unification appears to be neither slowed down nor called into question by the new European situation. Practically non-existent, in Belgian circles, is the fear of a Fourth Reich that lies behind the Polish attitude. From the comparison, one could indeed reach the conclusion that this ghost could only roam across a country that has for over forty years been in the darkness of communism. On the contrary, Belgium, a country open to Europe and to the world, indeed a pioneer of the demolishment of borders, is in a position to look towards the future with optimism.*

**E** *Momentous events have been taking place at a faster and faster pace*  
**I** *in the last months, and indeed in the last few weeks, namely in Eastern Europe. Do you not have the feeling that we are at the end of an era? That something very substantial is changing—more substantial than we can even completely understand?*

**Mark Eyskens** - I think indeed we are at the end of an era. All in all, my feeling is as if during the last six or nine months the whole twentieth century had arrived to conclusion. The twentieth century has been marked by the struggle against two kinds of totalitarianisms. First against Fascism and Nazism; and to bring about their defeat we had to sacrifice 50 or 60 million people during the Second World War. Second, we had to fight against communism, and this other form of totalitarianism is now coming to its final stage, through a kind of internal collapse, a spontaneous implosion. But communism as well after all, has, cost a very high price in terms of human lives. Today the Soviets themselves avow that Stalinism killed probably between 40 and 50 million people. So the cost in terms of human lives is about the same for the two regimes.

**E** *A very intriguing question, of course, regards the reasons for the sudden*  
**I** *implosion after so many decades of the Communist system.*

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**Mark Eyskens** - We are all struck by the very speedy pace of that implosion. But there is something else that seems to me rather paradoxical. I am more struck by the fact that—as you said—these regimes could last in Central and Eastern Europe for nearly half a century. This is the really astonishing phenomenon: that communism, imported by the Red Army into five or six countries of Central Europe, of which two or three had been pluralistic democracies before the war, could last for nearly half a century. This, I think, provides an *ex post facto* proof of the extreme efficiency of the technology of dictatorship, and the accuracy of what was forecast in Orwell's novel *1984*. What for me is extremely striking is that one could succeed in maintaining such a regime—which is a horrifying regime in terms of human cost, frustration and alienation—and for such a long period, with the collaboration of many intellectuals.

**E**  
**I** *Of the West?*

**Mark Eyskens** - Yes. The incredibly long duration of the Communist regimes in the satellite countries is certainly due to the sophistication of the means of totalitarian control. But I think it is also due to the attractiveness, after World War II, of socialist thinking in a world destroyed by Fascism and Nazism, and to the intellectual appeal of Marxism as a doctrine of human liberation, in which the dictatorship of the proletariat is an absolutely necessary element. According to this doctrine, there were three stages in the process of liberation of the human gender, and the second stage, the dictatorship of the proletariat, was the necessary passage towards the typically utopian phase of communism. And all this was sincerely believed for a very long period by millions and millions of people who were ready to accept the horrors of the dictatorship of the proletariat in the hope that the third phase would come about and bring about a totally new society. The end of this illusion is the real long-term cause of the collapse of the Communist regimes.

**E**  
**I** *There must, however, also be more immediate reasons for such a sudden implosion.*

**Mark Eyskens** - I think there has been a very great impact exerted by what we call the third industrial revolution, or more accurately, the industrial revolution of the third kind. One of its main features is the stream of information, the influence of the media, the impossibility of maintaining countries in a situation of insularity. Look at the example of the GDR, but also of Czechoslovakia and



of the other countries of the Eastern bloc, and even to the example of the Baltic countries that are part of the Soviet Union. For years and years, night after night, the population has been able to learn from radio and frequently see on television the lifestyle in our societies, perceived from abroad as being totally free and very wealthy. Thanks to the unstoppable spreading of information all over the entire world, the different political systems have for the first time been tested in a kind of free market of ideas. And the comparison has had extremely negative results for the Communist regime.

**E** *Then is the main reason of the internal collapse of communism to be found in the so-called "information revolution"? In something that any Marxist would consider to be purely "superstructural" factors?*

**Mark Eyskens** - Oh no. There are also "structural" factors at work. The unstoppable spread of information across borders, the information revolution, has been possible only because of a new wave in the industrial revolution: because of the industrial revolution of the third kind. As a matter of fact, one could object to my analysis on the grounds that I am making a large use of the typical analytical tools of Marxism, that I am basing my reasoning on structural economic factors highly determined by technological evolution, as already underlined by Karl Marx. Well, it is indeed a very interesting and ironic intellectual exercise to try and apply to communism the Marxian dialectics, the analysis of its internal contradictions. The same analytical tool applied by the Marxists for decades and decades on Western capitalism and aimed at casting light on the contradictions that do exist in our system can be applied to the situation in the Communist countries. And this leads to the discovery of contradictions as big, if not bigger, then ours. Indeed, so big as to have led to the present implosion of the system.

It is therefore only through the technical sophistication of the tools of dictatorship that it has been possible to keep these regimes in place for such a long period. But now—to come back to your first question—we have finally arrived at the end of an era. Of course we are not reaching the end of history, but we are certainly reaching the end of what I would call the "era of ideological debates". Or we have at least arrived at an attenuation of the intellectual discussion in terms of capitalism versus socialism. In the West, even those political actors that still call themselves Socialists, and in some countries—such as Italy—even Communists say today that they have never approved of communism. That is basically true, because they have been

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revisionists since the time of Bernstein; and they have always been in favour of social-democracy, accepting the democratic rules of the game. But even Western European Socialists have for many, many years preferred some kind of planning to the market economy. They have to accept today that market economy—due to its efficiency—is superior to all kinds of planned economies.

**E**  
**I** *Even in terms of social efficiency?*

**Mark Eyskens** - Yes. Even in terms of social efficiency. No experience of planning in Western countries has succeeded, not even when it was just a mild *planification indicative* in the French way. In both Western and Eastern European countries, everyone now admits today that the market economy is a superior economic system, and this indeed marks the end of an era.

Having said this, however, I think that we should not conclude on a triumphant tone. We should not put it in the terms “we have won the struggle between the regimes”, or “the Cold War is over, and we have won.” As far as the Cold War is concerned, it is perhaps a slightly different problem, but in terms of antagonism between regimes, that kind of conclusion would be largely over-rated and not sophisticated enough. At the close of the twentieth century, in our societies of mixed economy and pluralistic democracy as well, we have to face many very complex problems and we will have to defend our democracy again and again. Western society has grown extremely complex—due to technological development and to a trend towards technocracy in large organisations—and dualistic. A growing gap is being brought about between on the one hand, the government (those entrusted with the task of running complex societies), and on the other hand, the populace, confronted day by day with more and more regulations to comply with, extremely complicated forms to complete and a social environment increasingly tense and difficult to understand. I think that the common man has become not the subject, but the victim of a new form of “alienation”, different from what had been foreseen by Marx. In a book I wrote a few years ago I called it “They-ism”, *vermenning*, expressing an estrangement of the individual faced with the impersonal nature of government.

**E**  
**I** *With the facelessness of power?*

**Mark Eyskens** - Yes, the facelessness of power. I think that this is a great threat for the workings of our democracy. Since social realities have become so

complicated, the art of government is becoming more and more an impersonal technique. Running a country means less and less making choices or implementing an idea, and more and more running a day-to-day administration without a face and without a profile. So as far as we are concerned, we should not be too satisfied about the failure and demise of communism, because that could hide our own problems which are still very acute.

**E** *Does this difficulty of communication between those governing and those*  
**I** *governed apply only to domestic policy, or on a world scale?*

**Mark Eyskens** - The main cause of the estrangement seems to be related to the stages and pace of technological evolution on a planetary scale. It is an element of today's history, and therefore a phenomenon with both domestic and international aspects. Try to explain to leaders of Third World countries the technicalities and intricacies of the debt problem. Their frustration is comprehensible.

The structural developments of the European Community also provide a very good example of the growing complexity of ruling people in society. I followed European institutions from the beginning, first as a student, then as a professor, and finally as a politician, and I have seen it grow more and more into an unmanageable bureaucratic power structure, every day more detached from the pan-European ideal of its origin. This is very frustrating. Thus, the main problem of the EEC today is that of obtaining consensus from the Europeans. In the public opinion, all over the twelve countries, there is a large and visible backing for the idea of European integration, economic and political, but there is also a widespread mistrust of Brussels bureaucracy.

**E** *This is the type of criticism that can normally be heard in British*  
**I** *government circles.*

**Mark Eyskens** - Yes. I am not in total disagreement with Margaret Thatcher's ideas as far as that point is concerned. But I feel that the British prime minister's conclusions are not consistent with her own analysis. In the EEC there is an undisputable excess of bureaucracy. The only logical answer is more democracy, and that means more democratic control by a fully-fledged parliament. As it has been the case in the United States, the right answer is a European legislature endowed with a much larger control power, and more clearly perceived by the peoples of Europe as their parliament. It is hardly a



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secret that today the Strasbourg Parliament has neither real power nor clear political mandate from the voters.

**E** *Does it not appear that on the occasion of the last elections for the*  
**I** *European Parliament, held in all the countries at the same time, there was for the first time a real feeling of a common predicament?*

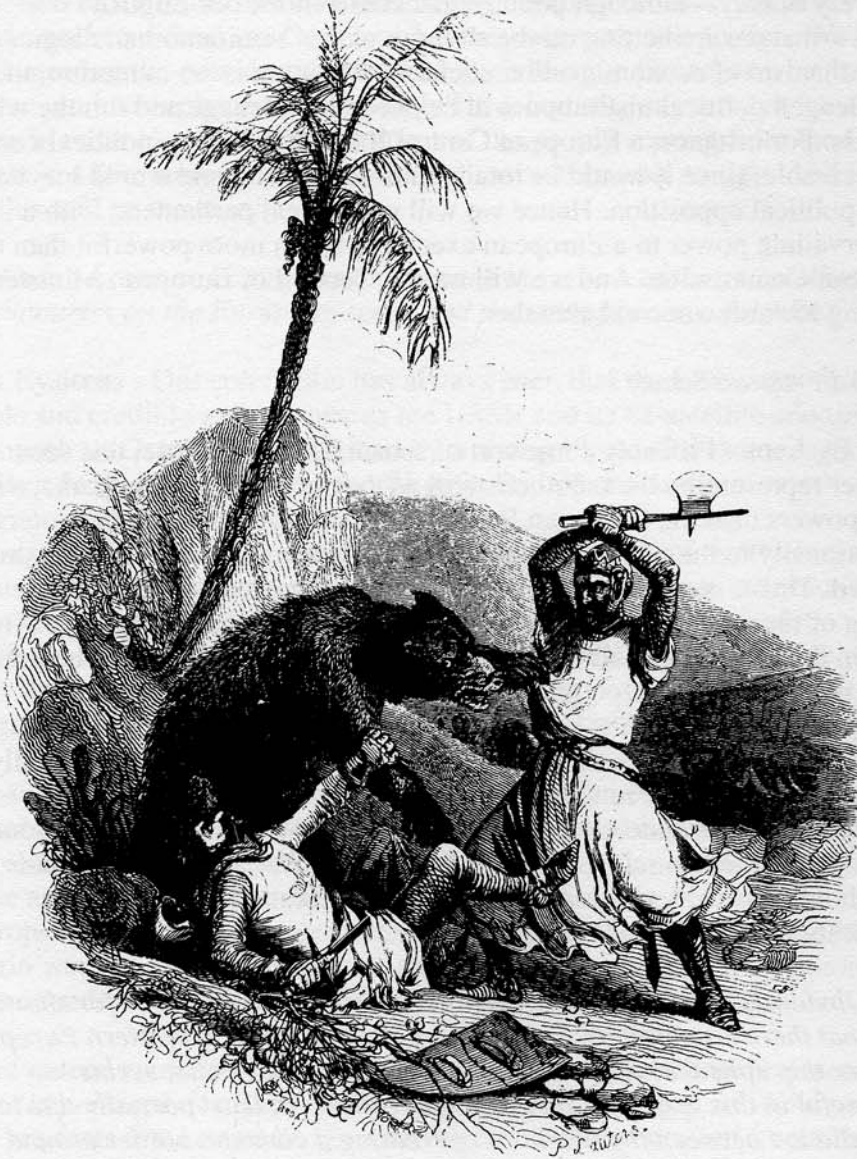
**Mark Eyskens** - That is true. But the degree of participation in many countries was very low: in some countries of the Community it was not even 50 per cent, sometimes 45 or even 40 per cent. What is more, the voters have the impression, and rightly so, of electing a European Parliament which has not enough impact on events. We may of course hope that, at the end of this year, on the occasion of the inter-governmental conference which will have to elaborate on European monetary union, we will also be able to agree on a reform giving larger powers to our European Parliament. That is the basic position, and it was also expressed by Chancellor Kohl. Of course, the UK is still very reluctant about any kind of transfer of sovereignty from a national parliament to the European Parliament.

**E** *Do you believe in a multi-tier Europe? Do you think that some EEC*  
**I** *countries are ready to go further on the path of integration, in areas where others might not be willing to follow?*

**Mark Eyskens** - My first observation is that an integrated Europe, and even a unified Europe does not mean an "homogenised" Europe. This is related to what Jacques Delors calls the "principle of subsidiarity", which means that the common authority of the union will be empowered as necessary in a number of crucial areas, but that a large margin of initiative will be left to private citizens, and in any case to the twelve national governments. So that is a first answer: that it is even desirable that there would be differences among the countries, but of course everything depends upon the extent of the divergence.

Secondly, we have to do our utmost to succeed in completing the program that has come to be identified with the date of 1992, and then proceed with a removal of the last remaining barriers. If not, the result will be a political anticlimax in the public opinion. And such an anticlimax in the western part of our continent, compounded by what is happening in Eastern Europe, could be extremely dangerous. So the risks and the consequences of a failure of 1992 can be deemed today as much more serious than could have been assessed six

months ago, or even three months ago. We in Belgium, among the founding fathers of the Community, living in a small country and not so sensitive as far as devolution of power is concerned, are much in favour of economic and



*Gottfried de Bouillon*



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monetary unification, knowing that we will thus reach a point of no return with respect to a political union.

I say very openly—although perhaps that could shock our English friends—that we are betting on the strength of this semi-automatic logic. Once the mechanism of economic and monetary unification is set in motion, then a fully-fledged political institution will be needed to manage and run the whole business. For instance, a European Central Bank without any political control is inconceivable, since it would be totally anti-democratic and would inevitably create political opposition. Hence we will need a real parliament, with a countervailing power to a European executive much more powerful than the European Commission. And we will need a Council of European Ministers, evolving towards a second chamber.

### **E** **I** A European Senate?

**Mark Eyskens** - Probably some sort of senate. In a first phase, this second chamber representing the member states as they are today might perhaps have wider powers than the European Parliament, directly elected by the voters, proportionally to the population. But in the long run this relationship would be reversed. This is our hope, and also that the future union would, with the passing of time, develop a foreign policy of its own. What we are trying to do today in this field—we call it “political cooperation”—is bound to be limited by the rule of unanimity.

There are signs, however, that we could go beyond it, and develop a really common European line in world affairs. Indeed, notwithstanding that constraint, we have succeeded over the last two years in taking many common stands on many essential issues, such as the Gulf War and other hot spots throughout the world, and especially in the last six months on German reunification.

**E**  
**I** Obviously, the upheaval in the East provides an ideal case for showing that there is a similarity of foreign policy interests in Western Europe; however this upheaval is also creating problems. A case that seems meaningful in this respect is the Schengen failure, at least partially due to the contradiction between the two aims of creating a common border around the hard core of the EEC, and of cancelling the German-German dividing line, thus healing a tragic wound in the heart of Germany and of Europe.

**Mark Eyskens** - We were very, very disappointed by what happened with the Schengen Agreement, all the more so because among the three Benelux countries—Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg—we had negotiated until five o'clock in the morning to settle all our difficulties. Then, at six o'clock, we heard from the Germans that they were not able to sign. We had a NATO meeting the next day, and I asked my colleague Genscher what it was all about, and he explained that it was just a delay, not for years but for a few months in order to consider the problem of the people coming from the GDR, and that in a few more months the Germans would be able to sign. And I still hope this will be the case.

**E** *Then you see no contradiction between the return of the ex-satellite*  
**I** *countries on the European scene and the strengthening of the EEC?*

**Mark Eyskens** - Our conviction has always been that the EEC cannot have a feasible and credible policy towards the USSR and its ex-satellite countries unless such an *Ostpolitik* is sustained by a strong *Westpolitik* that is a push towards a further integration of the Western European countries.

It is only thanks to the economic and political integration of the twelve, and eventually more, members of the EEC that we can exert some influence on the newly liberated Central European countries, bolster some degree of attractiveness and become here in Europe a countervailing power vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. And providing such a countervailing power will remain a necessity, even if the Soviet Union is de-Sovietised and becomes Russia again.

One has only to look at the geography of the Eurasian continent to see that in the East the very existence of Russia creates a permanent political problem, a problem that can be peacefully offset if and only if we create in Western Europe an integrated supra-national entity. Should, on the contrary, the process of European integration be interrupted or disrupted, then the only possible scenario would be one of dangerous asymmetry, even if the Soviet Union or Russia abandoned every tendency towards hegemony.

We are indeed confronted here with a situation that proves how Napoleon's words "*la politique des Etats est dans leur géographie*" may still hold today. There are facts that cannot be ignored: the relationship between a country of 260 million inhabitants and a subcontinent divided in 20 or 22 smaller states would inevitably be one of asymmetry.

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What would happen in such a hypothesis is that a reunified Germany would become predominant in a divided continent, and this would of course not be coherent with the idea of Europe that has prevailed in the last forty years. Another scenario is that of a divided Europe permanently submitted not only in terms of security policy to an American-Russian condominium. To answer your question, I would say that progress in EEC integration is not only compatible with, but also necessary to a new relationship with Central and Eastern Europe.

For all kinds of reasons, I think that an interruption of the process of Western European unification would be in contradiction with the needs of our economic progress. Actually, it would be unacceptable to our societies. We are confronted by many challenges, the competition from Japan and the Far East being a major one, and to respond to them we have no alternative but to pursue our historical task of economical, social, monetary and political unification.

**E** *There are two questions that inevitably appear at this point: what strategy of unification would fit into the present international context? And what kind of Europe would respond to these needs? Indeed, the crucial question is whether a concept of self-sufficiency and a policy of protection would be suitable for the unification of Europe, be it with the present twelve countries, or eventually with fourteen or fifteen members. Would protectionism and, in general, an inward-looking attitude provide the desirable basis for the creation of the United States of Europe?*

**Mark Eyskens** - My answer is of course negative. I am afraid this would not correspond to my idea of a united Europe. Moreover, this would be in contradiction with both the spirit and the text of the Treaty of Rome, which states very clearly that our Community is an open Community. So of course we always answer that new members are welcome, provided that there is a sufficiently high degree of economic convergence, that they accept what we call *l'acquis communautaire* and that they accept the finality of the Community: political union with a common foreign policy. That raises the question of a common security policy, and eventually of a common defence policy. Under these conditions, I can envisage a widening of the Community as such. As long as these conditions are not fulfilled, other problems have to be considered. One such problem is related to the situation of the EFTA countries, the European Free Trade Association. They are very close to the Community, to the point that our exports to the six EFTA countries exceed total European exports to the US and Japan together. That is quite considerable. Two weeks



ago we began negotiations on the setting up of the EEE—*Espace économique européenne*. What does that imply? I would prefer to believe it meant organising within that structure something which is very close to a confederation, not a confederal government, but a kind of confederation based on joint councils of ministers dealing with individual areas of competence, and eventually on a joint parliamentary assembly with delegations from both the European Parliament and EFTA. Of course, the EFTA countries are in a weaker situation as they do not have their own parliamentary assembly, so they will have to send representatives of each member country. We are even prepared to introduce into the European Court of Justice some judges from the six EFTA countries in

**Belgian Foreign Minister Mark Eyskens  
has also been Prime Minister and Minister of Finance,  
as well as Governor of the IMF and of the World Bank.  
His books *La rationalisation du comportement du consommateur* (1964)  
and *La source et l'horizon* (1986), among many others,  
have been awarded important distinctions.**

order that they may control the implementation of common policies. This is complicated, yet far-reaching in its institutional aspects. I would call this a relationship of a confederative type. If that becomes possible it could also open up the EEC to East European countries, as soon as they have recovered their economic efficiency. This does not apply today to Poland nor to Hungary, due to their very weak economies. But should we manage to help them take off, perhaps within two to five years or in any case, before the end of the century, and then they could join a large group of confederated countries.

**E** Could we include East Germany in this, or is that yet another chapter?

**Mark Eyskens** - Possibly the same chapter, however, I do not think it will be as easy to deal with the problem of East Germany in the same way as with the other central European countries.

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As you know, Chancellor Kohl proposed as the second stage of his 10 point plan a confederation with the German Democratic Republic. The reply of the GDR to that proposal was: "Yes indeed. We are ready to negotiate with the Federal Republic a *Vertragsgemeinschaft*." That could be a sort of confederation, based on unanimous and consensual decisions with common institutions for clearly determined areas of competence: in the economic, cultural and perhaps even social fields, leaving out probably a common foreign policy and security policy, although as far as security policy is concerned we will have to envisage a type of cooperative arrangement. I think we have to maintain our own responsibilities as far as security is concerned, not against Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, but as an insurance premium for risks we will have to take, because our planet will still be a dangerous one. We have the proliferation of nuclear arms. We know that there are at least twenty-two or twenty-three countries potentially capable of producing mass destruction weapons.

I cannot envisage Europe becoming a totally disarmed political entity, totally denuclearised, without any competence or capacity as far as defence is concerned. For me, that is a political impossibility since it would mean our political union was without any credibility. But on the other side, this security policy should strive towards a mutually more defensive defence. Of course we still have to define the precise operational content of this concept. This would imply that after the CFE agreement we all hope to sign in Vienna this year, there will be a second CFE conference, aiming at a much lower armament ceiling, while still maintaining an adequate defence, but structured in a more defensive defence mode.

**E**  
**I** *Something like the Swiss Army?*

**Mark Eyskens** - Well, our defence has also a dissuasive component, a nuclear deterrent. I would like to draw your attention to the fact that, if both alliances further reduce and restructure their forces, making large-scale attacks all but impossible, we would end up with a cooperative security policy between a politically united Europe and the countries of Eastern Europe, including the Soviet Union. I think we should offer the Soviet Union some confidence-building measures, to be negotiated in the context of a Helsinki II. We should make a very clear gesture on the question of frontiers, and be open to the idea of a non-aggression pact. I think that the time is ripe for the NATO countries to offer the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact a non-aggression pact.

**E** For the first time now, you mentioned the NATO countries, instead of  
**I** Western Europe.

**Mark Eyskens** - Well, it would not be very credible for the countries of Western Europe to offer the Soviet Union a non-aggression pact. This is only possible between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. We all know of course that the Warsaw Pact coincides with the Soviet Union, whereas on the Western side there is an American predominance. I think that it is not impossible, and actually rather urgent to envisage that on the occasion of the next Helsinki meeting, we seize the opportunity to negotiate the new political architecture of Europe, including a peace treaty with Germany, and a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union and an agreement on borders.

**E** Are you referring to maintaining present borders?  
**I**

**Mark Eyskens** - It depends upon which borders one has in mind. Of course if you refer to the border between West and East Germany, this is a border which in the framework of a reunification would simply be erased from the map. More caution is needed on the question of the ancient borders between the Baltic states and the Soviet Union. In this case, I am in favour of self-determination, as these countries were independent before the war. I must add that Belgium has never recognised the annexation of the Baltic states by the Soviet Union. The crux of the issue, however, is the Polish-German frontier—this is essential. When I speak of an agreement on borders, I am referring mainly to the Oder-Neisse line. Not to touch that border is just vital. And I hope this will also be the future viewpoint of our German friends. Guaranteeing Poland—and the Soviet Union—that the Oder-Neisse line is untouchable, inviolable and definitive would be a major confidence-building measure.

But let us leave this question aside and go back to my reasoning. In a perspective of a very close linkage of West Germany to East Germany, a confederation, or a kind of *de facto* unification, what will happen to the Warsaw Pact and to NATO? My political optimum would be that the Soviet Union accept a *unified Germany, a Germany that could stay within NATO*. Some people tell me this is wishful thinking: that it will never be accepted by the Kremlin, and moreover some Kremlin leaders have already said that in the event of reunification, the Federal Republic will have to leave NATO. I am not sure that this point of view will remain unchanged, because the leaders of the



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Kremlin are usually intelligent people. So it could be for them an attractive scenario to have a Germany unified *de facto*. The legal unification is of course a major political symbol. It is *more* difficult to make the Soviet Union swallow that, and not only the Soviet Union.



*Breydel and Vansaeftingen*

**E**  
**I** *Do you intend Poland as well?*

**Mark Eyskens** - Yes, and perhaps even other countries. But for the Soviet Union a unification could be safer in terms of European stability, including the military aspects of that stability, within the NATO framework.

**E**  
**I** *Why?*

**Mark Eyskens** - NATO is a multilateral institution where decisions are taken jointly. If there were good relations between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, this could be considered safer by the Soviet Union than having a unified and neutralised Germany. The Russians know very well that a big country with 80 million inhabitants and with such economic power is never neutral: it determines its own orientation, alliances and future. That would be an element which would be unpredictable for the Soviet Union.

So it is not to be totally excluded that the Soviet Union might accept a kind of unification, while a unified Federal Republic stays a faithful member of NATO. That for me would be an ideal solution: it implies that we give the Soviet Union a maximum of guarantees and that we set up a kind of common security policy in Europe—with institutions. You know that one of my predecessors, Mr. Harmel, once proposed a kind of European Security Council. That is not a bad idea and we could indeed envisage the creation of a council common to the two Pacts, in charge of monitoring security, frictions, alarms and also of observing, monitoring and controlling disarmament.

**E** *Would that include the Americans and the Russians? Are you speaking of*  
**I** *Europe in the Helsinki sense?*

**Mark Eyskens** - Yes. Of course we should not be too West-Eurocentric and present ourselves as the nucleus, the centre around which turn a second and third circle. This would be too West-Eurocentric. I do not think this is a good psychological approach. I am firmly in favour of a political union of the twelve or thirteen or fourteen countries, and then the establishment of relations of a confederal type with all the other countries of Europe. And although I do not see the Soviet Union becoming a member of the confederation, we can of course elaborate a new relationship based on a form of cooperation with the Soviet Union.

I stressed this idea two months ago, and I saw yesterday that in his New Year's speech Mitterrand also spoke about a confederation, and Chancellor Kohl, too. I think it is a good concept. We have to focus it better, and fit it into the Helsinki framework.

**E** *Should we not add to this picture the way in which these new*  
**I** *developments in East-West relations interfere with the serious problem of North-South relations?*



*Vandernoot and Vandermerck*

**Mark Eyskens** - Yes. That is a second dilemma. The first one was how to avoid being caught in a choice between *Ostpolitik* and *Westpolitik*. The second dilemma may be that we have to choose between our *Ostpolitik* and our *Südpolitik*. When we negotiated the renewal of the Lomé Convention, when we had the Euro-Arab summit in Paris with 22 Arab countries, the *leitmotiv* of all these Third World countries was that the whites were helping the whites to the detriment of the black world and the Third World.

I understand these fears, and indeed it is not unthinkable that the more we have to invest in the countries of Eastern Europe, the less money we will have for the South. But this would be a very bad policy. At the Euro-Arab summit in Paris I presented five responses to these fears. First, if one looks at what Europe does rather than at what could be considered to be its intentions, one could see that at Lomé 4, the financial package was increased from ECU7.5 billion to ECU12 billion for an increase of 52 to 53 per cent: a very substantial



increase. Second, the worst that could happen to the Third World would be a weakening of Europe. It is to the advantage of the Third World countries to have a coherent, strong Europe capable of maintaining its efforts in favour of less developed countries. Third, we do indeed aid the countries of Eastern Europe, but these countries, if they recover, will also become potential partners for the Third World. They could associate themselves with our efforts, and be partners in a Lomé 5 or Lomé 6. Fourth, thanks to détente and to the results of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, we are going to save substantial amounts of money that can be spent in development aid. Finally, my fifth point, though this was a bit naughty, was to tell them rather clearly that if we disarm in the North of the world, between West and East, then they should make a comparable effort to disarm between countries of the South. What they spend on armament on a yearly basis is four times as much as the official development aid they get from us, so if they made an effort to disarm, they would also free lots of money that they could use much more efficiently, I think, than on weaponry.

**E** *There is little doubt that the position of the South is weakened by the*  
**I** *East-West détente. Indeed, more than a détente, what we presently see between East and West is almost an entente. And in this new international climate, the Third World countries will not be able to play Americans versus Russians and vice-versa, in the way they have managed to do in the past in order to get aid from both sides. They will probably also be obliged to reduce these internal tensions, these huge armament programmes, since most of them follow this same logic.*

**Mark Eyskens** - The support, the aid they received from the Soviet Union and the Eastern countries has always been extremely marginal. In the best of cases it was neither economic, social nor cultural aid but oriented aid, and generally, military aid. So I do not think this is a very striking argument.

**E** *What I was referring to was, for instance, the Alliance for Progress. This*  
**I** *was something the Americans devised after Cuba became Communist, to prevent other countries from following this example. Many aid programs, similarly in Africa and elsewhere, were related to the risk of Third World countries becoming revolutionary. Now this risk is declining.*

**Mark Eyskens** - You are totally right, indeed. If détente becomes entente, regional conflicts will still be there but will lose their character as elements of

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what has been called the Third World war between the two great powers. Entente among the superpowers will lessen the strategic importance of many Third World countries and facilitate the solution of local conflicts.

**E** *The problem of the South is not only that of a transfer of resources.*

**I** *There is also the problem of the demographic explosion and also a kind of rediscovery of culture and tradition. There is the aspect of immigration: the Islamic veil affair in France and initially the Rushdie affair in Great Britain, in which the two problems are compounded: the impact of immigration and the conflicts of tradition. Do you see these as the tensions of the 1990's now that we are moving towards East-West entente?*

**Mark Eyskens** - I hope not, but I am not sure my hopes will come true. My impression is that we have to place these immigration flows into an historical perspective. There were powerful waves of immigration into the United States during the nineteenth century and even during the eighteenth century. The United States exerted a great attraction on many people in the nineteenth century, and even in the twentieth century. Now the same is true of Europe, as a consequence of our economic success story. Many people from the Third World want to come here, attracted by our high salaries and social security systems. Due to economic constraints we have recently reduced all these advantages, but in any case the West European subcontinent is still for many people in the world a kind of Eldorado. What, then, should our attitude be? Time is of course needed to absorb all these minority groups, so we have to bide time. I am against all kinds of xenophobia and I believe that it is unavoidable that in the twenty-first century and certainly in the twenty-second century, races will become more and more mixed, and they will all contribute to our cultural and social life. With Europeans, we have already experienced this and it has been a success. In this country, after the war, we had thousands and thousands of people coming from Spain, Greece and Portugal, and they are all integrated. I have second generation and third generation students at the university with Spanish names, but capable of speaking Flemish without any accent.

There is a major difficulty with the Moslems for religious reasons, and to a certain extent, I understand their reactions to our customs. Their civilisation based on religion has been confronted with the supersonic speed of technological evolution more than ours has, and they are suffering from cultural shock. Islamic fundamentalism, especially for Iran and the Shi'ites, but

also in other parts of the Islamic world, has been a reaction to the impact of modernity. We should not be surprised: our Christian churches have shown great flexibility. But after all, it took a few decades in the past, even centuries. What we should try to do is to combine both, to have some respect for their traditions and ways of life, providing these ways of life are not contradictory to life in an industrial society. I hope the same will happen to the Arabs. We must bide time. But I am totally opposed to the political exploitation of the social tension created by immigration from the Third World. This is again an awakening of the old demons of the 1930's. I consider Le Pen as a crypto-Fascist, and I think these people are extremely dangerous.

**E** *During the last elections Le Pen's Front National managed to conquer a substantial percentage of the popular vote in the regions bordering Germany. Do you not think this was also a reaction to European integration?*

**Mark Eyskens** - Yes. Le Pen is a nationalist, and his success in the French elections, more or less as is the success of the Republicans in Germany, at least in part is due to the exploitation of the resistance within Western Europe itself to the integration of the EEC. The fact that this resistance exists should not come as a surprise. With the progress of institutional, political and economic unity, what used to be the European dream becomes something very concrete and practical. We will enjoy more and more privileges, but we are also discovering new obligations and constraints, and this inevitably creates discontent and opposition.

**E** *Are these the reasons why you are so cautious about triumphalism?*

**Mark Eyskens** - Of course with great satisfaction we can observe the historical victory of the principles we have stood for for many decades, and around which we have created the European Community: democracy, freedom, economic efficiency, and so forth. But in many discussions I have had with people from the Third World, when we insist on respect of human rights and we try to introduce paragraphs on human rights into cooperation agreements with them, they interrupt me and say: "Remember that fifty years ago, during the Second World War, and even before, in Europe you organised the systematic extermination of millions and millions of people in the concentration camps. So what about human rights? Respect of human rights in Europe is very recent". That outcry certainly should advise us not to be triumphalistic about our achievements, but it is not totally correct. I think the



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idea of respect for human rights in Europe is rather old, going back to the French Revolution, the Enlightenment. But their implementation in a coherent systematic way is rather recent: over the last 40 or 45 years.

**E** *There is one international actor we have not mentioned, and that*  
**I** *is Japan.*

**Mark Eyskens** - The more détente there is between East and West, the more economic frictions there will be between Japan, the US and the EEC. Some economists are even forecasting increased tensions. I think this is exaggerated. We have to be objective. The Japanese have made some efforts to increase their imports from the West, but it is still easier for the US and Europe to import from Japan, because of cultural and language barriers. And indeed, they have a history of protectionism—a typical feature of large isolated countries—as with Great Britain and the US. We should also note that the Japanese balance of payments surplus is financing the US deficit. Such a large imbalance cannot last for centuries, and we will have to look for a better relationship. This implies, first, that Japan has to evolve towards a “social market economy” with a real social security system, more leisure time: convergence of the structural elements of Japanese society towards our own. Second, we need from our side to enhance our productivity and efficiency and to be more innovative. I hope we have learned something along these lines from the economic crises of the early 1970’s and 1980’s. We have to attract Japanese investors to Europe. If their multinational corporations come here and manufacture and export from Belgium to the rest of the world and eventually to Japan, this will improve our balance of payments and reduce their deficit.

**E** *Do you see a continuation in the trend of the past decades towards more*  
**I** *and more integration and free trade?*

**Mark Eyskens** - I do not see only the continuation of that trend. First, I see the end of communism. I see the strengthening of long term tendencies towards political democracy based on political competition. The other side of the coin of political and pluralistic democracy is free trade and competitive market economy, with its social corrections in terms of redistribution of incomes. And this is incompatible with protectionism. Political competition leads to democracy, economic competition leads to market economy and of course a market economy and free trade cannot work in an isolated country: they have to be applied worldwide. So what becomes clear at the end of this century is a

more coherent concept of the workings of an economic and political system: a great convergence between economic efficiency, political efficiency and social efficiency. This is supported by great values which date back to the French Revolution, to the American Revolution, to the age of the Enlightenment and in the end, to Christian values. This convergence is very positive and opens up the prospect of a twenty-first century which could be very attractive for our children and the next generation. We have suffered a lot during this century. Our parents and grandparents suffered even more, through two world wars and many economic crises. Let us hope that responsible members in our society have drawn some lessons from this history.

**E** *Therefore your attitude towards the future could be considered a*  
**I** *rationally optimistic one?*

**Mark Eyskens** - Yes. I am certainly not a pessimist, and this applies to Europe, as well as to the world as a whole. In the global problems of the planet, my attitude is also an optimistic one. I was in total disagreement 20 years ago with the evangelists of zero growth. They totally exaggerated the problem. Protecting our environment and greater ecological awareness is only possible if you develop the appropriate technology. With the appropriate technology you can indeed protect the environment from the effects of other technologies. Yes, it is not by condemning technology that you are going to protect the environment: on the contrary.