

A Place in the Shade

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Admittedly, at first glance it may seem that only for the sake of being non-conformist at all costs would one assert the idea put forth in the last issue, that, except for the terrible grief Saddam Hussein's lunacy caused the Iraqi people, the Gulf war of 1991 could be considered a blessing in disguise, at least from the point of view of Europe. But it was no snobbery. And indeed, the lesson of the events of the fall and winter of 1990-91 is a real one, and just in time for the present phase of the European unification process, allowing clarification of a crucial misunderstanding on the political objectives of such a process, and about a future role for Europe on the international scene.

To be frank, in the Gulf crisis, all ambitions of the Twelve to perform as a single actor in the Middle East were cruelly unfulfilled. The fact that only some EC member-states were present on the political and military forefront and only in their respective individual capacities, as well as the inability of the European Community to shape even the slightest role for itself as a block, is evident and indisputable. Nor can one deny that this was the inevitable result of a divergence of perceptions, interests and ambitions of the EC member-countries, as was immediately and pitilessly pointed out by the critics of European unification: British, American, and even some from continental Europe.

Yet it would be an exaggeration to extract from this single failure a diagnosis of congenital impotence, and to regard it as proof that among the nations of Western Europe, long-term interests are far too different to enable a common

foreign policy ever to see the light of day. On the contrary, consideration of the behaviour of the principal EEC member-states taken one by one necessarily leads, first of all, to the observation that the individual European nation-states did not fare much better than Europe as a whole, and secondly, to the surprising revelation that the actions of Germany, Britain, and France fit into one another like pieces of a puzzle, and in the end form a rather significant overall picture.

The twelve-headed monster

Taking the example of Germany, it has already been pointed out that Bonn, at first, showed a certain reluctance to commit itself to the line leading to military confrontation, and even allowed itself to be implicated in Moscow's manoeuvres of mediation. Only at the very last minute did it align itself with the coalition. Such behaviour is not difficult to explain: first on Germany's list of priorities throughout the Gulf crisis was the necessity of not complicating its relations with the USSR, in a moment when the Supreme Soviet was discussing the ratification of the "Four-plus-Two" treaty on German reunification. And in that very moment the main Soviet sponsor of this treaty, Gorbachev, was under heavy attack by the hard-line communists, who had found in the Iraqi-UN clash a unique opportunity to support their argument that the Soviet president's foreign policy was a sell-out to the West.

Eventually, the firing of Shevardnadze gave satisfaction to the right wing of the Soviet political spectrum, and probably saved the "Four-plus-Two" treaty. But the risk for reunited Germany of ending up in a legal limbo had been very serious. And many Germans actually were rather irritated with the White House for not having taken into consideration the schedule of their Soviet problem in planning Operation Desert Shield. In other words, Bonn demonstrated it had no direct or pre-eminent interests in the Gulf region, but rather, tactical requirements and objectives subordinate to the classic goals of its foreign policy, eternally attached to Germany's unity, the security of its borders, and its relations with the Slav world.

As for Great Britain, the country which on this occasion positioned itself, with respect to Germany, at the opposite end of the Community political spectrum, there is no doubt that its political elite has proven its swift, keen political instinct in understanding from the very beginning that Bush was intent upon carrying his initiative to the extreme consequences of a head-on military collision with Iraq. The British government sent precise and repeated messages to its European partners to join Britain in backing the US, trying to convince them that such a support was needed first and foremost in order to keep the Americans strongly moored to the future architecture of European security. British diplomacy seemed to be telling the other eleven EC countries that if they wanted the US commitment on the Old Continent to last, it was indispensable for them to support Washington in other fields of play. Thus, the aims John Major's Britain was pursuing through its military presence in the Gulf were strictly tied to security in the European theatre. In fact, neither Germany nor Great Britain has any real interest in the regions bordering on the Arab and Persian worlds. And to an even lesser extent does either one have the



Europe's key role

international power and relevance to project its influence and ambition in the various regional conflicts that the post-1989 world has inherited from the Cold War era, not even in the Middle-Eastern one, the most serious and complex of them all.

France, on the other hand, has a different excuse for its behaviour, as the hexagon's security presents a more complicated political-military equation. The Soviet menace is not as immediate as in the case of the Federal Republic of Germany, which after reunification has on its own soil about three times as many Russian troops as Americans. Moreover, France's defence requirements cannot be limited to an American presence counterbalancing the Soviet threat, but include an important Mediterranean component, and therefore the necessity (shared by Spain and Italy) of preventing the tensions that prevail in the eastern Mediterranean from spreading to its western half: hence the necessity of maintaining good relations with the Arab countries of North Africa. This explains why France up to the last moment kept posturing that it believed in the possibility of an Arab or negotiated solution. But when the hour of war arrived, France accepted to pay whatever price in terms of its Arab relations and committed its forces with the UN, making an explicit declaration that it was its duty as one of the permanent members of the Security Council.

While it seemed to be fulfilling its world responsibilities, Paris was in fact demonstrating the priority of the European shutter of its foreign policy over the Mediterranean one. Its emphasis on being a permanent member of the UN Security Council was just a way of trying to uplift its international rank in response to the reunification of Germany and to the end of the post-war European equilibrium. Paris, of course, maintained that this reassertion of its rank was *tout azimuth*—in all directions and with respect to all the countries of the world—but it is easy to see that it was directed mainly at the EEC, where it risks being dwarfed by the German giant.

Clearly, the association after World War II of non-communist Europe into a peaceful community of equals was possible only because Germany was divided, and because what was left of Germany was roughly equivalent, in demographic terms, to the other two "big" countries of the original EEC,

France and Italy. Now, with the collapse of the GDR, there is nothing left to justify French institutional superiority over Germany, except through emphasis of France's membership in the exclusive club of the five "big powers" that have permanent seats in the UN Security Council—the supervisors of "world order". And in order to make this point France had no choice but to send the Foreign Legion to participate in the liberation of occupied Kuwait.

All this adds up to a simple conclusion: confronted with the Kuwait-Iraqi crisis, and the ensuing UN-Iraqi confrontation, Europeans could not see anything else but the problems that preoccupy them and constitute the main target of their foreign policy: European equilibrium and security. In a way, in the attitude of each of the three principal European countries there was one part of the three-pronged equation for the West European defence. Britain took care of "keeping the Americans in", Germany of "keeping the Russians out", and France of "keeping the Germans down", according to the famous formula about NATO's three main objectives: indeed, an admirable example of the spontaneous division of diplomatic work, with roles silently allocated by a political "invisible hand", so that apparently in pursuit of totally different interests the overall result is very similar to the basic aim of the alliance of post-war Europe with America.

Might makes right

Moving on to analyse the causes of European political cooperation's lamentable performance, a particular comparison proves itself to be useful and instructive: that of the EC and the Soviet Union, where the latter's degree of internal disunity could be seen as even bigger than that of the EC. In effect, there are no territorial claims between Belgians and Dutch or Spanish and Portuguese, nor are there armed conflicts or reciprocal massacres as is the case between the Azerbaijanis and Armenians, the Moldavians and Ukrainians, or the Russians and Lithuanians. It is also obvious that the long-term evolutionary trend of the EC is opposite that of the USSR. In the Soviet Union today, the political debate carries on about whether or not to dismantle the political union in which these peoples have lived for centuries, before and after the revolution.

In Western Europe, on the contrary, the problem is exactly the opposite: how to perfect the union among peoples who until fifty years ago were at war with one another, but who today consider their old rivalries as unthinkable and to the detriment of all. Nevertheless, and in spite of its centrifugal tendencies and risks of fragmentation, the Soviet Union was capable of substantial diplomatic action during the Gulf crisis. True, in the end its political line revealed itself to be a losing one, but it created a moment of great uneasiness for President Bush.

It is easy to draw from this comparison what one could call an “institutionalist” morality: to conclude that in these two situations of serious disunity in Western Europe and the Soviet Union, what Europe is missing is well-attuned institutional machinery for the production of precise foreign policy aims and the related implementation strategies. The USSR, on the contrary, whatever its present degree of decomposition, still is organised enough to have a line in this domain, and even to transform its internal contradictions and divisions into foreign policy initiatives.

Indeed, it has been confirmed by the most authoritative experts on Soviet affairs that Moscow’s initiatives in search of a compromise were due both to sympathies for Iraq widespread in the Moslem republics of southeastern USSR (the very republics that until now have remained relatively loyal to Moscow), and to the fear that these sympathies could further complicate and fuel the ethnic and national quarrels that have their hottest spots on the shores of the Baltic and in the gorges of the Caucasus.

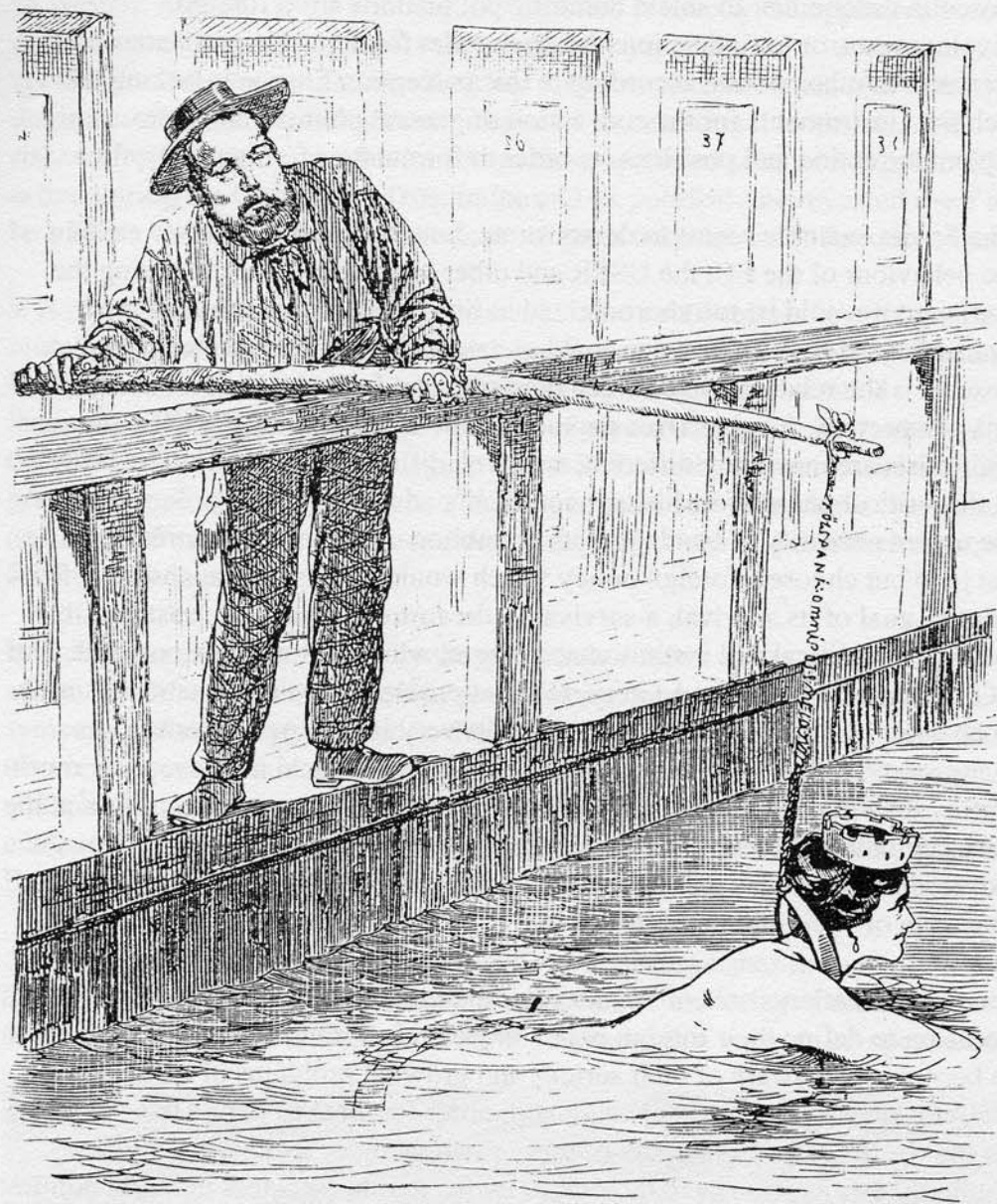
According to this “institutionalist” vision, what distinguishes the situation of the USSR from that of the EC is the existence of an institutional mechanism to take foreign policy initiatives and conduct diplomacy, a valve to be opened or

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closed in order either to shield domestic political life from foreign developments, or to find an international outlet for domestic problems and pressure. In other words, according to this perception Europe is lacking the technical instruments for the conversion of general political aims into diplomatic action and positions, in order to formulate a foreign policy line.

The Soviet example seems to demonstrate, however, that in order to explain the behaviour of the EC, the USSR and other international actors during the Gulf war, it would be too short-sighted to limit the analysis solely to the availability or not of a decision-making mechanism. What is to be looked at, instead, is the relationship between domestic and foreign policy aims. And in this perspective, the objectives pursued by the USSR and by the EC during the Gulf crisis are inevitably different, and even difficult to compare. The USSR, in this critical phase of its history, could only adapt its foreign policy aims to the urgent necessity of bandaging its crumbling unity. In other words, it could not help but choose a foreign policy which would assist it in the absolute, first-priority goal of its survival, a survival in the form implying the least possible number of political and institutional changes, which always prove painful. The EC, on the other hand, had a very different problem. Given that united Europe as an actor in world affairs is still taking its very first steps (or perhaps, as many would argue, has yet to be born), its objective could not have gone much further than the one that the capitalist and working classes set themselves at the very beginning of the French Revolution, when it was difficult to imagine the extraordinary changes that were soon to be brought to social relations: the objective of "being something".

Finally, the nation-states of Western Europe found it rather difficult on this occasion to define their foreign policy objectives, because these states have yet to become fully aware of their serious and growing problems of national identity, whose resolutions are a must in order for them to define their interests on the world scene. In fact, the European nation-states still have not posed explicitly the question as to their capacity (or not) to be actors in world politics, although every day they acquire more painful evidence of the unspeakable truth: that taken individually, they have a very reduced relevance in today's world. And it is for this division between their pride and the hard facts that



A continent under strict control

they oscillated in a fairly violent manner between two very different interpretations of the situation that had been created by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, and by the ensuing UN condemnation. At the beginning, the European nations believed that participating in the multinational force in the Gulf would equal an entry ticket (at near bargain rates) to a party where a colonial splitting of the crucial regions of the South would take place. Subsequently, later on during the Gulf crisis, as the governments of these countries gradually understood just how determined the US administration was to reaffirm the weight of military power (*vis-à-vis* the “civilian powers”) in the world order, there was a rush—and not always a very elegant and dignified one—to align with the indisputable leader of the new “unipolar” order, no longer in the hope of carving out a piece of the action in the post-war Middle East, but out of plain fear of being punished.

The behaviour of the United States during the Gulf crisis and in the chain of events that led up to the war betrayed an obvious will to demonstrate that it is military might (and technology)—and not financial wealth or industrial exports—that in the end represents the true measure of the political power of a country, its influence on world affairs, its international “rank”. Faced with this demonstration, Europe has been awakened brutally from the dream which had been nourished by the so-called “revolution of 1989”.

Late in the summer of 1990, most European observers still believed that the Soviet “resignation from superpower status” (a status based on a gigantic army, totally out of proportion with the inefficient communist production system) could lead from the “bipolar” world of the Cold War years to a “multipolar” international order, in which the economic dynamism and the sophistication in consumer goods technology of the Europeans and the Japanese would allow a united Europe and the empire of the rising sun to be placed on equal footing with the only traditional superpower left: the United States. After the Gulf war, no longer can they harbour such illusions. The United States, in spite of its unquestionable economic difficulties, has re-established, for a moment, the international hierarchy of power born of World War II. Above all, the Bush administration has reaffirmed that “international rank” as an objective of foreign policy is to be attained by backing up diplomacy with enough nerve to risk or to

face military confrontation, while the civilian powers, namely the three losers of the Second World War, betrayed—despite their remarkable post-war economic “miracles”—a severe incapacity to pursue other international objectives, but those of mercantile penetration.

A place in the sun

In the eighteenth century, Montesquieu had pointed out the difference between the foreign policy of kingdoms and of republics, namely of federal republics such as Switzerland. While kingdoms attempt through international action to gain what Montesquieu called “glory”, republics simply pursue the satisfaction of their people’s long-term interests and the solution of actual social problems, that is to say goals of a definitively domestic nature. But the goals of “glory” (today, one would say “rank”) have not completely disappeared from the international behaviour of democracies and parliamentary regimes.

According to the historian Paul Kennedy, an objective of this nature clearly is present in the recent foreign policy of George Bush, its aim being “to break the mood of self-doubt and defeatism that has existed among the country’s elites since the 60s, ... and allow the nation to recover self-esteem”.¹ And Kennedy compares this attitude to that of Spain under de Olivares, “the great minister of Philip IV, who often justified by the objective of ‘reputation’ the distant military expeditions of Spain in the years 1630 and 1640”. But behind such deployments—which were just as impressive, with allowance made for time and technology, as the recent dispatch of US forces to Saudi Arabia—... there was also Olivares’ firm belief that the victories on the field would confound the domestic and foreign critics who spoke of Spain’s decline. When the news of the first battlefield success (at Noerdlingen, in September 1636) reached Madrid, therefore, Olivares declared it to be ‘the greatest victory of our time’. Once again, Spain had proved its detractors wrong: because of its military prowess, it was still number one in international affairs.”

No military victory, however, could derail the economic decline of Spain and change its destiny, within time, of being cancelled from the club of great powers. From this angle, one therefore could ask the same question today: “But

what is 'rank' if many of those who don't have it become richer and more influential than you? A kind of noble status which makes an impression right at the moment when it has just been contested".²

In the thinking of the "founding fathers" of united Europe—Adenauer, De Gasperi, Monnet, Schuman—there was a lively awareness of the role held, in the preparation of Nazi military aggression, by the myth of conquering "a place in the sun", a high-ranking position in world order. And they held a symmetrical belief that in democratic regimes, a strong tie has to connect (and to a certain extent subordinate) foreign policy objectives to internal politics. During and after World War II, when the design for a politically united Europe was conceived, it was aimed at freeing Germany from the obsession of French aggressiveness ("France", the Germans used to say at the turn of the century, "has declared war on us thirty times in two centuries!"), and freeing France from the nightmare of the military superiority that Germany had finally achieved since the second half of the nineteenth century. But these were largely domestic policy objectives, as they implied protecting France and Germany from the dangers that traditionally threatened these societies from the inside: nationalism-militarism in Germany, and jacobinism-bonapartism in France. In fact, in the European federalist project, the domestic and foreign policy objectives were indiscernible, and still are so today. There resides the uniqueness of such a project, and the debate over the lesson that Europe should draw from the Gulf war is bound to remain a deaf man's dialogue, leading to no result if it does not start from the awareness that the word "Europe" has different political meanings to different people, and that the actual process of European unification that has taken place over the last fifty years is the result of the convergence, mixing and overlapping of at least three different and sometimes contradictory political projects: a project for an economic order, a project of prestige, and a project for peace.

To begin with, there is an idea of Europe as a free-trade area. This project has been to a large extent translated into reality among those West European countries that the Soviet threat had forced into a bloc, and has been an authentic economic success, to the point of bringing about the late-arriving and reluctant adhesion of Britain, and today even the decision to apply (taken under the pressure of the business community) by some Scandinavian

countries, traditionally so proud of their national identity as to border upon open racism. But the logic and the advantages of free trade do not apply to Europe only, and now that the fact of having escaped communism is no longer an exception in the world, it becomes hard to understand why the EEC should not include—if it limits its goal to rationalising the international division of labour—not only the ex-satellite countries, but Morocco and Turkey as well, or indeed whomever else requests admission.

This view of what united Europe should be is quite different from the project of those who complain most about the failure of the EC to carve out a role in the Gulf crisis. Their project starts from the perception of Europe as a group of middle-size powers, or ex-great powers, seriously frustrated in their ambitions of “glory” or “influence”, of “standing” and of “rank”, and who hope that in uniting they will “count” for more. In other terms, Europe represents a way to satisfy the political *milieux* who traditionally wish, for their respective countries, a policy of prestige and power, but who realise that one by one these countries do not have the means for their ambitions. This perception of Europe sees the world of today through the lenses of yesterday, those of the politics of a balance of power among nation-states obsessed with territorial insecurity and expansion, and it is bound to lead again to the same type of intra-European controversies that were typical of the first half of the twentieth century.

Altogether different is the third European political design: the project of an historic reconciliation between France and Germany, to associate one time and for all the fate of the two great nations whose rivalry has for centuries engendered struggles and massacres. European unity in this political project was above all a coalition which in uniting France and Germany, would neutralise the reciprocal aggressiveness, and reduce the threat that for the whole continent and even for other continents always had been represented by the dynamism, the drive and the ambition of these two peoples.

In reality, the unique nature of this third political project still cannot be fully perceived if one considers European unity as an alliance aimed at *joining the total forces* of the member-countries. On the contrary, in this vision of European unity, the joining of forces would only be that of the cultural,

scientific and economic dynamisms of the societies in question, while under the profile of international action, the unification of Europe would rather resemble a collective peace and security system, aiming at *balancing and reciprocally neutralising the forces* of the different nations of the Old Continent.

An alliance, even a defensive one, is inevitably directed against someone who is not part of it. A system of security, on the other hand, paradoxically may be considered *as being directed above all against its own members*. In particular, the political project of Europe's founding fathers (Monnet, Spinelli), conceived of during the darkest years of the "European civil war", was before anything else a project aimed at creating the conditions for a stable peace, through renunciation of the rivalries which had horribly stained Europe with blood. As a political programme, it saw in political unification the instrument for combating the internal tendencies that had channelled the dynamism of French and German society towards power and aggrandizement, had ended in the self-destruction of continental Europe, and had allowed other powers like England, Russia and America to become imperial centres on a world scale.

During the period of the Cold War, this pacifist-European project had lost its political meaning. In effect, Franco-German reconciliation was no longer sufficient to guarantee peace, because peace was no longer threatened by rivalries among Europeans, but rather by those among the great, non-European superpowers. Even if it is precisely during this period that European unification made great progress, it would be misleading to believe that the demons of the past had disappeared for ever. But now that the threat of Soviet expansion has lost credibility, at least in part, the very reason that pushed the Europeans to put aside their rivalries have also gone, and the success that has been obtained until now in establishing a united Europe based merely on free trade can no longer be considered sufficient to guarantee peace among the old nation-states. Since 1989, the parameters of the international equation seem to have changed radically. The reunification of Germany has altered the balance within the very heart of the EC and has demonstrated that some nationalist prejudices against Germany are still alive in Britain, while a Franco-German competition for influence begins to be visible in the ex-satellite countries,

allowing certain aspects of nationalism and political rivalry—and to a lesser extent, economic rivalry—among the European countries to resurface once again. In other words, there is the return to the threats to peace from the interior of Western Europe itself, a return which restores to the old Monnet-Spinelli project of guaranteeing peace by political unification all the importance and urgency it had during World War II.

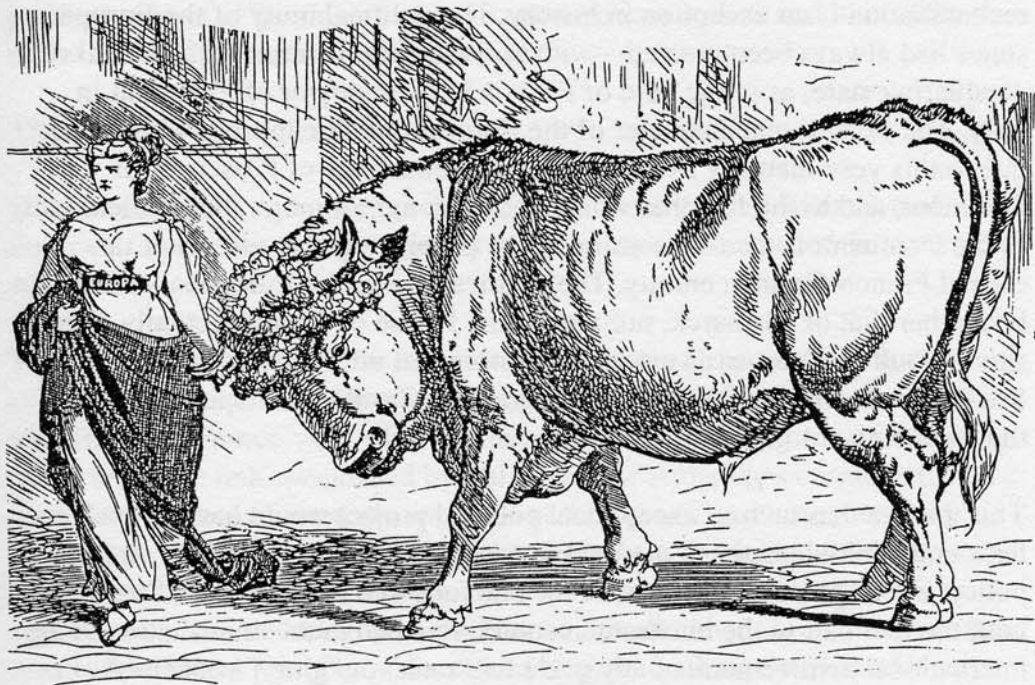
Of these three political projects, the first (the single market) is not incompatible with the other two, and it could even constitute a point of departure. The second and third, on the contrary, are not only incompatible, but squarely are alternatives to one another. They were able to coexist in the imagination of the Europeans as long as the Soviet threat and the balance of terror had transformed the European nations' quest for "glory" or "rank" into a mere dream, and had guaranteed peace in Western Europe, by relegating to history the Franco-German rivalry. But today, this crucial external constraint no longer exists, and Europe is confronted with the choice between a project of European unification that would enable the nations of the Old World to avenge half a century of irrelevance and dependence on the US, and a project of peace. The lesson of the Gulf war hardly could have come at a more opportune moment.

Leaving the past behind

From the angle of those who think that the third political design which goes by the name of "European unification" remains the only politically and historically sensible one, the war in the Gulf, the poor performance of the EC, and the obvious failure of political cooperation had value as a signal. In effect, they demonstrated the extent to which the other two models of Europe are insufficient. All during the course of the Gulf crisis, free-trade Europe gave the impression of the fat merchant unable to attach around his huge midriff the sword of a knight. And the idea of a united Europe that would make up, by acquiring "rank" and "glory" in far-away wars, for the imperial frustrations of the individual European countries, capsized in the raucous dissonances of national responses to the American call to arms. As it was inevitable, in pursuing influence and glory, the European governments ended up flying their

flags on the basis not of European collective interests, but of national interest in its strictest sense, with each country trying to derive more pride from the fact that other European partners could not deploy the same means.

And inevitably, a foreign policy aimed at glory and prestige and at healing national frustrations brought back to the surface the very differences in the historic heritages that had begot these same frustrations.



Taming a wild past

How could one expect France and Germany to have the same attitude in a crisis like this most recent one if each had the objective of ridding itself of the shadows cast from its own imperialist failure? As French thinker Alfred Grosser has pointed out, Germany had to face up to the Gulf crisis carrying the weight of the horrible and still unpaid-for crimes against the Jewish people, whereas France bore another burden, certainly less heavy, but fundamentally of the same nature, tied to the torture and massacres perpetrated during the

Algerian War. No alliance that has as a goal the quest for healing the frustrations and mistakes of the past can free itself of the weight that this same past represents. And the past inevitably divides France and Germany. Only a political project directed integrally toward the future will be able to unite them.

European exceptionalism

The political project of European unity conceived of as the Franco-German reconciliation is an exception in history. The political unity of the European states had always been created—with rare exception—around the sword of a conquering state, as in the case of Prussia in Germany or of Piedmont in Italy. The exceptional character of the European political project is indeed due to this very inability to compare it with examples of Prussia or of Piedmont, and to the fact that what is being sought through the political unity of the Continent is the overcoming of the purely negative effects of the eternal Franco-German enmity. The political model for European leaders can be neither that of Bismarck, nor that of the House of Savoy. Actually, they should look more towards models of consensual unification, such as the Swiss one, that of the merging of Aragon and Castille into Spain, or that of the American colonies.

This implies that such an exceptional political project would have to lead, at least in the initial phases of a united Europe, to an “exceptionalism” in foreign policy: a foreign policy inspired of the one followed by the United States up until the first half of the nineteenth century, founded in the renunciation of any international involvement, of any quest for “rank” or “glory” conceived of as ends in themselves. Let it be understood, though, that it is not a question of renouncing the glory deriving from the fact of having built “a city on the hill”, of being a peaceful society tolerant of diversity, or of having known how to overcome century-enduring bloody, religious rivalries.

The United States at its origin offers a very instructive historic precedent for the foreign policy of a new genre of “international subject”, as united Europe would be, and as was in that era the Union formed of the ex-colonies. The US was guided by a political principle that could be applied to the foreign policy of

united Europe: the principle of “non-entanglement”. Just as the American colonies, which in creating the Union, wanted to found “not only a new country, but a new social order”, there is at the very origin of the European project the idea of creating a peaceful order among the European nations, thanks to the renunciation by France and Germany of their hegemonic ambitions. Thus, if the American Revolution was “the rupture of the political connection with time-worn Europe”, European unification must mean the rupture of the political connection with the war-worn Europe of the past. The political project of the fathers of united Europe was no less ambitious than that of the fathers of American independence.

The new non-entanglement

Of course, there is an important difference between the self-limitation of Europe’s international ambitions and the “non-entanglement” of the American colonies.

The non-entanglement of the American ex-colonies included the refusal of any extra-continental alliance, not only with the former enemy, England, but also with Bourbon France. And while the latter insisted on giving some permanent character to the link established by Lafayette, the Americans considered it as a mere convergence of interests, accepted as “the product of bitter necessity”. But the world has become much smaller since then, and it is unthinkable today that the nations of Western Europe could confront alone the dangers of chaos and war which come today from the East and the South, dangers different from those of the recent past, but no less disturbing. The alliance with the United States remains in this sense fundamental for Europe. And it must be obtained by giving, in exchange, loyal support—and, when needed, encouragement—to the efforts by the US to meet its responsibilities as guarantor of the international order across the whole of the planet.

The birth of a common European security identity cannot be accomplished in one step. Security in effect represents a permanent objective, for which the actual measures and organisation vary according to situations of peace, crisis or war. Defence, which in the strictest sense of the word is but a set of security

measures typical of a situation of war and therefore a question of the conduct of military operations, must remain for the foreseeable future within the framework of a renewed Atlantic alliance. But Europe itself could take its security needs into its own hands in situations of crisis or peace. Not only with regard to the protection of the civil population (for example, in the case of biological warfare in neighbouring zones), but also in the protection of borders and in the struggle against illegal immigration from the South or the East. Not only in the verification of disarmament agreements, but also in control over the transfer of military technology. Not only in the repression of the international drug trade, but also in the struggle against terrorism. Not only in the participation in "Blue Helmet" missions, but also in the prevention and the interposition in case of conflicts between nationalities in the Balkans or in Central Eastern Europe, or in case of a major crisis in some far away country that could trigger a massive flow of refugees to the EC.

Certainly: these issues are not "grand politics", the type of policies which jolt the imagination of the masses and which give—thanks to CNN—access to planetary notoriety, or which could compensate for the frustrations of the past and provide "glory" and "rank", or at least "presence" and "standing". But this is the kind of international action through which Europe in the future will be able to play an essential role keeping the peace. And peace, for the fathers of Europe, was the main objective of their ambitious design.

In forcing acknowledgement of the inadequacy of Europe seen only as a common market, and of the vanity in looking on the European level for compensation for the primacy lost by the nation-states of the Old Continent, the war in the Gulf thus compels the Europeans to go back to the original vision of the European project.

It is a vision that can appear utopian and mythical, a vision one could consider appropriate for the devastated Europe of 1945, and at odds with the renewed arrogance of the reconstructed and prosperous national realities of today. All this possibly could be true. But the war in the Gulf has demonstrated the objective limitations and powerlessness of whatever united Europe is presently in existence, as well as of its component member states, and the total lack of

buoyancy of the pragmatic European leadership and public opinions of the post-communist age, indifferent to myths and grand political designs. The war in the Gulf has thus confronted the affluent and spoiled West Europeans with a choice between the rediscovery of a utopian tendency, of a mobilising myth (probably the last secular myth of our time), and the resignation to sliding even lower on the international scene. A fall that would inevitably lead back to the nationalist quarrels, and revive the conflict between German dynamism, French attachment to formal status as a great power, and British temptations to become a dependent of the United States.

And it is for brutally thrusting Europe in front of this reality that the war's lesson to the Old Continent may in the end have a positive value: for having allowed Europe consciousness of the fact that no matter what the European foreign policy, it must limit itself strictly in its ambitions.

It is quite feasible that just like the "unipolar" world order which some Americans have talked about, this lesson will be of value for a very short period, and that in the not-so-immediate future, a more strongly unified Europe will be able to set for itself more ambitious goals. But this possibility depends on the acceptance of today's constraints, which will allow Europe to strengthen its unity. For, as Montesquieu wrote, there is something wrong in trying to impress with a grand design. It is not the means that must be brilliant; it is the end. True politics is to arrive there by obscure paths.³

References

1 - "A Declining Empire Goes to War", *The Wall Street Journal*, January 25-26, 1991.

2 - Gilles Martinet, "La politique de l'apparence", *Le Monde*, March 13, 1991.

3 - "Il n'est rien de si facile à un homme qui est dans de certaines places que d'étonner par un grand projet: il y a du faux à cela. Ce n'est pas les moyens qui doivent être brillants; c'est la fin. La vraie politique est d'y parvenir par des routes obscures.", Montesquieu, *De la politique*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, Gallimard, Paris, 1985, p. 119.

Some of the ideas presented in this article have also appeared in *Commentaire* (Paris), *Politica Exterior* (Madrid), *Europa Archiv* (Bonn), and *Commentary*, the monthly of the American Jewish Committee (New York).