Crisis in Europe?

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Abstrak

Pasca penerimaan Constitutional Treaty dan Lisbon Treaty, saat ini sulit untuk menghindari terminologi "krisis" ketika melihat situasi proses integrasi Eropa. Krisis ini berkaitan dengan setiap proses yang tumbuh dan berkembang. Tulisan ini hendak memaparkan penyebab krisis dan mencoba membedakan antara krisis dan manajemen krisis. Jurang pemisah antara warga dan proyek-proyek Eropa sudah sering dijabarkan. Kenyataannya, generasi yang kemudian menjadi penentu kebijakan dan pendukung proyek-proyek Eropa bukan lagi generasi yang berpengalaman secara personal dalam proses pra integrasi Eropa. Argumen-argumen baru harus dibentuk untuk meyakinkan warga Eropa. Hilangnya batas-batas dalam kehidupan sehari-hari diterima sebagai sesuatu yang alami, tanpa menyadari bahwa itu adalah akhir dari jalan yang panjang dan sulit, yang juga menuntut perubahan paradigma dalam mentalitas kolektif.

Kata kunci: Uni Eropa, integrasi Eropa, referendum

To "crise" or not to "crise"[1]

Crises are an element of personal and social life; they are a part of growth processes. All living organisms go through crises. Maturity is achieved by passing through a crisis, which is experienced as a very serious event in life, although adults tend to smile about this perception of a crisis, which they have also passed through and now remember with a mixture of nostalgia and self-sufficiency. Crises also accompany the adolescent later in professional and family life. The midlife-

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[1] Apologies for the terrible neologism, which evokes a certain identity between "crisis" and "existence", but also the nearness between crisis and a certain commotion of the person who is passing through a crisis ("cry").

crisis[2] or the "crisis of the void nest"[3] is situations which can be solved by flight[4], by intelligent changes, by falling into a hopeless routine or by conscious confirmation of responsibilities —and probably by many other strategies which the non-expert is unable to present in a systematic manner.

In any case, "ubi vita, ibi crisis" —or inversely. Absence of crisis is a sign of death —of real death or of the death of that person who is unable to evolve, to react with new responses to new information and new challenges, which — being maybe 20- has become old (like there are others who are 80 and remain young). There are several strategies of self-protection against crisis[5], because crises are mainly associated with negative elements. There are, of course, "Crises unto Death"[6]. Also the European crisis could lead to the death of this project, at least in its ambitious version that wants to go further then a broad common market.

But the negative perception of the crisis does forget that maturity —as it has been exposed before— is achieved only by going through crises: European literature has even developed a form of novel in which this step from immaturity to maturity is thematised: the "Bildungsroman"[7], in which the proofs and challenges the protagonist has to overcome are considered a necessary part of a positive process[8]. In that sense, one can agree with Andrei Tarkovski's view of the crisis: "An inner crisis is always a sign of health. In my opinion it means nothing else than an attempt to find one's own identity again, to get a new faith. They who consider intellectual problems

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[2] Literately described for example in the novel *Juegos de la edad tardía* (1989) by the Spanish writer Luis Landero.

[3] It is magisterially described in Carmen Martín Gaite´s novel *Nubosidad variable* (1992).

[4] As in the two quoted novels.

[5] An extraordinary example can be found in Effi Briest's father in the homonymous novel by Theodor Fontane. For the old man, all the different events -also his daughter's history and sufferance- are commented on only by a stoic: "Es ist ein weites Feld" – "This is an ample field", as a concluding remark which allows him to go back to his favourite activity: reading the newspaper.

[6] The term is obviously borrowed from Kierkegaard's "The Illness unto Death": indeed, illness is a crisis that sometimes ends in death.

[7] Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* is thought to be the model.

[8] There has been a long tradition of linking the process of maturing with a journey. But in the 20th century crisis of the European legacy the journey as a way to self-realisation has also entered into a crisis, whose most clear expression can be found probably in James Joyce *Ulysses*, a parodic reversal of Homer's hero and his journey. Odysseus was considered by Adorno -in a modern and probably unfair manner- as the prototype of the individual, who is able to develop himself, during a long and difficult journey. In post-modernity, the journey as way to self-realisation will be definitively deconstructed, for example as in the novels of Paul Auster, *The music of chance* and *Moon Palace*.

enter into inner crises. This is completely logical, because the soul yearns for harmony, and life is full of dissonance. In this contradiction we find the stimulus for the movement, but also the source of our pain and our hope. This contradiction is the confirmation of our inner deepness, of our spiritual possibilities"[9].

It is within this context that the crisis in the European Union has to be analysed, mainly in the link Tarkovski establishes between inner crisis and the search for identity. A Europe which has moved from hubris to doubt about itself would need to believe in its identity, or at least in its role in a globalising world, in which Europeans remain living in a privileged status.

The Princess and the Pea

To have forgotten this is a clear sign of a profound crisis. In a world in which so called regional conflicts are devastating life expectancy of millions of human beings (in 2005 there were 17 major armed conflicts in 16 locations)[10], in which –according to UNHCR– there are more then 9 million refugees plus 5.5 million

displaced within their own country, in which the life expectancy in OECD countries is 78.3 years whilst in developing countries it is 66.1 years, in which in some countries more than a quarter of the population has no access to an improved water source[11], the situation in Europe (despite the ongoing economic problems) is absolutely privileged. Challenges are growing in Europe –from protection against indiscriminate globalised terror to the maintenance of the competitiveness by guaranteeing high social standards. Nevertheless, the consequence of

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(from the SIPRI website http://yearbook2007. sipri.org/chap2/app2A, acceded 8.9.2008). For the period Apri-June 2008, the excellent *Barómetro* of the NGO "Escola de Cultura de Pau" indicates that 27 armed conflicts are open (see *Barómetro 11 sobre conflictos, derechos humanos y construcción de paz*, in: http://www.escolapau.org/img/programas/alerta/barometro/barometro17.pdf, acceded 8.9.2008).

[11] For example, 26% in Bangladesh, 27% in Malawi, 30% in Solomon Islands, 30% in Sudan, 33% in Benin and Yemen, 34% in Cameroon, 38% in Tanzania, Mongolia, Swaziland and in Bhutan, 39% in Kenya and Burkina Faso, 40% or more in Vanuatu and Timor-Leste, Uganda and Haiti, Zambia and Mauritania and Eritrea, Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leona, Laos, Angola, Congo and Togo, more than 50% (that means, more than half of the population!) in Fiji, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Madagascar and Mali, Mozambique, Guinea and Chad, Cambodia and Niger, and Papua New Guinea , reaching 78% in Ethiopia – and the list is not exhaustive (information taken from the UN's *Human Development Report 2007/2008* in http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2007-2008/, consulted 6.9.2008).

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[9] Andrei Tarkovski: *Esculpir en el tiempo. Reflexiones sobre el arte, la estética y la poética del cine*, Madrid 1991, p. 218. This is my own translation.

[10] According to information from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), "In 2006 there were 17 major armed conflicts in 16 locations (...). In the period 1997–2006, there were 34 different major armed conflicts"

European "navel-gazing" could be a distorted perception of world reality, a perception in which the princess ends up being disconsolate due to a pea ....

As a special case, the current crisis in the European Union, the crisis whose most visible sign is the non acceptance of the so called "Constitution", is the consequence of many different causes, but the fall of the Berlin Wall and the return of millions of Europeans to a world of freedom can surely be considered as a main factor – actually a very positive development. But the subsequent EU–enlargement has often been seen from the negative perspective of reallocating the funds –what is synonymous to: losing some funds– and (in some cases) of the possible inundation by workers coming from new Member states, that, even from a narrow-minded national perspective, can be seen as a positive development because the new States are also new markets or new allies for pushing political objectives.

The fall of the Berlin Wall was an (unexpected) crisis, which led to the death of an inhuman system, which has trampled on the human rights of millions of men and women. The negative (or, let us say problematic) consequences of this "crisis unto death" pale beside the blessing it has brought to thousands of citizens – and which will be brought to more and more, as the situation becomes increasingly stabilised.

But enlargement –telling the story in fast motion– has reinforced the need to introduce institutional reforms, which have been necessary for a long time. Institutional reforms are a delicate matter (as has been demonstrated by the impossibility to solve this chapter in the Treaty of Amsterdam), because they are connected with power, and no State seems able to resist the erotic of power. After the chaos in Nice, the States have essayed the "flight ahead", including this point in the political agenda of a "great deal": the "Constitution" made by a new system, which should (both, the new method and the Constitution itself) reconcile citizenship with the European project again, from which it had distanced itself during the last few decades[12].

But the citizens have not honoured all the good intentions. The rejection not of the Constitutional Treaty but of the actual situation in Europe, made explicit in the referendum in two founding Member States and, in the second round, in the only State which had to foreseen a referendum has provoked the blockade of a political class that has not foreseen alternatives to these cases. After the debacle came the "oath of disclosure": the politicians had no answer to the question:

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[12] The Introduction to the *White Paper on a European communication policy* (COM/2006/0035 final) has the very significant title "Closing the Gap".

What shall we do with a broken "Constitution"... early in the century?

The idea to convoke a "year of reflection" after the two failed referendums has brought only the sound of silence. And like in a bad football game, in which neither of the teams was able to move the ball convincingly near to the adversary's goal, the extra reflection time has had no other consequence than to transmit the impression that the coaches had no idea how to achieve the objective, so that only under the pressure of the circumstances coherent political actions have been developed. Indeed, also in this period of anomie and lethargy, the Union has been able to act for example in the fields of police co-operation, in security issues and in some fields of foreign policy – sometimes slowly, but in any case with more decisiveness than years ago.

The devaluation of "reflection" (in the future, what prestige shall be a "period of reflection"?) and its identification with a "waiting for Godot" in the form of a strong Presidency of the Council which shall, like Moses, lead the European Union to the promised land (Germany in 2007) shows that there is not only a crisis, but a real problem, the problem of crisis management. Yes –Germany has been able to free the situation from de cul de sac– for a short time. The insistence to see the "Constitution" approved –now under a form with less "sex appeal", as a Treaty– has lead to a Lisbon Treaty which seems to be the Constitutional Treaty after a small reducing diet. With one radical change: only a country has compulsory to convoke a referendum for approving such a kind of document. And this country – namely Ireland– has shown the same behaviour as France or the Netherlands in the first round: the active campaign of the "no"-supporters has gathered in the population's real sorrows and fears. Again – the crisis management has posed all hope in a strong Presidency, now Sarkozy's France. The proposal, with which also the Irish government seems to agree, contemplates the realisation of a new referendum that hopefully will end with the needed result. Maybe that is the solution – it has a strong side effect: how can be justified that the serious political expression of the citizenship's will is denied?

All these difficulties in the ratification process of the Constitutional Treaty (or also the negotiations about the financial frame 2007-2013) have been –or even are– only two very visible symptoms of the weak management. And it is this bad management of the crisis –and not the crisis itself– that is alarming.

It is not daring to say that Europe has suffered two extremely serious crises in the 20th century: the two wars which, beginning on Europe's soil, have involved the whole world, causing so much destruction that here Andreas Gryphius' word from the the Thirty Years' War –

"Wir sind doch nunmehr gantz, ja mehr denn ganzt verheeret"[13]–could be applied.

The reaction after each one of these crises, the crisis management, was completely different: after WWI, despite the warnings of personalities like Coundehove-Kalergi, life went on. In fact, Coudenhove-Kalergi saw with prophetic clearness that things could not go ahead under the same mental categories, that a radical change was needed if the next disaster were to be avoided. Very expressive is his sentence: "So geht es nicht weiter"[14]: Europe "is facing a future which is enormously uncertain". The reason was, in his opinion, "the lack of unity among its peoples"; Europe might well lose "what remains of its well-being if its people continue to be so divided"[15]. But nothing decisive happened: Coudenhove was able to convince –"trop tard!" according to himself[16]– the French Foreign Minister Aristide Briand, but Briand's memorandum to the Society of Nations ended in the nightmare of bureaucracy. The crisis management has failed, or –better– it never has started to work, it has not recognised the crisis.

After WWII, after the shock of the total crisis of the European consciousness, after the negation of all its roots except the flowers of evil –sad flowers–, the crisis management was completely different. And there was indeed a real, profound anxiety causing crisis: there was not only a destroyed continent, a field of ruins – "Wir sind doch nunmehr gantz, ja mehr denn ganzt verheeret"–, but the phantom of a cruel division, in which one part of the continent could be a terrible threat for the other, as well as the negation of the human dignity for all its own "citizens" (it has to be put in quotes, because citizenship includes precisely the rights which were denied to the persons there), who didn't believe that the Paradise on earth could be established by the Communist Party. The Schuman Declaration in May 1950 exactly signified a change of paradigm, going to the roots from which the grapes of wrath had grown –and could grow from again and again.

"Nothing happens!" there. "Change the world!" here: two crises, two radically different type of crisis management.

Mummy, I have lost my referendum!

And now, a crisis that –compared to the "big bangs" of the last century– is a "middle class crisis" caused partially by events that generations have hoped for

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[13] Andreas Gryphius: "Thränen des Vaterlandes/ Anno 1636".

[14] Coudenhove-Kalergi, Richard, *Europa erwacht!* Zürich, Wien, Leipzig: PanEuropa, 1934, p. 9 ("we can't go on like this").

[15] Coudenhove-Kalergi, Richard N., *Pan-Europa*, Geneva: Coudenhove-Kalergi Foundation, 1997, p. 25. Originally this came from a speech he gave in 1923. Own translation.

[16] Coudenhove-Kalergi, Richard, *J'ai choisi l'Europe*, Paris: Plon, 1952, p. 172.

but did not expect to see (the end of the "killing fields"). Two unnecessary referenda and a compulsory one have been lost, because the politicians have been so disconnected from the population that they have not realised that "Europe" is not a dream any more (the enthusiastic dream of young brides and grooms) but a reality, the reality of a couple living together for decades, knowing perfectly well the defaults of the other and forced to discover day by day, again and again the reasons for remaining enamoured.

The day after the Paris disaster, no one was able to go to the goal, to take the ball, to bring it to the central point and to give new instructions to the team on how to reorganise things in order to win the match. The vote in the Netherlands has caused the profound deception to see that the population of a second founding Member State has rejected the dish that was prepared with love by a Convention which was supposed to represent this people now saying "no" to their representatives' proposal.

The loss of reputation of the "reflection" after convoking the year in which reflection became synonymous with silence was only one of the symptoms that the crisis management was not convincing: like the old Bismarck, the "Lotsen

gingen von Bord"[17], politicians have abandoned the scene; in the negotiations about the financial frame 2007-2013 one may have had the impression of attending a meeting of flat owners in a big building debating how much every one has to pay for installing a new elevator or for restoring the old façade. The budget is one of the most relevant manifestations of the political priorities, of the relevance given to a project in the context of the whole world configuration that is implicit in politics. If this is true, the priority of the European project is not very high. If Governments do agree at the end to dedicate to "Europe" a minor percentage than in years before[15], they are transmitting the conviction that they don't believe in it – why then should the population believe in it? Why should it believe, for example, that Europe has the key for creating jobs and be competitive in the globalising world of knowledge, as announced in the Lisbon strategy – announced and not ful-

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[17] When Otto von Bismarck was dismissed by the Emperor, Sir John Tenniel published a cartoon showing Bismarck leaving the ship under the Kaiser's glance in *Punch* on March 29 1890 (*„Dropping the Pilot"*). The cartoon's title has been translated into German introducing the relevant change which is even interesting for establishing a comparison with the current situation.

[15] Nowadays, no more than 1.24% of the Union's gross national income can be made available to the Union, whilst 45% of it goes to national, regional and local expenditure in the Member States. For the period 2007-2013, the percentage has been fixed at 1.045% of the EU's GNI.

filled[19]?

And then – Germany was there, and the renewed France under Sarkozy. And they have rediscovered the old method's charm –the intergovernmental negotiation–; no more referenda, please! Everybody was happy, because a Treaty could be signed, in a magic city like Lisbon – and the population remains far, distant, passive. The Irish citizens have shown this, probably as the representatives of many other citizens.

Reasons: a first approach

Some reasons for the last years' situation are easy to see:

Governments have renationalised their positions. Probably, the last generation of Europe-minded Governments has retired with Helmut Kohl, François Mitterrand, Felipe González. And also young Tony Blair, who sounded convincingly European, has first become older and then retired. The fresh wind from the

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[19] The Report about the Lisbon agenda 5 years after its approval is extremely clear: "External events since 2000 have not helped achieving the objectives but the European Union and its Members States have clearly themselves contributed to slow progress by failing to act on much of the Lisbon strategy with sufficient urgency. This disappointing delivery is due to an overloaded agenda, poor coordination and conflicting priorities. Still, a key issue has been the lack of determined political action" (*Facing the challenge. The Lisbon strategy for growth and employment. Report from the High Level Group chaired by Wim Kok*. Brussels: European Communities, 2004, p. 6).

East has not yet been as strong as expected – even very strong, but in another direction. Jean Claude Juncker is there, in a founding State, a small one, along with Angela Merkel and François Sarkozy, whose European engagement seems respectively to be discontinuous or plenty of activism.

To mention the lack of leadership is not very original. The last few Commissions have been relatively weak, because Member states wanted weak Commissions. Jacques Santer and his crew have fulfilled the expectations, with the special help of some of its members. Romano Prodi has provided some emphasis, but the "Delors-effect" was unavailable to him. The current Commission was debilitated from the beginning, after the Parliament's hearing.

So, leadership from the Commission – as in the times of Jacques Delors– cannot be expected. And it was in a certain sense a sign that some Governments' "dream candidate" for its Presidency, just Jean-Claude Juncker, has not accepted to go there. Leadership has to come from one or several of the Member States. The panorama is not rich in politicians with a coherent European concept, a convincing success story in their own country (which seems a previous condition for leadership) and quietness at the national front (which seems a previous condition for having time and mental space for dealing with European issues). Also the most

mentioned candidates for an eventual President of the Council with the new Lisbon profile sound not absolutely convincing.

In fact, most of the Governments' preoccupations are dealing with -sometimes- urgent political areas, if not with elections (Spain has survived 2004) a traumatic change in Government, the German Government was blocked for months due to the announcement of elections and the difficult negotiations for a new Government in 2006; then was France's turn with Presidential elections) or with the management of difficult majorities like in Italy under Prodi. Other issues dominated the agenda: mainly security issues; the fight against the new forms of terrorism has been one of the main preoccupations of the Governments. Therefore, it is not surprising that in this field European co-operation really has made advances that were not imaginable some time ago. The difficult economic and labour situation (for a long time, then at least temporarily overcome, in Germany and France... and then in all the Member states) was also a high priority for the Governments (and is now, linked with the energy issues, the highest priority), also due to the effects these situations normally have on elections. The alarm produced by some events with racial background in The Netherlands or the explosion of violence in the marginalised outskirts of Paris and some other French cities have absorbed few

years ago the whole attention of the Government during months. Immigration is another issue that absorbs a lot of energy in some countries like Spain, Italy or Malta – and here only timid beginnings of a European reaction have been visible. Experience shows that attention paid to the European project tends to be more intensive when at the national (and international) front there is quietness. And the last years were constantly affected by urgent, sometimes controversial (like the Iraq War), often emotionally hard events. The European project appears to have to wait. It has waited very long, maybe too long...

If you add to this panorama an old disease (the disastrous communication policy of the Union and the Governments in European issues), the mixture is ready: euro-scepticism or at least "euro-distance" can not be reduced by politicians offering to the population information but not answers to the population's questions, as was evident in the debates around the Constitutional Treaty, where questions and doubts have brought to the fore some older preoccupations not immediately related to the Treaty –on agriculture or on enlargement–, but the debate around the Treaty was the first occasion the population has had to be European not only by voting for the Parliament: but it was a lost occasion! After different ups and downs, years ago a good part of the Union's communication policy was put under the (co-

)responsibility of the Member States: this means -as it is said in German- "den Bock zum Gaertner machen". Through necessity, the Member States have to maintain a certain tension at the European level: "Brussels" -the mythical Brussels of the European negotiations- is the necessary "Other" for explaining why the Government cannot give to its citizens what they are asking for: there is a bad stepmother ("Brussels") who hinders the good father's (the Government's) will to be generous to his children. This role-play, which forms part of the multilevel construction of Europe, is not easily compatible with information about Europe that awakes sympathy.

A second approach: a new generation or: what is a frontier?

But it is a "must" to go further than this explanation and to find some other reasons for the difficulties to manage an in fact serious crisis in a privileged continent. Sometimes, when a patient dies, doctors speak, at least in Spain, about a multiorganic failure – this explains without explaining anything, but tranquillises the curiosity. However, there is something true in this expression: things are complex, in human beings and in society – also in the case of our patient, who has not died but is suffering a serious illness. A deeper reflection could include the following issues:

The European project was created af-

ter two terrible wars and, therefore, by generations of Europeans who had suffered death and wounds probably in their family or at least in the near circle of friends or colleagues, destruction maybe of their own house or of iconic buildings in the city to which they belonged, hunger, sometimes deportation... The European project has promised this generation that such suffering will never happen again, and later on -when post-war Europe has woken up looking at an iron curtain-, the European project has assured that life on this side of the iron curtain would be radically different than on the other side. The European project was understandable by itself. It doesn't mean that everybody (every political party, every group in society) has agreed with all the details, but it does mean that the fundamental message of the project (no more war ever! and therefore: integration) had a logic that directly affected the vital situation of the population.

But this generation, the generation who has politically made and socially supported the European integration -the war and post-war-generation- has retired widely from social life and nearly completely from political life (Jacques Chirac was its last representative in politics); that means that the natural empathy with and the natural comprehension for the European project has disappeared. And now, the European project has in a certain sense to be reinvented (it is no more a project for a divided Europe), and must find a

new argumentative basis for convincing the 'new' European societies. Indeed: there has been a generation change, and for the new generations, new argumentation has to be found in order to create support for the European project. These new generations know the Europe that caused integration not by experience but from books or maybe by listening to the stories told (often with poor success) by the elder generation. In a considerable part of Europe, relevant parts of the population have not experienced what it means to have frontiers in Europe: to be controlled, to be visibly considered a foreigner. The young generation is not only the internet-generation, a "way of life" which has in a certain sense diffused the borders, but also of inter-rail, for which the passport has to be shown at the youth hostels but not when crossing the borders. How can be explained to this generation that the feeling of moving freely is the consequence of a long enduring project, of the will of a generation of politicians who have dared to attack (in a certain sense) the grounds of the modern State: the sovereignty and its symbols, one of which are the borders?

The search for a new argument is necessary because another feeling has also changed: in the last decades –probably beginning with the anti-Vietnam-War-movement, which has included more people than those who have gone to demonstrate on the street– the confidence in politics and politicians is broken. In that

sense, the situation has changed considerably: for decades the making of Europe was a job for politicians, only a general confidence was necessary, and this confidence did exist. The post-war-politicians were generally supported by a population that was probably more devoted to other, more urgent issues: in the immediate post-war, to the reconstruction of the conditions for a normal life; after that, to guarantee to the family a welfare and to the children (as everybody has heard so often) that 'you will not have to suffer what I have suffered'. But in the last decades, the interest has grown to know what the politicians are doing (transparency is one of the stars at the political firmament), the interest to be consulted (deliberative democracy and dialogue do accompany the transparency in this firmament). Maybe that the political interest does articulate anymore 'in the traditional ways, in elections, membership in political parties and so on; one of the elements of the political interest is precisely the mistrust to the traditional ways of making policy, including probably the parliamentary life.

The numerous cases of corruption, the impression that politicians are trying to conquer or to maintain the power, that particular interests (of the political parties) are more important than the "bonum comune", the real decadence of Parliamentarian life in several countries – whose elected members are 'prisoners' of the Parties and have to do what Parties say if they want to be nominated for the

next election– are elements that have favoured this mistrust. Behind this attitude there could be also a reception (unknown by the receivers) of one of the key theories of post modernity. In fact, Foucault's reinterpretation of Nietzsche has underlined that behind all ideologies (and nearly all human constructions) power is hidden (the Nietzschean "will to power") or –more precisely– the will to maintain the status quo that is guaranteed by the permanence in power.

The lack of trust in political constructions has also affected the closeness to European integration, which is seen exactly as a political construction, and this is erroneously identified with a construction made by politicians and –this is the next step according to the logic of mistrust– for politicians and their friends (for example, the multinationals).

On the contrary, confidence has grown towards alternative political actions ("the street" as a thermometer for the citizenship's meaning has become prestigious!). The street –in correspondence with post modern feeling– is true, is authentic, not manipulated by political forces or by the media (of course this is a very simplified naïve vision), is coming from the bottom (of the hearts...). Now, real support for European integration is necessary – but confidence does not exist anymore. It was an alarming symptom how support for the European Union has been decreasing more and more in the new Member States from 2004 onwards

(during the negotiations, before the accession and also later) and how small the turnout was for the first European Parliament elections after the accession[20]. If in a young love the flourishing enthusiasm is lost so quick, what can be expected from a couple after years and years?

Could it be that under the population there is the unconscious perception of a real and very alarming situation that we are living in a time of *politicians, but not of State men and women?* And could this be the reason why the 'Europe' project is subordinated to national and probably electoral interests? The lack of vision for a project which is like a tree that often gives shadow not to they who plant it but to the next generation sometimes has a victim: the tree itself. If you are looking for shade for yourself, a tree is not a convincing solution as a parasol would be better. But between a world full of trees and a world full of parasols the difference is considerable. This silly example

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[20] Malta (with 82.4%) and Cyprus (with 71.2%) were the exceptions. In the other countries the turnouts were under 50%: Lithuania 48.4%, Latvia 41.3%, Hungary 38.5%, Slovenia 28.3%, Czech Republic 28.2%, Estonia 26.8%, Poland 20.9%, and Slovakia 17.0%. It is true that, in the whole European Union, the turnout has diminished considerably (from 63% in the first elections 1979 to 45.6% in 2004). But only in the United Kingdom (32.2%), Denmark (47.8%, both in 1979) and Sweden (41.6% in 1995), the turnout by the first elections did not reach 50%. In the other countries, it seems there was a certain enthusiasm for the new possibility to participate in European political life.

illustrates (or tries to illustrate) the difference between a project (which includes elements of a vision, of a collective desire) and short-winded political enterprises from politicians jumping from a problem to the next one in order to present a clean service record before the next elections.

It makes the impression that also some European institutions have fallen into the trap of the logic of power. It is to a certain point comprehensible that in the Council the national interests are defended (only to a certain point! – the opposition between national and European interests is pretty artificial): in the end the Council is *the* fore in which national governments are represented. In the Commission things are completely different: the only interest that shall move it is the European interest. As guardian of the Treaties the Commission has received since the beginnings a commitment which, also since the beginnings, has been understood not in a passive manner, waiting for transgressions of the 'acquis' by States or enterprises, but in a teleological vision, taking the measures for realising the foundational objectives and the later added goals. Sometimes the Commission has become indeed the motor for the integration. But the Commission is as strong or as weak as the States allow.

It is politically not correct to criticise the European Parliament. But it seems to me that this institution has a certain degree of responsibility for the Com-

mission's weakness and, therefore, for the fact that the Commission is unable to contribute with more decisiveness to overcome the bad crisis management. At least twice, the Commission was the addressee of the political action of the Parliament: in the crisis of the Santer Commission the Parliament has accepted the States' imposition (in fact horse-trading) of a 'global solution'; in the nomination of the members of the Durao Commission the Parliament has benefited from the 'political incorrectness' of one of the nominated members for profiling itself, accepting at the end again horse-trading the Member States (the substitution of only one proposal by maintaining other questioned candidates). It seems that in both cases the Parliament has looked more for deepening (or showing) its own power than for acting according to the European interests. Actually, the Commission has to be a (strong) ally of the Parliament in front of the Governments, because Parliament's and Commission's starting point are often nearer, defending the European vision whilst the Council frequently plays the role of the counterpart, introducing the logic of the national interests. The *contra natura* alliance between Parliament and Council has opened a new scenario marked more by the need for self-representation than by the sorrow for the 'project and vision Europe'.

It was the snake

It is easy to lay the blame on a scape-

goat, a collective one in this case: the politicians. It is common in some languages to say that a population has the government it deserves. It is probably not fully true, but in the case of the European crisis it is difficult to deny that the problems are rooted not only in the political but also on the social level. It does not only correspond to a pessimistic view to say that egoism is living in the hearth of human beings but also in societies – which after all are constituted by human beings. Not only has egoism found a place but also solidarity has too, which, however, can be and has to be weakened once and once only. Solidarity was from the beginning a part of the European project – under the idea of bringing the standard of life in the different European regions closer together. But it seems to be easier to weaken it up in front of disasters in third world countries than in front of "normal" situations in the new or future Member states, that is, in front of disparities which have to be overcome by the reallocation of funds, financed by (the citizens of) the Member States and "moved" when new Member States enter. And that automatically means some sources for financing projects will close up in the "old" Member States. But it is not easy to understand why one has to give up some privileges. So, the reaction to the last enlargements (as it has been pointed out before) was not marked by happiness alone.

It seems the project is accepted by the majority of the population (the opinion polls show this[21]) but that it does not create waves of enthusiasm. Aside from the quoted arguments of the lack of solidarity and the failure of the communication policy other reasons could be added. For example: disadvantages of the integration are easily visible, advantages –established often after long years of negotiations and under the removal of obstacles, also conceptual barriers– are perceived after a short time as a "natural situation". What has been said before about the frontiers is a good example for this: the long way to the Schengen Treaty is forgotten, and the impression is inevitable that frontiers never have been part of the life of the citizens in this part of Europe. Restrictions, however, in agriculture or fishery immediately cause the cry: 'Europe is to blame for it!'

An already mentioned normal strategy in political life contributes to this reaction: Governments have to negotiate constantly in "Brussels" (in the quoted mythical EU-Brussels, in which now the battles succeed!); for the negotiation they need a little bit of "anti-Brussels" agitation in their own country. If they don't cry a little bit how terrible the arrival home will be without convincing results, it is difficult

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[21] According to the last *Eurobarometer*, 55% of the respondents think that their country's membership on the EU is a "good thing", whilst only 13% argues it is a "bad thing" (the gap of the "happy members" goes from 75% in The Netherlands to 29% in Latvia; see *Eurobarometer* 69, April–Mai 2008, in http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb69/eb69_en.htm, acceded 8.9.2008).

to convince hard and experienced negotiators to move from their positions. Coming back home, what they have not managed to achieve must of course be attributed to "Brussels", not to their own weaknesses in the negotiations. Therefore, the "mythical" mentality is much diffused, according to which results in Brussels (bad results; of course, good results are always the consequence of their own capacity) are caused by forces outside their own control and not due to their own defaults. There is a *fatum* floating over this modern Troy, in which "battles" for thousands of euros are won or lost. And it is hard to confess that often simply "the other" has negotiated better...

Europeaness and otherness

This "Brussels"-Europe is perceived sometimes as a strange world, apart from being the citizens' own vital space, a distant world in which decisions are taken that affected citizens who have not been asked about them. European integration is so submitted to the risk of being considered as part of one of the most dangerous enemies in postmodern collective mentality: globalisation. As we have explained before, postmodern Europeans are not confident in large constructions for solving world problems; the "suspicion logic" is being applied to these projects; they are considered as constructs that are hiding particular interests or the only economic logic, the neoliberalism which seems to be the only "ideology" after the fall of the ideologies.

Schemes like this are obviously too simple, sometimes virtually primitive, but –precisely due to this characteristic– easy to transmit and to "convince", at least emotionally. Mistrust in front of models that seem to consider only one aspect of life, the commercial one, neglecting other sorrows (the ecology, small cultures, quality of life, the disparities in the world...) is the logic reaction.

Moreover, in the complex world in which we undoubtedly are living people are looking out to protect their own environment, asking for societies in which their own identity is safe. In some cases the State is still fulfilling the role of convoking identitarian cohesion (as was the norm in former times); in other cases, the State has been abandoned by the citizens' nearness, and sub-state levels (the region or also the local level, sometimes even the quarter) are playing the role of giving an identitarian "home". For this process culture is an indispensable element. With Europe being a highly dense, extremely diversified cultural space sharing important elements, the European Union has been transmitted not even as a political project but primarily as an economic world, so that the perception of the cultural and even civic values included in the project is underdeveloped, identification therefore is made difficult.

The last problem for the lack of identification could be a problem of ignorance (and, therefore, a consequence of the communication policy), which causes expectations in front of the

European politics that can never be fulfilled. For example: one of the most relevant and complex fields for the future of European societies is the employment issue, another one, immigration. Here, citizens expect "Europe" to solve these problems not knowing that the competencies of the Union in these fields are limited and that the States remain to be the protagonists; also under the pressure of the events the States are resilient to give up more competencies to the supranational level. But the feeling that these issues are not being solved convincingly is causing loss of prestige not only for the Governments, but also for "Europe".

It is not good enough to be good

European integration is good – in so far as human projects can be good, which means it is not perfect. But it has achieved the main goals for which it was created: to assure peace in Europe and to guarantee reasonable levels of freedom, overcoming historically consolidated physical (and also mental) borders. Now, this project is in a certain crisis, due to the addition of causes, within a complex world resulting also from a very positive evolution (the evolution towards freedom for millions of people in Europe) but also complicated with hard events, threats, dangers –with paradoxes and perplexities. Hopelessness would be the worst reaction: hopelessness paralyses even the forces which could help to manage the

crisis, not only by the politicians, but also by society, whose reaction to the crisis is an essential part of its solution. A psychological crisis amplifies the real crisis.

Maybe Pope John Paul II was right when he wrote hope is the key element for Europe nowadays: in fact, he considered Europe's main illness today was "loss of hope"[22]. Therefore he wrote, "Possibly the most urgent matter Europe faces, in both East and West, is a growing need for hope, a hope that will enable us to give meaning to life and history and to continue on our way together"[23].

It was strongly raining in Rome in March 1957 when the Treaties were signed. For pessimists this could be an announcement that things couldn't be successful in the future. But water is needed for life – hope too. ◻

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[22] John Paul II, "Apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa*", 28.6.2003, n. 9, in : http://212.77.1.245/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_20030628_ecclesia-in-Europe_en.html.

[23] John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Europa*, n. 4. Years before, in 1992, Jacques Delors – then President of the European Commission – surprisingly claimed that Europe lacked a soul: "Si dans les dix ans, nous n'avons pas réussi à donner une âme, une spiritualité, une signification à l'Europe, nous aurons perdu la partie". With hindsight, he described it in the following way: "Car je fus amené, alors que je présidais la Commission Européenne, à demander que l'on donne une âme à l'Europe, persuadé que je suis du caractère impératif de redonner un sens à l'action collective" (Jacques Delors: "Esprit évangélique et construction européenne. Conférence en la Cathédrale de Strasbourg, le 7 décembre 1999").