



Albrecht Rothacher

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UNITING EUROPE

JOURNEY BETWEEN GLOOM AND GLORY

Albrecht Rothacher

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PREFACE

Very early in this excellent book, Albrecht Rothacher suggests that Europe is standing at a crossroads. What is interesting about this observation is not just how correct it seems at this precise moment, but how often and in how many ways it has been said about the European Union in the past. If Europe is a journey as this book suggests, every enlargement, every treaty, every divided Council and every opinion poll often seems to place us at a crossroads of a kind. The new constitutional treaty agreed at Brussels in 2004, and at the time of writing poised to run the gauntlet of national parliaments and public opinion, is unlikely to change the perception that European Union is a journey, as Rothacher rightly suggests, without a clear destination. Indeed, it is probably the greatest achievement of the EU that it has endured, and added so much to Europe's common life, in the complete absence of any clear consensus among Europeans about what it is for and where it is going.

The fact remains that European Union is both a destination and a way of getting somewhere. It is a *modus vivendi* for a continent with an historic leaning towards armed conflict and military dispute. It is a mechanism for creating a single market that has delivered extraordinary prosperity for Europeans. But it is also the expression of the idea, long latent on the European continent and its offshore islands, that Europe's peoples form a political community of a kind and that they must someday have institutions that express that. If the first two, at least in the current liberal consensus about the value of regulated free markets, seem uncontroversial, the last still has the quality of an existential debate for many in Europe. Decades of failure to properly articulate an objective view of European Union to European citizens — on the part of governments, an increasingly powerful media and the

institutions of the EU themselves — has left a deep void of public incomprehension. This in turn has encouraged a tabloid perception that unscrupulous pro-European integrationists have had the better of the past five decades, expanding their sinister project without the burden of too much public scrutiny or comprehension. If the Eurosceptics sometimes sound paranoid and parochial, it is at least in part because defenders of European Union have too often given them little reason to think otherwise. The space between the Philadelphia dreams of Valéry Giscard d’Estaing and the more ambitious *conventionnels* and the stubborn nostalgia of the British “withdrawalists” is still much too sparsely populated by public debate or media attention. And therein lies a real failure to make the European Union comprehensible to the people it serves. It also suggests that we may find ourselves at the European crossroads for a little while longer.

Part of the problem, as Rothacher points out, lies in the tendency to subordinate the political argument for European Union to the economic one, especially in more euro-wary countries like Sweden and Britain. This creates a debate on Europe that is badly misshapen. Unless we can talk openly about the political instinct that leads many Europeans to the conclusion that the European peoples have (a) a common cultural and political heritage, (b) an inescapable political interdependence in the face of global political, economic and ecological challenges and (c) a responsibility, given Europe’s traumatic history, to bind themselves together politically so that they can never again be broken by military conflict or disfigured by dictatorship — both painfully recent memories in much of Europe — the argument for European Union will sound half-baked, and Europe’s crisis of identity will persist. If nothing else, we will have no apposite response to those who can and do make the inverse of this argument: that the tribal European nation states can never form any kind of political community, federated, confederated or otherwise.

This intelligent book does not duck that argument, or the questions it raises. Indeed, Rothacher is clear that unless we try to understand Europe as a political problem we will never understand it at all. As important as it may be to understand the neo-functionalist analysis of

the inter-institutional dynamic, unless you learn to see the European Union as it looks to a Brussels *fonctionnaire*, or an Irish farmer, or a Portuguese businessman or the Prime Minister of Poland, it simply won't make any sense. It won't make a lot of sense when you *do* learn to see it that way — but that is at least partly the point. The fact that this book is leavened with this kind of perspective makes it a refreshing analysis. For all of the ink spilt at the feet of individual Union policies, it is still rare for a writer to consider Europe as a whole, in its many political contexts. Nor does Rothacher confine himself to description, and his prescriptions for the European Union are lucid. Whether you agree or disagree, whether you think Europe's journey tends to gloom or glory, the arguments in this book will make a good companion at the European crossroads.

*Graham Watson MEP
Brussels
June 2004*

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACP	African, Carribean and Pacific group of states
CAP	common agricultural policy
CFI	Court of First Instance
CFP	common fisheries policy
COR	Committee of Regions
COREU	European Correspondence
CSFP	common security and foreign policy
DG	Directorate General of the Commission
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EC	European Commission
ECA	European Court of Auditors
ECB	European Central Bank
ECJ	European Court of Justice
ECS	Economic and Social Committee
ECSC	European Coal and Steel Community
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
ECU	European Currency Unit
EDC	Euorpean Defense Community
EDF	European Development Fund
EEC	European Economic Coomunity
EIB	European Investment Bank
EIC	Euro Info Centres
EMI	European Monetary Institute
EMS	European Monetary System
EMU	European Monetary Union

EP	European Parliament
EPC	European Political Cooperation
ESCB	European System of Central Banks
ESF	European Social Funds
ETP	Executive Training Programme (in Japan)
EU	European Union
Euratom	European Atomic Energy Community
FVO	Food and Veterinary Office
IGC	inter-governmental conference
ISPA	Instrument for Structural Policies for Pre-Accession
JET	Joint European Torus
LDC	less developed countries
MEA	multilateral environmental agreements
MED	Mediterranean
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
OAD	Official Aid for Development
QMV	qualified majority voting
SIS	Schengen Information System
TAC	total allowable catches
TEN	Trans-European Networks
UNICE	Union of European Industries
VAT	value added tax
WEU	Western European Union

INTRODUCTION

Some day historians will probably rank Europe's peaceful integration achieved in half a century of sustained efforts among mankind's major achievements. Other parts of the world — East Asia, Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Arab world — envy our old quarrelsome continent to have accomplished such a remarkable degree of unity, solidarity and common purpose against all odds. There is truly no historical equivalent. Yet, how come that Europe's integration is seen by many, if not most, contemporaries and even quite a few active participants as tedious, wearing and somnific, if not as annoying and threatening the accustomed way of life and of politics proper?

There are, in my view, three major reasons for this perfectly avoidable alienation:

- Europe's current constitution is a messy nightmare. The Council is an executive body which operates as a legislature. The European Parliament to this day enjoys only partial budgetary rights and no right of taxation. Further, Parliament and Commission are mostly in charge of sectoral policies which could often be better decided at national or regional level. At the same time they remain impotent on most high politics issues of internal and external security for which continent-wide decisions and policies would matter most. As a result, the EP is being blamed for all the wrongs of "Brussels", and at each European election voter participation shrinks to ever lower minoritarian levels.
- European decision making is done by intransparent commitology, incomprehensible in its dynamics and workings to anybody but a handful of gray gnomes in the Council and a select few expensive lobbyists. There are precious few heroes left on the European scene,

like Jean Monnet or Jacques Delors, to provide both vision and real leadership.

- There is no shortage of earnest panel discussions, thick volumes and sober monographs covering in literally exhaustive detail the minutiae of a vast range of EU policies. Yet at the same time these worthy libraries (to which this author also modestly contributed) exude a spirit of collective ennui and stodginess. A look at student reviews of the major EU textbooks on the net reveals a fairly damning unanimous verdict.

Hence this book attempts to show that Europe is an interesting, fascinating and multi-faceted challenge, where people, provided they have the proper information, can change the course of history for the better. Programmatically it attempts to offer a perspective of federal democracy with a few core competences handled at the European level, and the rest — including the most current EU spending programmes and regulatory policies — in the spirit of subsidiarity, returned (“devoluted”) to the national, or often better, regional and local level of decision making.

Karl Marx once claimed his dialectical materialism had put German idealism and Hegelian philosophy standing on their heads back on their feet. European integration has to do the same. The functionalist method of integration through the backdoor has become a victim of its own success and outlived its usefulness. The proliferation of second and third order regulations and of poorly administered funding programmes has eroded popular acceptance and obscured the view for the essentials of constitutional reform in Europe.

There is no shortage of good inspiring federal systems in the contemporary world. They range from Anglo-Saxon models like the US, Canada, Australia, South Africa and Malaysia to continental models like Austria, Germany, Belgium and Switzerland. Probably the Swiss system of a small, effective, multilingual and well controlled executive, with a strong element of direct participatory democracy, is best suited for Brussels.

If Europe’s citizens choose not to act and leave decisions on their future to the type of leadership which currently runs the major member