



Carrefours

• Newsletter •

FORWARD STUDIES UNIT

Editorial

To capture the interest of European citizens in the future shape of the EU, the European public debate should become more concerned with identifying and de-dramatising the consequences of changes taking place on the global level and within societies. Moreover, the debate should become more positive: we can find solutions and we are capable to implement them, but we need the participation and support of the European public.

The stakes are high: Europe is facing a crucial stage in its history with enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe and the introduction of the Euro. These developments present a fundamental challenge that can only be met if a perception of a common project emerges which is shared among the elite as well as the European public.

Detrimental to a feeling of belonging to Europe and having a stake in a common project, is the impression of competition, non-cooperation and even hostility among the EU member states. Despite recent political developments in some member states, the national debate on European issues in many member states is still overburdened with a new kind of «nationalistic rhetoric» which is often considered to be justified on the grounds of domestic politics. Although reference to national interest and defence of specific interests may be entirely justified, the image of «we against them» undermines the whole European project. In the same vein, the sometimes misdirected criticism of European institutions and policies is eroding the legitimacy of the EU based as it is on people's perceptions. On the other hand, the European institutions should, of course, accept legitimate criticism and be obliged to reform in view of new requirements.

An elementary question to be asked when striving towards a comprehensive European debate is «What is of concern to the European citizen?». An indication of popular concerns are published by the Eurobarometer which regularly asks European respondents what policy areas should be addressed at the European level over the next ten years. In line with the general trend of a shift from scarcity (modern) to security (post-modern) values, the expectations of the European public centre around measures to alleviate, on the one hand, fears

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for their personal situation, such as the fight against unemployment and the fight against illnesses like AIDS and cancer; and on the other hand, fears in the surrounding environment, like the fight against organised crime, drug trafficking and environmental degradation.

The public has clearly realised that these problems depend on events beyond their immediate neighbourhood, which do not respect national frontiers. European countries, exposed to the negative effects of phenomena linked to globalisation, pollution, poverty and political instability, are brought together to find mutually acceptable solutions to meet such challenge. In this sense, the point raised earlier about the damaging image of member states' competition, is relevant. The public is aware that you cannot score any «national» points by winning over your European partners on issues like the protection of the environment or the fight against organised crime. The situation may be a little different regarding unemployment, but the debate is rapidly changing, and with the coming of the Euro, many of the issues linked to the redistribution of national resources etc. will acquire a European dimension. To meet the challenges of the future, the EU is, therefore, not only dependent on finding diplomatic or technical solutions to the problems it will face, but also on acquiring a higher degree of legitimacy for these measures which can only be reached by a permanent public dialogue on regional, national and European levels.

Anna MICHALSKI —■

O u r s y m p o s i a

THE EUROPEAN UNION AGAINST RACISM AND XENOPHOBIA Marseilles, 23-24 November 1997

What should be the role of the European Union in the fight against racism and xenophobia? This was the theme of the 15th European Carrefour on Science and Culture, held in Marseilles on the 23rd and 24th of November 1997 in the presence of Commissioner Pádraig Flynn, and organised in cooperation with the city of Marseilles.

The Carrefour – which constituted one of many efforts undertaken by the Commission as part of the European Year against Racism – brought together leading personalities in the fight against racism and xenophobia in Europe. The background of the participants

was diverse and reflected the concern attributed to this societal problem in all Member States of the Union, in academia, in NGOs, in the institutions of the EU, in government ministries and in local action groups. The Carrefour took a comprehensive approach to the question of what the role of the European Union should be in the fight against racism and xenophobia. The discussion covered the current situation in Europe with respect to racism and xenophobia, the causes behind these phenomena, and potential strategies that could be employed in fighting them.

Racism and xenophobia are not isolated to specific groups or segments of society. Rather, these phenomena cut across conventional lines of division, and racist and xenophobic sentiments exist within the broad layers of civil society as well as within state administrations. Racist, neofascist, and xenophobic groups and parties are gaining ground in many European countries, such as France,

Belgium, Germany, Austria, and Denmark. In many cases, these parties have in recent elections enjoyed disturbing electoral successes, though in some countries they still remain isolated at the margins of the political spectrum.

EVERYDAY RACISM

However, the voicing of xenophobic and racist attitudes at work, at school and in the everyday relations between people suggests the existence of widespread and more «mundane» kinds of racism and xenophobia. This everyday racism shows itself not only in expressed attitudes, but also in explicit and implicit discrimination in employment, housing, schools, at restaurants and in bars. Racism and xenophobia are not isolated, however, to extremist parties and the widespread societal attitudes these exploit, but are also present in the media and in state institutions. Not incidentally, the media presents skewed images of, for example, Islam, thus reinforcing existing prejudice. Racism and xenophobia, whether expressed through voiced concerns or outright discrimination, are also common in state institutions such as the police, the state administration, and the public services. This kind of racism is particularly complex, as it often hides behind anti-racist declarations.

There is no one-factor explanation of racism and xenophobia in Europe today. Rather, racist and xenophobic sentiments stem from a wide range of factors – economical, societal, and political. The causes are complex in the sense that what may be true for one country or region cannot explain racism and xenophobia in another. The participants at the Carrefour asserted that social exclusion is a key explanation for the recent rise in racist and xenophobic sentiments. Unemployment and increasing economic inequalities in the European societies feed feelings of exclusion, anxiety and insecurity, which in turn provoke xenophobic and racist sentiments.

On the other hand, European societies have always to some degree been racist and xenophobic, and to point to social exclusion as the key explanation neglects that racism existed

also when Europe flourished economically and, indeed, does actually exist also in those European countries where unemployment and social inequality are least prevalent. European policies, in their attempt to strengthen cooperation and identity internally, may in fact bring about, rather than weaken, racist and xenophobic sentiments. This is true both for the Schengen agreement and the concept of a European citizenship, which may be interpreted as discriminatory. Similarly, national governments could be more active in advocating understanding and spreading morale. If governments are not willing to integrate non-Europeans – by for example granting them full political rights and by pursuing a more open immigration policy – how can citizens, state administrators, and the police be expected to act differently?

The European Year against Racism is also the beginning of a long-term process of fighting racism and xenophobia in Europe. The follow-up to this year will require action at both the Member-State-level, the societal level, and the EU level. At the Member-State-level, efforts to improve the economic situation, reduce unemployment, and ameliorate the functioning of the welfare state, are also important elements in the fight against racism and xenophobia. Moreover, efforts could be undertaken to eradicate racism and xenophobia within the state administration, the political parties, the media, the public services, schools and the work place.

MOBILISING CIVIL SOCIETY

At the societal level, civil society initiatives which fight actively against racism and xenophobia and which aim to enhance the understanding of other cultures should be supported. Grass-root initiatives, resting on engaged and active citizens, are perhaps the most efficient way to undermine racism and xenophobia. Not only do such efforts support an understanding based on personal experience, but they also reflect the awareness that «we» and not only «they» have to adjust in today's multicultural Europe.

At the European Union level, the Commission and other EU institutions have an important

role to play in forging and maintaining a partnership with NGOs, Member States and other societal and political actors involved in the fight against racism and xenophobia. Such partnership would rest on a reality of mutual dependence. The Commission is in a position to launch initiatives, but requires input, feedback, and cooperation from NGOs and Member States. Likewise, NGOs, churches, the social partners, universities and other societal actors, are capable of mobilising civil society, but require channels and encouragement from the institutions of the Union.


Given the fact that certain EU policies and programmes may have served to reinforce rather than weaken racism and xenophobia, it is essential that an awareness of these problems guides the Union's initiatives, also in policy domains that are not directly linked to the fight against racism and xenophobia. Indeed, it may be just as important to ensure that existing policies (in fields such as development, foreign policy, and immigration) are consistent with the EU's efforts to combat racism and xenophobia, as it is to launch new legislation.

Finally, new legislation on a European level could serve to establish a firm legal framework resting on the principle of non-discrimination, as well as to complement and facilitate efforts undertaken at the societal and the Member-State-level. Possible legislative instruments include a directive based on the new article in the treaty on non-discrimination (Article 13). At the Carrefour, Commissioner Flynn confirmed the intention of presenting such a directive before the end of this Commission. Another legislative instrument would be to introduce affirmative action, which has become one of the most effective instruments to ensure the integration of disadvantaged and discriminated groups in the United States. In Europe, the debate on affirmative action has been isolated to the domain of equal treatment of men and women so far. As a third possible legislative instrument, the participants at the Carrefour stressed the importance of enhancing the rights of third-country citizens. The extension of citizens' rights to third-country citizens in domains of EU competence would send a clear

message that the European Union is open to cultural diversity, considering multiculturalism an integral part of European identity, and is intent on fighting ethnic and racial discrimination.

Jonas TALLBERG —■

ANTICIPATING AND SHAPING TOMORROW'S WORLD *Brussels, 1-3 December 1997*

 In December 1997 the Forward Studies Unit (CdP) organised a prospective studies conference together with the Commission's Institute for Prospective Technological Studies (IPTS Seville). The Conference aimed at bridging the gap between prospective studies research and the policy process exploring the key issues which are likely to effect the European agenda in the next twenty years or so. A number of the presentations deliberately challenged accepted ideas and consequently the discussions were animated and rich. The full proceedings will be published in due course. A somewhat subjective set of highlights of the Conference is given below.

The Conference starting point was the identification of the key issues. What are the opportunities and challenges? The question is then how these issues can be addressed (the methods) and finally, how can we ensure that the results are used effectively? (Although the Conference was concerned with research methodologies the main focus was the «issues» rather than the «methods» so this aspect received less attention. It is our intention to return to the question of prospective methodologies in a future meeting.). (The Conference built on the success of two earlier workshops which IPTS had initiated under the label «Profutures» in 1993 and 1995.)

The following broad themes were addressed by the Conference in a series of half-day sessions: Institutional Change, Wealth

Generation, «A European Focus», Sustainable Development, Social Factors.

The Conference discussions clearly exposed a division between what one might term the «classical» approach to prospective studies (based on good statistical evidence, trend analysis, traditional economic models, etc.) and the more creative, descriptive approach of some researchers. Both approaches have strengths and weaknesses, and the CdP and the IPTS could have an important role to play in integrating these two approaches.

INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

The key element of the first presentation on «Supra-National Governance and Democracy» suggested the need for a European constitution, perhaps following the example of the US in the 18th century, which would provide an important cornerstone for a more democratic foundation. Such a development would need to be paralleled and even preceded by a broad public debate.

The starting point for the second speech on «Globalisation and Good Governance» was that technology and globalisation are the two main engines of change, complemented by hyper-competition as the guiding principle for global interaction. While globalisation takes place very rapidly in terms of economic and environmental issues, it is a comparatively slow process in the institutional and governance realm. These changes have both positive and negative effects. They allow us to accumulate much wealth and prosperity (described by the speaker as the «buffet» economy), but they also create jobless growth and a large «outsider» community of people who cannot partake of the buffet.

WEALTH GENERATION

Two keynote speeches also introduced this theme, namely «Longer Term Perspectives of World Economic Development: Fundamental Challenges and Uncertainties», and «Innovation in Europe - An Industrial Perspective».

Among a number of challenging points made by the first speaker, we could highlight the following: there is an evolution towards a multipolar world economic structure. However, there is a continuing debate as to whether the centre of gravity of this structure is shifting from the Atlantic to the Pacific area. The speaker disagreed that such a shift was occurring, emphasising that there is no clear shift of economic gravity from the Atlantic to the Pacific area. The growth rates required for this to happen are too high (9%) until 2010.

The second presentation moved the debate into the world of business. The speaker stressed that shaping tomorrow's world will depend on the following major factors: competition, unemployment, social, distributional and environmental factors. Science and technology can contribute to wealth generation in order to respond to the imperatives of these factors. The older version of competition (the «military» doctrine) was a «zero-sum» version. Today the emphasis is on innovation that moves the game away from such zero-sum considerations.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Again, two keynote speeches introduced this theme, namely «The Practicability of Sustainable Development in an Open Society and a Global Economy», and «Sustainability and our Obligations to Future Generations».

Both of the presentations on sustainable development were provocative in arguing against the current policy framework. The first presentation made the useful point that the current organisational structure with environmental departments forming a conventional administrative sector could not cope with the concept of sustainable development because the concept was by its very nature cross-sectoral. The second presentation demolished sustainable development as a policy imperative by the use of economic analysis but then used ethical arguments in proposing to replace sustainable development with support for human rights.

SOCIAL FACTORS

The final theme was introduced through one keynote speech, namely «Challenges to European Social Organisation».

This presentation by a leading trade unionist showing how trade union organisations have become actively involved in creative debates concerning the evolution of the European Social Model (ESM) was also noteworthy. The ESM is special and has features that are worth safeguarding. The phenomenon of a vigorous market economy tempered by a strong welfare state, a good public service ethic and dignity, and workers rights expressed through collective bargaining is found nowhere else in the world.

However, Europe faces key challenges in the social and economic environment, namely, globalisation, the demand for forms of work which fit better into the rest of our lives, and, the risk of many, particularly less skilled, people being marginalised by high levels of long term unemployment. As a response to these changes, the trade unions have to extend beyond negotiating and lobbying. They have to become, a refuge of stability and mutuality in a world of change, a gateway for learning opportunities for the children of members and for members themselves, and perhaps even a guarantor of top-up pensions.

The Conference was very successful in exploring the key issues relating to the medium

term future. Some presentations were more «adventurous» than others but all the presentations identified a number of issues of importance to policy makers and succeeded in generating lively and useful discussions. A number of quite challenging and counter-established-wisdom ideas were developed by the speakers. If there was a deficiency to highlight it was the apparent difficulty of the prospective studies experts to think creatively about the future. To «*think the unthinkable*», as the late Herman Kahn emphasised. Of course there were exceptions, but in general the research community seems to have a current concern with methodology rather than messages. (A recent meeting of 24 top young Cambridge researchers in a symposium called «*The Next Generation*» showed a similar resistance towards unrestrained crystal-ball gazing. So we were not alone in this respect.). However, as one speaker emphasised, it is not sufficient just to «think creatively» about the future. The resultant scenarios have to be coherent and be supported by appropriate data, etc.

The CdP is examining ways in which the positive achievements of this Conference could be maintained and enhanced perhaps through some sort of annual event (particularly with respect to the «mainstreaming» of prospective studies research).

Michael ROGERS —■

Our Studies

TRANSBORDER CO-OPERATION: AN IMPORTANT ELEMENT IN THE PROCESS OF INTEGRATION

The Forward Studies Unit identified in the early 1990s the importance of stimulating, and in many cases re-creating, regional

co-operation among the newly democratised countries in Central and Eastern Europe (CEECs). The aim was to enhance the links between a variety of actors (state and non-state) at different levels (local, regional, national and European) so as to overcome the legacy of the Soviet-style command economy which imposed spatial and administrative organisation and specialisation concentrated to the national level and Moscow. Co-operation spanning over

several bordering regions was also seen as a means to alleviate strains between the countries in Central and Eastern Europe caused by their sometimes complex ethnical composition in the guise of on-the-ground involvement into the management of joint projects.

Another important guiding principle was the inter-state (diplomatic) element of transborder co-operation which would assist the CEECS to build relations of confidence with each other and with their western neighbours through a process of continuous consultation and negotiation, and through the management of joint programmes and projects. Transborder co-operations may be regarded as a new dimension in international politics which combines diplomacy or inter-state relations and instruments with concrete action between local and regional actors in an on-going process capable of adapting to the needs of the participating units. There is the hope that such arrangements will generate virtuous spatial dynamics, fully compatible with the process of European integration.

Of the European transborder co-operations, the agreements around the Baltic sea, the Barents and the Black Sea were single out, as having a special strategic importance in the perspective of EU enlargement to the Central and Eastern European countries. These sea-areas will, in terms of security (soft and hard) and economic and social development, constitute important points of contact between the enlarged Union and its main partners and neighbours: Russia, the Ukraine, Turkey and the Caucasus Republics.

IMPACT OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY _____

As there does exist a medium-term need to ensure stability through economic and social development in the area beyond the border of the enlarged Union, the EU (Member States and institutions) should contemplate, at an early stage of the enlargement process, how to assist these transborder agreements best to enlarge their scope and ensure a broad participation of different actors (national, regional and local authorities, academic institutions, local business networks, NGOs etc.) in concrete projects and programmes.

Within the ongoing work on transborder co-operation the Forward Studies Unit had commissioned the Italian research institute «Nomisma» to do a study on «*The Impact of Transborder Co-operation on the Use and Diffusion of Science and Technology in Central and Eastern Europe*». The study set out to evaluate the impact of Science and Technology (S&T) in five transborder agreements, namely the Council of Baltic Sea States, the Barents EuroArctic Region, the Black Sea Economic Co-operation, the Carpathian Euroregion and the Central European Initiative. Although primarily focussing on S&T-related aspects, the study identified some major positive aspects and obstacles for a successful and expanding co-operation. They can be summarised as follows:

- Traditional ties with western neighbours increased the openness to co-operation and absorption of ideas, including, of course, the positive impact of physical proximity to a Western European country/region. This aspect has in particular benefited co-operation around the Baltic Sea which has developed a wide range of activities with a great variety of institutional, economic and social actors involved¹. The Barents EuroArctic Region agreement has to a large extent been driven by the Nordic countries which see an interest in maintaining and expanding co-operation in S&T in the sparsely populated North, which has a high density of scientists and strategic research centres in relative terms. They have also been keen on engaging Russian central and regional authorities in an attempt to stem the serious environmental degradation under way in many places on the Kola Peninsula.
- An uneven institutional decentralisation has provided for very unequal co-operation potentials in border regions. For example,

¹ A Swedish official was quoted complaining that the Foreign Ministry in Stockholm together with other ministries had abandoned an attempt to dress an inventory of all projects, initiatives and co-operation links within the Baltic co-operation agreement since it was impossible to find out exactly what was happening where. Even though such a statement is coloured by the authorities' urge to be fully informed, it is a potent yardstick of the success of the Baltic Sea agreement.

countries where the progress of regional decentralisation is most advanced are also the ones best placed to benefit from co-operation. This has been one of the major difficulties in involving Russian regions in concrete cross-border co-operation, which has often been seen with a degree of suspicion from the Central government in Moscow. Also, for many countries in Central and Eastern Europe, the degree of centralisation has acted as a brake on bottom-up activities associated with transborder co-operation although most of them have recently made substantive progress in their efforts towards greater decentralisation.

- Financial constraints have acted as a powerful brake on co-operation, not only as far as concrete projects are concerned, but also in terms of the ability to communicate (internet, telephone, fax, travelling, publishing etc.). Lack of financing has been a problem in several transborder co-operation agreements, notably the Carpathian EuroRegion and in the Black Sea Economic Co-operation². Meanwhile others, like the Central European Initiative, have been more successful in attracting funding from a variety of international sources.
- The institutional infrastructure and the political will, associated with the agreement itself, are both instruments to launch any co-operation initiative and to underpin its further development. The lack of political will and inefficient or overburdened institutional structures have acted as powerful constraints on some transborder co-operations. The reason for this situation is many-fold, but some elements may be cited, namely cultural and religious differences, lingering traditional/historic tensions and animosities, financial constraints, lack of competence on behalf of regional authorities, and deficient physical infrastructure.

The Nomisma study shows that co-operation in S&T in the broad sense, i.e. including academia, may have beneficial effects on other areas, such as business, especially SMEs, and education, and may therefore act as a conveyor

² The recently created Black Sea Trade and Development Bank is set to improve this situation as soon as it becomes operational.

for a broader scope of co-operation. Moreover, co-operation in S&T may be generated by quite small means, such as computerisation, access to modern communication services (internet, etc.) and a possibility to establish contacts with the academic communities in the West (travel, publication of research results and so on). This form of co-operation is especially important in those transborder agreements where the scope and intensity of co-operation has not yet reached a dynamic stage. Stepped-up efforts to promote S&T related projects could therefore have a positive impact (for different reasons) on the Barents EuroArctic Region, the Carpathian Euroregion and in the co-operation around the Black Sea.

Anna MICHALSKI —■

THE POLITICAL SYSTEM AND THE NCIT

Since 1997, the Forward Studies Unit has been running a seminar on «Democracy and the Information Society». The following text is an extract from a report, produced as part of the seminar, on changes within in the «political sphere» brought about by the new communication and information technologies. (NCIT)

«Political sphere» or system can be considered as a complete, organised, lasting and circumscribed set of variables (or players) in interaction. Its aim is to coordinate and manage a given society, a function similar to that of the brain within the human body.

Certain scholars have tried to model the political system. According to David Easton's scheme, demands emanate from society as a whole. Those in power are then supposed to respond to the expectations and problems by decisions which are general in scope. These are sometimes at the root of new difficulties which, in

turn, lead to other government decisions. A continuous flow of actions and reactions thus is developing between the decision-making centres (governments, parliaments) which symbolise the world of politics and what is often called «civil society».

This model considers the political system as a kind of «black box» in an environment (society as a whole) which sends it social demands, and to which outputs are made in the form of decisions. This analysis does, of course, have a number of flaws. However, it does have the merit of highlighting the importance of information and communication flows between political players, governments and citizens, to which we should add «intermediaries» (they come between the social base and the decision-makers) :

- channels of access to decision-making bodies, such as political parties or pressure groups, which have three functions: expressing demands, representation and social integration;
- those areas where government extends into society through executive bodies such as the civil service.

From the *systemic approach* we move on to the *cybernetic approach*, looking at the political system in terms of communication between the players concerned. Our starting point is the assumption that *the political system is an information system* as well as a governmental system. Therefore its task is to resolve problems which confront society. The political system is entirely made up of communications, as a prerequisite for any knowledge and certainly for any possibility of action. Can a minister or a European Commissioner take appropriate steps without being informed of the facts? Is it possible, in our democratic systems, to envisage elections without widespread dissemination of the names of the candidates and their manifestos? Can a pressure group act effectively if it does not know the decisions it is contesting?

Considering information as a major element of politics and its vitality, the information system thus does support the political system. Like the latter, it does contain a number of inputs and outputs: information is generated by a

variety of means (discussion, debates, etc.), it involves various players (including the media) and is then communicated in various ways (direct interaction, the press, television, radio, electronic media, etc.), thus contributing to the permanent process producing information. As a result, both the information system and the world of politics are formed by the messages that circulate within them.

But if both are so interdependent, won't the changes within the information system (brought up by the emergence of electronic media) have an impact on politics? We are witnesses of a new phase in the evolution of communication; should we not prepare ourselves for equivalent historical changes in the political sphere? In addition, within the planned convergence of information technology, television and telephony, where will politics have its place?

A NECESSARY CHANGE

The concept of information society has now penetrated the economic and financial world. But the same cannot really be stated for the world of politics, which will still have to adapt to functions and an environment that increasingly do depend on technology:

- the new communication and information technologies are going to have global repercussions and affect all human activity, either in a direct or indirect way;
- the increasingly complex structures of the modern state require new methods of government, management, decision-making, changes to traditional political activity and the way it is communicated;
- this is also valid for the internationalisation of major economic and financial functions and a new geostrategic context.

The exercise of political power must incorporate this new parameter in order to manage a society which is already familiar with the conditions of technological change. Therefore, the «political sphere» is not governed by immutable «natural laws». It must constantly adapt to the evolving nature of political reality

(considering polis as city). Neither its methods nor its forms are invariable or imposed. Furthermore, the political system is challenged by a phenomenon of modernity (in the shape of the information society) which is taking it away from its cultural references and confounds its space-time markers. The new communication and information technologies are overturning the unities of place, time and territory on which such central values as democracy or the state are traditionally founded. We must therefore develop a new approach, not questioning democratic practice and values as we know them, but taking the development of the new communication and information technologies into account.

Finally, until now, the sources of inspiration for political renewal were basically ideological. But since the fall of the Berlin Wall it was frequently argued that ideology is dead. Furthermore, the technological revolution has come about in a period of strong societal aspirations (hence the resistance to governments and to politics in general). Are the two phenomena linked? Are we heading for a crisis of politics or are we experiencing a transition to new forms of public participation? The law and legal structures that govern political activity now face the challenge of ensuring the survival of political institutions (that is, their stability), while helping them adapt to the changes brought about by the new communication and information technologies. Unless these technologies are themselves the modern source of political renewal.

WHAT KIND OF POLITICAL SYSTEM? _____

A brief analysis of our national constitutions shows that while they take account of individual citizens, they devote the greater part of their provisions to organising and legitimise the existence and discourse of those who govern and thus the absence and silence of the governed. Therefore, politics has been monopolised by a minority to the detriment of the majority. «*On behalf of...*» is the generative grammatical rule of the political sphere - but also of all opposition, because the people, both the foundation and the fault line of the political system, can burst in at any time to demonstrate that their concerns and desires are not

the ones that were in particular attributed to them by the politicians.

Such is the case today, with increasing signs of fracture between political professionals and the general public. Electors are abandoning the ballot box and are increasingly forming new groups which are not connected with parties and parliaments in order to discuss, debate and take action on public affairs¹. Hence, we see a transformation of the links between the political system and society as a whole, a shift in the boundary separating them.

However, what will be the role of the new communication and information technologies in this socio-political context? If the political ideal is universal participation rather than the election of representatives which monopolise political activity, is it possible to envisage means of action different from voting, based on the use of communication technologies, and stimulating some kind of public participation that is qualitatively superior to the counting of ballot papers? If the answer is yes, it means that with the development of the new communication and information technologies we have an opportunity to experiment with new ways of organising and regulating politics within the NTIC. But this requires a new type of relationship between the protagonists, i.e. the decision-makers (executive and legislative) and their satellites (administrations) and the public, either individually or collectively.

Does this mean a total revolution leading to a dilution of politics in society as a whole and thus to direct and active intervention by the public? Or will it mean simply that the current (representative) political mechanisms will develop along with new socio-political relations, and that a public debate to which anyone can contribute will slowly but definitely be generated? One or the other result will have an impact on the concept and exercise of political power.

Bénédicte CAREMIER —■

¹ The increasing number of associations shows this phenomena.

Miscellaneous

A SOUL FOR EUROPE: ETHICS AND SPIRITUALITY

In December 1997 the European Parliament adopted a budget which includes an explicit reference to «A Soul for Europe». This comes under the Grants for projects organised by Associations and Federations of European Interest and bears the following commentary: «This credit is also intended to support activities in the framework of reflection at the European level on the ethical and spiritual sources of European construction.» The budget justification adds: «There is reason to maintain the credits of the present budget and to widen the effect of this line so as to cover the financing of the programme 'A Soul for Europe', such as it was conceived by the former President Delors and supported by the present President, Jacques Santer. The programme 'A Soul for Europe' has the aim of bringing together the Humanist, Christian, Jewish, Muslim and other traditions to reflect about the ethical and spiritual implications of European integration.»

The objective of *A Soul for Europe* is summed up thus: «We are at a crossroads of European history where the debate about meaning has become a major consideration. The building of Europe is not just an economic and political exercise but also has a spiritual and ethical dimension. The objective of this initiative is to encourage those who are aware of this to bring their specific contribution to the unification of Europe.»

The most difficult thing to communicate to potential applicants for *A Soul for Europe* is the necessary link between the vocation of the European Union on the one hand, and ethical/spiritual reflection about the policies

which translate this vocation on the other. In other words, the articulation between the *European character* of the criteria («all projects should explicitly promote the integration of Europe») and the *ethical and spiritual character* («all projects should promote reflection on the spiritual and/or ethical meaning of building a new Europe»). The words *soul, Europe, ethics, spirituality* conjure up so many ideas that may be very commendable in themselves but are often quite unrelated to the politics of the European Union. People think, because they are doing interreligious dialogue, or discussing cultural identity, or promoting values education, or equipping their communities to live in a Europe after the Iron Curtain has come down, that they should qualify for a subsidy. They have to realise that it is the connection between such reflection and what is going on in relation to the institutional construction of Europe that is the key. *A Soul for Europe* was created to encourage ordinary members of the various religious and humanist communities in the difficult task of passing the economic, social, political processes of the European Community under the focus of their own deepest convictions about the meaning of life after the Cold War, at the end of the 20th century.

INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

Inter-religious/philosophical dialogue has never been easy. Sticking points of culture, tradition, history, not to mention theology and community life, are always there to spoil the cooperation or sidetrack the resolve. However, with «*A Soul for Europe*» there is a new element. The dialogue does not merely depend on the religious or humanist partners. It is provoked and promoted by a third factor, the European Union. A political agent with its

own vocation and agenda (shared by the partners) supplies the subject matter of the dialogue and cooperation - assisted, of course, by the financial resources required. This is developing into an effective means of involving concerned citizens in European affairs, especially in sensitive political situations.

Secondly, there is increasing concern today about the need to develop a European Muslim identity. At the colloquium «Cultural Pluralism and Religion in Europe», organised by the Islamic Foundation and the Selly Oak Colleges in England in September 1997, a Muslim speaker pointed out that in Western countries «there exists a consistent trend among young Muslims towards an Islamic affirmation of their identity and a profound revival of its spirituality and practice. Contrary to the widely held analysis, this phenomenon is not exclusively the expression of an opposition to the West. European Muslims must face their new reality with a constructive and determined state of mind in order to provide themselves with both a clear direction and a set of plain Islamic rulings allowing them to promote a balanced Islamic identity in the West, confident and part of the future of these societies». Non-Muslim Europeans should be exposed to this search too, so as to recognise more the historic contribution of Islam to European civilization and put in question their own, all too often monocultural, self-understanding. The questions of identity, values and religion posed by Muslims are by no means all limited in their relevance to Islam. Cooperation with other faiths and with secular humanism in this field is fruit-

ful for the development of a broad front for European self-awareness. What is more, the growth of a self-confident European Islamic identity may help serve as a bridge between Europe and the Arab world.

Thirdly, much Christian-Jewish dialogue in Europe since the Second World War has arguably been sterile and ineffectual. Founded in many cases on guilt and silence, it has shown itself to be more concerned with form than substance. Some of it has been fundamentally dishonest. Mark Ellis, the American Jewish theologian, has called it «not an ecumenical dialogue, but an ecumenical deal: you (Christians) say nothing about the state of Israel and we (Jews) will say nothing about the Holocaust.» Although in its first three years *A Soul for Europe: Ethics and Spirituality* has had little impact in this field (indeed it is not directly relevant to theological discussions as such), it does offer scope for a fresh start in Christian-Jewish dialogue: first, by supplying a new, socially relevant agenda related to what Jews (sometimes and with reason called «the first Europeans») and Christians see as the meaning of Europe and the purpose of European union today, and secondly, by extending the dialogue to include Muslims, Humanists and others; third, may it not also serve to develop the trust which is necessary for that other urgent dialogue, so vital to the EU's stalled Foreign and Security Policy, about Europe's contribution to peace in the Middle East?

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