Politics and Purposes in Fifty Years of European Integration

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What have been the purposes of the degree of integration and the measure of unity which Europe now exhibits?[1] There is still disagreement about the extent of unity and the durability of the integration that has been achieved over the last half century, but the disagreements about why Europe has become a more close1y-knit continent both politically and economically seem much greater. Without a historical sense of why these developments have been a persistent thread running through the fabric of the last half-century's history, present disagreements over the nature and extent of what has been achieved are certain to be made more acute by the circumstance of the American attack on the Iraqi regime in March 2003 and the bitter division inside the European Union which it has provoked. The question, why the European Union exists, seems forgotten in putting the campaign in Iraq in the forefront of politics. It is my intention here to reassert the answer in the hope that it will be seen as more important than that campaign.

In doing so, some simplification of the definition of purpose is unavoidable, but the purposes of European politica1 and economic integration since 1945 may be grouped together as fulfilling five main objectives. The relative importance of these objectives has varied over the period as a whole with changes in the world situation and with the increasing comfort, safety and prosperity within Community Europe, for which integration itself, of course, also has been partly responsible.

The earliest of these objectives was national security, the preservation of the national territory from the invasions, bombings, occupations, partitions, annexations and other violent actions and atrocities of the years 1914-1945. Against these the international order of the states themselves had provided no adequate defence, and even less so had international organisations or international law. For this reason, Germany and its future were the central concern of the successive European Communities. Inherent in all proposals, successful or otherwise, for the creation of a united Europe was a concern with the control of Germany and that concern is still part of the cement which binds the European Union. Defence against attack from the Soviet bloc in the 1950s meant that Germany could not be left disarmed. Its defence was the business of NATO. The creation of NATO was a prerequisite for the creation of the first European Community, the European Coal and Steel Community. Nevertheless, even during the Cold War Europe's ultimate fears were of Germany, as were those of the Soviet Union, as Soviet records for the 1950s have now shown. Germany's own desire for territorial physical security was at least as great as that of the rest of the continent and German foreign policy reflected this almost to the exclusion of all else. The German Federal Republic was to become the central pillar of the European

1. Editorial note: This text was presented in Athens during the Greek presidency of the Council of the European Union, in the first semester of 2003.

Communities and their chief paymaster. Western Europe, narrowly defined as the European Community of Nine, has never in its history known so long a period of peace on its national territories.

Secondly, beneath this desire for physical safety lay a deeper yearning for security from the vagaries of economic change, which had in some countries in the inter-war period been a threat to personal security as disruptive as the threat of military violence. The provision of personal and family economic security was a strong electoral demand after 1945. Coming together with an increased domestic purposiveness by national governments this led to a much greater range of social protection, very loosely called 'the welfare state', which became a dominant aspect of all Western European politics between 1945 and 1968. It was the uniquely-long period of economic prosperity in Western Europe between 1945 and 1972 which made this possible by providing the cash and also the deceptively optimistic perspectives of the future on which such welfare programmes were often based. From their outset the political institutions of European unity were seen as, and indeed proclaimed themselves as being, integral aspect of this same political response. The European Coal and Steel Community had its own welfare programme.

Thirdly, from its origins the process of European integration was a part of a process of commercial liberalisation, at first advanced by the United States through the Marshall Plan and desired, although more gradually, by most West European states as a way of overcoming the economic shocks of the inter-war period and the extreme, but unprofitable, national economic protectionism of that period. Every European state except the Soviet Union was inherently heavily trade-dependent, because of their size, their history and their contiguity. The path to present 'globalisation' was already being trodden by 1948 and the European Community came to be an important advocate of trade liberalisation, while serving, like other international institutions, as an instrument of control over the pace of those policies more effectively than the single, separate, liberalising states could have done. Only states can lower tariffs, eliminate import controls, and make their currencies convertible. The European Economic Community provided a forum of agreement in which the policies of a return to the more globalised economic world of the period 1890-1914 could be managed cooperatively and more safely than in the period before the First World War when there were only central banks to manage it.

Fourthly, from these early concerns with safety, welfare and the international management of economic prosperity, the European Community evolved into a definer and provider of legal, social and political norms. At first this was essentially restricted to the enforcement of commercial rules and rules of international economic competition. The initial supranational nature of the Community, while it held a distant promise of some form of more general supranational law and perhaps governance in Europe, was necessary as a replacement for the international law discredited by the events of the 1930s. The Court of Law of the Coal and Steel Community and the supranational status of the High Authority of that first Community were accepted because enforcement of the rules within the Community, particularly against Ger-

many, by some new form of accepted supranational legal authority was agreed to be necessary. Given the central attachment of the Communities to state objectives of welfare and security, concern with circumscribed aspects of personal security was present from the beginning. Such agreements as were reached on the economic treatment of migrant workers within what it was hoped would become a more perfect labour market were enforced by the same supranational authority and Court of Justice as the high political aspects of the Coal and Steel Community and the Economic Community. The connection made by Community citizens between these activities, which at first affected only small numbers of them, and the universal concept of 'rights', however ill-founded in theory and history this was, universalised the concept of 'rights' and turned it into a definition of what the European Union stood for.

Prosperity did not, it was clear by the 1960s, eliminate social and legal discrimination. As wealthier electorates began to press for a national law which better reflected the extremely rapid social change which accompanied the great European boom, the European Community institutions themselves were bound to respond to the same pressures. The definition and defence of legal norms of human dignity and human rights became part of integrated Europe's quest for identity. These have now become prerequisites for accession to the European Union. Even some contemporary, and probably temporary, economic nostrums have become requisites, independent central banks, for example, so that the European Union has become an arbiter of virtue, defined as the way it itself behaves, or is supposed to. This far surpasses its earlier purposes, even though it is wholly dependent on the earlier structures.

Fifthly, 'democracy', wisely left undefined, became a prerequisite for membership of the European Communities. The persistent discovery of the nature of the Nazi dictatorship had much to do with this, although the identity of the European Union as a proselytising instrument of democracy was slow to reach the position it has now attained. The absence of democracy was no final barrier to singing commercial agreements with Franco's Spain. The next expansion of the Community, however, has laid down rules of political behaviour for the new entrant-states, even when not all of those rules are so evidently enforced in the original six member-states of the Treaty of Rome. This does, in spite of its inconsistency, seem to reflect popular opinion within the existing member-states.

None of these achievements has required a political confederation, much less a federation, and even less so political unity. Furthermore, in the creation of the Europe we presently have, other international organisations have played their part without having any supranational characteristics and while relying on the same traditional diplomatic procedures that were used in the 1920s; OEEC, OECD, EFTA, The Council of Europe, NATO, The Western European Union, even the remnants of earlier aspirations towards a Scandinavian common market and a Scandinavian union.

Nevertheless, the supranational characteristics of the Court of Law and of supranational parliamentary assemblies have not been merely symbolism. Even had they been so, that symbolism would in itself have been of major importance. There has been a sufficient area of agreement on what Europe should do and be in common for

a supranational law and an acceptance of supranational governance not only to have remained in place since the early 1950s but to have expanded its scope, its ambitions, and even its pretentions. Of course, it would have been impossible to be the world's greatest international trader, and thereby able to exercise such strong political leverage, without extending some European political interests to the global level. But there is evidently more to the story than that.

Historians have been much less successful at uncovering the deeper channels through which the persistence of the idea of European integration has flowed. Has this persistence been caused by common sentiments of Europeanness, by common European idealism, or even by shared cultural sensibilities? That none of these influences has been effectively delineated by historians does not mean that such influences have not played their part. Without some common sentiment of this kind, it is hard to believe that developments could have gone so far. Nevertheless, the fundamental structure of the Union has been a commercial one, the common market, which has worked so well for so many highly-developed, high-income, trade-dependent economies clustered into so small a geographical area.

The prevailing evidence from opinion polls, including the regular surveys undertaken by Eurobarometer, indicates only a tepid level of allegiance by national populations to the European Union, but also that moments when national sentiment in any member-state veers towards favouring withdrawal from the Union are relatively rare and short-lived. That supranational authority is accepted as advantageous does not mean, however, that a European *demos* exists, or even that it is in the process of creation, however slowly. If it did exist, there seems to be no method by which it could be consulted. The proportion of national voters in each member-state who record their vote in elections to the European Parliament has declined in every election since the first. This trend might reflect many things. If it reflects disillusionment with the idea of European unity that may be no more than a reflection of an equal disillusionment with national parliaments.

To list what have been the objective foundations of European unity over half a century is to confront the changes in national democracies and the role of national parliaments over that time. The purposiveness of national administrations and parliaments in the 1950s in the first six member-states and in their closest associate, the United Kingdom, showed a confidence in the state as an agent of economic and social reconstruction which now seems hard to imagine. Wartime experience of economic and military organisation by the state built on the belief in the administrative state which had grown in the inter-war period and strengthened reliance on the state as an economic protector against uncontrolled international economic phenomena. The state was expected by the electorate to provide the safety, welfare and growing prosperity which were what national populations wanted from reconstruction. It had learned something of how it might do this. It was told by economists under Keynesian influences that it might do it in difficult circumstances better or at least more speedily than the market. Economic circumstances in fact proved highly favourable, giving states an increasing confidence in their managerial capacities. Reconstruction pro-

vided an ideology of the state which did not conflict with the pursuit of European economic integration. Rather, it encouraged European integration.

With the return after 1968 to more normal levels of growth of income and of cyclical economic variation statist ideologies have gone the same way as Keynesian economics. The moral purposiveness of national parliaments and national administrators has gone with them. National parliaments have reverted to their pattern of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and become mediatory market places between the public and private sectors in which shifting patterns of interest-groups seek their own advantage by advocating policies whose origins are often hard to discover. In this setting the morally purposive are unlikely to become government officials. The European Union survived this change because its commercial purpose was unaffected and its definition of 'democracy', that flexible word, is what it itself practises. What purpose would it serve in such circumstances to 'democratise' the European Parliament as a step to creating a European *demos*?

Two conclusions, tending in opposite directions seem equally fair as European Union member-states quarrel openly and in some instances deliberately misrepresent each other's positions over the issue of Iraq. One tends towards pessimism. The European Union has grown through the pursuit of particular limited, but desired and important purposes. In national parliaments the national policies which are translated into legislation have become haphazard in their choice. They are influenced by consultation only in so far as consultation helps administrators to improve future policy enforcement. They emerge from interest-groups and administrators bargaining in a market-place. They do not necessarily arise from popular electoral demand, unlike those policies in the 1950s and 1960s which linked the aspirations of states to European integration and unity. The European Union runs forward towards its greatest expansion with nothing to power it but the spent fuel of earlier ideologies. There is no programme which could awaken the sleeping *demoi* to create a European *demos* and no prospect that if there where it would change the situation. What lies beyond the present torpid contentment of the European Union's citizens is hard to discern.

Nevertheless, a second conclusion might discern reasons for optimism. It is difficult repeatedly to justify a war in the name of democracy without inciting populations, people, *les peuples*, *le peuple*, European citizens, to ask: what is this democracy for which the war is being fought? When they ask that question they are programmed by two and a half centuries of argument on that subject to answer; the war is being fought on our behalf. No matter how simplified a definition of democracy that may be, it captures one essential element of its definition, the tendency of democracy to inclusiveness. When they answer their own question in that way it appears that in all those countries preparing the attack on Iraq it is only in the United States that a majority of the population supports such action, and the American majority leaves room for a very numerous minority. In such circumstances we should perhaps thank President George Bush for using so often a word which arouses thought about fundamentals. A European state can not, even in the age of domestic computers, be an everyday plebiscite. Neither can the European Union. But neither can the nation nor

the supranation of the EU govern successfully without the allegiance of its citizens. It is particularly difficult to fight a war without that allegiance. Allegiance, by definition, is a two-way agreement between government and the governed. Perhaps, therefore, the largely unsupported attack on Iraq will reawaken some return within the European Union to discussion of the humane purposes of democracy as a system of government, 'if only', to borrow a phrase from the British poet Philip Larkin, 'that so many dead lie round'. It seems singularly appropriate to express this hope here, in Greece, at a time of the Greek Presidency of the Union.