



EUROPE, POWER AND NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY

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Europe's approach to national sovereignty makes about as much sense as the behaviour of the road-runner in the cartoon, when he rushes off head-long in a certain direction, rushes on over the edge of a cliff, and hangs there with legs churning until he actually notices what has happened – and only then crashes to the ground.

The recent crisis of confidence over ratification of the new EU constitution was certainly powered in part by many EU citizens' fears about losing more national sovereignty and control. But they started or, more exactly, re-started worrying about this when Europe had already been running over the edge of the cliff for fifty years. There can be no question that the 25 current member states of the European Union, and perhaps even the 3 further states linked with them in the European Economic Area, have gone further in renouncing and pooling their sovereign control of public authority functions than any other previous or present group of states have done in history while still calling themselves states – retaining separate seats in the United Nations, and so on. It seems timely to take a fresh look here at why this was done; what contradictions it is breeding at this particular time; and some issues arising for other regions that are also, so to speak, heading for the cliff – as many seem to be e.g. through ASEAN's recent declaration of a tighter security community, or the efforts to deepen cooperation in the African Union and smaller African groups, the Gulf Cooperation Council, and various Latin American or pan-American frameworks.

First, looking back to the 1950's, it is important to recall that limiting sovereignty in the original European Communities was about survival. Putting key resources needed for warfare, like iron and steel, under impartial non-national control was a radical experiment, but it could look like the only remaining hope for nations that were emerging from a deep well of suffering and guilt and needed a way to exorcise national demons for good, in themselves or in their neighbours or both.

Secondly it was about post-war reconstruction and prosperity, where creating a single market allowed European countries to get more profit from their economic complementarities, and creating a central budget and structural policies helped to equalize standards of prosperity and welfare notably between the North and South of Europe. In the 1950's Denmark had double the GDP per capita of Italy, while now the average Dane is only 15% better off than the average Italian. These motives for integration might, of course, be shared by many countries or regions, but the solution that the Europeans found for them had some peculiar features that still are more or less unique. They include:

- the creation of the European Commission as a central management authority for the new single market space, as the single voice and negotiator for the common commercial policy of the Union, and so on;
- the fact that a high proportion of policy and implementing decisions made by the EU states were taken in the form of laws designed to have direct and binding effect across the whole European territory (now amounting to some 80,000 pages);
- the European Court which has the right to detect and punish states that fail to apply these laws; and
- the fact that states made over a certain part of their revenues (from customs and VAT) to go directly into the Community budget for use under the central authorities' control.

Also important to recognize is the 'cultural' effect of this European experiment especially on the official élites and on state-level decision making. Even in Iceland which is not an EU member, government officials reported recently that EU-related work takes up 64% of their office time. Working in a policy-making space much bigger than the nation becomes a habit with a certain comfort level and it becomes quite natural (rather than a paradox) for various players to see it as serving their national interest: small states because they have the formally equal say in the process that the Westphalian world would deny them, big states because they can seek an instant multiplier effect and sometimes a useful multilateral fig-leaf for their policy designs.

More broadly, it has become something of a cliché of analysis to note – especially in the context of Europe-U.S. tensions – how 50 years of community living have selectively strengthened existing tendencies among European leaders and citizens to see safety in terms of compromise, obedience to common rules, mutual mixing and non-provocation; and to react with both a practical and moral concern when they see others seeking security and prosperity different ways. If Europeans are often inconsistent in worrying more about deviations from these norms by their real friends – like the USA – than about their real enemies, it may be precisely because they define friends as the people who are prepared to sit together in a smoke-filled room all night, come up with some kind of messy compromise in the morning and submit to a supranational authority for checking up on how well they implement it. No-one should be surprised if North Americans (and others) find it extremely hard to relate to the notion that this approach is not only practical but somehow normatively desirable.

This ‘post-modern’ or ‘non-Westphalian’ experiment has contained some large contradictions from the start:

- it was never self-sufficient, in that the Marshall Plan provided some of the starting capital, the U.S. through NATO provided the over-arching security cover, and NATO also lifted a lot of the load of suppressing wrongful European nationalism;
- it has always relied mainly on states to be their own policemen in enacting and enforcing joint decisions and bearing most of the costs. The European Commission only has some 18,000 personnel to oversee and develop the aforementioned 80,000 pages of legislation across 25 countries, the European Court of Justice has only 1600 personnel to catch possible abuses by 460 million EU citizens, and the EU budget is equivalent to just over 1% of the total GDP of the 25 member states. The vulnerability of the system once states start second-guessing and trying to renege on their commitments (as has happened lately eg on EMU stability targets) is obvious;
- the pattern of sovereignty surrender and centralized control has always been patchy, with truly supranational and Westphalian-type

intergovernmental methods coexisting in the EU machinery itself, and with some of the most basic functions of a community like border control, law and order, currency, defence and foreign policy still only partially and/or weakly integrated.

Four further contradictions related to the EU's security and strategic functions have come to light particularly sharply in the first years of the 21st century. First, Europe created a single market and immigration area long before it woke up to the dangers of non-state enemies like terrorists infiltrating and exploiting this fertile space, and it is still scrambling in face of complex practical and psychological difficulties to get European states and peoples to start seriously confronting this threat. Cooperation against terrorism, as a timely example, is complicated both by the inward-looking ethos and relatively late international 'socialization' of internal security authorities: but also by subjective factors like different countries' differing 'hands-on' experience of violence, and differing views on the trade-off between protection and liberty.

Secondly, since the end of the Cold War, with enlargement and with the continual shifting of NATO's focus towards out-of-area tasks, the EU is coming into much more direct strategic contact both with ambiguous neighbours like Russia and with large and small problem actors in other regions. Yet the EU's original philosophy and the ways its resources are organized have turned out to be eminently mismatched to challenges of this kind. The basic issue is not so much whether a 'common' foreign policy is feasible *per se* for a large group of still nominally independent states: NATO, including many of the same states, developed many features of such a policy (eg with binding joint positions on arms control and *détente*) during the Cold War. The obstacles specific to the EU are, rather, a combination of (a) the need for such a policy to cover the external dimensions of all the EU's uniquely wide range of internal competences, and to be extensible to all world regions; (b) the complex division of relevant powers and knowledge within Brussels and between Brussels and Member States; and (c) the inherent 'value biases' of European policy as mentioned before (perhaps strongest when operating formally/institutionally, which tends to bring out the 'superego' element in élites' thinking).

Thirdly, the rapid expansion of EU territory since 1995 compounds both these problems in special ways of its own. It brings Europe closer to the threats; stretches its security resources more thinly; and stretches the post-modern integrative method more generally, because solutions have to be found that are objectively and subjectively appropriate for a wider variety of members. Hang-ups over further enlargement are one clear example of this, since it is only natural for 'core' countries to fear further extension of their liabilities while states near the new borders would prefer to acquire integrated buffers beyond their own territory. Cross-cutting with this difference are the more historically and culturally conditioned ones over whether it is felt acceptable (a) for Europe to behave more like an 'Empire' from now on and (b) for it to be a power distinct from the USA.

Last and most obviously comes the recent crisis of popular confidence, and of democratic credibility in the integration process, which – as already argued above – was a train-crash just waiting to happen. It is logical that it came in the older rather than the newer states, partly because the Central Europeans (irrespective of whether they like and trust their leaders or not) have so recently repeated the old European bargain of trading off sovereignty for safety, and know the value of what they have gained. It is historically understandable that it should have come at a time when the growth of European monetary and defence cooperation had begun to eat into the last sensitive shreds of sovereignty, and when West European societies were growing rapidly more diverse first and foremost through non-European immigration – in both cases triggering a predictable 'last-ditch' reaction. Thirdly, however, what a lot of the 'No' voters seem to be fighting to preserve are actually cultural and way-of-life values at the street level rather than traditional factors of sovereignty at state level. What is in crisis may, thus, not be so much the European model in abstract as its failure to deliver goods proportionate to the inputs demanded, in the currency of welfare, security, pride of identity and freedom of choice that is visible and means something to ordinary voters. The irony is that precisely because of Europe's inchoate and incomplete stage of development, most of these popular experiences are still far more directly mediated by national political systems than by actions in Brussels. A host of commentators have not been wrong to home in on the issue of French, Dutch and general European leadership. A significant part of the problem is, indeed, the slow-

ness of a given generation of European leaders to develop the new political skills needed for the new political hybrid that is collective Europe. Unless they can learn both to play their part in helping to steer the collectivity in the right direction, and to win and hold the trust of their own electorates while doing so, the EU can hardly advance much further in building its security personality or in any other field.

What to conclude? Muddled and wounded as the European model may be, most of the changes it has brought are irreversible. Moreover, for most of the world's observers outside the USA, Europe has a way of looking stronger, more fortunate and more all-round enviable than it does from the inside, and it will not be easy to reverse the integrative or 'post-modern' ambitions of such regions as Africa, South-East Asia, Central and Latin America.

The obvious conclusion is that they should look with a harder eye at the Europeans' contradictions and omissions and think about ways to avoid the same pitfalls themselves. A much bigger question – which deserves a book in itself – is how these pockets of emergent (and inevitably imperfect) post-modern organization of relations among states can coexist in an increasingly globalized system with single large 'modern' states like the USA, and with states and regions who have so far hardly even reached 'modern' standards of state competence and/or orderly inter-state behaviour. Part of this road-runner's problem is that while it has run too far over the cliff itself, a lot of other players are busy trying to push it off or to pile up spikier rocks below...