

**WHAT VISIONS DO WE HAVE FOR EUROPE ?
CHALLENGES OF THE EU EXPANSION, WITH SPECIAL FOCUS ON ROMANIA**

SOME OBSERVATIONS

The visionaries who coined the theme for this session have set us a challenging task. The title is searching. It begs decision from the very outset. Do we have visions for Europe, should we develop such visions? Or does a vision for Europe suffice? And if so, which vision for which Europe?

Permit me to declare my position from the outset regarding our subject: I submit that we do not need visions for Europe! For a clear, refined and proven vision for Europe already exists. For the greater part its realisation has proved a success story. Yet this vision is little appreciated or understood, even after fifty years of political toil. What we need is understanding, one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and often the fruit of meditation, hard work and the discernment coming from silent prayer. Visions for Europe we do not need. What we need is conviction about the significance of the European project, consensus about its values and objectives, understanding of the political institutions needed to achieve those aims and the commitment to engage with the democratic processes which produce Europe's policies.

A clear vision for Europe was developed in the early 1950s and provisions for its realisation have been carefully calibrated in treaties. If visions are seen, and they certainly can inspire and motivate, we should pray that they elucidate some nodal issues at stake in the abiding challenge of shaping Europe in the light of the values and aims to which it has aspired and on the basis of the unique a singular achievement of the fifty years of European construction which will be marked on 25 March of this year.

In a time of crisis

In a moment of profound crisis, such as Europe is currently experiencing, there is need for lucidity about basics. If we are responsibly to shape our common future, we need to understand why our forefathers set out on a societal project and what they had in mind. That story is known to us : how the ideas of Jean Monnet inspired the Schuman Declaration (9 May 1950) which led to the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) itself aimed at establishing peace between erstwhile enemies and some years later in March 1957 to the European Economic Community (EEC). Like the preambles to the founding treaties, the Schuman declaration merits close reading from the perspective of Christian social thinking. There we see how the production of coal and steel, the market, some economic and trade issues, are to become the means of consolidating peace, achieving solidarity and developing the standard of living of Europe's peoples, Furthermore if the core objective was making and keeping peace in Europe, Schuman saw the European project as a step to achieving world peace.

In the light of the theme and in the context of the crisis besetting the EU at present, it is worth revisiting that Declaration :

'World peace cannot be safeguarded without the making of creative efforts proportionate to the dangers which threaten it.

The contribution which an organized and living Europe can bring to civilization is indispensable to the maintenance of peaceful relations. (...)

Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create a de facto solidarity. The coming together of the nations of Europe requires the elimination of the age-old opposition of France and Germany. Any action taken must in the first place concern these two countries

With this aim in view, the French Government proposes that action be taken immediately on one limited but decisive point.

It proposes that Franco-German production of coal and steel as a whole be placed under a common High Authority, within the framework of an organization open to the participation of the other countries of Europe.

The pooling of coal and steel production should immediately provide for the setting up of common foundations for economic development as a first step in the federation of Europe, and will change the destinies of those regions which have long been devoted to the manufacture of munitions of war, of which they have been the most constant victims.

The solidarity in production thus established will make it plain that any war between France and Germany becomes not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible'.

In similar vein the preamble of the Treaty of Rome underlines elements of a concrete vision for Europe :

Determined to lay the foundation of an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe;

Resolved to ensure the economic and social progress of their countries by common action to eliminate the barriers which divide Europe;

Affirming as the essential objective of their efforts the constant improvements of the living and working conditions of their peoples; (...)

Anxious to strengthen the unity of their economies and to ensure their harmonious development by reducing the differences existing between the various regions and the backwardness of the less favoured regions

Resolved by thus pooling their resources to preserve and strengthen peace and liberty, and calling upon the other peoples of Europe who share their ideal to join in their efforts (...)'.

The preamble to the treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe continues in the same tradition

Believing that Europe, reunited after bitter experiences, intend to continue along the path of civilisation, progress and prosperity, for the good of all its inhabitants, including the weakest and most deprived; that it wishes to remain a continent open to culture, learning and social progress ; and that it wishes to deepen the democratic and transparent nature of its public life and to strive for peace, justice and solidarity

throughout the world, (...) the peoples of Europe are determined to transcend their former divisions (...) Europe (...) a special area of human hope’.

Art. I-2 of the same treaty sets out the values on which the European project is based :

The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the member states in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between men and women prevail’.

And its Article I-3-1 asserts that “the Union’s aim is to promote peace, its values and the well-being of its peoples”.

The vision of Europe is thus clear: it aims to overcome divisions and establish an area of peace, justice, democracy, political stability and prosperity in order to ensure the well-being of its citizens and promoting its values both within Europe and in the world. Yet somehow this vision seems no longer to inspire or warm the heart of the citizen. The events of 1989 changed the face of Europe: the communist system was undone in Europe, the bi-polar world effectively ceased to exist. Europe was set on the road of re-unification, therefore in a different and new geo-political context. The external threat had disappeared. At least in western Europe peace and welfare were and are taken for granted. Thus a certain re-focusing of the vision was required. This re-refocusing became all the more necessary for in the same period the high-tech information society, combining with and accelerating the processes of globalisation, unleashed profound forces of change in society. Citizens live and feel intensely a tension between the local and the global levels. This tension often disorients and in some cases produces reflexes manifested in forms economic patriotism,

protectionism and in terms of EU governance a regrettable tilt towards the intergovernmental.

What has happened: is the vision itself in crisis? Is it the institutional means that are no longer credible in a changed and changing societal context? In this regard one recalls that the poet W. B. Yeats once asked: “how can we know the dancer from the dance”? To probe further, as Christians and Churches must, one might ask if the noble vision of Europe has become the victim of a more fundamental crisis in society, a multi-dimensional crisis of a philosophical and spiritual order?

Is it therefore a matter of addressing mal-functioning institutions, or institutions no longer responding to citizens’ expectations of democracy in the high-tech information society? Or are we on the threshold of a new order challenge to the *homo europeus* ?

A crisis not uncommented

In the aftermath of the referenda on the Constitutional treaty in France and the Netherlands in summer of 2005 commentary and analysis have pointed up numerous explanatory factors. These are well known. They include the alleged opacity of the text itself, poor communication by the governments, relatively weak dispositions on social policy in the treaty text, a perception by some of the EU as over bureaucratic and technocratic, concerns about the dilution of national sovereignty and the accountability of EU governance, frustration with inconsistency by member states governments in regard to the Stability and Growth Pact, and of course the misuse of the referendum to register dissatisfaction with national government policies.

In addition some insist that fear for the future played a role in both referenda. Fear of globalisation, fear of delocalisation of work and industry, the spectre of unemployment or insecure employment, the fear of the immigrant, fears generated by the demographic decline, fear for the future of the social welfare systems, fear of international terrorism, fear that the enlarged membership of the European Union reduces the national capacity to address and manage these issues, and finally a brooding fear and sense of impotence in regard to the capacity of citizens to influence the processes of European decision-making : these and other underlying insecurities in the body politic certainly played a role in both referenda. I believe such fears, if unattended and left to fester, can render the European body politic ethically and spiritually myopic, if not blind.

Addressing the crisis

At political level it is frequently remarked that Europe has sprinted from crisis to crisis and that the process of European integration is presently in the doldrums from which it will emerge in due course. This position holds that the EU will stumble along under the Nice treaty provisions until some political impasse is encountered which will force an major institutional reform. Incremental reforms, such as the Prüm Convention¹, will advance and duly deepen the process of integration. And citizen will come to accept, because such policy measures will be seen to deliver results in time. This form of governance, even if well intentioned, is doomed.

¹ The Prüm Convention, published by the Council secretariat 10900/05, was signed on 27 May 2005 by Belgium, Germany, Spain, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Austria. It covers a wide range of areas of cross-border co-operation: inter alia, information exchange, illegal immigration, repatriation, joint-border policing operations, civil crisis management. It requires signature on the part of eight Member States so that it might be brought to the EU as an area of reinforced co-operation

Others however, including some Prime Ministers, consider that Europe is in deep crisis. The future of the Constitutional treaty is unclear. As far as member state governments are concerned three broad categories would appear to have taken shape² : (i) the Madrid group of the eighteen who have ratified with two countries which intend to ratify and two more prepared to do so, (ii) the sceptical countries, the UK, Poland, the Czech Republic, plus the Netherlands on some issues and perhaps Hungary, (iii) the ambitious option along the lines of Belgian Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt's suggestion of a united states of Europe made up in the best case scenario of the Eurozone countries which would proceed with objectives such as a European socio-political policy, a single foreign policy and a joint army. And of course France must await the outcome of its Presidential elections in early summer of this year in order to determine its position. In regard to re-launching the Constitutional treaty the President-in-office of the European Council, Dr. Angela Merkel, has a nigh impossible task on hand. A roadmap will be completed in the few remaining days of the German presidency after the French elections. Whatever the outcome of the political processes in this regard, - and the Churches will need to accompany the detail of the debates closely - there is an acute need to elucidate the spiritual and social ethical charge (content) in the European project and of course to hold politicians and civil servants responsible for its continued realisation in European policies.

In the face of this situation what is the role of Christians and Churches? How can the EEA 3 contribute? In the first instance as Europeans we all bear a responsibility to open our eyes and perceive what the European project has achieved. Indeed, it is fragile; yet it is the first Community of nations in a brand

² Fernando Riccardi, Bulletin Quotidien Europe, no. 9362, 9 fév. 2007, p.3

new world in which major powers co-exist³, pool sovereignty according to agreed rules for the common good of their citizens. It is our responsibility to ourselves, to future generations of Europeans and to the world, to recognise the politico-historical uniqueness of the process of European integration. As Christians we have a responsibility to name in the public forum the values on which the European project is based: peace and freedom, the dignity of the person, the rule of law and democracy, community, the responsible exercise of power, solidarity ad intra and ad extra, respect and fostering of its constitutive cultures and identities. In short the Churches have a particular responsibility to awaken recent European memory and to assist in educating believers and citizens to what has been achieved on our continent, and to open minds and hearts to examining the capacity of the “community method” of governance to respond to the challenges of our globalising world. Opening real vistas of hope, encouraging fellow Christians and citizens to investigate proven grounds for hope also in the here and now is an essential part of evangelisation. In the face of the fears mentioned above we certainly have need of vision. Jacques Delors recently remarked :

‘Si la Grande Europe est en mesure de montrer d’ici 2010 ou 2020 qu’elle constitue un laboratoire pour la mondialisation, elle donnera sans doute des idées à d’autres pour organiser un peu mieux la globalisation. En tant qu’artisans de cet ensemble de 500 millions d’habitants, nous avons besoin d’une nouvelle pensée sur le monde, nous pouvons donner non pas le seul exemple, non pas le seul modèle, mais un exemple réussi »⁴

³ Philippe Herzog, *Le bonheur du voyage, Ethique action, projets pour relancer l’Europe, Confrontations Europe*, Editions Manuscrit, Paris, 2006, p.11 ; c.f. English version , *Travelling Hopefully, Ethics, action, perspective for a revival of Europe*, Confrontations Europe, Editions le Manuscrit, Paris, 2006, p.13.

⁴ J. Delors, *Notre Europe et Jacques Delors, L’Europe tragique et magnifique*, Saint-Simon, 2006, p. 171, 186.

Yet to generate the European self-confidence implied by Delors, civic education to the European dimension is vital. Indeed in the light of Europe's new geopolitical context we need to generate an accessible narrative on what Europe is for and persuade an anxious citizenry. As Anthony Giddens remarked, the "why" is just as important as the "how".⁵ The "why" of the European project will not find an answer that is satisfactory in economics and law alone. There is need to a spiritual and theological word. The Macedonian of Acts 16.9-10 may be calling again, "come over to Macedonia and help us". The text of the Acts of the Apostles continues: "Once we had seen this vision, we lost no time in arranging a passage to Macedonia, convinced that God had called us to bring them the good news" (Acts. 16.10).

The Churches have already provided material to promote reflection on assessing the significance of the European project as launched by the Schuman declaration and the founding treaties⁶. The EEA3 comes at a moment when the intensification of this grass-roots reflection in local communities, in our parishes, which are genetic points of civil society across Europe, is much needed for the good of our common future.

Concluding remarks

Europe needs a vision, certainly. It has been built successfully on a vision rooted in values. Of that vision a Slovenian economist recently asserted in a report delivered to the *Notre Europe* foundation :

⁵ Anthony Giddens, *Europe in the Global Age*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2007, p.204.

⁶ *The Evolution of the European Union and the Responsibility of Catholics*, Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE), 2005 ; an Anglican approach is represented by Guy Milton, *The European Union A Theological Perspective*, Grove Books, Cambridge, 2006.

« L'Europe, dans son meilleur jour, offre une vision différente à l'humanité. Même si elle a ses problèmes, cette vision fonctionne et produit des sociétés plus douces, plus sûres et plus équitables socialement. Les défenseurs de ce modèle européen sont les vrais visionnaires ... »⁷

That vision needs to be re-appropriated in our radically changed and changing geo-political and societal context. This will require herculean civic educational efforts on the part of the state, society, Churches and religions acting in co-operative respect.

However, understanding and praxis are inter-related and interdependent. Thus if the European body politic is to be re-awakened to the vision on which Europe is constructed, EU policy-making must show that the dignity and welfare of the human person is the centre of the endeavour. The European institutions must be perceived as efficient, transparent in their modus operandi and adequate to the aims the EU sets itself. And palpable evidence of a willingness on the part of European institutions to engage the ethical and social ethical debate in the detail of policy will be part of the proof, though an essential part, that the 'those who defend the European model are the real visionaries'

⁷ Manja Klemenic, cited in J. Delors, idem p. 174.