THE ROLE OF EUROPE IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS AND THE DEMOCRATIC CHALLENGE[1]

Max Kaase
University of Bremen

When, on November 10, 1989, the Berlin Wall finally came down, it signalled the eclipse of totalitarian communist rule in Central and Eastern Europe. Nobody could know at the time how, in these countries, the transition from communism to some sort of democratic government would turn out. Certainly, the core message seemed to be that with this turn of events the arrangements that mankind had tried out to organize itself politically in the framework of the nation state, had boiled down to some form of liberal democracy. Surely, democracy never seemed the perfect political order, but by comparison no other set of institutions, rules and beliefs could better match the universal values arising out of the eighteenth century period of Enlightenment and the political revolutions in France and America. Little wonder then, that for a while Francis Fukuyama's 1992 notion of the End of History (Fukuyama, 1992), in the sense of the apparent exhaustion of acceptable options for a political order other than democracy, seemed to sum it up nicely. Therefore, for me, socialized as I was into the new democratic Germany after World War II, with its totalitarian GDR counterpart just across the border always in sight, it seemed that Europe, after so many years of ideological separation, was now on its way to a happy future without major violent conflicts, setting an example for parts of the world that were not yet under democratic rule.

Looking back over 15 years and being confronted with great challenges to this - as it now seems - naïve notion, one must justifiably ask: What went wrong?

Let me begin by attempting to answer with a brief reference to our upcoming XXth IPSA World Congress in July in Japan under the title "Is Democracy Working?" There is a famous saying dating back almost a century ago and attributed to Churchill that states: "Many forms of government have been tried and will be tried in this world of sin and woe: No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all those others that have been tried from time to time". While apparently there has always been a pervasive sense of imperfection with respect to pluralist democracy, it was with the eclipse of communism that the easy yardstick of comparison which made Western democracy in the end always look good, vanished. It now appears like a "cold project", as some have said, where core elements such as freedom and the legal state are so much taken for granted that democracy Western style has no emotional meaning any more for its people. This is one of the reasons why the IPSA decided to take a closer look at how democratic institutions and political beliefs and actions have evolved over the last twenty years or so.

For example, as contemporary democracies are not all of one kind, an important cornerstone of the democratic process comes to mind: the idea of competition, which is the essence of "voting the rascals out", thereby manufacturing change in government composition and institutionalizing creativity in problem solving. I will not bore you with academic discussions on the pros and cons of majoritarian vs. consensus democracy which, to a certain extent, implies a choice between majority voting and proportional representation as different ways of influencing party system structures and probabilities of government turnover through institutional means. One important point, though, comes into play when Europe and its international role is considered: Are its democratic political systems institutionally well-enough equipped to cope with new problematiques that require deep incisions into vested interests and the status quo? And can they nevertheless still maintain their legitimacy, the support of their citizens?

To help you to understand what I am talking about, allow me to mention three major challenges that European democracies will need to face sooner or later, and be it only for sheer resource reasons: restructuring of the health

insurance system as well as the pension system, and finding powerful labour market policies to counteract the high rates of lasting unemployment that plague many European countries, especially among the less educated of the work force, but even more so those in the new member states.

One factor which drives a large part of these challenges is demography: as European populations get older through increased life expectancy - the average life expectancy in the EU-25 was about 73 years in 1962 and rose to 82 years in 2002 - and as we observe a growing imbalance in fertility rates, the cost of health and pension systems will need to be increasingly carried by future cohorts. This may turn into a new version of the generation gap which, some expect, at some point will invariably end in generational conflict. This picture may sound much too dire. However, one must only, for a moment, look at the enormously different fertility rates between Israelis and Palestinians and those between Serbs and Kosovo Albanians to get a sense of the political thrust this factor has already had and will have in the future also in less conflict-ridden societies.

Such developments and problematiques point to major weaknesses in the democratic political process: pluralist democratic governments act with the short-term electoral cycle in mind, and they tend to neglect long-term implications even of easily foreseeable developments such as demographic change. If, like in the recent German case, a major opposition party (the Christian Democrats) finally decides to put complex issues of this kind on the agenda and automatically challenges established interests and individual resource allocations, the voting public is usually not willing to go along. What was the result of the September 2005 General Election in Germany? - A grand coalition of the two major left and right parties, with about three fourths of the seats in parliament. Not only does this jeopardize the logic of democratic competition, it also raises the crucial question: Will such grand coalitions that, by necessity, represent centrifugal political forces, be ready to implement the deep changes that are necessary but would substantially impinge on what people have since long grown accustomed to in levels of state services and income?

Europe, despite such problems, is still abundantly wealthy. But this wealth will neither last forever nor is it without major flaws. Let me just name two: first, because of high unemployment, especially among the less-educated, and the neo-liberal, ("it's the economy, stupid") philosophy, the gap

within countries between the wealthy and the poor becomes ever wider, creating a large potential for renewed social conflict. Second, the migration of people within and to an enlarged and united Europe, but with big differences in wages and wealth, as well as migration of firms into regions of cheaper labor in and beyond Europe as part of the globalization process, pose a major threat to established worker privileges and trade unions as the keepers of this flame in the "old" Europe.

To sum up here, three core questions will need to be answered as time goes by: (1) What is to become of the European welfare state? (2) Will the Europeans be able to maintain the level of wealth and well-being that the majority of them have achieved since World War II? (3) Will a pluralist democracy be able to contain the conflicts which will invariably result from the developments briefly described above? Easy and reliable answers are not yet available, and, depending on responses to these questions, a major impact on the international role of Europe can be expected.

Up to this point, no mention has been made of a major achievement which European states have been able to bring about after 1945, educated by the lessons of two large wars on European soil in the 20th century: the unification of Europe through the founding of the European Union. But how unified is Europe? Again, while the initial stimulus to think of a European political entity was of a political nature - the lessons from World War II to contain Germany -, the emerging thrust was an economic one and still is. Surely, Europe now has a politico-institutional structure in its own right, even if legitimation of decisions rests on frail ground, with the limited power of the European parliament. But has the subsidiarity concept underlying Europeanization that the level of the political system which is closest to the problem needing to be tackled should be responsible - led to a clear-cut division of labor and empowerment between the levels? The answer is: rather not, and European foreign policy is a perfect case in point. This frailty has contributed to the atrocities in the former Yugoslavia in the Nineties where Europe, for historical reasons and vested national interests, did not act with one voice, forcing the United States finally to intervene. This problem has again become visible in the widely differing reactions in Europe to the American decision to wage war against Iraq.

There can be little disagreement that Europe's cultural diversity is an enormous asset - incidentally also for social researchers who have a quasi-lab

before them when it comes to the various ways in which European countries have, in historical perspective, tried to cope with similar problems such as the ones originating from the times of the industrial revolution. But clearly diversity is not only an asset when it comes to decision-making and problem-solving. The European Union has now grown from 15 to 25 member states, with almost all of the new members coming from Central and Eastern Europe, and therefore with a very different political and economic legacy. On top of this, there are four applicant countries - Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and - a topic to be returned to in a moment - the highly controversial application of Turkey, adding in toto - if accepted - another 100 million people to the more than 450 million people presently living in the 25 EU member states. Little wonder, then, that this raises even more questions about the effectiveness of the political institutions of the EU; the rejection of the European Constitution by the people of The Netherlands and France gives you a sense of the problems ahead in Europe resulting from this extension.

For some time now, in European political science a debate has raged about the decline of the nation state because of European integration, but also because of the internationalization of commerce, the emergence of transnational NGOs and rapidly growing communication through the Internet - the latter even playing an important role in Jean-Marie Guéhenno's speculation about the "end of democracy". Up to this point, while there is, of course, evidence of transfers of power from European national governments to the European level, little doubt remains that the end or even the decline of the nation state is a premature conclusion. But is there at least such a thing as building up a European identity that supersedes or is on equal footing with other existing identities and might be regarded as a sine qua non condition for some kind of a European state? Survey researchers have tried to find a conclusive answer to this question, but up to now to little avail. Surely, social psychological studies have helped us to understand that a construct of one overarching identity is too simplistic and that every citizen nurtures multiple identities which all have special meaning to an individual and are activated according to situational contexts. They range from local identities with a town or a soccer club to regional, national and cultural identities and are all very important for the self-definition of the individual. Of the identities studied, European identity has been found to be the least embedded and meaningful one, and this cannot surprise anybody when one

considers - returning to this point the enormous cultural diversity that manifests itself in ethnicity, nationality, religion and - very significant - language, not to speak of intra-nation divisions such as the class cleavage. In particular, language - despite English becoming some sort of a European lingua franca especially for the elites - is still an important hindrance to the construction of a European public sphere, one of the preconditions for the growth of a European identity and for a united Europe which, in world politics, can speak with one voice and can thus be a major player jointly with the hegemonic United States, Russia and the emerging world power, China.

Thus, there is European diversity, but there is also cohesion. Europeans widely share the universal values of freedom, freedom of opinion, tolerance towards others, rejection of violence as a political option, legality and democracy, as embodiment of the will of the people expressed in regular free elections. But, historically speaking, this is a rather recent and dramatic achievement in large parts of Europe and must not be taken for granted. As one example, the recent EU enlargement does not automatically imply public acceptance of the newcomers especially among the citizens of the "old" member states as large differentials in trust towards the "new" member states indicate. But there is now also another challenge to Europe which has become clearly visible with the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, and the military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq led by the United States: terrorist acts by Islamists in the heart of Europe in Spain in 2004 and London in 2005, which, because of the counter measures taken by European governments, now even constitute a threat to established civil rights by being forced to move towards a surveillance state. One example of this is the encompassing provisions which German and international authorities are taking to prevent terrorist action during the soccer world championship in Germany in June and July 2006.

What is particularly problematic here is that, presently, terrorist attacks all over the globe can be linked mostly to a particular religion - Islam - in its extreme, violence prone interpretation by some politically-minded groups. This development has created an awareness for potential implications of this religious belief, an awareness that did not exist in Europe before.

At first sight, the number of Muslims in Europe is small: about 15 million in a Europe of about 450 million people. One has to keep in mind, though, that there are concentrations of Muslims, approximately 5 million in

France - mostly stemming from former French colonies in North Africa - and more than 3 million in Germany who come mostly from the rural parts of Turkey. In both countries, they are concentrated in metropolitan areas of the countries such as in Paris and Berlin. With this political background in mind, it cannot come as a surprise that the entry of Turkey, with a population of more than 70 million people, into the European Union has become such a controversial issue and a concern that will remain on Europe's political agenda for years to come.

There is not enough time to discuss this complex problematique in any detail. Let it suffice to mention that the in large parts wilful seclusion of Muslim communities from the majority society has shadowed for some time the view from realizing that these communities do not share all the universal values of the West, for instance, with respect to the role of women. With a particular view on the need to accept and foster multicultural identities, this potential clash of values has largely escaped public attention until Islamic belligerence threatened to make the Huntington idea of the clash of civilizations become a reality (Huntington, 1997).

I do not want to overstate this case since the majority of Muslim communities seems to take a clear stance against violence and terrorism. But if Turkish youth in Berlin cinemas get up and applaud the killing of an American officer by a Turkish secret service man, as recently happened in the movie "Valley of the Wolves", then one begins to wonder - even if one could look at this also from another perspective when in American Rambo movies it is always the good American hero who has no reservation in killing everybody who is against him. Even more reason to ponder over the issue of clash of civilizations has been created by the publication of a number of caricatures of Mohammed in a Danish newspaper a while ago; this act has caused major debates on tolerance and freedom of the press in Europe and has triggered well-organized violent demonstrations in many Islamic countries. The classical Jihad was ready to fight for Islam, but according to strict rules. The recent Jihadism, by contrast, is a very different affair: it is a war without rules, an irregular war by nonstate actors with means such as suicide bombing in numbers previously unheard of, and a broad variety of terrorist actions. This has now become a global war, in part fought on European soil, one fed by the Iraq war and the American underestimation of its consequences, the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict and - the most recent

battlefront - the Iran nuclear threat which may force Europe to behave like a world power although it has neither the military means nor the strong political will to do so.

I have been asked to speak briefly on the role of Europe in international affairs. I have approached this topic from the vantage point of whether a uniting Europe, economically strong, but politically still diverse and militarily weak, can play the role that might be expected to be in the best interest of world peace and the spreading of the democratic creed. Europe's post-war renaissance has been a great achievement, but it has also made Europeans complacent and unwilling to pay the price for credibly assuming this role. It is high time that Europe comes to its senses and takes on this responsibility although I am afraid that the available evidence points to a more skeptical direction.

References

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