

Morale & Change in the Union¹

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Historically, morale, i.e. “the condition of courage, determination, and pride in the mind(s) of a person, team, army, etc.; level of confidence”², has been, already since the early immortalised days of the mankind, the driving force of any extraordinary human achievement. The Trojan war, although motivated by purely trade and economic considerations, had to be camouflaged by a reason of honour that was the only way to enable the formation of the “Pan-ellinion” consisting of the until then independent Greek city-Kingdoms. It is thanks to such morale that the feeling of belonging to the same nation took concrete shape and got strengthened via the long pursuance and up to the realisation of the final goal. Likewise, the European Union, despite its first qualification as economic, was, since its outset, conceived as being much more than economic: “Nous ne coalisons pas des Etats, nous unissons des hommes” declared Jean Monnet, making of his statement an ever symbolic reference. “Prendre ses responsabilités quand votre objectif est d’unir l’Europe, c’est en même temps engager celles des autres, de ceux qui choisissent de travailler avec vous, et c’est encore à travers eux influencer sur le sort des homes et des femmes qu’ils déterminent à leur tour par leur action politique ou syndicale, par leurs décisions économiques ou administratives”³It was with this belief that he set up in 1955 « le Comité d’action pour les Etats-Unis d’Europe » reasoning that « Probablement seule l’idée d’une communauté pacifique de peuples pouvait réaliser ce regroupement, véritable préfiguration du milieu politique européen qui gèrera nos différentes démocraties comme une seule dans l’avenir »⁴.

So far, Jean Monnet has been justified. The European Economic Community became a European Union and a Constitution for Europe is ante portas. However, nowadays, the question arises more than ever whether this European Union is still based on a such a morale as the European Economic Community or if, on the contrary, it has become even

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² Longman, Dictionary of contemporary English, 1987

³ Jean Monnet, Mémoires, Fayard 1976, p. 598

⁴ Jean Monnet, n. 2 supra, p. 613

more economic than its predecessor, merely a kind of successful Internal Market? Does the latter and European competitiveness prevail over any other consideration, or do they both remain at the service of the attainment of the objective of the United States of Europe? Is the trajectory of European integration sufficient to consolidate the “morale” of the European Union or does Europe run the risk of watering down its belief in being a Union of peoples? What is the reason why the Union is so far from its citizens? It is not my intention to address all these fundamental considerations thoroughly, but rather to stand back from current developments with a view to contemplating how Europe could stick to its pathway by reviving its intrinsic values that have led it to today’s unprecedented success.

There is no doubt that the first period of the European integration was inspired by the “dream” of an integrated Europe. A dream that was consciously shared by the six founding member states. A dream that an integrated Europe should be based on common values, such as democracy, liberty, solidarity, peace and the respect of the human being as the cornerstone of all of them. In fact, these values reflect no less than the way of European living and thinking, i.e. the European culture-education (*paideia*)⁵. From this point of view it cannot be denied that the original foundations of the European experiment were the common values deriving from the diversity of cultures and forming the main features of a European identity: unity in diversity. All of that remained always in the sphere of ideology. Culture became a formal part of Community’s action only with the Maastricht Treaty. The European identity continues to be as vague and thorny as ever. It was, however, enshrined in the minds of the peoples and of their politicians. Equally important, Europe was seen by the outside world as forming a coherent cultural identity, despite its own theological inquiries about its final destination.

In fact it was thanks to this strong unwritten, and almost unspoken, latent cultural feeling that the Six were eager to get their project off the ground by making the necessary compromises in the name of the “interest of the Community”. An interest that should each time be defined by whom? Although the decision making process was, and still is, based on the Institutional balance principle, it is clear that at this first creative period of European construction the Commission exerted a predominant role, as *primus inter pares*⁶. This was to a large extent thanks to the enthusiasm of its technocrat-bureaucrats inspired by the target to create a Europe reflecting the common interest of all. The small number of member states

⁵ Isocrates, *Panygerique*, IY, 50

⁶ Since the classical principle of division of powers is not applicable at the European level, the Institutional balance principle refers only to the political Institutions; hence, the above assertion does not affect the extraordinary role of the Court of Justice of the European Communities either consolidating or even innovating (for instance, primacy of community law, direct effect etc.).

and the visionary determination of their politicians not only allowed the objective definition of the Community's interest by the Commission, but it was at the same time a determining factor for the respect in principle of the great majority of the Commission's proposals without major difficulties. At the end of the day the Commission did exert its right of initiative and the member states did accept its proposals respectfully. The belief of belonging to the same culture and, subsequently, the willingness to attain the common goal created the conditions for reaching compromises, indispensable for the way ahead, as well as for trust and mutual respect. Without that it wouldn't have been possible to define and follow the interests of the Union each time.

This is not any more the case. Today the Commission, rarely takes new initiatives. Instead, it limits itself to the management of the existing *acquis communautaire* which, nevertheless, is mostly bound up in the comitology rules. New important initiatives derive nowadays rather from the European Parliament or the Council by way of a decision inviting the Commission, according to the Treaty establishing the European Community, to consider and propose new policies. It is their trends that are the origin of new Commission proposals⁷. At the end of the day member states are now more present, more active, more influential. Decisions are not any more taken basically in "Brussels"; national capitals have become equally important. "Brussels" is what it was plus the national capitals either each of them or forming changing alliances depending on the case, blocking minorities or overwhelming majorities. The Community method of searching for compromises in the name of the interest of the Union has been replaced by the right of the stronger or more effective. The Union is not driven by the common goal, but by the short term prevailing interests of its member states in getting a majority in the Council. Neither the Commission nor the European Parliament automatically manage to counterbalance this trend. All in all, a merely technocratic consideration by the most supra-national institution of the Union has finally been replaced by a merely political approach, either in anticipation of, or in conformity, with the political wishes of the other two institutions.

It is true that the European trajectory has seen plenty of ups and downs. Nonetheless, the average direction was steadily upwards till the turn of the century. As from the Prodi Commission the decline has started. Its official name is "Administrative Reform". If one questions what was the reason why the Union managed to keep on going deeper and wider despite all, the answer could be twofold. First, "morale" was there as a kind of shield to resist against the "downfalls" and get started again in the

⁷ Spyros A. Pappas, *The institutional alteration of the right of initiative of the European Commission in Problèmes d'interprétation à la mémoire de Constantinos N. Kakouris*, ed. Sakkoulas & Bruylant, 2003, p.673 and in *Futurum*

upwards direction. Second, behind each “revival” there was always a specific motivation. The first decades of creation were followed up by the magnificent Delors project, the renewal of the European contract under the heading of “1992”: the formation of the largest ever Internal Market without barriers. The introduction of the Euro was a continuation, while the Santer Agenda 2000 opened the way for the United States of Europe. Nevertheless, it should be noted that from the Six to the Fifteen it was natural that compromises would become more difficult, yet still feasible. From the 50ties to the 90ties national Administrations got acquainted with the Byzantine community procedures and were therefore more effective than previously. National politicians begun acknowledging the political value of the Union for their internal political needs and, thus, started being more active at the European level. The maturing of the sui generis structure of the Union made of the European Parliament more of a real “Parliament”.

This is the context in which the Commission, this admirable institution that led the Union to its success, found itself after almost 50 years of super-activism ground between two stones. One from the national level and the other from the European Parliament. Instead of analysing this new environment, that was after all the natural evolution of its success, an oversimplified political game led the member states and the European Parliament to the reduction of power from the Commission based, unfortunately, on criticism against it. Lack of transparency, lack of accountability, democratic deficit and so on and so forth. Was it an objective criticism? Certainly, perfection is always to be attained. Certainly, there was room for improvement. However, this was not the point. Without attempting to apologise for the Commission, it could easily be pointed out that there is hardly an equivalent to it as far as transparency is concerned. From the White Papers to the final decision there are plenty of possibilities to get the information, to be listened to and be taken into account. No other more participatory example could be compared with the European decision making process. Still, a White Paper on a New European Governance⁸ had to be launched, as if there were no openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness and coherence (what about the inter-service consultation?) at all. This unequivocal formulation was rather seen as a general blame against an institution, which had striven hard to defend the interest of the Union, only at the costs of very minor irregularities. However, the final cut was delivered by this reform that did not deserve its name. A reform should be understood as the redefinition of the objective and the administrative adjustment to it or straightaway the adjustment to the new circumstances. Instead the recent (by name) reform is mainly limited to internal procedures, while not touching upon the question of a new role for the Commission. For instance, should the Commission stick to the exclusive right of initiative?

⁸ COM(2001) 428 final, 25.7.2001

What should be the new role of the Commission in the search for political compromises? Should it be like before or with the maturity of the other institutions and the size of the Union should it have a different role? What about the role of the Commission as guardian of the Treaty? Shouldn't it be reinforced? What about the implementation of Community policies by the member states and their management? Shouldn't the Commission improve and coordinate them? What about European careers? Should it remain a numerus clausus creating thus a kind of distance from the national administrations or should it take the way towards a more integrated European administration by drawing from national administrations?

Questions of this kind were not raised and the reform was understood as a punishment looking to cut down the courage of its servants. Among other novelties it introduced less favourable conditions for the staff as if the best should not be stimulated to work for the Union. A lack of interest to work for the institutions is already noticeable. More internal procedures were introduced, be it annual plans and reports or checks making of the Commission a real bureaucracy in the bad connotation, creating more internal business, management of the management, instead of letting its civil servants focus on the service of the European goals as before in the spirit of the (French) public service mission. And, even worse, by introducing in the system uncertainty in the name of rotation, there is no more independence. For instance, a director general is not any more untouchable as before, since from the moment of their appointment they have to anticipate the conditions for the next personal move within the institution. From the top to the bottom of the hierarchy personal considerations and politics prevail over the concern of attaining the goal. The feeling of serving a mission is over, the morale is not there.

Mutatis mutandis similar misgivings exist in the minds of the majority of the European citizens. The distance between them and the Union keeps on growing. However, this should not be taken as a sign of lack of morale. Morale is somehow alive deep in them. This should rather be taken as a sign of their concern. The Union is more than the Internal Market, especially when it comes to Globalisation. European citizens are demanding a new political project to revive their morale. If the common currency, the euro, was the first tangible proof of the European identity it has to be followed by more. The experiment has not yet been accomplished.

The Barroso Commission signalled a new target by re-invigorating the Lisbon goal to make the EU "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion" by 2010. This is an encouraging message from the point of view that there is at least a clear cut objective that would regroup all efforts for its attainment. This

is important. Nevertheless, the question arises whether it is enough or appropriate? Although it is of paramount importance in getting everybody on the same tracks, it may not be sufficient. More is needed and this more goes beyond economics. Competitiveness should not be a target in itself, but the vehicle of other more fundamental and viable objectives⁹. Culture is here key. Quality next to quantity. The European project goes beyond economics . Is competitiveness understood in this way? It remains to be proven. First signs give rise to some doubts. The switch of audiovisual policy from its mother-home which was Culture for the sake of content, to the Information Society DG where technology comes first is surely not a move in the right direction. Furthermore, if morale does exist in the European citizens it is a necessity for a good follow up to re-establish the morale and the pride in the officials of the Commission in its new role in a more integrated Europe. Will the Constitution for Europe give the answer to this desideratum? Maybe it is time for more courage, for a revolutionary vision. Compromises do not lead ahead. They just let a system survive, but for how long?

⁹ "Competitiveness [...] is not an end in itself," explained J.-C. Juncker in his capacity as President of the Council for the 1st semester 2005. "If Europe wants to be strong, she needs three things that go together: improved competitiveness, greater social cohesion and a more balanced ecological environment."