

**"Reuniting Europe: Our Historic Mission"**

**Jacques DELORS**

Aspen Institute

Wallenberg Lecture

14 November 1999

Only the original speech as delivered is authentic.

© Jacques Delors, Notre Europe, November 1999.

With the collapse of the Soviet empire, History is once again on the march in Europe. But although the fall of the Berlin Wall truly paved the way for the reunification of Europe, the ten years which have since elapsed have been merely what might be termed a "transitional" stage towards the market economy and democracy. For many of the European countries in question the future is still uncertain.

Today, we no longer speak of the "other Europe" as we used to do, but of the CECC countries – the central and eastern European countries - and I fear that that jargon betrays our underlying feeling that those countries are not yet part of our world. Much remains to be done and - let us not delude ourselves - the goal is not simply to enlarge Europe as we did in western Europe when the Community increased from six to nine and subsequently to ten, twelve and fifteen Member States. Our historic mission is to reunify Europe behind its common values, while respecting its diversity.

When History began again in Berlin, it did so in its own haphazard way. It is for us to give it a meaning, failing which we can only be its playthings and, in all likelihood, its victims.

This is why we must be absolutely aware of each of those countries' own individual personalities and also of the marks left by forty years of totalitarianism and an economic and social organisation which was at once centralised, paternalistic and inefficient. In that regard, we must speak in terms of the cultural dimension of enlargement.

All those nations - some large or small to varying degrees – have memories and a genetic inheritance of a whole history of tragedies and caesuras. That geopolitical dimension should be borne in mind when considering the great ideal of peace which is the centrepiece of the European edifice.

By stressing this change of scale - since we must now think in terms of some thirty Member States in a Europe whose eastern boundaries will probably remain uncertain for some considerable time – it is my intention to emphasise the burden of the heritage that we shall have to assume, because we shall have to reach beyond all the tragic events and errors of the dying century or risk failure. We shall have to transcend this never-ending European civil war which has twice become a world war and subsequently fed on the Cold War between the two superpowers. The question is whether we can reach beyond the vicissitudes of diplomacy between the two wars, with the failure of the Treaty of Versailles, the Spanish Civil War, the shame of Munich and the shock of the German-Soviet pact, in other words, whether we can transcend the powerlessness of the large and the small European States, who were the supposed victors, and that of those on the losing side and recreate, between them, order and peace on the continent.

What sort of political project, I almost said what marriage contract, is acceptable to or better, desired by the candidate countries? And, since it is not possible to duck the issue, what institutional arrangements are best suited to turn this greater Europe into an efficient, transparent and democratic whole?

## 1. The cultural dimension

Raise the question of Europe's cultural dimension and you also have to raise that of the European identity or, more reasonably, identities, without shrinking from shaking the kaleidoscope and bringing strong, often contradictory, pictures into view.

Is it possible to reunite Europe without pondering on the European identity and without trying to identify what conception Europeans should have of themselves? Frankly, I do not think so, even if this undertaking turns out to be risky and difficult.

Without a doubt, what is special about Europe is to be found in its diversity, its contrasts and its contradictions - whether we consider its languages, religions, philosophies, social organisation or, on a more down-to-earth level, its climates, agricultural systems, cuisines and lifestyles - but that should not dissuade us from undertaking the exercise. For the fainthearted, I would mention a few facts. All Europeans travel in the same aircraft, drive the same cars on the same motorways, stop at the same hotels and spend their holidays on the same beaches. What is more, they increasingly eat the same food, watch the same television programmes, share the same fears, rush to see the same films, are keen on the same sports, wear the same clothes and enjoy the same books. They rely on the same sources of information and inspiration and have at least one common language, even if it is only a type of pidgin bearing only a remote relationship to the language of Shakespeare or Queen Victoria.

But, you may object, this reflects increasing globalisation rather than any convergence of lifestyles as a result of some sort of European miracle. While granting this freely, I suggest we take our quest for a European identity further. At the risk of annoying some of you, I might be tempted to point to our common heritage: our Judeo-Christian civilization and our democracy inspired by ancient Greece, Roman law and the Enlightenment. Not to mention the contribution of invaders and occupiers, such as the Muslims, who have left us eloquent witness of their discoveries and religions. And today, we co-exist with them once again as a result of the inflows of immigrants over the last fifty years.

But let us go further. It seems to me that the soul of Europe emerged at the famous Hague Congress of 1948 where political and intellectual leaders came together to militate for a united Europe. I shall take up just some of the founding characteristics of the European spirit which emerged there.

In the words of Hendrik Brugmans, who later went on to be the first Principal of the College of Europe in Bruges, "Europe is a land of men continuously struggling against each other". "Europe" he said, "is the place where no certainty is accepted as truth, unless it is constantly being rediscovered. Other continents boast of their efficiency, but it is the European climate which makes life dangerous, adventurous, magnificent and tragic, and consequently worth living".

In our quest for an identity, we must look both backwards to the past and forwards to the future and it seems to me that the feeling of being the continent of doubt and of perpetual self-questioning is an exceptional asset which Europeans can use in order to respond to the challenge before us. That challenge is how to adapt our principles and models based on striking a balance between society and the individual or – as I would prefer – between the community and the individual in the light of the changing realities that we face.

But is there a European view of the world? Faced with a greater Europe, we cannot regard this question as a luxury, since it has become less and less clear with each successive enlargement what common objectives Europe has.

By pushing its borders further to the east and the south-east - even though it does not seek to reach the Urals - Europe has opened up to the nations, often small ones, which have arisen, as others have arisen elsewhere in the west, during this millennium, but which, as States, have suffered all sorts of vicissitudes, the most recent of which, under the aegis of the Soviets, was not the smallest.

The legacy of the Cold War is a heavy one. This can be seen in the case of Germany with the lack of understanding which continues to exist between people in the east and west. This is so in spite of the fact that Germany consists of one people with a common language and a shared history. At European level it must not be overlooked that although the two halves of Europe were arbitrarily separated for the fifty years, they less artificially split during the preceding centuries owing to the quirks of geography and history: first the schism of the east with the separation of the eastern churches from that of Rome and then the Ottoman conquest and finally the differences in economic development. Consequently, in order to reunite Europe, mental and psychological barriers, just as much as political or customs borders, will have to be dismantled.

The European Union has to take in old nations but young States marked by discontinuity, whose ethnic and political frontiers do not always coincide and whose desire to assert their sovereignty in their new-found freedom is particularly acute given that they have only just emerged from a regime of limited sovereignty imposed by the Soviet Union.

Although their desire for change is great, their capacity to deal with it is not unbounded. They are still torn between two forms of integration, the European and the trans-Atlantic. Initially, the attraction of the dynamism of the US economy was often irresistible, whereas the crisis affecting the social systems of western European democracies gave them no incentive to imitate unreservedly models showing such signs of strain. But the eastern European countries are attached, perhaps more strongly than we are, to the welfare state. It remains, both for them and for us, to find out how to reform it.

As for us, we should admit that we have scarcely sought to develop our ability to understand - even less take into account of - ways of thinking different from our own. We can hardly be surprised if misunderstandings remain between the applicant and existing Member States of the European Union. Instead, let us try, in the words of the Czech Senator Josef Jarab, to "recognise our differences so that we may respect them and learn from them".

We are doubtless rather too blasé today to believe in the "European Dream" as we did in the aftermath of the War. Nevertheless, Europe needs its dream and, without it, renaissance and reunification would be illusory. Eastern and central Europeans, being less privileged than us and less concerned to protect a comfort which they do not yet enjoy, are more open to that "European dream". But they want to play a part in it. They will not be reduced to recipients of western advice and nostrums. They assert that they too have something to add to the construction of our common home, and this is only right and proper.

May I add, without wishing to shock our German friends, that it may be because they neglected that aspiration that the West Germans did not find all the cooperation they had hoped for from

their eastern compatriots despite all their financial assistance and sacrifices.

## **2. The geopolitical dimension**

In creating the European Community, by way of the Coal and Steel Community and later the Common Market, the principal objective of the Six was peace. This reflected the cries of "Never Again" in the immediate post-war period and a determination to banish the horrors of the two world wars forever.

The tragedies, not only of Bosnia and Kosovo, but also of Chechnya, are there to remind us – not that we need reminding - that Franco-German reconciliation and the formal recognition by Germany of its eastern border with Poland on the Oder-Neisse line – no matter how decisive - do not suffice to maintain peace throughout Europe. At the continental level, peace is still therefore the Union's primary objective and "Never Again" is as applicable today to the Balkans as it was yesterday to other European theatres.

The need for peace and security is very strong in the countries seeking to join the European Union, if only because many of them have never felt that they were masters of their own destinies. Hence the attraction that we have already mentioned for some form of Atlantic integration and the race between NATO and the European Union, in which NATO appears to be the only organisation capable of meeting in the immediate future the requirement for security of countries which have not forgotten the lessons of the inter-war years or the ineffectiveness of the undertakings given at that time by France and Great Britain.

By joining NATO, Poles, Czechs and Hungarians felt that they had got at least part of what they were looking for when they applied to join the European Union.

With the exception of two countries with large populations, Poland and Romania, we have to talk and then negotiate with small or medium-sized nations. Their mentality and their memory of the past are not the same as ours, as Milan Kundera, for example, has pointed out.

"It often seems to me", he said, "that the known European culture hides another unknown culture, that of the small nations ... We imagine that small countries are bound to imitate the larger ones. This is an illusion. Indeed, they may be very different ... The Europe of small nations is a different Europe, it has a different outlook and its opinions often constitute a true counterbalance to those of the Europe of the large nations".

"Nations know", he added, "that their existence can be called into question at any time and that they may disappear ..."

That analysis strengthens our resolve to carry out our political project which is to secure peace by guaranteeing frontiers and mutual understanding among peoples.

The question which inevitably arises when that geopolitical dimension is considered is that of Europe's eastern borders and its institutional relations with the countries which will share them from now on. This faces us once again with the problem of identity which we raised earlier, in so far as it is possible to ask what exactly is the identity of a Europe which is not aware of its geographical limits and is incapable of distinguishing itself from the countries which surround it for hundreds or thousands of kilometers.

Is Russia European? That question has been asked for centuries - both in Moscow and elsewhere in Europe. But is it necessary to answer this age-old question in order to be convinced that the European Union should have very close relations with Russia and the Ukraine? I do not think so. A great nation such as Russia, whose strategic importance was made clear again recently in Kosovo, needs to feel at home in the great European peninsula. But to achieve this, it is not necessary for Russia to be an integral part of the European Union. On the other hand, we should conclude more substantial cooperation agreements with Russia than the ones in force at present.

History and its lessons tell us so. The desire for peace, too. Also the dictates of realism. There will be no lasting peace in the greater Europe of thirty or more countries if Russia does not feel that it is associated with priority objectives and if it is unable to share our responsibilities for making our global village a more acceptable one for all, where human rights are respected more and, to a certain extent, there is greater solidarity. Leaving aside all their differences and domestic quarrels, all the Russian leaders I have met have insisted that that Russia is a great power and, as such, must have its say.

It has not been easy and it will not always be easy in future to make progress in this direction, witness Russia's economic difficulties and the tragic events now unfolding in Chechnya.

Let us not forget that we are on a knife-edge between respect for our values and a necessary political realism. Moreover, we should not forget our other neighbours in greater Europe who also want to enter the virtuous circle of political peace and economic modernization. Foremost amongst them is the Ukraine, which is so close to us in terms of culture and history. Let us give that country the attention it deserves.

And what about Turkey, you may well ask .. ? If only because of the undertakings we gave Turkey, I cannot see how we can fail to open our borders to her, even if her membership of the European Union manifestly also depends upon her satisfying the general conditions required of all applicant countries, in particular a fully pluralistic democracy and complete respect for human rights. In order to avoid any tension or frustration, we should implement all the commitments we have already undertaken vis-à-vis Turkey.

### 3. The political project

It is not possible to discuss this subject without being clear and frank. In a European Union of thirty Member States, we cannot retain the same objectives and aspirations set out by the Maastricht Treaty since, once the number of partners around the table have increased, the differences in perception between Member States make it very difficult to reach agreement on common actions, in point of both the means and the objectives. Look at the difficulties already experienced by the European Union of fifteen in implementing all the provisions of the Maastricht Treaty.

This is obvious in connection with the two areas in which new developments in the building of a united Europe are expected - foreign policy and defence, or justice and police affairs. The discussions under way in these two areas make this abundantly clear. The delay in developing these policies is not attributable to the unsuitability of the institutions, as is sometimes claimed, but to political - and sometimes philosophical - visions which translate differently even within the Europe of fifteen Member States, that is, the idea which each of us has of the world role of our own country, and also to diverging conceptions of the exercise of sovereignty.

In day-to-day relations between Member States, the most important thing is to give political responses to certain basic questions. For example: who wants to take on the means to implement what are known as the Petersberg missions, participation in peace-keeping operations, repatriation of refugees, humanitarian aid and, if need be, intervention in a crisis so as to restore a peace?

Or how to quantify the European military effort in relation to the Atlantic Alliance and do we agree to share the burden if we really want a European pillar for the Atlantic Alliance? Does this entail - and it should always be borne in mind - the possibility of the European Union specifically carrying out Petersberg missions? Or again, in the field of justice, are we in basic agreement on the policies to implement jointly so as, for example, to set up transnational teams of police officers or to terminate certain money-laundering practices?

Rather than a predetermined definition of the institutional framework, it seems to me to be important for those concerned to agree on a "Community method", that is to say, to make use of what I call the "institutional triangle" - the Council, the Commission and the European Parliament - under the direction, as it should be, of the European Council, that is to say, the Summit of Heads of State and of Government, and subject to the supervision of the Court of Justice. Experience has shown that when it diverges from that method, Europe gets nowhere.

It remains to be seen whether the method will remain effective when there are twenty-five or thirty around the table. I have good reason to doubt it: at fifteen, taking the views around the table in the Council of Ministers takes forever and the participants tend to get up and leave once they have spoken in order to speak to the press without waiting for the end of the debate. You can imagine what that will be like with thirty! ... In truth, the whole operation of the Council of Ministers needs to be rethought if we want citizens to be able to follow the decision-making process, which is lost on them in the labyrinth of a procedure which may take months, if not years, with drafts circulating from committee to committee before they are examined by the appropriate bodies of the Parliament and come back at last to the Council.

I do not believe either in the virtues of the so-called ratchet theory according to which political progress emerges as if by magic from economic integration. I have therefore never believed that

the Economic and Monetary Union - for which I worked so hard - would, as some claimed, serve as a springboard for political union.

No, we have reached the stage of development of European affairs where we cannot avoid a direct political approach to the issues. This is why I keep asking the same question: "What is it we want to do together? How far are we prepared to go to achieve together the things which matter to us and which we cannot, or can no longer do individually?"

I asked that question in my capacity of President of the Commission before the last enlargement, because I considered, not without reason, that it had to be answered before the three applicant countries at that time, Austria, Sweden and Finland, acceded. Those three countries' objectives did not always coincide with those stated by the Twelve, particularly in view of their neutral status. I fear that I was preaching to deaf ears. It was as if the question was taboo, because by asking it one risked offending one party or another or harming a sort of blissful optimism which had to be preserved.

For my part, I still think that it is better to ask the real questions rather than sweeping them under the carpet and that there are fewer risks in revealing any potential disagreements before welcoming new partners than after having recruited them. It should therefore not come as a surprise that I have persisted, in public and in private, in asking men and women from the countries of central and eastern Europe, both political leaders and representatives of civil society and intellectuals, what objectives they hope to achieve by joining the Community.

Far be it from me - as you will appreciate - to attempt to dissuade them, as I told you in my introductory remarks. I am convinced that it is our historic mission to reunite Europeans in a single political entity, but I should like us to agree on the content of the marriage contract before choosing its general form. That is to say, before we define the institutions which will enable us to work together, since in order for those institutions to allow us to bring a joint project to fruition, that project must have been defined with sufficient precision.

This is also true of the States already in the Union at least as much as it is for those knocking on the door. Do we want to be faithful to the European contract which I would sum up as follows: competition which stimulates, cooperation which strengthens and solidarity which unites? Do we have the will to give the European Union the means this contract requires? If so, I say without hesitation that the European budget will have to exceed the limits imposed by Agenda 2000 to which the German Presidency got the Fifteen to agree last spring. What I would like to see is all the conclusions drawn from the principle affirmed in his time by Hans Genscher, according to which no Member State can be made to go further than it can or wishes to do so, but that a State not wanting to go further may not prevent the others from doing so.



#### **4. No realistic project without viable institutions**

If agreement is reached on the preliminary questions which I have put to you, it will then remain to distinguish clearly between three complementary approaches.

First, it is possible to improve the way in which the Union currently functions without reforming the Treaty. The institutional triangle must be set in motion again.

In parallel, a dialogue should be opened on what the marriage contract for a Europe of thirty could realistically be.

Finally, the political and institutional conditions will have to be fulfilled so that a vanguard may move further forward with a view to political integration.

But prior to that, since events are sometimes our masters, we – together with the countries concerned - must take up the challenge of the successive crises in south-eastern Europe. After Kosovo, we are faced with the urgent need to find a path which will lead us step by step towards reconciliation, stable frontiers and peace. We need a clear plan more than we need a multitude of new or old organisations jostling each other and getting in each others' way.

All things being equal, we have a precedent: Robert Schuman's initiative of 1950 when he suggested to yesterday's enemies that they should pool what were then the sinews of war: coal and steel. A similar inspiration can guide us in an approach by which we can encourage the peoples and countries concerned to work together, to develop trade in goods, services and capital and to adopt a minimum set of rules and institutions which will promote such development. Our financial and technical aid would be conditional on progressing towards such a flexible form of organisation with the help of all the countries in the region, including Bulgaria and Romania. Those two countries would moreover be assured that their participation in this "Balkan Association" would not in any way delay their actual accession to the European Union. Be sure of this: History will judge us on our capacity to introduce stable frontiers, protection for minorities and respect for human rights into the region for the first time, while, at the same time, those countries embark on an essential drive for economic and social modernisation.

To return to the institutional triangle, I would observe in passing that the European Parliament, endowed with its new powers under the Amsterdam Treaty, must use them reasonably and take care that its citizens are brought closer to the European adventure. As for the European Commission, it will reassume its former role as a motivating force only if it makes the full use of the potential afforded by its members acting in concert and if it shows Heads of Government how useful it can be by helping them find the dynamic compromises which will advance the building of Europe. If it does this, it will be able to propose advances and show what the European interest should be through its right of initiative.

It is therefore up to the Council of Ministers to reform itself accordingly. It is now overburdened with a plethora of tasks, which is reflected in a burdening of the European Council, which cannot exercise its directing role. It is for this reason that I proposed that the Ministers responsible for European Affairs should meet in Brussels every fortnight with the full confidence of their governments. In cooperation with the European Commission, they would clarify the agenda, set priorities, apply subsidiarity and inform public opinion about what the European Union was hoping to achieve. Transparency and simplicity are vital assets if

democracy and the active participation of citizens are to make progress.

Once work on the building of Europe has been set back in motion in this way, the central question of defining the project for the greater Europe will be addressed: what do we want and how much can we do together? If there is a belief in the virtues of a large area which will enable trade and cultural exchanges to develop, then we have a realistic design which could form on a solid humane footing the foundation for peace, mutual understanding between peoples and the adaptation of the economies to the great changes taking place. The title European Union is perfectly appropriate since it is a question of uniting peoples while respecting the Nation States, reaping the benefits of free trade and cooperation and supporting each other's efforts thanks to the added value of common policies. The renewed institutions of the Treaty of Rome would be able to manage this great ensemble.

This grand ambition is however unlikely to satisfy those who remain faithful to the ideal and the political philosophy of the founding fathers of Europe: Monnet, Schuman, Adenauer, de Gasperi, Spaak ... The new treaty should therefore enable a vanguard to go forward further and faster. This vanguard should be permanently open to those who might wish to join it some day. The idea is to carry on down the road already embarked upon towards economic and monetary integration, social and environmental development, the creation of a European task force to carry out the Petersberg missions, the pursuit of joint actions in the area of foreign policy and the establishment of an area of human security ... That vanguard must have its own institutions in order to avoid any confusion. To my mind, therefore, the system of closer cooperation provided for in the Amsterdam Treaty is not capable of affording a good solution.

\* \* \*

However, these considerations of an institutional nature must not distract us from our key concern. I witness the frustration of candidate countries getting to grips with the voluminous *acquis communautaire* which we are pressing them to incorporate into their own legislation. This is an enormous task for countries which have lived in the radically different context of ultra-centralised economies.

This calls to mind the proposal made in 1990 to create a confederation of European countries without delay or any further ado. François Mitterand had sketched out the project, but the idea – doubtless ill-defined and badly proposed – came to naught. The idea though was attractively simple: to show those countries that they were members of a large European family and that even if they could not accede to the single market they could cooperate on a regular basis with the Member States of the European Union on the major questions relating to their internal and external security.

Without harking back, believe me, to what might have been, I think that a political gesture of that nature would still be welcome today. It would not be necessary to create new institutions or to strip the Council of Europe or the OCSE of their prerogatives. It would merely be a matter of opening our arms to our eastern and central European brothers who are ending up by doubting our political will. I will conclude by repeating that the reunification of Europe is our primary historic duty.