Notre Europe

ETUDES & RECHERCHES

Reaction for *Notre Europe* to Andrew Moravcsik's article: « What can We learn from the Collapse of the European Constitutional Project? »

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I agree with Andy Moravscik that more "participation" is not, in itself, a cure for what ails Europe. I've always regarded the "democracy deficit" as a symptom rather than a cause of the underlying problems with political integration in Europe. And I can't dispute Moravscik's underlying point that people would argue less about the EU if they took less notice of it.

But I don't agree that Europe will achieve stability by disaggregating the constitutional treaty into smaller pieces and calling them "adjustments." European integration flourished in the decades when economic growth and international stability - imposed by the clarifying simplicities of the Cold War - had narrowed the range of relevant policy debate in Europe. I don't think that is where Europe is today. In consequence, I don't think we can expect Europeans to continue to defer to policies presented as the fruits of "consensus" or technical expertise - rather than disputable political decisions, forcing attention to the underlying question, who decides?

Start with the economy. The core states, France, Germany and Italy, have been plagued by low growth and high unemployment for more than a decade. Moravscik may be right that the EU itself does not prevent governments in these countries from undertaking reforms that would alter their economic prospects. But there is little political support in these countries for paring welfare spending and labor market controls in ways that might help. Voters in these countries want more protection, not less - from low-cost producers in Asia and from immigrant workers, competing for jobs in Europe.

It may be demagogic to blame continuing economic problems on "Brussels" or on actual EU regulations. But opposition to the constitutional treaty was denounced as demagogic by most politicians and most news commentators in France and the Netherlands last year. Voters were not swayed by such appeals to higher reason. Moravscik seems to assume that what is reasonable to social scientists will prove reasonable to European voters. I do not think the record of European politics in the Twentieth Century bears out this complacent view.

Of course, economic stress on today's Europeans is much less than what their parents and grandparents faced before the Second World War. But one should still ask whether the accumulated treaty provisions that make up the European Union - technical, obscure, intricate as they are and never previously exposed to great challenge - hold even as much claim on people's loyalties as the pre-war liberal constitutions that were so easily swept aside in the core European states.

One needn't take an apocalyptic view to see that European institutions are exposed to very real and serious challenge. Already there is talk in Italy about withdrawing from the Euro - which might indeed be helpful, by allowing a devaluation of Italy's huge public debt. Withdrawal by one nation would almost certainly provoke debate about withdrawals by others. And then participation in the "Euro," today's most visible symbol of commitment to a common European future, would appear as a mere idiosyncrasy, a bit of institutional debris from a deluded past.

Then there are all the challenges of security outside the realm of economics. Moravscik refers to proposed constitutional provisions creating an EU "foreign minister" as merely "clarifying bureaucratic responsibility for foreign policy." To have a serious foreign policy, Europe would need to have the capacity to deploy European military force, which would, in turn, require some form of serious European military force in being and some adequate provision for financing such a force. The constitutional treaty is artfully vague on whether a "common foreign and security policy" will have such resources behind it. But these are not "bureaucratic" questions.

Suppose that a revived Russia seems more of a threat to the Baltic states or to other new EU members in Eastern Europe. Why suppose that the different nations of Europe will have the same inclinations or priorities about how to respond - any more than they did when it came to the Anglo-American war against Saddam Hussein (or the ensuing terrorist insurgency)?

What if (as seems likely) there are more terror attacks or more riots in European cities? What if different governments want to pursue different sorts of security measures in response? What if they have different priorities in balancing security with civil liberties or obligations to asylum seekers or immigrants? If there is more public concern about security, will be there be more public patience for European-wide measures, with all their attendant compromises and complications to accommodate the different priorities of so many member states? It will not satisfy critics to appeal to the "clarifying" standards of "bureaucratic responsibilty."

It is telling, after all, that surveys still find high support in Europe for the United Nations, more so than for any level of government within Europe. The UN could not stop the United States and its partners (including many EU states) from invading Iraq. Neither could it assure support to the stabilization of a new democracy thereafter. The UN could not disarm Hizbollah in Lebanon nor stop

the Taliban resurgence in Afghanistan nor even diminish the continuing slaughter in Darfur. Never mind. It is a beautiful dream and makes no demands on Europeans.

Europeans might stop worrying about EU constitutional formalities, but that won't make them feel secure. It might make the European Union seem less exposed to challenge - but only because it has become something like the UN, something which stands for high ideals of no particular relevance to actual political challenges.