

# Euroskepticism: Pathology or Reason?

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by Jeremy Black

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“I tell you, Poirot, nothing’s more difficult nowadays than the question of allies. They can change overnight.”<sup>1</sup>

The complaint, by the fictional Sir Roderick Horsefield to the famous detective, captures an element of the problem of alliances. They involve not simply a tussle of interests but also serious issues of comprehension because, whatever the rhetoric of shared values, there are differences. These become greatly magnified by the habit of extrapolating differences onto the background of two different states, rather than understanding them, more appropriately, in terms of the continuum of values present in most states.

Of late, American public debate has been dissatisfied with most allies. Those allies in the Middle East are presented as both adopting inappropriate policies and as being actively or passively unhelpful. Variants of this criticism have been made about Egypt, Israel, Pakistan and Turkey.

There has also been much criticism of European policies, not least at the time of the Iraq crisis. Most of this criticism has been directed at France. From a different direction, Britain has received considerable criticism. This article addresses American criticism of British Euroskepticism. This is pertinent because much of the American establishment sees European unification as an inevitable – and positive – process, and lacks an understanding of this project’s flaws from an historical perspective.

It is indeed far from easy to write on this matter for a largely American audience, because Americans tend to view Europe both as the relevant unit for analysis and as the goal of an historical process. Sometimes, it is as if we are dealing with Marxists who, allegedly knowing the future, have scant patience with the present if it does not conform to the rules of historical inevitability.

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<sup>1</sup> Agatha Christie, *Third Girl*, first published 1966 (London: Fontana, 1968 edition), p. 103.

Thus, Ronald Granieri, in his interesting and clearly argued presentation in this issue, does not doubt the correct path:

it is those same Euroskeptics who have stood in the way of the political integration that would have granted Brussels the legitimacy it lacks . . . If Europeans hope to speak with one voice . . . then they need to take the necessary steps in that direction.

This statement, however, ignores the existence (and deficiencies) of the European Parliament, and fails to address the extent to which much of Europe's population appears to prefer to speak in their national forums and treat coherence at the continental level as a secondary consideration. Granieri seems to think that it is the fault of the "Anglo-Saxon Euroskeptics," a term that does not do justice to the diversity of British society. In doing so, he ignores the extent of skepticism elsewhere. The British public was not given the vote on the 2005 constitution: the Dutch and French did that. At other times, the Danes, Irish and Norwegians have all voted against aspects of the European project. To treat Euroskepticism largely, or wholly, in terms of Britain is factually inaccurate. It is also an all-too-convenient rhetorical device tapping a familiar critique of Britain as isolationist.

The idea of an inevitable agglomeration appears particularly bizarre in a Europe that is steadily fracturing with the creation of new states, most recently Montenegro in 2006 and Kosovo in 2008. Spain opposed recognizing the latter, because it feared that the Basque country and/or Catalonia might follow, while an independent Scotland or a division of Belgium are both serious prospects. Scotland is governed by a party pledged to a referendum on independence, which it supports.

From the perspective of a one-voice prospectus for Europe, this perpetual splitting is troubling, if not redundant. It certainly serves notice about the strength of nationalism,<sup>2</sup> and, thus, of the extent to which Europe as a government system will only work if able to co-operate with this nationalism, and not if it ignores it, which is the current policy, not least with the stress on an *ersatz* nationalism.

Americans tend to treat Euroskepticism as a cranky idiosyncrasy, rather than what in fact it is, a rational perspective focusing on history and the national interest. Indeed, the tensions between Britain's national interest and the European project, with its very different set of premises, are historically grounded. The European Union appeared to provide a permanent institutional solution to the conflicts and tensions that undermined stability in Continental Europe, but the forces that created those conflicts have passed, and the solution to them itself presents a new set of problems.

<sup>2</sup>The extensive literature includes Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism* (London, 1960); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford, 1983); Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford, 1986); E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn, Cambridge, 1992); John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn, Manchester, 1993).

Two different views can be advanced. First, I will note the reasons for British difference and, secondly, I will discuss the European Union's deficiencies. We must recognize Britain's global power, and the degree to which this has led not only to a profound functional difference between Britain and Continental Europe, in terms, for example, of the importance of trans-oceanic trade and empire to Britain,<sup>3</sup> but also to a more lasting cultural and ideological inheritance of difference. This inheritance includes a democratic character to British political culture that is not shared on most of the continent.

Discussing these points does not simply entail looking back and ignoring considerations of present functionality, but the latter are operative when they can draw on notions and practices of consent that rest on historically-grounded identity. This is a challenge to American policymakers who wish to either neglect these senses of identity or to overawe them when they seek to advance American national interests, most conspicuously in the case of Turkish entry into the European Union.

In part, there is a need to consider the complex overlays of identity and the extent to which these, indeed, constitute political culture. In Britain, for example, there has been both exceptionalism and close contacts with other European states over the centuries. This is possible because identity is neither exclusive nor a constant.<sup>4</sup> Reality is always more complex and fractured than those who search for a uniform *zeitgeist* might suggest. The same is true for France,<sup>5</sup> but the nature of both exceptionalism and contacts, and the resulting balance, are different between the two countries and this difference helps explain contrasts in their political cultures.

Moreover, identities develop, or are expressed most clearly, in hostility or opposition to other groups, and their real or imagined aims and attributes. Usually these groups are ones with close relations, particularly physically. Indeed, this closeness is almost necessarily the case. As a result, the reality of overlapping senses of collective self-awareness can be very contentious, as also can be the processes of adaptation in these senses. To a considerable extent, these tensions can be lessened by the collectivism of the European Union, and this is an important aspect of the claims made on its behalf. However, a more critical view can also be taken, one that notes these tensions' impact on the workings of the European Union and indeed suggests that its success is partly dependent on economic growth, and that, without this growth, the tensions will come to the fore. Whether that is a stable alliance partner for the United States is open to question.

The economic growth argument can be pursued by suggesting, either that European federalism creates a larger economic space and encourages growth, and is, therefore, benign for the world scale, or, in contrast, that this

<sup>3</sup> Jeremy Black, *The British Seaborne Empire* (New Haven, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> Jeremy Black, *Convergence or Divergence? Britain and the Continent* (Basingstoke, 1994).

<sup>5</sup> Fernand Braudel, *The Identity of France, I. History and Environment* (London, 1989).

space rests on corporatism and protectionism.<sup>6</sup> As a result of the latter, the European Union can be presented as malign, leading both to an under-performing Europe and to difficulties in European-world relations. Given the American need for dynamic and effective trading partners, this can be viewed as particularly unfortunate, as an under-performing and protectionist Europe does not provide an adequate market for American exports nor a conducive space for American investment.

Such specific economic issues particularly interest foreign commentators, but also relate to contrasts between member states. Usually similarities and affinities are emphasized when discussing alliances, but these are not the only reasons for closeness, co-operation or union. Complementarity is also an issue. It, indeed, was the basis of the economic relationships of the British Empire, which relied on mutually-profitable differences in production. This situation helped make British adjustment to the European Union difficult, because, in place of the Empire, with its controlled exchange economy designed for mutual benefit, Britain was offered, thanks to economic similarities with her neighbors, a union of competitors rather than of partners. Britain competed as an industrial exporter and agricultural producer, particularly with France, Germany and Italy, and this affected the economic value of European convergence.

From within Europe, the critique of the European Union as restrictive economically is but part of a wider concern about illiberalism. This concern has attracted little attention from American commentators, and possibly unsurprisingly so as the nature of the post-1945 American alliance system was, understandably, to make the compromises necessary in order to anchor anti-Communist systems. This indeed was an aspect of the degree to which great-power status rests on co-operation, with the great powers often used to pursue the strategies of their allies.<sup>7</sup>

Yet, there is a fundamental divide between the assumptions of the European Union on the one hand and political liberalism on the other. In the Continental states, there is the concept and reality of what Helmut Schmidt, the Social Democratic (SPD) Chancellor of Germany from 1974 to 1982, termed the “political class,” a notion integral to the practice of government in the European Union.

It can also be seen in France where a small elite of graduates of the *grandes écoles*, particularly the Ecole Polytechnique and the Ecole Nationale d’Administration (ENA), established in 1945, dominated government, politics and business through a system of *pantouflage*. Jacques Chirac was an ENA graduate, as was Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, and prime ministers such as Laurent Fabius from the left and Alain Juppé from the right.

<sup>6</sup> Ivan T. Berend, *An Economic History of Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Jeremy Black, *Great Powers and the Quest for Hegemony. The world order since 1500* (London, 2008).

European Union institutions seem to be characterized by a disinclination to accept public scrutiny and, therefore, accountability. Thus, the European Central Bank, established in 1998, refused to publish the meeting minutes of its Governing Council or to record any votes taken at these meetings. Similarly, at the national level, the Juppé government in France (1995-1997) in trying to meet the Maastricht Treaty criteria, introduced the measures intended to cut government spending by decree, and not via the National Assembly.

This approach might conform to the idea of France or Europe speaking with one voice, the goal of the United States. However, it contrasts with the theory of British politics, with its strong emphasis on a more democratized practice of politics. The latter in practice has more in common with U.S. politics, than with those of many Continental states. Indeed, the nature of the governmental structure created by the EU is inherently anti-political, in so far as politics is to be understood not only as a popular process, but also as one in which different views may be accepted legitimately.

Consider, for instance the European Union's history as it seeks to anchor its teleological mission. There has been a preference to look back to the eighteenth-century European Enlightenment, presenting it as a worthy precursor of its goals, and, indeed, a movement with progressive and tolerant values. The Enlightenment, however, also offers troubling parallels with the modern stage of European history, as well as an instructive contrast with the situation in eighteenth-century Britain and America. Whereas the cultural and intellectual life of the latter two was broad-based, and rested on considerable, and legally-grounded, political and religious freedom, the situation was different across most of Europe, with the conspicuous exception of the United Provinces (modern Netherlands) and Hamburg.

In contrast to Britain's situation, most of the Continental Enlightenment was top-down and only shallowly rooted in public support. This helped account for important facets of its character as self-righteous and socially condescending, as well as its emphasis on mission and not popular mandate. The populace were generally presented by Enlightenment ministers and commentators as ignorant, and their beliefs treated as the antithesis of the Enlightened. The peasantry were to be improved, in spite of themselves, and the language used to describe them was that employed to discuss children, the mentally weak, or animals.<sup>8</sup>

Prefiguring much of modern European political culture, the intellectuals, who sought to influence Enlightenment governments, dismissed what they disliked as superstitious.<sup>9</sup> They also exaggerated the possibilities of

<sup>8</sup> Harvey Chisick, *The Limits of Reform in the Enlightenment: Attitudes towards the Education of the Lower Classes in Eighteenth-Century France* (Princeton, 1981).

<sup>9</sup> Arthur Hertzberg, *The French Enlightenment and the Jews: The Origins of Modern Anti-Semitism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

change through education, and neglected the difficulties of turning aspirations into policies. In addition, they underrated the problems of government, the vitality of popular religiosity, and the disinclination of people to subordinate self-interest, and their own notions of a just society, to the views and self-righteousness of others.

Thus, there is a contentious historical background to the European Union. The geographical background is also unhelpful. The EU's history is Continental and inward-looking, one that offers little to Europe's Atlantic heritage, a heritage which is particularly strong in the case of Britain but has been downplayed in that of France. It is easy to forget that what made Europe, and most especially Britain, distinctive in world history was its ability to use the oceans to create the first trading systems and empires able to span the world.<sup>10</sup> This is easy to forget, in part because of Europe's nature now, but also due to the way European identity is currently understood. Now, Europe's attitude towards the outside world is at once vainglorious and defeatist.

In part, this perspective focuses on the United States, and makes the EU an unsteady ally. Despite repeated talk of the EU, the Euro, and European foreign policy initiatives, as constituting a system that rivals the United States, Europeans are acutely aware that this has not happened. The Euro was explicitly intended as a rival to the dollar, with international political benefits supposed to flow from this position. Instead, in the 1990s, the Bosnian and Kosovo crises made it clear that European states and federal institutions were only able to address issues of Balkan stability by turning to the United States for support, although the U.S. government scarcely covered itself in credit in either episode. In addition, American, as well as European military power limitations were more apparent than most commentators cared to note.

Many Europeans have been clearly unhappy about American strength—military, political, economic and cultural. This dissatisfaction was exposed and accentuated in 2002-3, during the debate over policy towards Iraq. In fact, however, the roots of difference went far deeper, and were related, in particular to an ambivalence about change, as well as an uneasiness with the impression of European powerlessness in the face of American strength.

For American policymakers, there are both advantages and disadvantages in the EU's conception of European history and geography. In particular, an emphasis on European identity as central to the real interests and histories of European peoples and countries encourages a stress on links within Europe. This lends itself to the attempt to incorporate Eastern Europe into the political, economic and military structures of Western Europe, which is an American objective.

This attempt has a clear cultural correlate, as it seeks to persuade the peoples of Western Europe that their prime identity is as Europeans, and that

<sup>10</sup> Kenneth J. Banks, *Chasing Empire Across the Sea: Communications and the State in the French Atlantic, 1713-1763* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2002).

their countries have a European character and destiny. Europe, in other words, is seen as much more than a matter of geography. To modern readers, this may seem to state the obvious, but, primarily owing to two factors, this is far from the case. First, for much of the last six hundred years, a large part of Eastern Europe was part of a very different cultural (and political) world, that of the Ottoman (Turkish) Empire. Although there were interactions<sup>11</sup> and although modern scholarship can search for parallels between (Christian) European governments and societies and those of the Ottoman Empire, to contemporaries the empire was not so much non-European as anti-European. It defined that which was not European—tyranny and Islam—and presented both as threats. Thus, there is a clear historical background to modern cultural rejection of a concept of Europe that includes contemporary Turkey. This is a major problem as far as American policy is concerned, not least because of the robustness of France's President Nicolas Sarkozy on this point.

Secondly, if "Europe" did not extend into the Ottoman world, it did spread across the oceans. This great expansion changed the world, but it also altered Europe. This was true both of the Europe from which trade, territorial control and colonizers came, and the rest of Europe which was affected by the expansion. By 1750, as a result both of Ottoman conquests and of the great European expansion, London, Paris, Lisbon and Madrid had more in common with colonial centers, such as Philadelphia, Québec, Rio and Havana, than they did with cities under Ottoman rule, such as Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia.

It is this tradition that is questioned directly by the creation of a new European history, for, alongside the challenge to the individual states of the European Union that has attracted most attention, and caused particular controversy in Britain, has come a determination to marginalize the residue and influence of empire, so that past links are treated as anachronistic, if not undesirable.

## Defining Terms

Issues of definition are complicated by the range of possible criteria. Europe can be treated geographically, although we must be more precise than to merely state that it is located between Asia and the Atlantic. But the geographic definition of Europe is open to debate. The Urals, for example, are neither a barrier nor a frontier. Indeed, in the preface to the influential French *Larousse Encyclopedia of World Geography* (1967), Pierre Deffontaines argued that the Eurasian plains from the Order to the Pacific should be treated as a single unit.

Europe can also be treated as a value system, a goal or an ideology. These contrasting ideas have been emphasized with the question of Turkish

<sup>11</sup> Daniel Goffman, *Britons in the Ottoman Empire, 1642-1660* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998).

entry to the European Union. Thanks to the support of national governments, the EU has been successful in presenting itself as the means, indeed goal, of public myths of European identity. The EU had both an explicit ideological and cultural agenda, even if its politics of bartering frequently concealed this. The Tindermanns' Report of 1975 called for a stress on common cultural traditions. Subsequently, there was much talk of supposed common characteristics and events of European culture, or what Jack Lang, the former French Minister of Culture, called "Europe's soul," such as toleration, the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. Even Erasmus and Socrates have been appropriated for the EU's higher-education exchange programs.

Yet this cultural approach *works* primarily because it has limited impact as far as the people are concerned. The key element, instead, is the vitality of national traditions. Nationalism involved a stress on the vernacular and the distinctive features of national cultures in some states. However, French legislation of 1975 and 1994 banned the use of foreign words in official documents, advertising and packaging if there are French alternatives. This was an indication of the mixture of hubris, stubbornness and lack of confidence also seen at the EU scale. The advocates for regional autonomy, if not a nationalist separatism, were also important. When control over education was transferred to the regional level, as in Belgium from the early-1960s, such ideas were institutionalized. In many respects, the separatist accounts of identity were traditional ones, based in the theories and practices of nineteenth-century nationalism. A more challenging version was mounted by assertive religious or ethnic groups, or both, most obviously Muslims, who lacked any such geographical focus to serve as the basis of separatism.

In sum, a preference for aspiration and moving forward over reality checks has characterised the EU since the 1980s. For instance, it failed to move slowly and to build from the economic fundamentals with the economic mishandling of German re-unification and with the Euro. The former is an appropriate parallel, as, in many respects, the EU rested similarly on a post-World War II idealism, and German re-unification was a key aspect in the war's end. Yet, the political sense of rebirth and the specific pressure to create a new solution, seen in these cases, was not appropriate in the 1980s and 1990s for already-functioning societies and economies.

To get the EU to work, if it can, requires the patient pursuit of changes in labor and social welfare assumptions and regulations. These changes are most appropriately handled at the national level, because it is there that political leadership is most powerful and interacts best with the population. In some states, this leadership is weak, notably in Belgium and Italy. However, it is a mistake to assume that this would be solved by adopting a European-scale politics. Far from these issues being largely a matter of political techniques and tactics, there is a serious problem of viability. A political system cannot work unless the majority of the population feels some sense of identity. In fact, due in part to the EU, this national sense of identity is now weakening in some

European states, while patterns of deference encouraging consent are also eroding. European peoples indeed are becoming more ungovernable, or the ability to contain this ungovernability is receding.

Yet, at the same time, the European Union has failed to replace the nation as a focus for popular identity, and thus loyalty. If this is a measure of its failure, it is also a cause of it. Indeed, although the political context is very different, there are echoes of the failure of supra-national Communism to ensure identity and support, both in the Soviet Union and in Eastern Europe.

The central political challenge in any community is the eliciting of consent. This is not simply a question of defining acceptable policies, and of selecting leaders who will be judged competent. Rather it also reflects the nature of identification between people and government, which encompasses history, symbolism, and a sense of place and purpose. These, in turn, combine to produce an ideology that is stronger than the more intellectual and abstract creeds designated by that term. Despite all the talk of the nation-state's failure and redundancy, and the need for replacing it by power-sharing, supranational bodies and Euro-regions, it is the nation-state that is most effective in eliciting and securing consent. It is no accident that Euro-federalism is endorsed most strongly in Belgium and Italy where the nation-states are young and weak in the face of regional and other divisions. It is worth noting that charges brought against recent Italian leaders such as Andreotti, Craxi and Berlusconi are suggestive of a political culture mired in self-interest and institutionalized corruption. The willingness to change the law in order to help Berlusconi avoid trial on charges of false accounting is similar to the EU's willingness to cover up serious fraud in both the Commission and the Eurostat. In contrast to Belgium and Italy, both Britain and Denmark see far less support for Euro-federalism, and France will only support initiatives on their own terms.

From the European Union's perspective, it is possible to exaggerate the nation-state's effectiveness as a representative political unit. There is a kind of circularity: the nation-state represents national interest effectively because its very existence defines these interests. What is less clear is that the interests, thus defined and pursued by the nation-state, are the primary interests of the people of that state.

Nevertheless, given that these interests do not exist clearly, except in the most basic terms, outside the political process, the nation-state plays a crucial role in discussing, defining and validating such interests. This is a fundamental qualification of the one-voice approach.

It is far from clear that a European political community can successfully fulfil the same functions as the nation-state, certainly in terms of obtaining popular support. This owes much to the role of historical formation in giving identities and meaning to the lives of political communities. Yet, considering Continental Europe's recent history, it is not surprising that the new constitutionalism following 1945 made scant attempt to find roots or

continuities. Within this context, creating the European Economic Community (EEC) as a way to recreate an acceptable solution to the German question,<sup>12</sup> and to root democracies at the national level, (although not democracy at the European level) appeared sensible, and its norms seemed appropriate, just as the response in Britain was understandably different.

Unlike African and Asian international bodies, all the EU members are democracies, and its institutions are thus filled, directly or indirectly, by at least ostensibly democratic processes. Yet, focusing on the difficulties of attempting to create a plausible European public myth helps to explain some of the problems faced by any effort to displace the nation-state from its position in popular loyalties. A sense of place and continuity is crucial to the hegemony of individuals and societies, and this affects the response to the currents of change that have become so insistent over the last century. In particular, the idea of a European state and/or nation lacks roots, and the impact of the very different roots of other political and ethnic groups make it unlikely that a new identity can be successfully created, or at least one that calls on similar commitment.

At this crucial level, therefore, the notion of European community is of value only if its institutional pretensions and prerogatives are restricted by the preservation of a major role for the nation-state. Telling people that, because they are Europeans, they must think and act in a certain fashion is unacceptable in a democratic society. This idea is especially problematic if it is employed to deny the validity of a people's sense of identity and the views that arise from it. A key aspect of free choice is that people should be able to choose the level at which they wish to express and make their free choice. This basic right was at stake in referenda about the Euro and the European constitution. Political goals should derive from the identities and interests of individuals freely expressed.

These interests are not fixed and, instead, are subject to the changes that are naturally a product of the use of free will. In short, democracy subverts the tendency to argue in terms of apparently immutable national interests. The latter is very much the rhetoric of partisan politics, which are inherent to democracy, but they require an understanding that others can legitimately advance differing views.

If, therefore, the exercise of free will leads to an integrationist European Union, the organization and goals of this union should be adaptable enough to support withdrawal or a major change in direction. Although Greenland, which had joined while a Danish colony, was able to leave the EU once it gained real autonomy, there is no sign that the EU, as currently

<sup>12</sup>Ronald J. Granieri, *The Ambivalent Alliance: Konrad Adenauer, the CDU/CSU, and the West, 1949-1966* (Berghahn Books, 2003); Jeffrey Glen Giaque, *Grand Designs and Visions of Unity: The Atlantic Powers and the Reorganisation of Western Europe, 1955-1963* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

conceived, possesses that flexibility. Indeed, not only its structures and processes, but also the convictions of its supporters, make the EU singularly unable to respond both to popular opinion and, also, to changing circumstances.

For ideological and functional reasons, it is easy to understand why those who see government as a *response process* find it easiest to conceive of this at the national level. It also best allows for the nature of change, not as a linear, uni-directional and predictable process, as conceived of by those who support the European “project,” but as variable, unpredictable and experienced in a very diverse fashion. The inexorable nature of EU policies was suggested by the fate of the projected Constitution, drafted by the Convention for the Future of Europe and accepted in June 2004 by the European summit in Dublin. While the French and Dutch elections rejected these policies in referenda in 2005 (and might seem to indicate the failure of the EU’s plans) still in 2007 most of the provisions of the Constitution (without the name) were agreed to at a new summit in Lisbon.

After the upsets of 2005, there was a deliberate avoidance of referenda, with promises to hold them being ignored, most prominently in Britain, while the Portuguese government was bullied into not holding a referendum. These actions evoked anger in Britain, leading columnists such as William Rees-Mogg in the *Times* to write about treason. It is therefore easy to appreciate why American remarks about the need for European federalism are received as, at best, lacking in sensitivity and, at worse, crass, bullying and one-sided. Most of the arguments employed by American commentators could be used to argue the case for an “anchoring” of Mexico and Central and South America through mobility of labor and goods and revenue sharing with the United States.

The democratic deficit is a key element. Non-Americans frequently remark that the Western alliance would be stronger (and environmental pressures less urgent) if Americans changed their private and public finances and their lifestyles. Whether accurate or not, such critiques frequently fail to take note of the character of American freedom and the exigencies of American politics. While rejecting criticism of their own norms, commentators are all-too-willing to opine about those of others.

The democratic element is crucial because it can cut across what is functional and “necessary.” This can be seen, for example, in British skeptics’ responses toward the Euro. Already the world’s second largest currency, the Euro has continued to expand. At the beginning of 2008, Cyprus and Malta took the number of states using it to fifteen. Overcoming earlier fears, it now appears that the Euro can survive, and even flourish despite failing to adhere strictly to the Stability and Growth Pact’s requirements: budget deficits were not to exceed 3 per cent of the nation’s annual GDP and the national debt must be limited to 60 per cent of GDP. In practice, the early phases of the Euro were difficult, accompanied by much small-business-driven inflation in some countries. Moreover, the measures judged necessary to ensure Stability and Growth proved hard to swallow.

Yet contrasts with fiscal developments in the United States and Britain in 2007-2008 suggested that the Euro's life-raft function seems to be working well (although largely due to German fiscal culture). For the British, the challenge to national sovereignty and democratic accountability was crucial, but so was the fact that by 2007 globalization meant not only oil at \$100 a barrel, but also large-scale outsourcing of jobs. The collective responsibility aspect of the Euro helped weak and feckless governments—such as that of Silvio Berlusconi in Italy—avoid the fiscal consequences of their policies. Yet, leaving aside the pragmatic point that EU policies greatly accentuated the strains of globalization by making inward investment less attractive, and by encouraging the direction of expenditure on research and development elsewhere, the question of democratic accountability at the national level remains crucial for those who believe that consent is of limited value without participation, and that freedom and liberty are central to a desirable public politics.

Changes in the world, in particular, the great importance of China at present, suggest that a stronger EU is functional and “necessary.” The Chinese do not wish to deal with the twenty-seven members of the European Union. They are willing to negotiate with Britain, France and Germany, but, for states like Slovenia to have their voice heard, it is necessary to be represented by the EU. The movement of attention away from Russia is relevant here, because the Russian policy of divide-and-pressurize ensures that states like Poland and Sweden were seen as having a distinctive role. This is not the case from the Chinese perspective. Yet, it is unclear whether the EU has the ability to generate solutions and negotiate successfully on crucial issues, such as energy dependence on Russia and trade with China.

Another pressure for united European action is provided by environmental concerns. This is an ironic point given that the United States, which supports a *united voice*, is against heeding international environmental pressures, most obviously in response to the Kyoto process. European countries take the view that environmental change is a shared pressure and that it is best to handle both specific problems, such as the pollution of the Rhine, and the more general concern at the collective level. The latter relates to the situation within Europe and also to the representation of European views at the international level. For many Europeans, rightly or wrongly, these are more acute issues than those posed by terrorism, and this is a reminder of the folly of assuming that a shared voice will mean a common list of priorities. The complexity of judging issues in terms of *hard* and *soft* is also underscored. With harsh and unexpected climate episodes, such as the 2002 floods, being heavily disruptive and the 2006 heat wave in France blamed for 14,000 premature deaths, it is unsurprising that this is not seen as a *soft* issue. In practice, both terrorism and climate change are serious challenges, in the short, medium and long terms.

For an historian, there are many problems in writing about the present, but it is also relevant to apply the particular training of the discipline.

Source-criticism is difficult when addressing the present as well as the future, but the skepticism that good historians show, in response to the ready assertiveness of those propounding schematic interpretations, is as relevant for the present and future as for the past. Skepticism, not cynicism, is a necessary caution in making pronouncements. Too many commentators on current affairs are in practice providing a uniform account aiming at a clear conclusion. Indeed, there is a widespread determination on their part to search not for complex lessons, but for those that apparently offer obvious guidance. In short, the public treatment of history frequently takes on a demagogic form and also a quasi-religious character, with episodes providing homilies about what will happen if wrong choices are made. Thus, the emphasis is on sin rather than redemption, blaming all on fundamental error: supposedly malevolent racial, religious, social or political groups, or malign and self-indulgent human will.

In contrast, ideas about learning from the past in an incremental fashion assume not a millenarian perfectibility of mankind or ending of history, but, rather, a notion of improvability. This approach, however, poses the danger that, in pursuit of an exemplary lesson, the past may be jettisoned if it does not contribute to, or correspond with, the lesson.

The most accurate history, one that notes the ambiguities of the past, the diversities of motives, and the complexities of causation, is not one that corresponds with political and religious strategies, utopian futures, or the public's need for clarity—heroes and villains. Such a history is one that tells us more about the past than about ourselves. It is one that repays examination, but it can leave us with the stigma of Cassandra. For the individual, as for the nation, experience must be clearly understood and built upon to ensure a better future. If we delude ourselves about the lessons of past events, we will not avoid the pitfalls of the past, nor secure its future successes.

Indeed, an intelligent skepticism in predicting the future is the most pertinent lesson from considering the past. As such, the informed study of history is a useful antidote to the familiar glib assumptions and predictions of politicians and journalists. Those who care nothing for the past will look sightlessly to the future.<sup>13</sup>

This can be rejected as a conservative approach, but it helps explain why, alongside the partisan Euroskepticism that is debated and decried, there is a more profound philosophical skepticism about the idea of pattern in past, present and future. Such a skepticism is also critical of the false consciousness deliberately advanced or encouraged by elites to justify their role and power, a process seen, for example, today in the attempt to create a pseudo-nationalism for the European Union.

Politicians need more than skepticism. They have to inspire and lead, offering visions of the future. Managerialism does not win elections. It is

<sup>13</sup>Jeremy Black, *The Curse of History* (London, 2008).

particularly easy to offer visions for others and far too much trans-Atlantic commentary (in both directions) takes this form.

So, it is quite likely that the pressure to act, and to be seen to act, will encourage an emphasis on the EU without which all-too-many European politicians fear they will be of even slighter consequence. The EU as force-multiplier is the goal because this allows European, national and regional voices to feel that they will be heard. In practical terms, it is difficult to see how this will work effectively given the range and diversity of views demanding attention, and that is a prime cause of skepticism about prospects. When combined with other issues, such as the remarkable demographic transformation of the continent, it seems hard to predict any clear outcome. Pessimism indeed is the root characteristic of Euroskepticism, but then the contrast seen throughout history between expectations and achievements makes most historians pessimists.

