The Fiftieth Anniversary of the Signing of the Treaty of Rome

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This article celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Rome in March 1957: it is time to take stock of what has been achieved within Europe in half a century. From the European Coal and Steel Community to the birth of European Economic Community, from the Treaty of Maastricht to the birth of the European Union and the single currency each step had to confront with political and economic resistances. Now a higher standard of living, peace and a democratic way of pursuing common goals have been achieved. It is time to redefine the institutional structure of the Union, and face the new challenges of our time: from the security of energy supplies to large-scale immigration, from the consequences of the admission of new member states to the renewed risk of conflicts.

1. Introduction

25 March 2007 was a notable anniversary for the six countries of Western Europe which fifty years ago took the first resolute steps towards future unity.

It is time to take stock of what has been achieved within Europe in half a century. Europe was then a continent worn out by centuries of civil wars and destroyed by the Second World War: now peace and a democratic way of tackling and settling differences and of pursuing common aims have been achieved; whereby a higher standard of living has been assured. It is time not only to reflect on how to overcome weaknesses and to correct errors in the relationships between member states, but also to define new goals for a Europe which has changed internally, and to outline new common aims for the future in its relations with the rest of the world, which are also undergoing rapid and profound changes.

On 25 March 1957, with the signing of the Treaty of Rome by the six ministers of foreign affairs of France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, the

Netherlands and Luxembourg, the plenipotentiaries of six heads of state and heads of government, the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Commission (EURATOM) were founded. The treaty embodied the first act of building a small organised Europe which, thanks to Jean Monnet and his political ally Robert Schuman, had been taken in 1951 with the Treaty of Paris and the founding of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). Schuman had proposed to Adenauer a joint management scheme for coal and steel, the two essential war materials, in order to transform them into agencies for peace and development. The German Chancellor had immediately accepted this revolutionary project and, once a solid Franco-German agreement was in place, the French minister of foreign affairs had pressed for the support of other keen Europeans. At that time, these were De Gasperi and the prime ministers of the three countries Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg which were already united in Benelux.

Without much attention from the media, but with great determination, the six European leaders had taken up the baton of the ECSC, sanctioning the reversal of centuries of internal struggles and wars in fulfilment of the dream that the pioneers of a united Europe had long cherished. The Treaty of Rome broadened the path towards a lasting peace and the development of a democratic and free Western Europe. At that time, only half of Germany – that part which had been occupied by the United States and Allied Forces during the Second World War – was part of the European Community. It was certainly no easy task to actually bring about a merging of the various countries' national interests into a single European Community legal and political system.

In the immediate post-war years two attempts at European integration, one economic and the other political, had both failed.

In 1947 the United States' appeal for joint management – by means of an intergovernmental institution for economic cooperation – of the Marshall Plan's substantial aid to reconstruct a Europe that the war had reduced to ruins, had not been heeded. The USA believed that a strong recovery in production after the disastrous war could take place more easily by means of a joint effort which, among other things, would have checked the growth of the Communist parties in Western Europe whose

breeding ground was post-war poverty and the attraction of Moscow's ideology.

The year 1948 saw the founding of the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC), which had been sought by Washington, but it had only an advisory capacity and hence had no legislative power, since each government wanted to control its own interests. Therefore it was no help in promoting the cause of European economic integration.

At a political and parliamentary level, the contemporary Franco-Belgian attempt, strongly supported by the USA, to create a European Assembly made up of ten countries with real legislative power, a precursor to a European government, was blocked, mainly by the British. However, in 1949 the Council of Europe came into being in Strasbourg. This was a caricature of the initial project and was merely a laboratory of ideas.

After similar failures, overambitious plans had to be abandoned and experts had to concentrate on a limited but concrete programme of sectoral economic integration.

This was, in fact, the French government's decision: to start a Community limited to coal and steel as a step towards progressive European integration. The main reason for this was the concern that Germany would make a strong independent industrial recovery, and, because of its industrial structure and the Marshall Plan funding, would recover more rapidly than the other European countries and once again constitute a threat for France. Consequently, the relationship between France and Germany – which had been at the core of the wars that had lacerated Europe, because coal and steel were to be found in contested border areas between the two countries (Saar, Ruhr, Alsace and Lorraine) – had to be substantially modified.

It was therefore essential for Paris to control the Ruhr, not by imposing its authority on a defeated enemy but by means of establishing a Community that allowed both conqueror and conquered joint management of coal and steel which might otherwise have created a power with incalculable consequences on the French border. Paris planned also, by means of the Community, to prevent Germany from exceeding French coal and steel output. This hope, however, never materialised.

The formula which gave birth to the new course of European history was wholly original: identifying progressive concrete aims to be pursued by means of community institutions with authority delegated by the member states, but exercisable only by a collective decision, and entrusting these institutions with the task of confronting the succession of challenges which Europe was facing.

The Six thus began their joint venture, initiating through the ECSC and afterwards the EEC, the totally new model of the "economic Community". At first limited sectorally, but spreading outward from this base, these institutions were to form the common basis for development in a peaceful and democratic way where any attempt to return to the past with its abuse of power and its nationalism would be resisted.

In the treaties the founding countries had declared their determination to develop the initial economic convergence into a larger and deeper community among the peoples of Europe: with the subsequent acquisition of new powers and new member states, it became the "European Community" and then the "European Union" whose contours are still evolving. This is designed to be the prelude to a new form of a united Europe – a Europe that is politically united – although this is still to be finalised.

Economic integration began by making a radical change through the creation of a "single" market: the single currency, an essential part of an economic and monetary union is still being completed.

The foundations for the future political Europe were laid later: a common foreign policy, a common security policy, a common defence policy, all of which are still being consolidated, and a common organisation of justice, freedom and internal security which has yet to be developed. The present-day continuing development of the Community is conditioned by profound geopolitical changes within and beyond Europe. As far as its members are concerned, it has seen the initial six increase in successive stages to the present number of twenty-seven. The final frontiers of Europe have still to be determined.

The European Atomic Energy Commission (the European Atomic Community), set up at the same time as the European Economic Community, has not had a long active life because of subsequent large-

scale mistrust of nuclear energy, both on the part of politicians and of public opinion. Initially, the aim was to promote a peaceful use of nuclear energy by coordinating the six member states' research programmes. This promotional stage was then rescheduled, becoming a sharing of knowledge and guaranteeing security by means of centralised controls over nuclear energy supplies.

2. Types of resistance and new challenges

The beginnings of the first Community (ECSC) and the later EEC were certainly not easy because lively opposition of various types had to be overcome. We can highlight some types of resistance which have still not been entirely resolved.

In Italy many coal and steel entrepreneurs - with the exception of Senator Enrico Falck, a leader in the private steel industry who, as a member of parliament, had participated enthusiastically in drawing up the Community agreement – backed by the trade unions, put up tough opposition because they feared they would be crushed by much stronger rivals and that they would have to give up preferential supplies of raw materials from North Africa and the USA in favour of those from Central Europe.

On the other hand, the Italian government was guided by an ideological Europeanism and Atlanticism, more than by the pursuit of concrete economic aims. In his speech to present the Schuman Plan to Parliament, the Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs, Taviani, with authorisation for European negotiations on behalf of the government, asked that economic interests be surmounted. Independently of the vision of a future united Europe, he advocated for a European Union with Western and Atlantic solidarity as a categorical imperative for salvation from communism and to guarantee future generations the heritage of the values of Christian society.

In Germany, the Ruhr barons put up fierce resistance to Adenauer, rebelling against the European Community's strict regulations regarding competition, which obliged them to get rid of their cartels and delayed the conclusion of negotiations: the USA had to intervene, because it was

in their interest to speed up the signing of the Treaty of Paris to show NATO that Europe was taking part collectively as member states of a Community. The Secretary of State Dean Acheson threatened to prevent Germany from pursuing an independent a foreign policy if it did not block the demands and the opposition of its coal and steel magnates.

In Benelux there was strong opposition to a supranational authority in coal and steel, because it was feared that Franco-German management would deprive the three small countries of their power. In fact, in the High Authority, France and Germany each had twice the votes of each of the other four partners, including Italy. Yet again, to calm the troubled waters, the US State Department had to intervene.

In the second phase of the process of European union, the EEC phase, France was reluctant to change the ECSC's model of vertical integration into a horizontal model for a common market for all products. The French government allowed itself to be convinced only after obtaining EEC integration for the agricultural sector, based on subsidies to farmers, who constituted an important reservoir of votes in the six countries. The Common Agricultural Policy remained sacrosanct in France as the European Community developed. Furthermore, the territories of the former French colonies became part of the European Community: during the negotiations for the EEC, France had lost Indo-China and, by force, was trying to prevent Algeria gaining independence. Paris, therefore, sensed that its colonial empire was crumbling: the European Community should therefore provide an alternative for earlier commitments.

Under pressure from the Minister of Economics, Erhard, who favoured a free trade policy, Germany attempted to organise the EEC in a less binding free trade zone to preserve wide margins of freedom. In the end, however, Germany accepted the customs union, with the understanding that, in the running of the EEC, the integration of the heavy industry sector, regulations regarding competition and issues concerning the economy should all have a German imprint. In substance, a balanced Franco-German tandem had been formed for agriculture and the economy, just as for coal and steel.

At the time of the ratification of the EEC Treaty, in Italy industrial groups and trade unions tried to steer Parliament to vote against it, but fortunately

they did not succeed. Similar attempts were seen in various forms in other countries where many entrepreneurs did not want to lay themselves open to more intense trade deregulation and to accept binding regulations regarding competition. Collateral evidence of this concern was seen when it was time to decide on the seat of the Community institutions: so as not to have on its home ground those people who were considered EEC inspectors, Northern Italy offered solutions that ought to have discouraged other governments rather than enticed them. This is, in fact, what happened and Brussels was chosen as the seat of the EEC.

It must be remembered that Italy aimed at the presidency of the European Investment Bank. Italy hoped to win EEC funding for the South, funding which sadly it was not able to obtain for a long time because of its inability to comply with EEC conditions. These, on the contrary, were accepted and well exploited by the other member states. The "blank" cheque to be paid by the EEC was not part of European philosophy.

Although the beginnings of the EEC experience were difficult because of internal complications, these latter have been surmounted because of the considerable external challenges, caused above all by Communist pressure from the USSR and by the breakdown of peace immediately after the Second World War. The heavy shadows which hung over Europe therefore hastened and strengthened the determination of the six founding members of the EEC.

The confrontation between Western democracy and the Communist bloc was seen not only in Asia, where there was the risk of another world war with the outbreak of the Korean War over the 38th parallel in 1950 and with US intervention, but also, and above all, in Europe with the "cold war". Although not an armed conflict between the opposing military organisations of NATO and the Warsaw Pact, the harsh confrontation between East and West in Europe in 1949 had led, as a reaction to the Marshall Plan, to the Soviet blockade of supplies for that half of Berlin that was under the control of the USA and the Allies. It also led to the Soviet crushing of the revolt in Hungary in 1956 and the construction of 106 kilometres of an "iron curtain" in 1961 to split Germany in two physically.

A further important challenge to European integration occurred within Western Europe as a reaction to the traumatic failure of the European

Defence Community, blocked by the French Parliament, even though the French government had signed the agreement. The EDC should have given rise to a European army, run by a political Community as an alternative to German rearmament, which was demanded by the United States in order to form a bulwark against the Soviet Union. This collective rearmament did not happen because Adenauer decided to participate in the ECSC.

3. The birth of the European Economic Community

Another initiative was called for in reaction to this setback, the Treaty of Rome, which was to consolidate and re-launch the initial integration process manifested in the Coal and Steel Community.

With the Treaty of Rome in 1957 the European Economic Community came into being. It had two main aims:

- a common market based on free competition among enterprises and the removal of duties and quotas for goods traded among the member states;

- a common trading policy with a single customs barrier at the borders of the EEC for products from third-party countries.

This framework has distinguished the European Customs Union, differentiating it from the free trade zone which the United Kingdom demanded before joining the EEC: in fact, London had no intention of altering the preferential treatment it still granted to Commonwealth countries. After very intense diplomatic battles, with the support not only of the Nordic countries but also of some pro-British circles within the EEC, Great Britain accepted the EEC model only on becoming a member of the EEC in 1973. British entry into the EEC became possible only after General De Gaulle had departed, having decreed a long waiting period, because he was worried about the close political connections between the United Kingdom and the United States of America, above all over the issue of who had control of the atom bomb. De Gaulle would have liked a joint atomic strategy involving the two European nuclear powers: France and the United Kingdom.

The Treaty of Rome added two 'vertical' policies to the 'horizontal' economic issues: the common agricultural policy and the common transport policy which contributed to consolidating the common market.

In the early days of the EEC, a common economic policy had not been formulated. It required a close concurrence of the national economic policies, in accordance with criteria dictated by EEC institutions. The member states were subject to internal pressures which were not yet subordinate to EEC principles. Likewise, a common monetary policy was not envisaged to ensure stability in the exchange rates within the EEC by means of strict national budget policies under EEC control. In fact, for many years the EEC was subject to monetary crises and to attempts, which in the end proved unsuccessful, to keep the par value movements under tight control by means of EEC mechanisms which were managed jointly. The last of these, in the early 1970s, before the single currency decision, was fixing a maximum fluctuation band, remembered as the "EEC snake".

These two lacunae were filled in 1992 with the Maastricht Treaty, which imposed supranational control, although some corrections were necessary later; further adjustments still need to be made to eliminate the current asymmetry between the common monetary policy and fiscal policy which is still mainly decided at a national level.

The Treaty of Rome had not envisaged any social integration because it was deemed that the *rapprochement* of national policies should come about spontaneously and not by decree, once the common market was fully functioning. In this case, too, when the Treaty was modified, several important EEC guidelines on social matters were added, but they still need to be studied in depth.

Despite the fact that the Customs Union had been organised surprisingly quickly – the task of the then President of the Commission Walter Hallstein and the Vice-President Piero Malvestiti – persistent protectionist forces could not be overcome, and the market of the six member states could not be transformed into a single internal market where the circulation of goods, capital and people and access to services was completely free.

4. From the Single Act to the Treaty of Maastricht

To give concrete form to these four fundamental liberties, the Treaty of Rome had to be amended in 1987 with an act which made the

observance of EEC laws obligatory. These laws are the same for everyone, and are voted by a majority in order to prevent protectionist sabotage by resorting to the right of veto by any single country.

This method of liberalisation, which was to be enforced with laws which reduced national sovereignty, greatly irritated the United Kingdom. The British Prime Minister tried to rebel against the authority of the EEC institutions, declaring that, instead, she was willing to accept liberalisation by way of a gentlemen's agreement among governments.

Following the Italian Prime Minister Craxi's vigorous presidency and the immediate stand of the French President Mitterand and Chancellor Kohl, Mrs.Thatcher was placed in a minority, and so at the Milan Summit in 1985 it was decided to proceed to a formal revision of the Treaty which was to introduce within seven years more than two hundred mandatory acts dictated by the EEC.

The new Treaty, called the Single Act because of the wide politico-economic range of its contents, prepared the ground for the future Maastricht Treaty of 1992 which was to impose a common monetary policy with the introduction of the single currency, coupled with a very strict control of national budgets. Despite the slogan "money first" launched by Jenkins and Delors, the real justification of the euro was not so much to open the door to political union as to prevent the continual competitive national currency devaluations which were compromising the single market, re-creating import barriers and export subsidies. In other words, the EEC wanted to prevent national incapacity or national errors, which were responsible for lack of competitiveness, from being dumped onto virtuous EEC partners.

Unfortunately the Maastricht Treaty did not acknowledge the concern of the Italian Minister of the Treasury, Guido Carli, who saw in the regulations over budget deficits the social and economic consequences of a possible serious economic reversal: only a vague mention of the economic cycle requested by the British Chancellor of the Exchequer was accepted. The error of focusing only on the orthodoxy of monetary stability without considering economic development and employment in cases of crisis had to be remedied in 2005, following the prolonged paralysis of economic growth in a large part of the European Union. The "Stability

and Development Pact" was amended: this is the system for enforcing the Maastricht monetary rules'. Countries with pronounced and prolonged slackening in growth and with a consequent high deficit in public revenue were granted an extension of the time necessary to comply with the maximum 3% ratio between the deficit in public revenue, estimated and real, and gross domestic product at market prices. This extension, however, had to take into account the time required to reach the reference value (60%) of the ratio between the public debt (including not only central government administration, but also regional and local administration and national insurance funds) and gross domestic product at market prices.

The Single Act paved the way for the subsequent decisions which at long last made it possible for Europe, still considered an economic giant but a political dwarf, to play a prestigious role on the world stage. At Maastricht, a common policy for foreign affairs, security and defence was launched. In order to be successful, however, there has to be a real sharing of strategic aims, which is not easy to achieve in the face of the great geopolitical changes arising out of the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the former Yugoslavia, the dramatic regional conflicts at the borders of the European Union and elsewhere in the world, and the rise of new international powers such as China and India, destined to be the super powers of the future. In the face of these changes, there is an increased need for the institutions of the European Union to play a more active role in proposing solutions to the new situation concerning global competition, which resulted in the Lisbon Declaration in 2000 and its more pressing reintroduction in 2005.

The Single Act also sanctioned an increase in the EEC's power over social affairs which was then developed at Maastricht with the formulation of a social protocol that has still to be completed. At first it was not legally binding because of British resistance, but the United Kingdom later accepted that the social contract be introduced in the Treaty of Nice which came into force at the beginning of 2003. Lastly, the Single Act launched the EEC economic and social cohesion policy to counterbalance the effects of the structural changes on depressed areas as a result of the single market and also introduced a support mechanism by means of a new European agricultural fund and a regional development fund.

Environmental protection and technological research began to receive more attention and there were interventions in these sectors, despite the meagreness of the EEC budget, an aspect of the Union which seemed politically insurmountable.

5. The birth of the European Union

With the Single Act and the Treaty of Maastricht, Europe reached another important milestone in the integration process, the framework of which was provided by two new treaties launched in 1992: the European Union Treaty and the European Community Treaty which embodied the economic themes of the EEC, the ECSC and EURATOM.

The European Union had five essential aims, which fulfilled the demand by European citizens for concrete actions and not just broad principles, which could have a positive effect on their daily lives. These were:

- to strengthen the democratic legitimacy of EU institutions with greater involvement on the part of the citizen;
- to improve the efficiency of the institutions whose decision-making seemed too slow;
- to develop a real social dimension within the Union alongside the single currency and the economic and monetary union;
- to implement a common foreign policy, security policy and defence policy;
- to institute cooperation in the legal sector and in domestic affairs.

Unfortunately these aims have not been wholly achieved, despite the adjustments made in three successive treaties, the Treaty of Amsterdam, the Treaty of Nice and the Constitutional Treaty. The latter was signed by twenty-seven heads of state and of government but is still not ratified after the negative result of the referendums in France and the Netherlands revealed increasing dissatisfaction on the part of European public opinion.

With regard to this, it should be noted that governments incapable of solving serious national problems, have offloaded the responsibility onto EU institutions, especially the European Commission and the European Parliament, thereby fomenting critical popular opinion.

6. The institutional structure and democratic legitimacy

The present institutional structure of the European Union and the subject of democratic legitimacy deserve to be examined. With the Treaty of Rome, the institutions of the EEC underwent notable changes compared to the ECSC institutions. Increasing the responsibilities for economic integration, the member states created a Commission without supranationality, in other words without the full powers of the Coal and Steel High Authority, granting legislative and executive powers to the Council of Ministers. The Commission was granted the right to initiate legislative procedures and is the guardian of the Treaty and the representative of European collective interests. Furthermore, on the discretionary authorisation of the Council of Heads of State, executive power was transferred to the Commission.

The Treaty of Rome began an institutional trend which is still based on four EU principles:

- the European institutions are positioned above the interests of the member states;

- the European organisms (the Commission, the Parliament and the Court of Justice) are independent of the member states;

- there must be collaboration between the European institutions (which, like the Commission, must support Europe's collective interests) and those institutions which can assert legitimate national interests;

- all member states are equal.

The basis of institutional dynamics is a triangle through which the so-called "community method" is conducted: the Commission acknowledges requests from the various EU sources and proposes solutions; the Council legislates and the Parliament co-legislates progressively; lastly, the Commission controls implementation, mainly effected through national administrations.

At first, the Treaty of Rome granted the European Parliament – made up of nationally elected members – the same modest advisory role that it had with the ECSC, together with the possibility of censuring the Commission by ordering resignations. This power of censorship was in fact exercised in 1999 on the Commission headed by Jacques Santer from Luxembourg.

However, the situation by which the European Parliament ranked lower than the Council, which at first preferred not to have parliamentary interference, could not last long: the democratic legitimacy of the institutions had to be increased. At the end of 1974 the heads of state and government agreed that the European Parliament should be elected directly by the citizens of the member states, and the first elections took place in 1979. This was the beginning of the gradual increase in the European Parliament's power, but it has never been allowed to share the legislative power of the Council of Ministers completely. It has been barred from interfering significantly in economic and monetary matters, and in matters concerning intergovernmental cooperation, such as the common policies on foreign affairs, security and defence, and issues concerning justice and internal affairs.

The member states wished to emphasise their greater specific weight relative to the Commission and the Parliament by institutionalising what were initially mere "fireside talks" between heads of state and of governments. And so they created the European Council which is the most important decision-making body of the European Union: it has the sole task of giving the EU the necessary drive for its development and of determining its general political trends. The European leaders' summit decisions cannot be changed by the European Parliament or by the Commission. There is only one single case when the European Council must yield to the opinion of the European Parliament and, if necessary, act on the Commission's proposal: this is when it has been ascertained that a member state has seriously and persistently violated the principles of liberty, democracy and respect for the rights of man and fundamental freedoms, and the constitutional state: principles which are now mandatory and solemnly ratified by the European Treaties.

When such a violation has been ascertained, the European Council can adopt severe punitive measures towards the state in question; for example, it can suspend its right to vote, thereby forcing it to respect EU legislation.

The presidency of the European Council still rotates every six months. Consequently the lack of continuity in the leadership of the EU results in the Third World preferring to speak with national leaders

whom they consider to be more prestigious and more reliable. The solution proposed by the Constitutional Treaty, now blocked, that the presidency should change every two and a half years would merely have attenuated but not eliminated the drawback of a leadership that has a rapid turnover.

Another institutional requirement, which is increasingly stressed, concerns the guarantee of continuity and consistency in the implementation of common policies for foreign affairs, security and defence, designated by national governments in the ambit of the Council. The Constitutional Treaty tried to solve it by appointing a European Union minister for foreign affairs. Despite the urgency, unfortunately the current ratification crisis does not allow the role played at present by the High Representative for Foreign Policy, Solana, to be more efficient. Solana holds this high rank in that he is secretary general of the EU Council of Ministers.

As well as a longer rotation period for the presidency and the appointment of an EU minister of foreign affairs, it is deemed essential to extend the qualified majority vote in order to reduce to a minimum the right of veto. To reach a majority, not only the number of states in support but also the size of the populations involved must nowadays be taken into account. Furthermore, the various areas of authority of the EU should be clarified (in some cases they are somewhat muddled), and the regulations for integration procedures should be simplified, making the treaties more concise.

A further institutional reform should be noted in the 27 member-strong EU: the rate of European integration should not be dependent on the speed of the poorest or the least keen country. The current treaties have tried to give substance to this necessity by establishing regulations to create forms of reinforced cooperation between countries that wanted to expedite the achieving of common aims. However, reservations and concern about possible ostracism have complicated the ways to bring this about and have rendered this sort of cooperation practically impossible.

In order to avoid the development of this sort of cooperation outside the treaties the scope of such cooperation should be made easily practicable, guaranteeing entry, of course, to those who intend to join in at a later date.

7. Conclusions

Public opinion's current apprehension and frustration regarding the EU should not detract from the fact that since the beginnings of the European Community in 1952, Europe has made remarkable progress in its integration process. However, it must be recognised that over half a century has gone by and successive generations, who live in very different situations from those of the early 1950s, have changed the initial and somewhat romantic perception of building Europe. At that time its citizens wanted peace and prosperity after the disasters of the war. Nowadays, Europe is perceived more critically in the face of new complex situations and insufficient responses on the part of EU institutions.

The member states and the EU governing groups are called upon to draw up a strategy and face a difficult challenge in the face of the following issues:

- the radically different geopolitical structure both within Europe with the collapse of the USSR, the Warsaw Pact and COMECON, together with the reunification of Germany, and outside the EU with the new major actors on the world stage: Russia, China and India;

- the many, dramatic new challenges for Europe which have stemmed from these developments and which go beyond the original search for peace and prosperity;

- the compromising of EU relations with the United States over the conflict in the vast Middle East area covering Israel, Palestine, the Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, Iran and also Afghanistan, as relationships in the Atlantic partnership fluctuated;

- economic insecurity and unemployment, not only because of the sacrifices imposed by the structural reforms to guarantee the stability of the single currency, but also because of the many complex effects of globalisation which, among other things, changes schedules of production which has a major impact on traditional domestic and regional markets;

- the consequences of the admission of new member states, in particular the former USSR satellite states where very harsh conditions of life compared to those of the other EU states have left their mark. The

attempts of many of their workers to settle in a Europe which is more prosperous, but which has unemployment problems, is cause for concern;

- large-scale clandestine immigration from economically desperate areas that are still not under EU control produces problems not only on account of employment, but also because of its implications for citizens' security;

- the renewed risk of conflicts in the former Yugoslavia at the heart of the EU;

- the uncertainty about the security of energy supplies.

As has already been pointed out, the general dissatisfaction with the current contribution which the European integration process has made to solving the problems mentioned above has been highlighted by the French and Dutch citizens' rejection of the ratification of the constitutional treaty: above all, young people's lack of interest in the European project and disillusionment on the part of very many citizens have been revealed. It is strange that this disillusionment has involved some heads of state and government who in Rome had signed with great enthusiasm a treaty that could offer positive solutions for many longstanding problems.

The constitutional treaty's impasse has revealed the European crisis. Some maintain that priority should be given to solving institutional issues, whereas others (perhaps the majority) are of the opinion that concrete issues affecting everyday life such as work, the level economic activity, future security and the battle against crime should be dealt with first. A compromise could be to face the most urgent issues in both sectors simultaneously, without seeking for perfectionism at this intermediate stage of unification.

The celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Rome, which occurs during the presidency of Frau Angela Merkel, gives the German Chancellor the opportunity to reach an agreement on how to resolve the crisis, at least in terms of procedure. The German federal government summarises priorities as follows: the reintroduction of the constitutional treaty; a commitment to speaking with a single European voice more than in the past; the determination of all member states to act together; the identification and devising of policies needed to solve immediate problems, such as the energy issue, and future

problems, such as global warming and the re-launching of world trade on the instigation of a single market to be established between the EU and the USA.

It is not only the European Community that is waiting impatiently for the current impasse of the constitutional treaty to be overcome. This impasse must not jeopardise the initial plan for progress towards a united Europe.

Among the heads of the great world powers, Putin, President of a Russia which borders the European Union has a determinant role in the international balance of power and on 22 November 2006 showed his strong interest in the future progress of an integrated Europe with the following statement:

> "In Russia we are following carefully the dynamics of the internal evolution of the European Union: the growth of our relations with the Union and their development depend a great deal on the course of the EU's internal transformation, on whether it remains predominantly a union of states or acquires supranational functions. We are interested in the stability and the predictability of our biggest neighbour. We are banking on the fact that change and expansion will not result in the erosion of its homogeneous legal sector. ...The task which faces us today is to create together the future of Russia and the European Union as partners and allies."

The prospects of a greater Europe stretching from the Atlantic to the Urals are increasingly debated: it is not exactly the Europe De Gaulle imagined, but it is centred on a European identity that is well defined in the global context, although not all European countries would necessarily be part of the EU institutions.

The essential thing is that they are bound not only by economic agreements but by respect for the values and principles sanctioned by the European Union treaties.

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