It is clear to us that there are many reasons why Poland had to join the European Union. One of the reasons that no statesman or politician can mention aloud—but I’m not a statesman or politician—is Russia. It is not as if we could expect or fear the resurrection of the Soviet or the Russian Empire. We all know that empires that have collapsed never come back to life; at least that is our historical experience. None of the Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman or British Empires has come back to life. So, we can safely expect that the Russian or Soviet Empire will not be resurrected. Nevertheless, we see that imperial nostalgia is strong in Russia and nationalist movements and tendencies are strong. Russia has, of course, various means to exert pressure or to blackmail other countries, especially those that once belonged to the Soviet bloc, and they will use it. Therefore, for us there are good reasons to be in another bloc, if one can say so.

This is not the only reason. There are, of course, economic reasons, which I’m not going to discuss and which many of those present are much more competent to deal with. Still, there is a problem that I think we should mention, though it is somewhat awkward to mention, and that is the question of sovereignty.

I tried to find the question of sovereignty in the thick volumes of the treaties of the European Union and indeed there was one mention. The index referred to one single sentence. In the text the sentence says: “countries that join the European Union limit their sovereignty.” That’s all: nothing more detailed. In the project of the new Constitutional Treaty, the very word “sovereignty,” as far as I can see, is not mentioned at all. The question is hardly discussed by people who encourage us to adopt the new Constitution, as if it were a futile, unimportant subject not worth discussion. But I’m not sure that that is the case.

Such a thing as European patriotism is hardly in existence. It is very weak. It is possible of course that it will emerge, but this is by no means certain. It is also by no means certain that Latvians and Portuguese, let’s say, feel that they belong together, not just as members of the world community, but specifically to the European sphere.

Sovereignty, as I said, is not mentioned. Is it really such an unimportant subject? I don’t know what would have happened today if this Constitution had been in force. For instance, foreign policy is supposed to be dealt with jointly. How will this be done? We have so far had one important test of union, namely, Iraq. I’m not going to discuss whether the war in Iraq was just, but nonetheless we remember how President Chirac reacted to Poland and other countries helping America. He was furious really. I can well understand his fury when he read the comments of the American press on the military virtues of France, but he preferred to direct his fury against weaker partners such as Poland. We also remember the Belgian Prime Minister recently saying that to reject the European Constitution project would amount to a return to the Middle Ages! This suggests that in the Middle Ages the European Union acted according to the veto rights of all members.
The question of sovereignty and of centralization is still being debated with no good solution. I live in Great Britain, where doubts about the new Constitution are especially strong. You can read the British press where almost invariably there are not only doubts, but also strong appeals to reject this Constitution. One can even read that it is a "clash of civilisations," a conflict of the libertarian tradition of the English people and the Napoleonic tradition with its centralized bureaucracy ruling everything. Britain is very strongly attached to the idea of the sovereignty of their Parliament. The sovereignty of their Parliament is obviously destroyed if everything is dictated by the laws and rules of the Union directed by the decisions of the Union, these having priority over all national laws.

So the question naturally arises. Do we really need this new Constitution? Is it necessary? Is it useful to us, this Constitution which is, as far as I can see, about 20 times as large as the Constitution of the United States with all amendments and that has served the United States well for over two centuries? This Constitution, apart from a number of phrases which do not have a juridical meaning at all but which just have ideological content, express good intentions: concern about unemployment, dealing with environmental problems, supporting technological progress, and so on. This is more or less meaningless. Apart from that, there are many rules that provoke doubts in many EU countries.

Even people who support the Constitution as it is in Great Britain would like to retain the rights of their country in matters of foreign policy, defense and taxes, that is to say, crucial points in a country’s politics. The referendum has been announced, though no one knows when it will be held. For the time being, one should expect the answer “no” will be overwhelming in Great Britain. And if I vote in this referendum, I will vote “no” as well. I don’t see why we should have this centralizing Constitution and I’m not sure that it will work.

Let’s go back to the question of Iraq. What would have happened if this Constitution had been in force? Could Mr. Chirac have forced other countries to follow his lead and refuse to give help to America? Or, or on the contrary, could other countries have forced Mr. Chirac to war? This is not a meaningless point. Obviously, we want everything to be discussed. We want all countries to seek compromise and solutions that could, via compromise, be reached. But we are by no means certain that compromises will be everywhere possible. So the Constitution could always be endangered.

**Europe’s Christian Roots**

You remember that the authors of the Constitution refused stubbornly to mention in the preamble the tradition of Christianity. Of course, the point was not to make theological statements but to be fair to the historical tradition of Christianity as one of the founding blocks of Europe. I think there is nothing wrong with mentioning this tradition. In terms of the philosophical bases for Europe, it was extremely important. Europe built philosophical or ideological ideas that are unique perhaps. European culture is based on self-doubt, so to speak. Especially during the Enlightenment, Europe was able to encourage us to see our own culture with foreign eyes, so a visitor from remote stars in Voltaire, an Uzbek in Montesquieu or the horses in Swift, and so on. That’s something unique that made possible such a science to emerge as anthropology, which is an attempt to look at one’s self with the eyes of someone else.

Christianity taught European cultures to avoid two dangers: one was the pantheistic doctrine, which hardly noticed the power of evil in the human world, and the other was the Manichean or agnostic tradition, which condemned the entire physical world, the body, as a product of evil. Because Christianity was able to avoid these two opposite traps it allowed us to see nature not simply as something that we should worship or condemn, but as an adversary to conquer. That was the ideological basis of the technical conquest of nature in European culture.

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