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THE NEW EUROPEAN UNION

Highlights from the Debate

From the outset, by far the dominant theme in the discussion among commissioners and guests assembled
in Warsaw was that of “anti-Americanism,” at a time when an enlarged European Union seeks to
strengthen its institutions with a proposed new “Constitution”—which would be more aptly called a
“Constitutional Treaty,” as a number of participants observed.

Is the emerging European identity being defined in opposition to the United States? To many European
participants, the answer is emphatically “no.” To wit, the comments of a prominent Italian member of
the outgoing European Commission: “…Just as Americans do not, and probably should not, engage too
much in Europe’s current constitutional process, this process is being experienced and felt by Europeans
as being largely unrelated to America. What Europe is so busy doing, with remarkable success and
remarkable shortcomings, is building a new entity with an original architecture and finding a new
dynamic balance among member states in the Union more than defining new policies in a substantive
sense. In this process, it seems to me, the U.S. is not a key factor, and I don’t see any opposition to the
U.S. in our efforts. On the contrary! What Europe is trying to achieve—a single market, a single currency,
enlargement and a constitution—is inherently inspired by America’s historical experience…”

Or, in the words of a British diplomat closely involved in the work of the Convention on the Future of
Europe: “…I think the advent of a European identity based on systematic opposition to the United States
was a real risk (...). Yet that risk has been markedly reduced by the very welcome enlargement of the
Union which has now taken place (...). Our American friends have to understand that there is a
requirement for a revival of the habit of consultation on the other side of the Atlantic. Conversely,
anybody who still believes that it is best to seek a European identity by distinguishing ourselves
systematically from America must understand that, on such a basis, there will never be a common
European foreign policy…”

However, a few qualifications were introduced in the discussion: To the effect that “behind the ugly [anti-
American] debate, loom large substantive policy differences. These differences are legitimate and do not
threaten the fundamental solidarity of our values” (a Swedish participant).

Or, in the words of a former British EU Commissioner, who doubts that the new Constitution will
significantly strengthen in the short term a common European foreign policy, “Europe from time to time
is bound to take a view which differs from that of the United States. That, however, does not affect the
fundamental, common purpose and common view and vision (...). Although there is a lot of repair work
to be done, in the end I think we are fundamentally on the same side, and need to be so, and to work very
closely to create the institutions able to maximize the chances of common foreign policy positions
wherever possible.”

Or, in the more worried words of a French parliamentarian who looks at opinion polls in Europe on
attitudes towards America and at the “wishy-washy” defense clauses of the new constitutional treaty, sees
“no hope of harmonizing European military forces and budgets, leaving a Europe that is relieved when we
are not involved with the U.S., and gradually sliding toward neutrality while lecturing the rest of the
world on international law (...). Shouldn’t that be called ‘decoupling,’ which was the nightmare we all
feared during the Cold War?... Taking up the same theme, a Dutch participant underlined the main tasks ahead for European defense: “First of all, continued peacekeeping in the Balkans—a task we can handle now. Second, peacekeeping in Afghanistan. Third, helping the United States to get out decently from Iraq. And some European countries assist the United States in that, while others unfortunately do not. Last and most difficult, helping the U.S. to enforce a negotiated peace settlement between Israel and the Palestinians. I fear that without taking up these tasks there will be no real European defense capability in the future...”

On Europe’s proposed constitution, a number of voices rose to applaud “a major achievement” without which we would stay with the status quo—namely, the Treaty of Nice, a pretty bad text...(a Dutch banker), or to salute “a trailblazing Europe setting the example for the whole world” (a former prime minister of South Korea), while others dwelt on the Treaty’s “shortcomings.”

Thus, a former Italian foreign minister and EC Commissioner, pleading for the approval of the constitution, expressed “two major concerns.... One is the question of a referendum. Of course, no one can object to a popular referendum to ratify the constitution. But if we give to one country that rejects the text the right to block the whole constitutional process, this is certain to decrease the legitimacy of Europe. If we want to improve European legitimacy, we should have a European referendum and not national referenda.... My second concern, in light of the past, is that now if a group of nations wants to move ahead, they can only do so with the consensus of all others. Had we had a similar clause before, we would not have today a single currency, nor the free circulation of the Schengen Treaty...”

A former German economics minister went even further: “I want a constitution, but a better one, not this one.... This one, in particular, deals in an unacceptable way with the independence of the European Central Bank. It has been rejected and criticized, rightly so, by the ECB, by the Council, by the Bundesbank, and by experts. This has to be changed. Let me make it clear that, absent such a change, I personally will never vote for such a constitution...”

In conclusion, a remarkable consensus emerged to stress the importance of a Europe eschewing “inward-looking tendencies” and fully open to Asia not exclusively focused on the transatlantic “tandem.”