

# Europe comes together in fear and trepidation

*Europe*  
3/12/04  
*The News*

**Dominique Moûsi**

Paris fifteen years ago, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, a confident Western Europe had no doubts about what it would bring to the "other Europe." It would offer a combination of political legitimacy, based on the strength of its democratic institutions, and of economic modernity, evident in its thriving capitalism. Western Europe was a successful and unique model of reconciliation, incarnated in the partnership of France and Germany. The Union was about to embark on the process that would lead to the creation of a single currency. This optimism, in spite of numerous Euroskeptical Cassandras, derived from a vision of the future based on the ability to transcend the past and manage the present. It derived, too, from a unique institutional talent to invent new concepts of sovereignty.

Last but not least, Western Europe could present itself as a junior but faithful and indispensable partner of the United States. Europe had also played its part in the successful outcome of the cold war by refusing to fall prey to pacifist temptations. Even in terms of security - vis-à-vis the crumbling Soviet empire, or in confronting the ethnic ghost of the past in the Balkans - Europe could be perceived as vital. If "we" in the European Union nurtured some doubts, it was not about ourselves, but about the quality of the "newcomers." Were they ready - clean enough politically and mentally - to sit in the comfortable armchairs of our impeccably modern democratic club?

We could not really close our

doors to them. But already then only a minority of West Europeans perceived the historical, moral and cultural challenge of a process that too few rightly perceived and described as one of "reunification," and not "enlargement." Those who felt really happy to rediscover distant cousins who had been artificially separated from them by the unfair and tragic conditions of history were not legion. A majority of West Europeans then - and maybe even more now - were dominated by a combination of economic apprehension and petty political calculus: Enlargement may be good for Europe, but is it good for me? Some, like Britain, used enlargement as a convenient tool to water down the process of deepening European integration; others, like France, were using deepening as a rationale for slowing down enlargement.

Today, on the eve of the historical enlargement, there exists a strange combination of change and continuity. On the former, the European Union is much less secure about what it will bring to the new entrants. On the latter, the arguments about the merits and risks - if not the costs - of enlargement are largely the same as they were more than 10 years ago. In 2004, the European Union is much less secure about itself, and about the quality and future of its model. Deep down, the EU has greater doubts than before about the ability of the new Europeans to "learn" from the old.

In fact, Europe, old as well as new, is in the midst of a deep identity crisis. How can we be secure about what we are bringing, when we no longer know what we are? We do not know where our continent ends. Is

Turkey in Europe or not? The question goes to the heart of our identity debate. Is Europe about the value of geography or about the geography of values? Turkey is clearly not in Europe, but that must be balanced against the risk of saying no to the only example of a modern, democratic and secular Islam. More than ever, we ignore our institutional future. We can no longer be sure that we shall have a constitution ratified by all, with a preamble encompassing all the values we are so proud of. And we do not know - especially with the war in Iraq and our fundamental divisions with respect to Washington and the future of trans-Atlantic relations - whether we can have a common foreign and security policy.

Even if we ignore our geography and our institutional and diplomatic future, we know too well the depressing state of our demography, which makes of us - in contrast to that other West, the United States - an aging continent, with a need to integrate others, who most likely are not going to be Europeans. We realise also the decline of the European ideal. Europe may have become a growing and expanding reality, from the euro to the Schengen Accords, but it is less and less an enthusiastic dream, a project that can mobilize us. Even among us, in the old West, one can perceive signs of regression in the form of a re-nationalization, if not a detribalisation of political exchanges.

At the end of the day, even the most sceptical of the new entrants do have to accept that the European Union symbolizes economic modernity. In fact, in anticipation of the pro-

cess of enlargement, investments from all over the world, from Western Europe to the United States and even Asia, have flowed into the countries about to join the Union. It is a perfect illustration of the fact that largely thanks to the EU, they are perceived as a "good risk." In countries where a growing cynicism towards the very idea of democracy is fed by rampant corruption and nepotism, what the European Union brings, despite its own shortcomings and occasional lapses, is a sense of limits. It is the sense that rules cannot be violated without a cost to the perpetrators and to society at large. In the European Union club, corruption is the exception, not the rule.

The third message of the European Union, after modernity and democracy, is reconciliation. This may be the most urgent, and ultimately the most important. For the seeds of intolerant nationalism are still present - and not only in the Balkans, where they have led to the return of war to the European continent for the first time since the end of World War II. Even in Central and Eastern Europe, the model of Franco-German reconciliation is valid, with its core message that you have to cooperate closely with the other in order to be fully yourself. Caught between Germany and Russia, Central Europe, too, has to become a land of reconciliation if Europe is to close the tragic side of its history once and for all.

**The writer is a senior advisor with IFRI, the French Institute of International Relations**

**IHT, April 30, 2004**