

**1 FRANCE AND GERMANY:  
THE IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION ON SOCIETY AND CULTURE  
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What I have to say today will be on the basis not of an expert, but on the basis of an **informed observer** of France and Germany.

In what follows I will restrict myself to three issues which are at the heart of the impact of globalization on French and German society and culture. They are:

- 1) the tension between the imperatives of social justice and competition
- 2) the issue of a European identity
- 3) and the transformation of the educational system.

When discussing the complex issue of globalization there many elements to take into account. Today I would like to stress in particular one item: the opening up of trade, increased possibilities of mobility due to changes in transportation and geopolitics, the lowering or dissolution of national barriers and the migration of populations that has accompanied this, the telecommunications and information technology revolution, the free flow of large amounts of capital by electronic means, and many other phenomena are part of a *process* that has been going on for a long time but which has particularly intensified at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In some ways this process is tied to capitalism, in some ways it is not. But it has indeed been underway throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, moving with fits and starts, a complex set of forces and processes: in many ways, globalization is really part of the Western *ideology of progress*. Significantly though, during the last thirty years the neo-liberal rhetoric and ideology engendered in the Thatcher and Reagan era (ie the 1980s) has 'captured' these broader issues and

branded them for itself, and, as in the case of all ideologies, has claimed inevitability for the process of the domination of market forces over all aspects of our lives. In reality, this is not actually very different from the 'inevitability of the triumph of the proletariat', a key tenet in a very different ideology. This perspective has reduced globalization to a purely economic phenomenon, but our experience has shown us that it is something far greater than that. John Ralston Saul's recent book (2005), *The Collapse of Globalism and the Reinvention of the World*, documents and critically analyses this process of 'ideological capture' quite well.

In our own recent experience, the local iteration of this ideological process in Ontario was seen in the government of Mike Harris and the Common Sense Revolution, and in Alberta where I spent the last twenty years it was presented as the Alberta Advantage Revolution of Ralph Klein. It is precisely this **conflation** of neo-liberal doctrine on the one hand, and many, many major changes in lifestyle, geopolitics, technology and other areas that has frequently led to polarized and often misleading discussions over the last years. This is evident not only in North America but also in the EU. French and German publications are constantly filled with articles on issues pertaining to the EU and globalization: it is impossible to read the *Nouvel Observateur* or *Le Monde* on the one hand, or *Der Spiegel* or *Die Zeit* on the other hand without encountering detailed articles, controversies, and discussions of these issues in virtually every issue. What is important is that the analyses which they present are beginning to show far greater nuance in respect to this discussion than was the case just a few years ago. The issue of globalization is very much in the minds of Europeans and they clearly feel the pressures from within the EU, as well as from outside the EU.

### **The Tension between Social Justice and Competition**

One topic in this discussion is the issue of the tension between the notions of Social Justice and Competition. The great imperative of neo-

liberalism is the paradigm of free market competition, and indeed the reality of intense competition is alive and well in the world today: for example, the rise of the Asian economies and the transferral of manufacturing capacity as well as outsourced service activity from Europe elsewhere in the world is a major and very real issue. Competition has indeed become more pronounced than ever before. However, the neo-liberal voices have repeatedly pitched the imperative of competition against the extensive and expensive social welfare systems of France and Germany, and the more strident voices have called for the abolition of these systems altogether as the main impediment to economic success. In the US, and to far a lesser degree in Canada, reductions in this area have been implemented.

It is most certainly true that one of the key areas needing reform within the EU is that of social policy. As Anthony Giddens, the Director of the London School of Economics has said, "The intensive discussion of the emergence of the knowledge-based economy that has gone on in Europe has **not** been matched by equivalent analysis of social changes" (*Global Age*, viii). The European Social Model (ESM) which lies at the heart of contemporary Europe and which is the product of almost two centuries of conflict, struggle and negotiation could be described as follows:

1. A developed and interventionist state, funded by relatively high levels of taxation
2. A robust welfare system, which provides effective social protection, to some considerable degree for all citizens, but especially for those most in need
3. The limitation, or containment, of economic and other forms of inequality (*Global Age*, 2)

The EU finds itself in the curious position of embracing and rejecting globalization at the same. On the one hand, we see that France for example is in many ways highly globalized. McDonald's makes most of its profit outside the United States in France. A third of Europe's biggest multinationals are French. More than one in seven employees in France work for a foreign-

owned company. At the same time there is widespread fear of the dismantling of the social system: in 1999, José Bové, a French farmer, led a group which attacked and *quite literally* dismantled a McDonald's franchise in the south of France and overnight he became a national hero.

While social justice has been a key element to European policy, there is another side. As various commentators point out, "it is significant that France, Germany and Italy still approximate more to the traditional gender distribution of work than do the UK, the Netherlands, or the Nordic countries. (*Global Age*, 85) My own observation is that, in terms of social justice, gender equality in France and Germany is **far behind** what has been achieved in North America: when I describe our university hiring procedures to European colleagues, they are astounded that we are not allowed to pry into the nooks and crannies of potential new professors' private lives (particularly in the case of female colleagues) in order to ascertain their suitability for a position. I remember when my young German sister in law carefully 'produced' the most fetching photograph of herself that she could in order to attach it to a job application. In general terms, I think that France has made greater progress in this area than has Germany: for instance, whereas in France there has been investment in women through child care and a benefit system that supports all mothers, regardless of marital status, in Germany, the social system depends heavily on the traditional family which is expected to pick up the pieces in any difficult situation, day care is only a dream, and divorce is still a conflict based experience instead of a collaborative one which seeks to **reduce** the effects of marital breakdown. (Giddens 14).

This issue is also quite evident in relation to immigration. I will come back to this topic in a moment under the heading of Identity, but suffice it to say here that recent events in France and Germany have demonstrated the extent to which the social justice issue has **not** been dealt with adequately in these countries. I would agree with Giddens that in many ways French and German society remain relatively 'blocked' in terms of the reform of social policy.

The main point here however is that we must recognize that a move towards a set of more globalized relationships is not automatically antithetical to the establishment of social justice, a set of commonly held values about the individual, and a national identity. The new type of egalitarianism which the EU is very slowly moving towards combines social justice and economic dynamism, with the recognition that there will trade offs. *The single most important social issue is the how societies should react to the new phenomena of cultural and social diversity.* (Giddens, 100) Totally free market ideologies do not create a fair and just society nor do they create the basis for long term economic growth: witness Britain and the effects of the Thatcherite government of the 1980s. The conditions that would balance, increased social justice and economic dynamism would be a far cry from deregulated labour markets. (*Global Age*, 88) The challenge and key goal for the EU then is to retain a high degree of market competitiveness and a high degree of social justice. A balance will be necessary, as will trade offs, but the possibility of achieving a model which is not 'American' in nature and which speaks to European values is not merely a dream.

### **The Issue of European Identity**

Numerous surveys that have been undertaken over the last years have shown that while the EU *per se* has wide support throughout the member nations, the issue of just what the EU is and what the new European identity is confuses many people. The rejection of the EU constitution by founding members in 2004 also reflected this widespread feeling and demonstrated that the discussion about European identity had yet to be undertaken and thoroughly developed.

How should we think of identity? I would suggest that it is and should be thought of as a dynamic quality: an identity is never stable nor complete. Identity must be thought of in terms of an integrated set of symbolic structures which exist through time and which assure continuity and

coherence. As Etienne Balibar has described this, “it is not a question of setting a collective identity against individual identities. All identity is individual but there is no identity that is not historical or, in other words, constructed within a field of social values, norms of behaviour, and collective symbols. The real question is how the dominant reference points of individual identity change over time and with the changing institutional environment.” (In Jacobs and Maier, p4; 1991:94)

The neo-liberal voices of globalization have said that the nation state is dead, and along with it national identity. Well, reports of that particular death have indeed been vastly exaggerated. It is my experience that citizens of France and Germany still very much consider themselves to be French and German: their languages are not disappearing (though they are changing), and the conscious or unconscious depth of cultural practice and reference is as profound as ever (though modified through American popular culture and cross cultural contact). Nevertheless, there is another dimension now present that has arisen through the years of the development of the EU: a consciousness of belonging to something else, a set of shared values which is not rooted only in national identity. The notion of European citizenship is starting to grow, but it is still very young and still developing. Within this context of the globalizing tendencies of capitalism, national identity and cosmopolitan identity are complexly interrelated.

Over the last twenty five years many things have been done officially to promote a European identity:

- 1) the development of the notion of a common mythology: the emphasis on humanism, greco -roman roots; the promotion of the ideology of the peaceful and democratizing project; the development of common Eurosymbolism (flag, passport, an anthem, a currency), international exchanges, and a movement towards a common educational structure;
- 2) a supra national legal system has been elaborated along with the creation of a European court

3) supra national citizenship has been affirmed by the right of free passage across national boundaries. Just this last week the EU told Canada that it expected the Visa requirement for citizens of the new EU countries to be removed. However, just how that new citizenship should be identified remains open.

The creation of an imagined community; the identity of “us” must be created: it is not a ‘natural’ entity. We Canadians are very aware of this since ours is a quintessentially constructed identity, largely in reference to the US and Europe. Canada has required a very long time to elaborate and define the qualities of national identity, and even now, 140 years after Confederation, much is not clear. However, when I cross the border I am Very aware of being in a foreign country and culture. The question of European identity can be thought of as the construction of a new “we”, not only an ‘imagined community’ with recognizable characteristics and values, but a lived reality. Does the new identity reside upon national identities, or is it an entirely new construct, or indeed a hybrid of these? Will the EU identity be like a national identity, but writ large, or will it be different? Will it be formulated in terms of positive characteristics about being ‘European’ or will it be formulated negatively as in, not American, or not Islamic? Europeans see the care and protection which the state offers them as being central to their lives, and part of their European identity.

Progress has been made: back in the 80s and 90s I used to drive from Germany to France in my then father in law’s car to visit my Polish cousins in Northern France: the sight of the German licence plates always drew stares from people in the small town near Valenciennes in northern France where we went; by 2000 that was no longer the case and people went out of their way to be friendly and show visitors whom they thought were German the way to my cousin’s farm house. It takes time.

Let us consider just a couple elements at play here:

**Language:** this is a key issue and one to which Europeans return frequently: a recent title on the front page of *Die Zeit* was: “Deutsche Sprache, tote Sprache”? (26. Juli 2007). As we know, identity and language are closely bound together. It is undoubtedly true that English has become something of a *lingua franca*, due to business, due to science and technology, due to the domination of the United States in world affairs. That does **not** mean though that national languages and their cultures will disappear. In the realms of business, science, international contact, a few languages will tend to dominate, often for practical reasons. This is not a new phenomenon. And as we have seen technology and popular culture are closely linked: English pop songs penetrate into every culture of world. However, in the ‘private sphere’ national languages flourish: German and French will not disappear tomorrow because vast numbers of people live, feel, raise their children, and have intimate contact to others in those languages. That these languages will undergo change due to the pressure of English—of that there is no doubt. But these languages and the identity and sense of community that they foster will continue to live in songs, narratives, dramas, television shows, and daily life in their respective cultures. English will play a role in forming the EU identity, a role which is as yet unclear. One has only to think of the variegated manner in which former European colonies around the world assimilated the language of the former colonial power to get a glimpse of that complexity.

**Immigration:** one of the great myths of France and Germany is that these countries were not countries of immigration. Well, maybe not in the same fashion as Canada, the US, and Australia, but the histories of these countries demonstrate that successive groups have immigrated to these countries over long periods of time. With the opening of borders, particularly after 1989, this has intensified, not only in terms of numbers but in terms of kind. This of course is the challenge, one that is faced not only by France and Germany but globally. Neither France nor Germany has done enough though to create a welcoming climate for newcomers.

In postwar Europe the rights of 'Europeans' have been widely granted to immigrants, though not in all countries: if one resides on the territory, one should be have access to these rights. This may have arisen from the development of the welfare state in Europe, since the welfare state requires that all resides benefit from social equity. Or, it has been argued that the extension of rights comes more from the idea of universal personhood. The legitimacy of individual human rights has broken out of the bonds of the nation state: the narrative of human rights has come to replace the narrative of nationhood. (p. 6, Jakobs). The result: citizenship has a new postnational character. In the early days of the EU, the notion of the European citizen and the possible development of a European consciousness was a significant factor; during the eighties and afterwards, it tended to disappear under the onslaught of neo - liberal globalization. However, the notion has gained new validity and the introduction of an EU passport is a sign of this. The creation of a common currency has also played a role in this. But it is important to understand that the identity must be built on other, non-economic grounds if it is to be successful.

"The problem with the European countries is not that they have been too multiculturalist [as the Right would say], but that they have not been multiculturalist enough." (*Global Age*, 133). One thing which the EU could learn from the Canadian experience is the necessity of adopting policies the aim of which is to change the attitudes of the *host* population, not only the *new* population. (*Global Age*, 124) Though the Canadian context is different from the European one, there are nonetheless lessons to be learned. Apart from the UK to some extent, multiculturalism has barely been tried in the EU, and other policies have not been successful as recent events of violence, riots, and racism in France and Germany have shown. There is no going back from diversity, pluralism, and mobility: these phenomena of the contemporary world are here to stay. The EU must come to terms **pro-actively** with these issues if it is build a society that corresponds to its core values.

Then there is also the issue of the secular society and how it is to act in the face of the return of the 'sacred'. The best way to counter racism and exclusion is to assist minority groups to attain success and rise in social prestige as members of the community. This has not been developed in either Germany or France in terms of a conscious policy, and it requires political leadership to make it happen. The creation of an inclusive educational experience in France and Germany cannot but have an impact on the notion of European identity, citizenship, and the development of shared values. Most European countries actually have policies to encourage either integration or multiculturalism: the claim is one of inclusiveness. However, in reality, in practice one finds that exclusiveness tends to dominate.

Eurobarometer research has shown that large numbers of Europeans still have difficulty in seeing themselves as European rather than national. The traditional differentiation of nationals and non-nationals ("I'm French, you're German") (Jakob, p.8) seems to be giving way though to a different classification, one based along the lines of a 'shared Western culture'. Other European nationals are far less seen as foreigners than are Turks, Asians, people of Islamic origin. Though identification with the European Project may remain marginal for many, they identify as non-Europeans people who come from outside of the EU, particularly non-white areas.

## **The Transformation of the Educational Systems in France and Germany**

One of the most significant, and most tumultuous, changes currently taking place is the major transformation of the European higher education system which was formalized by the Bologna Accords of 1999 with the avowed aim of "harmonizing the architecture of the European Higher Education system". Some 40 countries agreed to change their systems of higher education to reach the goals of the Bologna Accord. The degree levels were organized around a Bachelor, Masters, and PhD set of qualifications.

The aims of this reform were manifold:

- \$ allow Europe to better compete on the international level in the area of higher education
- \$ promote ease of transfer from one national educational system and overall mobility within the European system
- \$ to create a two cycle system (ie undergraduate and graduate degrees)
- \$ to establish a common credit system (the ECTS ) with standardized numbers of credits for particular degree programs
- \$ to make the European system more attractive to foreign students by reducing its complexity: the existing system was very 'country specific'
- \$ promote a truly European system of education through new interconnections
- \$ and also promote a degree of convergence between the North American and European systems of higher education through the creation of comparable structures.
- \$ by 2010 the system is to have been rebuilt into an undergraduate and graduate system as in North Am

Anyone who is familiar with the complicated, tortuous, and overly 'national' character of the European post - secondary system can well imagine the potential significance of this change: EU identity, cross border mobility, stronger levels of competitiveness are benefits which all come to mind.

Now what is significant here is that this agreement is not an EU agreement, but rather one amongst national governments, and therefore not binding on EU states: it is voluntary for all signatories. There is also a major disadvantage in having the traditional national systems and the new developing system existing in parallel, which actually makes things **more complex** than before. Perhaps this was the only way to achieve this arrangement at this time, but it does not have weight that a decision by the European parliament would have. However, the European Commission in Brussels is actually very much involved in its implementation. The changes are taking place at varying speeds in varying ways across Europe, but they

most certainly are having an impact. The awareness of the need for reform in the area of education is a recurrent theme in French and German publications. My son just started an MA program in International Studies in Paris this week and in style and content (and fees unfortunately) it very much resembles a North American program. And earlier this year I traveled to the Lyon region with a group of representatives from Ontario universities to visit the French partners in the Ontario/Rhône-Alpes agreement, the pendant to the Ontario/Baden-Württemberg agreement. What I saw there was both world level quality (in the scientific establishments we visited), but also a new vision: the universities, grandes écoles, research institutes and others were all uniting under the Université de Lyon banner in order to concentrate their effectiveness in a world educational market.

The first French female finance minister (Christine Lagarde) and the female federal education minister of Germany (Annette Schavan) have both spoken out for the need for major reforms in the post-secondary sector in their countries—to a chorus of claims that this is impossible, as one could expect.

In Germany the Constitutional Court has ruled that the federal level cannot prohibit the Länder from establishing tuition fees, and in many cases this has been done, with the expected result on the part of student organizations. As elsewhere, the universities which are starting to do this are also creating a system of scholarships, something which does not really exist in Germany (or France) in the same way as in North America. Many students have been reluctant to take the new BA and MA programs for fear that employers will not recognize them, but this too is changing and some universities have put these programs exclusively in place (eg. Bremen and Erfurt). In addition, since many programs are taught in English, the aim of this is to attract students from North America who would find both the price and the atmosphere in Europe attractive. So, yes, innovation is occurring.

However, in both countries, there are considerable problems of

insufficient infrastructure and political will to integrate children of immigrant parents into all levels of education, the number of foreign students in the German system was only about 15% last year, and funding for post - secondary education has not kept pace with the growth of the participation rate in the EU, the pressures of the global knowledge economy, and the need for a tolerant and educated citizenry. (Giddens, 184). In addition salaries, working conditions, and a very tortuous system of entry for new professors makes recruitment of university faculty members problematic.

As one could expect, this process has been criticized as an Americanization of traditional European educational systems. There are still problems related to the recognition of the new degrees, what entry level positions they prepare students for, and of course the disruption which this introduces into the post- secondary system. Student demonstrations in France against the changes (in 2003, for example) have been particularly noteworthy. And in the case of Germany the new degrees conflate vocational and academic education in a way the old system did not. However, this process does maintain some of the delicate balance between standardization and diversity which is necessary within the educational system.

## **Conclusion**

The EU is a fascinating and largely successful experiment in maintaining the balance of national community and the globalizing effects of supranational identity in an age of extensive transition. With the events of 1989 the EU became a different beast: with open boundaries to the East and to the Balkans, the very identity of the EU became problematic (Giddens, 200). Should the EU grow, should Turkey be admitted? Along with this came another change: the Franco-German axis had been at the very fundament of the EU: that has now changed somewhat with the successive enlargements (Giddens 202) and will continue to change. This can have the very positive

effect of balancing out power relations within the EU. Time will tell.

Despite some indications to the contrary, this is a great time of opportunity for the EU. I have been traveling to France and Germany for the last 35 years, and both countries are very different now than when I first new them then. In many ways they are more modern, more cosmopolitan, more open. In other ways they are still narrow, bureaucratic, and unsure of their place in the new world. But the developments of the past 50 years speak in favour of the future. I intend to stay tuned and to continue the comparison with North America as we evolve along as yet uncertain paths.

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