



## What is the EU?

by Sylvie Fodor

The EU is a political and economic grouping of 27 States, 455 million EU citizens, 6% of the world's population, generating an estimated 30% of the global national product. It has the world's strongest currency and a single market created by a system of laws which applies in all member States. It is also the world's largest donor of development aid. The EU maintains common policies in areas such as trade, agriculture, regional development and climate change ... It has concurrent membership of its member states in a number of international organizations : the WTO, the IMF, the ERBD, the WEU, the OSCE, the UN and its myriad of agencies, such as WIPO, the World Intellectual Property Organization, where CEPIC has Observer Status. As such the EU wields considerable global economic and political power.

Built on the ashes of World War Two, it grew from a small club of 6 nations in 1957 to a large forum of 27 nations in 2008, it has several applicants and no Member State has ever expressed the wish to leave the Union.

On the face of these facts, the EU is a success story. Yet regular polls point to the abyssal ignorance of its citizens as to what it actually is and how it works.

One reason for this ignorance may be that the EU has been built on a paradox. It is an intergovernmental organization with supranational powers in some instances. Often referred to as a Superstate, it, however, does not fit well into the definition of a State upon closer scrutiny.

### **The EU is not a territory**

Presently the EU encompasses 27 countries all located in Europe, yet the territory of the EU is not the same as the territory of Europe as parts of the continent are outside the EU, such as Switzerland, Norway and European Russia. Nor do any of the EU Treaties prescribe that member states are to come from geographical Europe. This is why Turkey and Morocco can apply for EU membership.

### **The EU has all the attributes of a government but isn't one.**

It has a Parliament, based in Strasbourg, elected by direct and universal vote every five years. The recent Treaty of Lisbon (2007) has again extended its powers in budgetary, lawmaking and international agreement issues.

It has an Executive, the European Commission, based in Brussels, indeed recently referred to as the "EU Government" by Commission President, Romano Prodi. The European Council, set up of representatives of member States, serves as a collective presidency and as link to the members.

Last but not least, it has a Judiciary, based in Luxembourg, the European Court of Justice, to ensure legal application of EU legislation across Member States.

What it does not have is power to carry out its political judgements. That is left to the Member States, and to the Member States only, to carry out the laws made in Brussels, the "Acquis communautaire", as their own national laws.

### **There are other contradictions**

The EU has not one but 13 currencies: the Euro is only its most popular and strongest, shared by 15 States, governed by a Central Bank based in Frankfurt. On the other hand although it has officially 23 languages and all documents must be translated in these languages, there is only one main common language of communication throughout the continent which is English.

### **The outvoted EU Constitution was in fact not a constitution**

The text was a consolidation of all treaties since the founding Treaty of Rome of 1957 to the Treaty of Nice in 2003. After the failed referendums in France and the Netherlands in 2005, a last born Treaty, the Treaty of Lisbon (13 December 2007), has added up to the others, amending, completing but not replacing them and introducing the necessary changes to make institutions conceived for 6 members work for 27.

### **The last paradox is the history of Europe's birth**

It is self-destruction which opened the way to unity. "What we need is a United States of Europe" said UK statesman, Sir Winston Churchill, in a controversial speech in 1945. In practice, the EU was born out of the dream of a few pioneers called Jean Monnet, Robert Schuman, Konrad Adenauer, Alcide De Gasperi, who on the ruins of a devastated and starving continent found the last stroke of energy to lay the foundation of European unity as an antidote to further destruction. They were pragmatic and cautious people who knew that they couldn't ask too much from their contemporaries just a few years after the war.

"The single Europe will not be made at once, or according to a single comprehensive plan", said Robert Schuman, former French Prime Minister and former President of the European Parliament, "Rather, it will be built through a series of concrete achievements, each of which will create a de facto solidarity."

The Schuman Declaration of 1950, placing France and West Germany coal and steel industry under joint management, the ECSC, was the first of the European Communities and predecessor of the European Union. It is celebrated as EU-sponsored Europe Day on May 9th as the true beginning of post war cooperation.

That the ultimate goal was Peace and that the means for Peace is Economy is very important to understand what the EU is really about. More than a structure, the EU is a process. It has set a framework to work together and, undoubtedly, it has brought peace and prosperity to Europe in the last 60 years, but nobody really knows where this process will lead to.

There is something called the "European Dream", argued author Jeremy Rifkin in his book "The European Dream" (2004), based on shared power. "This is the first time that a collective part of the human race has had a dream, as thin as it is, that is an attempt at global consciousness. It may fail, it may be too ambitious, it may be too thin, but it's actually a dream based on global consciousness for a globalised world."

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