

Can Europe become a great power ?

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Tuesday, 2 December 2008

Excellencies,
Dear Ms. Kwek,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Distinguished guests,

First let me thank the EU Centre and Mrs. Kwek Puay Swan, its director, for organising this conference, as well as the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy for kindly hosting this event and giving me the opportunity to share some views at a time when the French Presidency of the EU is drawing to a close. Thank you all for your presence today as we reflect on an issue which is often misunderstood or misrepresented, and can benefit from some new thinking.

There is a paradox about Europe and power. To a large extent Europe invented modern power, as defined by the concentration of power in the hands of the nation-State, technological edge, military superiority, projection of power in the rest of the world, efficient systems for producing goods and services, dominant ideologies and so on. Today, Europe still comprises two nuclear powers and permanent members of the UN Security Council, four members of the G7 and five of the G20, and it is home to NATO, the most powerful defence alliance in the world with no close second. Many of the great thinkers on power have been Europeans, from Clausewitz to Raymond Aron, from Zbigniew Brzezinski to Henry Kissinger.

However many informed observers will tell you that Europe has now lost all ability to project itself into the wider world, that it has become largely ineffectual, and is busy making excuses for its weakness by calling it virtue. This school of thought appears to be particularly prevalent in the United States, but also in Asia, as any regular reader of the « Straits Times » will know...

I believe this paradox needs revisiting, as I have attempted to do in a paper I had written before my appointment as Ambassador to Singapore, at a time when I was in academia, and which was published last July, in an updated version, as part of a series of books on Europe, in both French and English. My intervention of today borrows heavily from this paper, but I have also tried to draw lessons from the most recent events. Both will be available for download on the website of the French Embassy, whose address is mentioned on the flyer circulated. Before we delve into the matter, I would like to ask you to grant me the academic freedom I enjoyed when I wrote the paper and to consider that these views are my own and do not necessarily reflect those of the French government, and even less so of the whole European Union.

I will first spell out the tenets of this paradox of Europe and the very idea of power. Secondly I will invite you to discover how the European Union has transcended that paradox and has actually reinvented the very notion of power.

I. the paradox of Europe and power

The tenets of this paradox are twofold :

A. the whole European adventure is born out of a rejection of power, a rejection which provides a significant part of its “genetic material”.

The rationale for the construction of an united Europe was to embed the restoration of German sovereignty into a viable political organisation. Therefore Europe’s founding principle is enshrined in French Minister for Foreign Affairs Robert Schuman’s historic words, pronounced on 9 May 1950 : " Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create a *de facto* solidarity." Solidarity, that was quite a new concept in European politics of the times, and it is not by mere chance that the six founding nations of Europe had been, while on opposite sides during WWII, burnt by the fire of power. It was also on purpose that their first action was, that same year, to create the “ European Coal and Steel Community ”. Placing production of the two raw materials of the weapons industry under a supranational authority was obviously meant as a way to prevent the resurgence of military power.

Four years later, after having failed to integrate the European armed forces into a European Defence Community, the Europeans and Americans allowed West Germany to rearm within NATO. NATO thus became Europe's only guarantee of security against the Soviet Union, while Europe relinquished all ambition to be a military power. These two parallel integration processes shaped the political matrix of Europe until the end of the Cold War, when the issue of power was again raised with the need to embed a reunified Germany into the political system of Europe. That issue was resolved through a bold leap towards integration within the European Community, at the instigation of Chancellor Kohl and President Mitterrand.

Epitomizing this new ambition was the Maastricht Treaty, signed in 1991, the most important step taken towards political union, even towards the classical form of the Nation-State, in the entire history of European construction. European citizenship was established; the creation of a single currency was decided; a common – albeit not a single - foreign and security policy (CFSP) was introduced; and issues until then considered to fall within the purview of member States, such as justice and home affairs, were included within the scope of Europe. In both its symbolism and its practical effects, the Maastricht Treaty marked a watershed in the European entity.

The ink was hardly dry on the Maastricht Treaty when the Yugoslav conflict erupted. While Jacques Poos, President of the European Council enthused about the fact that " The hour of Europe has come ", Europe proved utterly powerless, and had to plead with the United States to step in. It took the clout, the weight and the instinct of the American superpower to reverse the balance of power on the ground and to take charge of the Dayton negotiations. The Europeans were only assigned bit parts and the situation got a replay a few years later during the air campaign against Serbia about the issue of Kosovo.

Learning from their failure in Yugoslavia, the Europeans went back to the drawing board and gradually put together the "toolbox" of political Europe. They created the position of High Representative for the CFSP, which to this day has been held by Javier Solana ; a 60,000-strong “ rapid reaction force ” was set up ; crisis management structures were formed

and the fragmentation of the European arms industry was greatly reduced. Europe is now able to conduct complex military and civil operations, such as the Artemis operation in Congo in June 2003 and the Althea operation in Bosnia in December 2004. There are currently 13 ongoing such operations throughout the world. Last month, the EU launched “ Atalanta ”, a large-scale operation against piracy in the Gulf of Somalia and the first European naval operation.

Now how far can this process be taken ? We have witnessed many pitfalls along the way, exemplified by the French and Dutch votes in the referenda in the spring of 2005 and again, last June, the Irish rejection of the Lisbon Treaty. But, the argument goes, hasn't Europe experienced other setbacks and each time overcome them? Once the impact has been absorbed, won't the inexorable momentum towards the creation of a "European power" resume ? Nothing could be less certain. As political integration proceeds, Europe is coming up against the limits – inherent to its nature, its procedures and its architecture - to its capacity to acquire State power. And this is the second tenet of our paradox.

B. the limits and stumbling blocks appear ever more clearly as Europe integrates further

They are threefold :

1. the first stumbling block pertains to Europe's internal equilibrium.

Europe is not a blank slate but rather an area overlaid, even crowded, with pre-existing patterns of power. It is made up of coexisting States whose historic experience, political culture, demographic and economic significance and simple national interest combine to define a specifically European distribution of power. As I have already noted, Europe comprises two nuclear powers that are members of the UN Security Council, several economic powers that are members of the G7, and allies that are members of NATO. It also comprises "neutral" States that are leery of power, dyed-in-the-wool Atlanticists, smaller States with no ambition to make their mark in the international arena, and nations that spent decades under Soviet rule keeping a careful watch on Russia out of the corner of their eye.

An excessively narrow geographic focus, though, would lead to overlook the United States as a European power. America belongs in Europe, as a result not just of the Cold War, but also of the current security balance, defined less and less in regional and more and more in global terms. It took an American intervention to put out the Yugoslavian fire. And more recently, the role of the U.S. in Europe has probably been made even greater by Europe's enlargement to Eastern countries, which have kept vivid memories of Soviet occupation and now see America as their best guarantor against their former occupant.

For decades, the constructive ambiguity that is the hallmark of the European project enabled Europe to move forward without upsetting this delicate political balance. It did so not by ignoring the equilibrium but by steering a delicate course within it and refraining from confronting it head-on. But any serious attempt to redistribute power in Europe would alter it in unpredictable ways. For example, when France and Germany consult each other, as they often do, before taking initiatives or positions that may affect the European political balance, eyebrows are raised, suspicions are aroused and countermoves are prepared among the other Europeans, hostile to anything resembling a French-German " directorate " or a " directorate " of large European States, as well as to anything appearing to infringe on sovereign equality, no matter how sterile, in decision-making.

And when a "European" interest impinges on or conflicts with an "Atlantic" interest, some nations are inclined to support the latter. This is not surprising, when the power differential is overwhelming, when there is no such thing as a European "director" but only US leadership. On the one hand, the United States ends up being, in the view of many Europeans, a "power equaliser" that places all the Europeans into a separate category that is much less differentiated than it would be if Europe were authentically independent.

On the other hand all countries do not share the same assessment of the risk of damaging the Atlantic relationship and the 2003 Iraq War was a case in point in this respect. For a number of EU countries, the issue was the transatlantic relationship rather than the merits of the case. Eight EU members, including the United Kingdom, Italy and Spain, and all ten of the incoming Eastern European members of the Union sided with the Americans and British Prime Minister stated it clearly in an interview with the *Financial Times* in April 2003 : "I want a stronger Europe, (...) but I don't want that Europe setting itself up in opposition to America, because (...) I think it will be dangerous and destabilising". Poland's President Kwasniewski was even more candid and just said : "if this is President Bush's vision, it is mine." I wonder how he feels about that statement today.

Anyhow, in a nutshell, the United States is a fully-fledged European power, unlike the European Union. Any move by Europe towards becoming a great power on its own would substantially alter its relationship with the US – an undertaking on which few Europeans are willing to embark.

2. the second limit has to do with the very fabric of Europe

Europe's decision-making processes are complex. The system combines federalism and supranationality. It involves myriads of pressure groups and lobbies. Its complexity increases with expanding membership – Pascal Lamy once talked about the "European law of physics", which states that complexity increases exponentially with the number of EU member countries. Within a decade, the number of member States indeed jumped from 12 to 27, but there was no real reform of the decision-making machinery.

These successive enlargements created a different Europe, whose geographical centre of gravity has shifted towards *Mittleuropa*, to use the old geopolitical concept. The new member States did not, however, find their place within a German "sphere of influence", but rather in allegiance to the United States, seen as the power that freed them from Soviet domination and above all as the ultimate guarantor of the security of Central and Eastern Europe against a Russia bound to rear its head again. The move that symbolised this guarantee, admission to NATO, occurred much earlier than accession to the European Union, which was a long drawn-out process. The "American tropism" in the foreign policies of the Central and Eastern European countries therefore comes as no surprise.

Added to this is an upsurge in populism, represented by such leaders as Vaclav Klaus in Prague, the Kaczynski brothers in Poland and Robert Fico in Slovakia. This trend tends to reduce the European project to an accounting equation, in which the focus is on open, avowed utilitarianism or the "defence of legitimate interests" of the countries concerned. The "ill wind of Eastern European populism", as French political scientist Jacques Rupnik has termed it, is probably only a passing phase in the history of these young democracies. But it fuels a

climate of nationalist selfishness that is always present under the surface in the rest of Europe, waiting to emerge.

The complexity of decision-making leaves the Union open to influences of all sorts and the United States has shown great skills in that respect. Some member States have been known to circulate documents in Brussels that reproduce the talking points handed out by U.S. Embassies in their capitals. What these practices demonstrate is that there is still no consolidated definition of a "European interest", in the sense of what we mean when we talk about a country's "national interest".

Globalisation is another factor corroding the fabric, method and spirit of the European construction. "Not only is globalisation unsettling Europe, it is tearing Europe apart," as French political journalist Alain Duhamel aptly puts it. While the European project was widely presented by the leaders of the member States as a way to control globalisation and to ensure a "civilised" opening of the borders to free trade, globalisation has instead inflicted a battering on Europe, bringing in its wake offshore relocations, loss of industrial jobs, tax and social dumping, deregulation and intensified rivalries. These scourges fuel a perception of increasing poverty and economic insecurity. They were blamed on Europe by its detractors and even, in many cases, by European leaders themselves in an attempt to pass the buck to a convenient scapegoat. The French and Dutch "no" votes in the spring of 2005 were above all symptoms of accumulated grievances, rather than an answer to the question put in the referenda. The votes nevertheless fed the vicious circle of the crisis, creating an image of institutional paralysis and a perception that Europe had lost its way. Even icons of Europe's industrial success, such as Airbus and Galileo, showed cracks.

3. the third limit pertains to the very nature of power

If we take a close look at the basic constituents of power, at least in its classical definition, we will find two deeply intertwined notions – security and the State, in a trade-off whose terms have been spelt out by English political philosopher Thomas Hobbes, more than three centuries ago. As I have stressed earlier, the United States has performed this all-important task for Europe since the 1940's and is still doing so today. The result is a fundamental difference in the way the Europeans see the world and themselves, a shift in their *Weltanschauung*. "The Europeans do not see themselves as the ultimate guarantors of their own security," says French political scientist Zaki Laïdi. Europe shares this peculiarity with Japan, another country that has been burned by the excesses of power, in striking contrast to existing powers like the United States and Russia or emerging powers like China and India.

A number of postures are possible on that basis, and they overlap in the European political landscape. Some countries seek fragments of power, including military power, while others seek "avoidance" and yet others seek diversion, focusing on threats to human security and ignoring threats to the security of each country taken individually. Anyhow, for Europe - as opposed to individual European States, or to the United States - to be perceived as the best framework in which to vest the responsibility for security, there would have to be a serious apparent or actual threat that is specific to Europe; a "European interest" outweighing national interest would have to be formed and sustained; and finally, Europeans would have to agree to defence spending on a much higher level than the current 1.7% of GDP. There are currently no signs of Europe moving in that direction.

The second constituent of power is the State. It is consubstantially related to power, not because of some abstract or metaphysical connection but because power is derived from command. "Command is power," wrote the French philosopher Julien Freund. And although command can be delegated, it cannot be divided. It is therefore impossible to seek power, in the sense of political command, for both the European entity and its constituent parts. Vesting such extended power in Europe would necessarily mean entrusting its exercise to a single political entity. This ultimate transfer of sovereignty would radically change the nature of the Union. And it would raise a large number of issues: the expression of national identities, the representation of the specific interests of each of the constituent parties, the legitimacy of a European authority, the powers to be vested in such an authority and the cohesion and stability of that entity. In reality, no one in Europe is prepared to take this ultimate leap into the unknown. This is true of European political elites and even truer of European public opinion. As democracy is also part of the genetic material of the European Union, public opinion everywhere demands to be consulted. In the past it has exercised this right, opposing decisions taken by governments and rejecting much more modest transfers of sovereignty, and in most cases untroubled by Europe's political weakness.

II. Power reinvented

Does this mean that power can only be vested in the classical unitary State and that Europe can only acquire power if it follows that model? In forging the concept of "soft power", American political scientist Joseph Nye has shown that power can be diffuse and multiform and that it can be defined as the ability to influence, resist, persuade, attract, negotiate and/or sanction. In these terms, the construction of Europe has, through its method and its approach, changed the way power is exercised. Europe has indeed invented new forms of power. To spell them out, I must introduce here a concept which I place great importance on, that of "normative power". First introduced by American political scientist Robert Rosencrance in 1986, this concept harks back to the projection of norms and values throughout the world, by the European colonial powers up until the Second World War, and by the United States thereafter. In the past, however, such power was always backed, more or less directly, by military force. Unable to deploy such force, the rejection of which is one of the foundations of its existence, Europe offers nevertheless a tried and true method for managing, in their many facets, relations among States.

A. Firstly by postulating that power-based rivalry can be transcended in one region of the world, and by putting that postulate into practice, the builders of Europe have put together a model of interstate relations where the use of force has progressively been eliminated and Kant's model of "perpetual peace" has come into its own. As Kishore Mahbubani likes to put it, Europe has achieved "not just zero war, but zero prospect of war". The change is doubtlessly due to Europe's decision to employ a method where the rule of law, procedures, discussion and arbitration prevail, under the watchful eye of the European Court of Justice. In this way Europe transcends national sovereignties without abolishing them.

B. Secondly, by quietly customizing for the rest of the world the **norms** it generates for itself, which it deems of universal, global validity, thus suggesting a new way of exercising and expressing power, based on ongoing consultations on all issues. This process enables States to get a fair hearing for their national interests, while accommodating the preferences of others, including States outside the Union such as the United States and Japan, and non-State organisations. Having proven themselves by standing the test of rigorous negotiation, these

norms enjoy the legitimacy that comes from being supported by a large number of countries and they benefit from the aura that attaches to highly successful undertakings.

Some of them are part of the core identity of Europe, indeed of the West as a whole. They comprise such features as democracy, market economics, the rule of law, human rights, social justice, non-discrimination and solidarity with those in need. They also include the rejection of *Realpolitik* and a commitment to multilateralism. So in a way Robert Kagan was perfectly right when he found that the Europeans were from Venus and Americans from Mars. I would just find objectionable his reliance on the levels of testosterone to set up a hierarchy between planets.

Now how does Europe shape the international order ? Allow me to share a few illustrations with you.

One famous case relates to trade regulation. Europeans believe in the socialising force of trade and this belief was the guiding principle of European construction, from the Common Market to the creation of the euro. Today, Europe's trade policies are an organising principle for the international order. Their effects have made themselves felt all the way to Seattle, where software giant Microsoft has been fined by the European Commission for a total of 1.7 billion euros since 2004 for violating European antitrust law, which even the American justice, well-known to be very sensitive to cartel practices and monopolies, was unable to obtain.

Also pertaining to regulation are European norms on food and health safety, on labour standards, on cultural diversity. One notable recent achievement is the adoption by the European Union of the REACH directive – REACH stands for “Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals” and entered into force in June 2007 – which aims at submitting within 11 years some 30 000 chemicals to a single hazard management system. Although it proceeded from a lengthy and careful consultation with the industry, the REACH directive had the honor of being lambasted in a *Wall Street Journal* editorial as the epitome of “normative imperialism”. Which is to me a clear sign that it has teeth and bites. This is good news for the public good of the preservation of human health and of our living environment, for which someone has to care. There is also a global aspect to this. Because the EU is the largest import market in the world, no large company can afford to ignore it, and all must abide by the norms it has set. By doing so, each company serves as a conduit through which these norms are transmitted to other markets, thus indirectly expanding Europe's influence around the world.

And if one takes a look at the broader picture beyond the issue of chemicals, Europe has not only developed a set of norms for the protection of the environment, but is playing a leading role in shaping the regime which is to succeed Kyoto. The European Emissions Trading Scheme is the largest programme in that respect. This week and next, Poland is hosting in Poznan the 14th Climate Change conference, which brings together all parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and we again hope to set the pace and to lift the level of ambition.

The current financial crisis has provided another opportunity for the European Union to take the initiative, first in agreeing promptly on emergency measures to prevent a meltdown of its banking system, then in calling for the G20 summit meeting which convened in Washington on a two-weeks notice and finally in offering a set of thoughts on measures liable

to address the flaws and loopholes which were at the roots of the crisis. And if you look closely at the final declaration released by the heads of States and governments in Washington, you'll note that most proposals laid out by the EU leaders made it into the declaration. This illustrates quite well, I think, how the negotiation machinery constantly at work among Europeans can provide schemes acceptable to a broader, global constituency. It goes without saying that the ECB and the euro, now increasingly used as a reserve currency, lend an even greater clout and authority to Europe in a field with a small number of large players.

Allow me to also mention development assistance policy as another example. The total of national and EU contributions reached 48 billion euros in 2006. That is 55% of total world official development assistance, three times the amount spent by the United States. Here too the EU makes a difference and is the trendsetter.

3. By pooling influences, joining forces and acting promptly in situations when the international security or global governance is at stake. The CFSP continues to make progress. Because it is pragmatic, because the 27 consult each other intensively, and because a range of financial, diplomatic, military, and humanitarian instruments have been introduced, the Union is able to make its presence felt on the international stage. A "European Defence Agency" was set up in 2004 to foster convergence of military research efforts. Javier Solana's mediation played a crucial role in resolving the political crisis in Ukraine in November 2004. This summer, Europe showed resolve and leadership in tackling the crisis in the Caucasus. A cohort of eurosceptics were hoping for a repeat of the debacle of the 1990s in the Balkans, and started gloating over the Union's supposed inaction without letting the facts get in the way of a good argument. Meanwhile, holding the presidency of the EU, President Sarkozy wasted no time in negotiating an agreement between Presidents Medvedev and Saakashvili. In spite of some subsequent disappointments when Moscow dragged its feet in implementing it, this agreement has proven its worth in bringing about a rapid ceasefire and restoring calm to the region. In all these endeavours, it is difficult to discern the pressure, coercion, intimidation and use of force that are the hallmark of hard power.

There are many ways in which these norms affect the world beyond the boundaries of the European Union. The countries nearest to it, most of them candidates for accession or aspiring to become ones, usually adopt and implement them readily. Beyond that group, other countries also take them on board because they hope in return to gain from the EU market access, development assistance or other concessions. The major emerging powers and Russia all seek dialogue – or "strategic partnership" – with the European Union. The EU conducts regular summits with China, India, Japan, the ASEAN and Brazil, as well as Africa.

The Europe-Asia Meeting, better known as ASEM, was conceived twelve years ago by its two proponents, Singapore and France, as a way of building a stronger link between Asia and Europe, at a time when transpacific economic cooperation was showing very promising developments through APEC. Since its first meeting in Bangkok in 1996, ASEM has fostered personal relationships between European and Asian leaders, and led to many initiatives, encompassing human rights, counter-proliferation, terrorism, Burma and North Korea, financial affairs, cultural diversity, and the list goes on. It has also led to the creation of the Asia-Europe Foundation, ASEF, which promotes mutual understanding between people through intellectual and cultural people exchanges. ASEM's meeting last month permitted a solid discussion on the world financial crisis which paved the way for the Washington G20 summit on November 15.

Conclusion

I have now come to the end of this walk through the many – and fascinating, I think – aspects of European power. Let me briefly summarise the propositions we are left with.

The traditional conception of hard power sustains doubts about Europe's ability to handle power. Some will conclude that it disqualifies any endeavour to make Europe a power. They will find doubtful that a foreign policy can have credibility if it lacks the power to coerce, which the EU has rejected. They will argue that a construct like Europe cannot morph into a conventional power able to ensure its own security without destroying its singularity and cohesion.

These are legitimate points and I would share them in principle. But they ignore the new avenues that Europe is exploring in its pursuit of political projects where the primacy of security has faded away, either because the project involves States that have forsworn the use of force in their mutual relations, or because security and defence are provided by others, the United States in this instance. Europe quietly contributes to shaping the world order by injecting its own norms into the many channels of global governance. Safety, environment and energy are clearly issues where this method can be applied most readily. The reshaping of modern finance could prove to be another one. It is quite reasonable to expect the European model to spread, under the banner of rationalism and humanism, as a pattern for international relations, and replace the iniquitous brutality of a world dominated by power. This approach is reflected in a European school of political philosophy best represented by the eminent German thinker Jürgen Habermas in his reflections. There is a broad and promising scope for this new kind of power, and Europe, the European Union, is its pioneer.