

# INTERNATIONALISM AND THE NATIONS OF EUROPE

The Nationalist Era is Ending, but What Will Replace It?

*John Lukacs*

Let us begin with the obvious. A certain kind of "Europe" is taking shape. I put "Europe" within quotation marks. This "Europe" which is taking shape, is a "Europe" of institutions. It is a result of the achievements of the fifties rather than of the forties and of the sixties: of the Schuman Plan and of the Western European Union and of the Common Market, of WEU and EPU and ECSC and EFTA, of *Euröp* and *Euratom* and *Europlan* and *Eurovision*, of OEEC and OECD and TEE.

There is nothing in history which is inevitable, and the history of no continent shows this better than the history of Europe: but certain things *are* irreversible (an interesting thought for philosophers: why, historically speaking, "inevitable" and "irreversible" are not at all the same) and this development of "European" institutions is one of them. It can no longer be unmade, no matter what happens, even if Charles de Gaulle or somebody or something else would change the direction of the historical development. For the point of no return seems to have been passed. And there is another thing, which is conveniently overlooked by de Gaulle's critics: even de Gaulle, even those who may have doubts about the ultimate value of these "European" institutions, doubt them not so much because they think that these institutions are too ambitious but rather because, in their opinion, the functions of these institutions are too humdrum, bureaucratic, devoid of vital inspiration: not because these institutions are attempting too much but because they are attempting too little: because the institutions of "Europe" may not be European enough.

Before commenting on this question of a "Europe" of institutions I want to sketch, and very inadequately at that, my impressions of some of the effects which this new "Europe" has already had on the daily lives of the peoples of the continent. And by "peoples of the continent" I mean nothing grandiose

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or grandiloquent; I am leaving aside, too, the great international centers with their now entrenched habits of cosmopolitan life, capital cities such as Paris or international cities such as Geneva. I know them; but I know, too, that a perhaps even more important gauge of this "European" development is found in the symptoms that this "Europe" has marked on the daily lives of people in the provincial and in many ways backward cities of Europe: on Toulouse, Valencia, Graz, Ghent, Trieste rather than on Paris, Barcelona, Vienna, Brussels, Milan.

• Here in Toulouse (from where I am now writing) "Europeanization" is, in many ways, at the stage where it was, say, in Berlin or in Paris two generations ago. This involves three things: goods, travel, ideas—probably in this ascending order of their importance. Or, in other terms: certain materials of life, certain aspirations of life, a certain consciousness.

Two generations ago, even one generation ago, nearly everything that people in this large dusty town bought were products of France. (The exceptions were few: Spanish oranges, English woollens, and even these were for what in the United States used to be called the Carriage Trade.) Today the shops have their share of German radios, Italian sweaters: these things are within the reaches of the vast majority who have become accustomed to their availability, even though (the Common Market notwithstanding) their prices are still a little higher (but, then, so is their quality) than those of their French equivalents. In the post offices it costs no more to send a letter to Berlin than to the next French town. More and more people travel abroad, to Spain, to Italy, Germany, including vast crowds of students, every year. They do not need a passport: a simple identification card will do, and often not even that is necessary. If they travel by car, their insurance papers automatically cover most of Europe. They speak of the Germans with very little bitterness; they are suspicious of the British and they have a generous dose of admiration for the United States. (Anti-Americanism in France is a very super-

ficial phenomenon: I often have the impression that, had he lived, John F. Kennedy could have beaten Charles de Gaulle in a French popularity poll—or, at that, had he wanted it, the French and the German peoples would have elected him over Adenauer or de Gaulle for President of a United States of Europe.) The Mercedes, not the luxury Citroën, is the prestige car for the Toulousains. Not a single seat is empty in the municipal theatre when *Lohengrin* is performed, in German, with some visiting singers from the Vienna Opera—here, in this provincial metropolis of the Midi, with its Latin *bel canto* tradition, in this world of Rossini and of Bizet. All of this would have been inconceivable in 1900, in 1925, probably even in 1935, less than a generation ago.



Very well. The nationalist era in the history of Europe is passing. Does this mean that an internationalist era is supplanting it? Yes and no. On certain levels of life (superficial ones, at that), in certain forms of expression, yes. Superficial, superterrestrial communications: on the airplane level the entire world is becoming something like one vast TWA or, rather, one vast panamerican operation. An airport civilization; a unesco culture. In Toulouse, as in Valencia, the thing that looks most like any other in the world is the airport, the building, its operations, its very smell.

Railroad stations on the other hand are not alike; seaports even less so; there is still a great difference in arriving in Hamburg or in Naples by ship; or, at that, in descending from a long train on the Gare du Nord in Paris or in Roma Termini.

On certain very important levels of life democracy nationalizes rather than internationalizes. As the rigid differences of the social strata disappear, the nation becomes more homogeneous. Let me illustrate this with an example that I have mentioned else-

where: in 1914 a French banker had more in common with an Italian banker than either of them had with their servants or even with their clerks; fifty years later the French banker has more in common with his clerks than with his Italian confrère.

In spite of a vast process which is diluting our national languages, their resilience is amazing. The artificial languages invented by broad-minded internationalists in the nineteenth century—Esperanto, Volapük—failed completely. The invasion of Europe's languages by English (or, rather, by American) words and expressions is still going on; but this has not yet affected the essential element of national culture.

There existed here in Toulouse social and potentially explosive political problems consequent to the immigration of alien peoples. First, after 1880 many Italian immigrants came into this lazy, sleepy underdeveloped portion of France; second, after 1939 came nearly one hundred thousand Spanish refugees, mostly Reds (*Spanish* Reds, that was, which makes about as much a difference from Russian Reds as Garcia Lorca from Mayakovsky). Within a generation "the problem" disappeared, because the immigrants, and especially their children, became wholly assimilated to France.

In this old corner of Europe, where historical and racial conflicts range back to centuries, where people are immensely sensitive to historic memories, men who can immediately recognize a Huguenot family-name, a Catharist place-name or a regional accent, tell me that they cannot distinguish the son or the daughter of a Spanish refugee from their French students at all. The children have become entirely French within a generation, because of the rising tide of social democracy, because of the immense sucking waves of a national culture, because of the French language. In speaking French from childhood they became French, unwitting sharers in a large patrimony of habits, tastes, inclinations, forms of consciousness.

No: Internationalism is not supplanting the life of nations—if by "supplanting" we keep in mind the literal sense of that fructiferous verb, involving planting, involving something that has to do with the very root of things. The entire history of Europe, suggests something that is the reverse of what Freud and Joyce tried to show us: that speech is not merely a formation of thought but that the influences go both ways, that thoughts themselves are formed by speech... In The Beginning Was The Word...

Recently I have crossed the French-Spanish fron-

tier several times: and each time I have been deeply impressed by the immediate palpability of national differences, of the immediate manifestations of different national characteristics, which means historical and living characteristics. Crossing a peaceful frontier by car or by train: two stations less than a mile apart, or two villages a few hundred yards apart, two sides of the same rivulet, sometimes a plain line painted on the asphalt amidst a clutter of houses: but what a difference! Not only different uniforms, different flags, but different faces, different speech, different rhetoric, different habits, different houses, different food, different sentiments, different tendencies of expression, of spirit, of the climate of the soul . . . If this is so on the frontier between two neighboring and related Latin nations, how about the frontiers between France and Britain? Italy and the Germanies? Poland and Russia?

Spain incidentally is a very trenchant example of the contemporary paradox I am writing about. She is more international than ever before and at the same time more nationally homogeneous, too. In the past her rulers tried to close her off, hermetically, from the rest of Europe, with the result that in the nineteenth century sometimes the return of a few exiles from France, a thin little whiff of new air, of new ideas, the coming and going of a few new people was enough to start a Spanish revolution. Today ten to fourteen million foreigners enter Spain every year, the radios blare, their papers are strewn all around, and the Franco regime is as safe and strong as ever.

The night before Christmas Eve, on the platforms of Irun, the Spanish frontier station, a tremendous crowd, pullulating, crowded against each other, sitting on their rucksacks and bags, with their transistor radios singing, as they waited for the train for Madrid and the South. They are a sample of the now more than one million Spanish and Portuguese workers, from housemaids to automobile mechanics, who swarm all over Western Europe, in whose capital cities they are far better paid, better housed, better employed than in their homeland. They return, for Christmas, spending most of their savings on that trip. In any event, ninety, ninety-five of every hundred of them return for good, too, within two or three years at the most. Sometimes they marry abroad: Spanish girls. How many of the 14 million foreign tourists who come to Spain each year will stay there? Practically none. In the cosmopolitan and aristocratic age of European history, before the

rising tide of social democracy and of mass tourism, few people travelled: but many of those who had travelled then stayed; many of them married women from other countries; others dipped deep into the historical wells of cultures of other countries. The zenith of European cosmopolitanism was reached during the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, not in the twentieth.

Briefly, the peoples of Europe, in this international air age, have become *more national*, while at the same time they have become *less nationalistic*.



What does this mean? It means that if a united Europe will come about at all—which is by no means certain: for I mean a united Europe and not a “Europe” of institutions—this Europe will have to be a *Europe des patries*, a Europe of fatherlands, in the sense that the *nations* of Europe, at least in the West, have begun to assume a function of *patries*: their cultural function becomes, gradually, more important than their political one.

There are no international poets in Europe, no international poems, not even international music, or a single international novel that is worth the paper on which it is written. But there are certain European poets, writers, historians, thinkers who, now as in the past, express through their national languages some of the highest qualities and the highest aspirations of the European spirit. Let us be now a little more precise about this “European spirit,” in order to avoid pious double-talking. In its broadest and deepest sense, the European spirit means a certain conception of human nature. (It is in this sense that “European civilization” is different from “American civilization,” both being, of course, part and parcel of “Western civilization”: but it is in this sense, too, that many millions of Europeans are American rather than European now.) In its narrower and more contemporary sense—which is the main subject of this article—by “European spirit” I mean the aspirations of all those who, superseding the

disastrous phase of nationalisms, have been aiming at some kind of a united and distinct Europe.

The question involving the prospects of the latter is this: is the present "Europe" of European institutions the result of a European spirit, or is this development of a European spirit the result of the European institutions? It is a question involving causality, the relative primacy of factors. But it involves historical and not mechanical causality, which means something that is neither mechanical nor categorical, since its "causes" and "effects" are not altogether separable. The influences go both ways. To some extent the present "European spirit" is the result of the growing number of "European" institutions: but the "European" institutions of the fifties have been themselves the results of a "European" spirit which had presupposed them.

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This was the "European" spirit represented by such diverse political personalities as Winston Churchill, Jean Monnet, Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi, Robert Schuman, Alcide de Gasperi, Konrad Adenauer, Paul-Henri Spaak, Pierre Uri, together with a host of Western European figures of political and public life. It was this spirit and the strong Christian-Democratic political tendency of the late forties which led to the establishment of the European institutions of the fifties—more precisely, of the 1948–1958 decade. (1948: Brussels Pact, Western European Union; 1949: Council of Europe; 1950: Schuman Plan; 1952: Coal and Steel Community; 1957: Pact of Rome, the Common Market.)

I need not deal with them in this article (I sketched their brief history in *Decline and Rise of Europe*). My point in this article is that the history of these "European" institutions is not enough: for the prospects of an eventually united Europe are inseparable from the development of a European consciousness—which means the gradual assumption, by the peoples of Europe, that they are Europeans; that, beyond being Frenchmen, Germans, Italians, they are the members of a unique cultural community which is more than a political entity; that being European would mean not only a sincere but vague political desideratum, such as being A World Citizen or A Member of The Human Race but something distinct and unique and necessarily different from being Asian, African, Australian . . . yes, even from being American.

Now this development of a European consciousness is something that is very recent, much more recent than we have been accustomed to think. It

is still very vague and weak. The desideratum of a United Europe is widespread, the clichés in favor of a supra-national "Europe" are on their way of becoming well-worn platitudes now, "European" is a veritable publicity slogan. There is practically no one in Western Europe who stands against the "European" policy of his government; rather, the contrary is true; the person who is nationalistic, or "anti-European," courts immediate unpopularity.

But whenever agreement on generalities is so universal and so widespread one should legitimately ask whether this does not mean that people don't think much (or deeply enough) about the important issues themselves. The popularity of "Europeanism" exists at the same time that, in a sense, the French are more French, the Italians more Italian, the Dutch more Dutch than perhaps ever before. I repeat that this condition has nothing to do with *nationalism*: it has something to do, instead, with *nationality*. It is a byproduct of democratization, of large slow vertical but also horizontal movements of peoples within nations.

Horizontal, too: because through this movement of masses of workers from one region of a country into another the process of national homogenization continues, regional differences disappear, and thereby not only the clerks come to resemble the bankers but the Sicilians the Emilians, the newfangled inn-keepers in Andalusia those of Catalonia, the industrial workers of Bavaria those of the Ruhr—and add to this the further concentration of nationality which has been the consequence of the end of the colonial era: the return of the Dutch from Indonesia, of the French from Algeria, of the Germans from Eastern Europe to the Germanies.

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This existence of national cultures is a fact which many of the planners of a "Europe" of institutions tend to overlook—even though it is not necessarily an obstacle to the unification of Europe. For it is the paradox of European unity that it must be formed by diversity; and the paradox of a European consciousness resides in the condition of its multinationality rather than in that of a vague kind of supernationality. In this respect the paradigm of an eventually united Europe is the Swiss Confederation rather than the United States of America: for even now, when the ultimate confederation of Western Europe has become probable, the federation of a homogenized and non-national Europe remains highly unlikely, indeed, hardly conceivable at the present time.