

# THE EUROPEAN CONSTRUCTION: A PROJECT WITHOUT OBVIOUSNESS

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Without any external or internal coercion, European states, at the end of the Second World War, decided to link their daily lives and even their destiny. The European Union, in continuity with the European Communities, is an ambitious political project, but above all, it is unique in the history of humanity. A quick review of the debates that have punctuated the stages of its construction shows that it is difficult, even illusory, to seek “objective” and indisputable origins or justifications for this political confederation: the “roots,” the national or regional histories, are juxtaposed without always being articulated, the naturalness of the borders does not stand up to analysis, the languages and cultures are infinitely diverse, the traditions, cultures and political organizations are, obviously, multiple. Reuniting the supposed “European continent” was not, and still is not, in any way obvious: for this, a sufficiently solid and shared “why” is needed, or rather “whys”: a desire for dialogue, peace, and prosperity, then, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, a desire for the “return back” of the countries of Central Europe, in particular, “in” Europe, and assertions of identity that are more in need of confrontation and exchange than isolation.

Thus, an original institutional and political setup has been put in place, progressively, in stages, in more than 70 years: according to the countries and the times, by voluntarism or mimicry, or both at the same time, starting not from a single project, but from several, in parallel, and which find themselves in an institutional space of convergence, the European Union, imperfect and perfectible. Between and within each Member State, the citizens adhere or not. They may not have the same desire for Europe, and their identification, adherence, and involvement levels differ according to their personal or collective projects, yet, this setup holds, endures, and evolves.

Why? And how? Because dialogue and communication are at the center of the realization of the European project. Exchange and sharing were already at the heart of the creation of the Council of Europe, a political organization created in 1949 to provide a framework for European collaboration in fields as varied as politics, economics, culture, social affairs, education, law, etc., and which today plays a more fundamental role than one might think in the protection of human rights. In 1963, a similar approach accompanied the political efforts for “reconciliation” between France and the Federal Republic of Germany, which were concretized by the Élysée Treaty, which provided for institutional cooperation and promoted twinning, meetings, and school or cultural exchanges. Today, far from being outdated, they are the cornerstone of the recently theorized “diplomacy of the regions,” which the European Union is trying to take into consideration in order to best articulate the dialogue between large and small levels.

Today, the European Union is a realized utopia for some, who defend the project or even find it insufficient in terms of political integration, and a quasi-dystopia for others, who denounce some transfers of sovereignty as harmful to the Member States and their citizens. Remarkably, the institutional setup allows for the cohabitation and confrontation of these positions. As there is no obvious solution, the construction of Europe is based on permanent negotiation, with 6, 10, or 27 member states, i.e., on the conjugation of differences that are not always well understood or explained. In this context, situations of incommunication are attempts to pursue dialogue, with imperfect inter-comprehension, hesitations, disagreements, and even conflicts. It is these particular confrontations that allow us to live and build together. This situation seems inevitable in the context of a plurality of opinions, options, and analyses. In the end, it is not surprising that in times of crisis, one can have the impression that the EU moves forward more quickly and with more solidarity... crises are, in fact, obvious facts that impose themselves on everyone and that can provide a favorable context for negotiations. In trying to resolve crises, the political and institutional evolve.

The achievements are numerous: peace and stability for 70 years within the Union; a single market that is an economic driving force; conditions for the development of mobility; an internal space whose borders have been virtualized; a single currency for a large part of the European population, which is not only more practical but also a symbol of unity; rights and protections for Europeans (fundamental rights, digital rights, consumer rights, etc.); an ambitious policy of humanitarian aid; an evolving Europe of health.

In other areas, the achievement is not complete or may never come, such as the European research and higher education area, while attempts at European universities are being made. Erasmus has been a tremendous incentive, perhaps more to develop mobility than to bring higher education institutions closer together. Generations of mobile Europeans are now taking advantage of their European citizenship, complementary citizenship that does not easily translate into rights and duties for the vast majority of them. We can still mention migration policy, social Europe, the Brexit, the situation at external borders and European diplomacy, still lacking recognition, and, of course, the war in Ukraine, but then it is no longer a question of incommunications, but of acommunication, of rupture...

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A Hermès office, the first French-speaking scientific journal published by the National Council for Scientific Research, has been set up in Georgia, within the University of Georgia in Tbilisi, to invite debate, particularly on the construction of Europe, with a focus on communicational analysis.

The issue №90 of Hermès, Europe, between incommunications and wars, is published five years after the issue №77, European incommunications, and returns on the achievements and the failures, with, thanks to or because of the European incommunications, but also on the current situation, the war in and against Ukraine. Nine texts among the fifty that make up the issue are proposed in English in this issue of the Caucasus Journal of Social Sciences, as well as two unpublished texts selected by the editorial board.

Dominique Wolton proposes a fruitful framework of analysis and an ultimately realistic approach to social, political, and economic relations based on incommunications. European integration is a complicated process, Europe is obviously not the same for all citizens, in representation as well as in projection, as the text by Élise Bernard reminds us. Among the successes, the economic recovery plan, unprecedented, ambitious, which, according to Guillaume Martin and Dimitri Oudin, was implemented through negotiations centered on both misunderstandings and situations of incommunication. The Brexit, currently forgotten in the media with the dramatic news of war and its consequences, is another example of a political process that illustrates the relevance of the approach proposed in this issue and, more generally, in the journal Hermès. The creation

of a European Higher Education and Research Area is generally considered a success (Thierry Côme), as are sports policies, which are now at the center of a particular diplomatic strategy (Radovan Gura & Martin Mancos), or European policies in response to the Covid-19 health crisis (Petia Georgieva), perhaps the prefiguration of a Europe of health.

However, leaders' positions and public opinion still diverge on many points, even if protecting children is a shared objective (Mihaela Gavrilă). So how do the different Member States and their populations react to the warlike aggression against Ukraine? The context of media warfare (Simona Modreanu) and disinformation (Martin Krus) are now the framework of our democracies. Denial is useless and can lead to ruptures, especially between rulers and citizens, and not only between countries but also within each State and each region: dissonances with respect to values, attitudes of identity withdrawal, rejection of others, acceptance of situations of acommunication. Let's read or reread the essay that Tzvetan Todorov published on September 11, 2008 (Todorov, T. (2008): we can become "barbarians" ourselves.

Of course, not all crises lead to war, and a large part of Europe did not want to believe it, especially in the West. Even if not all Europeans have the same conception of Europe and its eastern "margins", and in particular do not necessarily understand why European integration is a formidable objective for Georgian citizens, the war in Ukraine obviously hustles us and invites us to re-hierarchize our values, to strengthen our cohesion, to redouble our efforts to try to understand each other and communicate better. Relationships are essentially based on incommunication: Admitting this can allow us to do everything possible to avoid, at all costs, incommunications, and barbarism.

Todorov, T. (2008). *La Peur des barbares. Au-delà du choc des civilisations*. Paris: Robert Laffont.