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## U.S.-EUROPE ANALYSIS SERIES

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### How to Build a European Community

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If the EU is not to deteriorate into little more than a free trade zone, serious community building measures are essential. These measures would aim ultimately at transferring more of the kind of commitment, loyalty and sense of identity citizens now attach to their nation, to the European community. Until this is done, the current structure cannot carry the high loads of traffic it has been subjected to. To allow for consolidation, no new members should be admitted for a ten year period. In the meantime, the European Commission should minimize its “Europeanization” of all matters that can be left to the nations states. Next, the European Commission should work to reduce the “compliance lag” wherein many European Union directives are neither obeyed nor enforced. And, above all, a major policy issue or two, say dealing with immigration, should be chosen that will be settled on the community level, by a community-wide referendum, following public hearings and town hall meetings.

#### Standing between Two Steps

The EU is trying to integrate the economies (and regulatory regimes) of its member states, but allowing them to maintain their essential political independence. The EU is seeking to stand between two steps on the ladder of integration: above the level of limited integration of a few economic sectors and below the level of a full union that would include political institutions sufficient to create a United States of Europe. This sort of “halfway integration” is not sustainable, in large part because economic activity is and must be embedded in political arrangements that reflect people’s values and identities. Contrary to the libertarian view, society is not composed of individuals seeking to maximize their pleasure or profit, and society will not naturally gravitate to a system that, by rationalizing the allocation of economic resources and unifying regulations, will enhance those individuals’ income and wealth. Nor are markets self-regulating (guided by an invisible hand). People are not merely traders and consumers, but also

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citizens whose sense of self is involved in their nation. Hence, when economic integration that benefits their pocketbook threatens their national identity, people will balk.<sup>1</sup>

Halfway integration cannot be sustained because economies are not freestanding systems with their own distinct dynamics but are integrally tied to the polity and society of which they are a part. And in free societies, major economic policy decisions must be made in line with a nation's values and a politically derived consensus or by other institutions that have acquired a legitimacy similar to that currently possessed by national institutions. Otherwise the sense of alienation will increase to a level that will endanger the sustainability of the regime.

One may argue that the economic integration of the EU has proceeded to ever higher levels with little political integration and even less formation of a shared creed. However, opposition to integration has been growing recently, culminating in the popular revolts in France and the Netherlands against the European Union Constitutional Treaty.

For a sociologist, these “no” votes were hardly surprising. Enlargement and deepening at the same time is an absurd way to proceed. To increase heterogeneity while seeking to limit national sovereignty and subject a significant set of decisions to a majority vote of the European nations rather than requiring unanimity is to ask for serious trouble. (This is of course the why the strongest supporters of a weak EU are also those who seek to add new members in the past and now.) What did surprise me is that the spike in anti-American feelings in 2003 did not serve to boost the EU bonds sufficiently to firm up its shared institutions. Communities whose internal bonds and sense of identity are weak often solidify when they unite against outsiders. Take any two groups of people, and tell them that one is team blue and the other red—and that they are to compete—and soon members of each team will become strongly loyal and involved in their team and antagonistic to the other. However the EU was unable to convert the strong anti-Americanism of the majority of its citizens into a meaningful common voice on matters of foreign policy and defense, and to develop the communal institutions and resources needed to do so. In the process, it revealed just how unprepared it is for community building.

The process of integration is likely to become even more difficult in the near future. The special historical conditions that have favored European integration over the last fifty years are unlikely to persist. Until very recently, Germany was strongly un-nationalistic and abnormally supportive of the EU. However, Germany has been moving to view itself as a “normal” nation-state, and hence one must assume that it will be more attentive to its preferences and interests in the near future. France, the other major motor behind European integration, favored the EU as long as, in effect, France dominated it. France always maintained a strong nationalist policy. However, if Germany were now to seek to have a full say, French enthusiasm for a strong EU would surely diminish. In short, the special conditions that tolerated a high level of economic integration combined with a low level of political integration are eroding.

## **What is to be Done?**

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<sup>1</sup>, These lines first appeared in Amitai Etzioni, *Political Unification Revisited: On Building Supranational Communities*, Lexington Books, 2001, p. xxvii

Several measures must be taken to reduce the load that the community now imposes on its members and which are a major source of the alienation of more and more citizens and hence, soon, of their elected officials, who currently are much more pro-EU than their voters. First, no new members should be admitted to the EU for a ten year consolidation period, to avoid further increases in heterogeneity and to allow for time to integrate the current members. (This period may well have to be extended.)

Second, the European Commission should reverse its tendency to “Europeanize” whatever it can lay its hands on, often without devoting sufficient attention to public opinion. The Commission has often given short shrift to “local” (nation-specific) values and preferences, while using closed meetings, complicated documents and bureaucratic procedures to broaden its reach. These tendencies are increasingly alienating people—and not only because national leaders blame the Commission for measures that are truly needed but that they fear to impose. For a consolidation period, until community building provides the needed shared values and commitments, the Commission should ease off and allow for maximum local control—just about the opposite of what it has been doing.

At the same time the compliance lag (or enforcement deficit) must be reduced. Citizens of some EU nations are increasingly alienated because regulations they take seriously despite the pains they impose are ignored with impunity by the citizens of other nations. This cannot be sustained in the long run if the Commission and thus the EU are to be viewed as legitimate institutions.

All of these steps are merely to lower the EU’s policy load to a level that the Community can manage while its carrying capacity is enhanced.

### **Community Building**

Before one can build formal political institutions, essential for a high degree of integration, the EU needs more shared values and commitments, to a level that in *some* areas will trump the national ones. There are many sociologically naïve or trivial ideas for doing so, such as having a shared EU newspaper or vastly expanded student exchanges. What is needed is a set of intense moral dialogues about one or more core issues that would justify turning over to the Community a measure of sovereignty and allow it to command some degree of the loyalty now given to the nation-state.

Although there have been dialogues among the intellectual and political elites about the need for a true European community since World War II, the public at large has not been deeply engaged. As a result, there is no wide public acceptance of a core of shared European values, nor is there a widely held sense that Europe’s shared political institutions would be legitimate if their role were expanded. Here follows an example, which I grant is far-fetched, but without some such move no deep sharing of values will occur, which is essential for high-level integration.

Assume that the EU nations would agree that they need a shared immigration policy (as those who enter one nation can end up in the others) and that this policy should be decided by an EU-wide referendum (not nation by nation, but requiring, say, two-thirds of all EU voters.) Some may say that this would mean that even if all the citizens of their small state will oppose the measure, it still could be passed. However, the whole point is for them to be encouraged to stop

thinking only as citizens of their state but to vote—on some issues—on what is best for the larger community, especially on issues such as immigration in which one nation’s policies can dramatically impact other nations.

Before a referendum is to take place, there would be one year of public hearings and town hall meetings all over the EU conducted by members of the European Parliament, local politicians, NGO leaders and whoever else wishes to do so, in which alternative policies will be discussed before the final and binding vote. The ballot would have to have several parts: how to deal with asylum seekers who come from countries in which no war or torture is taking place; what to do with illegal immigrants; what rights immigrants are to have and what requirements they must meet before they can become EU citizens. The debate is sure to be emotional and unlikely to have the same outcome that some Commission committee would have come up with. However, it will reflect the people, their values, and preferences and commit them to treatments that are the same across the EU. If the European Parliament would then spell out in law that the referendum favored and the Commission sees that these laws are implemented, the EU political institutions would gain in credibility. After one or more such dialogues, best limited to those policies that must be handled at an EU level, the EU might well be ready for a higher level of integration.

One may say that this approach calls for plebiscitary democracy rather than a representative one and that immigration policies or the like should be worked out in parliament. However, this assumes that the European Parliaments members have a mandate which currently they do not. We are dealing here with building democratic institutions and not with functioning ones. Hence, a few such referendums are what the EU’s doctor should prescribe and post haste.

I am the first to grant that the EU may not be ready for such moral dialogues. But unless it is, or can be brought to accept them, than the EU will not evolve to be a true community and will gravitate toward a glorified free trade zone.