

## *Images of Europe: Skeptics versus Skeptical Optimists*

Heartland Europe is finally escaping from its past slaughter and division. Francis Fukuyama's thesis that liberalism's victory over absolutism means the end of history is demonstrably true for this part of the globe.<sup>1</sup> To be sure, optimism is tempered by all the contrary scenarios of the disaster that looms if the European enterprise does not go forward. No Frenchman struggling to adapt to the post-cold war primacy of a united Germany—and to the Bundesbank's no-inflation credo—would interpret his lot as rosy. And every upstanding German, horrified by the accusation that he or she might actually be a closet optimist, would recoil from the very suspicion of such weakness of character.

Yet Europe's postnational change of consciousness and activism at this end of a millennium would be unthinkable if Europeans were not braced by a new self-confidence. Most fundamentally, members of the European Union trust each other in a way they never have before. No matter how often they have fought in the past, they have no doubt today that they have banished war among themselves. More and more they are surrendering, or "pooling," once sacrosanct sovereignty and now allow a full 50 percent of their domestic legislation and 80 percent of their economic legislation to be written in Brussels. And they are leaping into the unknowns of monetary union and of enlarging the European Union to absorb the fledgling, unproven central European democracies.

There are, of course, rational motivations for all of these innovations in an era of globalization and interdependence; ozone holes and instantaneous worldwide transfers of billions of dollars make every European state too small to cope alone.<sup>2</sup> But such motivations at any previous point in history would have been swamped by all the opposing impulses of nationalism, habit, and fear. Today they are not.

Probably never before in history has a transformation of such magnitude been so little remarked as it occurred. The assumption of the divine right of kings fell in battle. The transatlantic slave trade ended only after a titanic struggle. Today, by contrast, the maturing beyond nineteenth-century nationalism that is occurring in central as well as western Europe has been undramatic—and obscured by countervailing wars in the Balkans and the Caucasus. It flouts conventional wisdom to note that what is most striking about the savagery in these fringes of Europe in the 1990s is that it is in fact the exception, a phenomenon occurring at Europe's periphery but not its core. The heartland—and today this heartland already goes well beyond Carolingian Europe to include the whole space of the old Holy Roman Empire and more—is already postnational and no longer inclined to solve its problems through war. Against all the probabilities of history, the core Europe of prosperity and peace has already spread hundreds of miles to the east in just the decade following the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Europe's postnational change of consciousness is most pronounced, of course, among Germans, who recoiled from Hitler's atrocities by initially seeking to submerge their dishonored German identity in a larger European identity. The long-time parliamentary leader of the Christian Democratic party, Wolfgang Schäuble, speaks for many when he says, "What is our national interest? Our overriding interest is stability in Europe, political, economic, and social stability. And this can be achieved only through the Atlantic Community and the EU. . . . It is not an act of altruism, but perhaps the result of a certain process of maturing or learning from earlier experience."<sup>3</sup>

The new cooperative mindset powerfully attracts non-Germans as well, as a way not only to avoid old-style German national domination, but also to maintain economic competitiveness in an age based on knowledge and loosed from geopolitics. Italy and Spain strove mightily to meet the criteria to become founding members of monetary union in 1999. Spain has joined the integrated military command of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) without

waiting for France to do so. Sweden, Finland, and Austria, following the collapse of communism, have formally joined the commonwealth of the European Community/European Union (EC/EU) that for decades was in fact determining their economic environment. Even Switzerland, while still eschewing membership in the United Nations as well as in the EU, is participating in NATO Partnership for Peace exercises. Farther east, the central Europeans are clamoring to be admitted to both blue-ribbon western clubs, the EU and NATO.

Because they have generated neither telegenic bloodshed nor eight-second sound bites, these startling departures from centuries of more confrontational intercourse in international relations have gone largely unnoticed in the United States—but historically they are far more novel and significant than the resort to archaic chauvinism that is going on at Europe's margins. Voters in Poland deliberately rejected irredentism and right-wing anti-Europeanism in the 1990s—and, despite financial evidence to the contrary, rate themselves in opinion polls to be as much middle class as did Americans in the 1950s. Similarly, voters in Hungary, the country that was left with the largest number of compatriots outside its borders after the murders and dislocations of World War II, have rejected notions of the kind of greater Hungary their forebears claimed. And even the apparatchik Romanian government that ruled with anything but liberal leanings in the early 1990s agreed with Budapest on rights for the Hungarian minority in Transylvania. Repeatedly, these conciliatory choices resulted from the yearning by governments and citizens to qualify for admission to the magic circle of the EU and NATO.

In Bonn and Warsaw, then, the vision of the twenty-first century is one in which the western European nations progressively cede sovereignty to the EU and European Monetary Union (EMU), then look east to integrate central European states into their commonwealth. As it did for western Europe in the second half of the twentieth century, NATO, the European Union's military analog, provides the assurance of security—partly against any possible resurgence of Russian imperialism, partly against petty Balkan or other tyrants. And this assurance fosters in an ever widening circle the kind of trust and cooperation that developed in western Europe during the cold-war threat and has now become routine.

From this point of view the main task of European politics today is to institutionalize the expanding cooperation so that it will endure.

Just as post-World War II statesmen like Dean Acheson and Jean Monnet seized the opportunity to force the hitherto warring western European states to work together in the European Community and NATO, so today's leaders need to seize the opportunity to intensify west European collaboration and bring those willing and able central European states into the privileged community. This requires a new kind of self-confidence and a willingness to take political and economic risks.

Thus, in the case of European monetary union, no philosopher, historian, or economist could say whether or not the experiment would really work. But it was launched anyway in 1999. A critical mass of politicians, whose very livelihood depends on healthy caution, dared this leap and brought to the gamble the kind of political will that is usually associated with gung-ho Americans. EMU must work, the logic went, or else we incur catastrophe. Therefore we will make it work. End of discussion.

Moreover, although monetary union was an elite project carried out despite popular disapproval, various ordinary Europeans came to share the spirit. Well before the 1999 inauguration, shopkeepers in Finland, Spain, and Italy were proudly advertising their countries' inclusion as founder-members of EMU by posting prices of goods in euros as well as in markka, pesetas, and lira. Even those conservative German voters who reelected Chancellor Helmut Kohl twice in the 1990s on the strength of his Adenauer-like promise of no experiments—and did not notice that he was plunging them into the biggest experiment of all—took the surrender of their beloved deutsche mark in stride.<sup>4</sup> And certainly the Social Democrat who ousted Kohl in a landslide vote in 1998, Gerhard Schröder, dropped his misgivings about the euro when he became chancellor.

Much the same could be said about Europe's second grand project, enlargement of the EU and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in the ambitious reuniting of a continent that was split at Yalta in 1945. In its own way this enterprise is just as bold, and just as unprecedented, as monetary union. No central European country, with the exception of the Czech lands, was a practicing democracy or had reached western European economic levels before World War II.<sup>5</sup> And all suffered from dysfunctional economies and politics in the half century of Soviet hegemony. Yet the optimism of Poland especially, the largest of the central European nations, is striking. Their tragic history has in-

clined Poles to fatalism. But today an upbeat mood is prevalent as they lead the reforms and economic recovery in the region. Their centuries-old inferiority complex toward the Germans is gone—in part, because they have compared themselves with the east German recipients of Bonn’s largesse and have realized proudly that although they are poor, their steady 5 percent-plus growth is the result of their own efforts, with no charity from others. This self-assurance has enabled them at last to feel at ease with the surrounding Germans, Ukrainians, and even Russians.

### *Escape from History*

In 1990 neither the western nor the central European success was foreordained. Serious commentators warned that the post-World War II era of EC (and transatlantic) cooperation was an aberration, no more than an emergency response to the existential and ahistorical Soviet threat. With that Soviet threat gone, defense would now be “renationalized”—that is, revert from routine NATO-alliance cooperation to fierce nineteenth-century style national clashes. Transatlantic trade wars would have nothing to constrain them. In the turbulence following the certainties of the cold war, the Europeans would revert to nasty balance-of-power free-for-alls. France and Germany would no longer be held to their marriage of convenience. The United States might well bring the GIs home and fall back into traditional isolationism. The United States’s abdication of its role as mediator would aggravate old intra-European antagonisms—between Britain and Germany, between the rich north and the poor Mediterranean, certainly between Greece and Turkey.

Predictions about nations to the east were even more dire as the new would-be democracies underwent impossible instant economic, political, social, and institutional revolutions, at a dizzying speed that no Western nation ever had to match during the slow evolution of complex democratic and free-market practices. These nations of central and eastern Europe had to build capitalist economies from scratch, with suspicious peasantries but no stable middle class, at a time when western Europe itself had sunk into recession and could offer no saving market. Given the wrenching change, skyrocketing prices, ruined savings, and loss of meager but steady social benefits in the early transition, there was a high risk that disoriented voters would equate de-

mocracy with misery rather than with plenty and would turn to populists for salvation. Many observers feared the spread of Yugoslav-style xenophobia as the Soviet lid was removed, releasing passions from the pressure cooker of central Europe's old rival nationalisms.

In the case of Poland, the largest central European country, there was also grave doubt that the heroic streak that was so magnificent during the century of Polish partition could assimilate the contrary art of democratic compromise. Indeed, Solidarity saint Lech Walesa became president by inciting a baleful "war at the top" and running against Solidarity prime minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki. The resultant clash within Solidarity temporarily threatened to vault Stanislaw Tyminski, an unknown populist émigré interloper, into the presidency; and the first fully free parliamentary elections seated twenty-nine squabbling mini-parties in the Polish parliament, the Sejm.

Nevertheless, western Europe discovered that its European Community was in fact more than just an anomaly. Even after the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, the West did not revert to Hobbesian anarchy; the greatly feared renationalization of trade and security issues never took place. The benefits of European Community cooperation and of NATO's shared defense proved far too attractive to discard. Both organizations turned out to be hardy enough to survive even the loss of the enemy.

France had forfeited the most influence of any country as a result of German unification and the subsequent devaluation of nuclear weapons, revaluation of the deutsche mark, and extension of Europe proper to the east. Nonetheless, France concluded that the only way to beat the rising Germans was to stay joined to them. The quaint French notion of the 1960s and 1970s that the French political rider would steer the German economic workhorse dissipated. At the same time, the small countries that have had such a disproportionately large say in the EC and the EU became resigned to lowering their voices so as to preserve the EU's ability to act.

United Germany, alone for a long time in the conviction that deepening and widening of the EU are not only compatible but complementary, drove both processes by sheer political will. Chancellor Kohl, with his first dream of German unification fulfilled, single-mindedly pursued his second dream of making European integration irreversible.<sup>6</sup> This was, he preached melodramatically, "a question of war and peace."<sup>7</sup> To be sure, he had to give up his goal of European political

union. But with time he expected EMU to create its own pressures for more political integration—and he also expected the threat of gridlock as the EU doubles in size to create its own pressures for more veto-proof majority voting. In this context, timing did not matter so much, despite the artificial debate in the United States about whether NATO or the EU would admit new members first. What was important was to get EMU and EU expansion started and let the central Europeans know they could count on eventual EU membership.

Moreover, the transatlantic alliance has endured. President Bill Clinton and a bipartisan congressional leadership bridged the period when the United States might have withdrawn into itself after the cold war was won; Congress finally approved the rescue of NATO even at the cost of stationing GIs in Bosnia. The United States shares its burden as a superpower and magnifies its influence by steady engagement in Europe, Clinton argued successfully. So firmly did he commit a new generation of politicians to the alliance that the Senate's big debate about NATO enlargement hardly raised the fundamental question of whether GIs should be in Europe at all half a century after World War II. And for their part, the West Europeans—despite periodic irritation with American know-it-alls—concluded yet again that they prefer U.S. leadership in security matters to sorting out European leadership among themselves.

Contemplating the new phenomena, senior British diplomat Robert Cooper concludes radically that we are witnessing the end, not only of the cold war, but of the whole continental system that has prevailed since the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. In our “post-modern” world European nation-states no longer pursue exclusive national interests with a heedless zero-sum reckoning. In an electronic age in which territory hardly matters, nations have little desire—except in the Balkans and the Caucasus—to acquire each other's terrain. As a consequence, the stunning new fact is, as Cooper says, that “Western European countries no longer want to fight each other.” This approach goes well beyond the “crude” hope of earlier decades “that states which merge their industries cannot fight each other.” It rests on the realization that war and conquest in Europe are no longer useful in the present era.<sup>8</sup> It sanctions unprecedented outside interference in members' domestic affairs. It presumes a new relationship mixing both cooperation and competition in what the business world is already calling “coopetition.” And it is simultaneously bringing the central Europe-



ans into the family and enabling them to catch up with the West's prosperity and new-found peace for the first time in a millennium.

Oddly, the bipolar cold war—which Cooper regards not as an exception, but rather as an extreme form of the nineteenth-century balance of power—froze political Europe long enough for the new realization about the virtues of the West's transnational cooperation to sink in. The EC's four decades of teamwork proved to have been habit-forming. And the Community's sister organization, NATO—though it first seemed to be no more than a traditional defense alliance against a powerful adversary—also transformed relations among the allies themselves. In the 1950s it introduced a permanent integrated multinational command. In the 1960s it supplemented this with a mutual review of each member's medium-term defense planning that let every nation see clearly its allies' military capabilities and intentions. The resulting transparency strongly inhibited aggression or any slide into hostilities, while promoting progressive transnational collaboration, even in the sensitive realm of weapons manufacture. By now, no NATO member could possibly launch a surprise attack even on an outside country—as Britain and France did in 1956 in trying to recapture the nationalized Suez Canal from Egypt—without the previous knowledge of its partners.

If the rhetoric of current leaders does not reflect this extraordinary transformation and evoke a United States of Europe as Winston Churchill did after World War II, the reason may be found in the twentieth century's disillusionment with all utopias. Post-cold war Europe is wary of grand designs. Modesty, not charisma, is the hallmark of this new beginning. Contemporary statesmen see themselves as carpenters, not as architects. And there is virtue in such diffidence, argues Michael Mertes, domestic adviser to Chancellor Kohl in the 1990s. It demonstrates the loss of a Hegelian trust in a dialectic of progress of the nineteenth-century variety. It shows a healthy skepticism and sobriety after the failure of utopian visions, which are in any case superfluous in the presence of vigorous pragmatic action. "We are in a phase in which we are implementing the great projects conceived at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s," asserts Mertes. European monetary union, the first project, will itself compel further needed changes in EU institutions. And "widening to the east, the second grand task," will not only bring added security to Germany and central Europe, but will increasingly spread stability



from Poland to its east. "It's a kind of reverse domino theory," he concludes. "You might say that the lack of great visions is a good sign, because at the moment there is so much to do."<sup>9</sup>

The perspective of Mertes—as of the bulk of the German political and bureaucratic elite—offers hope for the future. But a century ago Europe also exhibited optimism in expecting constant progress, only to have this faith shattered by the carnage of World Wars I and II. Are the twentieth century's five decades of peace, then, just as much a false dawn as the four decades of peace before the guns of August 1914?

No, because of the A-bomb above all, thinks Dominique Moisi, deputy director of the French Institute of International Relations, savoring the irony of this blackest of reasons for hope. "The big difference today is that, to a large extent because of nuclear weapons, the return of war in a classical sense, if not excluded, is at least very far-fetched. It's a totally new phenomenon in world history."<sup>10</sup>

Besides, adds Wladyslaw Bartoszewski, Polish foreign minister in the mid-1990s, people have learned caution precisely because twentieth-century history was so terrible. He declares, "I am a practicing Christian, and I have faith in the capacity of people to change." He speaks as both a historian of the twentieth century and a participant in that history, a veteran of Nazi and Communist jails, and the only central European member of the commission that tracked Nazi gold in Swiss banks. Delving into the past, he compares the current metamorphosis with the first birth of a European consciousness in the Middle Ages. And he believes the twenty-first century's first Polish foreign minister, distinguished medieval historian Bronislaw Geremek, had the best possible training for that job.<sup>11</sup>

### *Europe's Miracles*

Geremek, less shy than his Western counterparts about using romantic language, seizes every opportunity to hark back to the eleventh-century east-west summit on the northern European plains between Otto III of the Holy Roman Empire and Boleslaw the Brave of Poland. The wish of these two rulers to unite their empires was not realized, Geremek notes, until a thousand years later, as part of the miracle of the present chain reaction of reconciliation in Europe.

In this chain, the first miracle was the French-German rapprochement, after almost two centuries of bitter enmity. So successful was

the personal reconciliation that today's young French and Germans take it for granted and find incomprehensible their great-grandparents' assumption that contests between these two neighbors would periodically burst into war. So solid is the political fraternity that it now prevails, time and again, even over major bilateral differences over the European Central Bank, nuclear power, and the very goals of European Union.

The second miracle, perhaps, was the rejuvenation of the European Community in the mid-1980s, as it roused itself from Eurosclerosis to aim for that real single market by 1992. This new momentum ensured that subsequent German unification could be embedded in a larger European framework rather than bursting that framework. Unlike 1871, 1914, or 1939, this latest rise of German power has been peaceful. Today we are finally getting Thomas Mann's European Germany, and not a German Europe. Or, rather, it is a German Europe as forged by a very European Germany.

The third miracle was the *annus mirabilis* itself, 1989, and its aftermath. Against all the odds of history, the world's last great empire, the Soviet Union, collapsed without bloodshed, except in Romania. There were many to thank for this: the stubborn Polish Solidarity free trade union, American deterrence, Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev, the 70,000 Leipzigers who expected to get shot but still turned out to demonstrate for freedom on October 9 and foreshadowed the opening of the Berlin Wall a month later. The Czechs—concluding that in Gorbachev's world, if enough demonstrators gathered, the police would not shoot—came next. The Bulgarians and Romanians—and then the Lithuanians and Muscovites—followed with their own street protests that toppled communist governments. Russia's internal as well as external empire disintegrated. And the central Europeans, with the democratic Germans as their new tribunes for admission into the Western organizations, began modernizing and escaped their perennial suspension between a big, predatory Russia and a big, predatory Germany.

The cornerstone of the benign central European evolution was the reconciliation that had long been pending between Germany and Poland, the country that had suffered the highest per capita death rate of any large nation under Nazi occupation. The two countries signed treaties pledging friendship and recognizing as permanent the post-World War II border realignment that awarded German Silesia and parts of East Prussia to Poland. Kohl gambled on opening the Polish-German frontier, despite all the fears about a flood of immigrants

from a region with wages only a tenth of those in western Europe.<sup>12</sup> And Germany, determined not to be western Europe's border on the East any longer, joined the United States in prodding their allies to help the Poles and other central Europeans join the West by providing them with financial aid, technology, managerial know-how, and institutional models.

Most of all, of course, in the new climate the central Europeans helped themselves by emulating the golden West. They craved membership in the EU and NATO, and they altered their behavior significantly in order to qualify. In varying degree they instituted rule of law, with protection of human rights, minorities, and commercial contracts. They set up independent judiciaries and allowed robust media to emerge. They privatized business. They accepted World Bank and International Monetary Fund conditions of austerity and did not make the IMF the scapegoat for the agony of modernization. They passed legislation to align themselves with EU requirements. They nurtured an incipient civil society. And the central European governments were not even deterred by the prospect of subordinating much of their newly acquired full sovereignty to the EU and a European Court of Justice empowered to sit in judgment over national laws.

To show their readiness for NATO membership, the governments raced to establish civilian control of their militaries and to open their defense planning to outside scrutiny. Poland began exporting stability, in part by donating weapons to the infant Lithuanian army, in part by forming joint peacekeeping units with its Ukrainian and Baltic neighbors, and generally blurring the new line between East and West as much as possible. Even noncandidate Ukraine, eager to have the alliance's nimbus radiate beyond the designated candidates for NATO membership, set aside disputed claims to Serpent Island to sign a friendship treaty with Romania and made the most of its opportunities under NATO's Partnership for Peace program.

Central Europeans are already reaping the rewards for their strenuous efforts. They have begun the march toward EU prosperity. They regard NATO membership as insurance against any imperial recidivism on the part of Russia and against any military contagion from the Balkans. Most fundamentally, they regard their admission to the West's premier clubs as certification, at last, of their Western identity. For them, this signifies deliverance from centuries of being the passive victims of history to becoming codeterminants of their own destiny.

Europe's final contemporary miracle might be identified as the new energy on the continent. To be sure, Europeans agonize about ruthless globalization, about their 17 million unemployed, their loss of competitiveness to American rivals, and the crippling costs of their social welfare. But the dynamism is real. So is the intuition that one must use to the full the rare historical gift of choice in an era when old institutions have dissolved but new ones have not yet solidified. The propitious moment must now be seized, to build a European Union that can save Germans from themselves and Europeans from themselves. "Such a historic opportunity doesn't come often," warns one senior German diplomat. "And if we give it up frivolously for a return to nationalism and protectionism, coming generations will never forgive us."<sup>13</sup>

And so European monetary union is proceeding, with an unanticipated normative and disciplining power to force down inflation rates and budget deficits across the continent. After prodigious efforts, even Italy and Spain are participating from the beginning, and Greece intends to qualify in a few years. At the same time, central Europe is beginning to get the payoff from austerity during its painful first transition years. Northern central Europe, at least, has finally rebuilt the quantitative gross domestic product (GDP) it had when the communist systems collapsed, on a much sounder qualitative base. Poland, with close to the fastest growth in Europe today, should essentially catch up with the western European standard of living in a generation or two—for the first time in a thousand years.

That is the European self-image.

### *American Skepticism*

American observers have a more jaundiced view of Europe. In a capsule, elite conventional wisdom reads like this:

Henry Kissinger's famous taunt—What telephone number do I call for Europe? —is as justified as ever. Without the Soviet threat to compel unity, Europe is relapsing into nationalism and war and the natural anarchy of international relations. Yugoslavia is a harbinger. The Europeans had their chance to deal with Bosnia, and fumbled it; in Kosovo, too, the United States had to pull their chestnuts out of the fire. Deepening and widening are irreconcilable, and the Europeans

are acting either hypocritically or irresponsibly in trying to do both. And small central European countries must still be the object, not the subject, of policy, subordinate to the West's more important relations with the former superpower, Russia.

Internally, Europeans squabble over mad cows. While the United States has the lowest unemployment in memory, Europe has 17 million unemployed officially (and maybe 27 million in real numbers) and has forgotten how to create new jobs or venture capital. The exorbitant welfare entitlements of European countries smother initiative. The old continent is in crisis and will not admit it. There is a public backlash against the 1992 Maastricht Treaty establishing the European Union; Helmut Kohl had to give up his chimera of European political union.<sup>14</sup> Europe plunged ahead in an upbeat mood as it pulled out of recession in the mid-1990s, but with the next downturn, true to form, European integration will again stagnate or regress. The consensus system of fifteen very different members produces only stasis. Europe is a museum of the past.

This is a simplification, but not a falsification, of much mainstream writing about Europe in the United States.<sup>15</sup>

The rebuttal from Bonn and Warsaw, equally compressed, would read something like this: You Americans have been misled by the neorealist school into expecting only Hobbesian contests among European nations in the wake of cold-war bipolarity. Conversely, you are setting up a straw man when you measure European integration against some imagined United States of Europe and conclude that it is failing. The new hybrid we are developing pragmatically does not fit on any hypothetical charts. It falls well short of your federation, but it also goes well beyond what you understand as a confederation, in which commonalities have to be thrashed out anew with each fresh transaction. It lets national identity and idiosyncrasies flourish, but it also authorizes a growing area of pre-agreed united action in trade negotiations and in the whole *acquis communautaire*, the 80,000 pages of laws and regulations already adopted. However ungainly it may appear, the EU continues to function because it brings tangible benefit to its members. The old Westphalian nation-state is no longer an option in Europe; it is simply too small to be viable. The megadeaths of World Wars I and II, the existential nuclear threat, Chernobyl, and today's digital globalization have all impressed this truth on central Europeans and even on the French, if not yet fully the British. We are

already pooling our sovereignty to a remarkable degree. And in synergy with you in NATO, we are performing the historic task of drawing central Europe into the West's circumference of peace and prosperity.

Yes, Europe (like America) did initially fail the test of Yugoslav breakup. But in the end the Balkan atrocities and humiliations finally compelled the West to do the right thing there and in the process to reorient NATO for twenty-first-century crisis management.

Yes, European unemployment is a blight, and it will not be easy for us to regain the competitiveness lost in the past decade. But our business cycles differ. While we applaud your record in job creation and will try to emulate you, we regard the 1990s more as your turn to surge than as evidence of our permanent inferiority. Europe has already begun its own round of boosting productivity. And in the interim, before we liberalize our labor markets and reduce long-term unemployment, our compassionate social net will enable the jobless to lead decent lives even in the midst of wrenching change; we have no explosive underclass. Currency union is focusing minds on fiscal discipline throughout Europe and will make our bottlenecks obvious so we can correct them.

Europe is indeed in a structural crisis, the Europeans continue—but this very crisis is impelling unprecedented cooperation. It is a high-risk venture. But not acting together would pose even greater risk. And the present course promises high reward, if competitiveness can be restored and if this war-prone continent can banish mass bloodshed in an ever-widening arc. Central Europe, with its low wages, well-educated workers, and pent-up consumer demand, will help the whole European continent. Already Poland, with its fast growth, expects to produce half as much as output in the much larger Russian Federation by the early twenty-first century, points out former finance minister Grzegorz Kolodko.<sup>16</sup>

### *Birth Pangs and Birth*

What accounts, then, for the stark difference in the view of Europe on the two sides of the Atlantic? Why do Americans see only the birth pangs, while the Europeans experience the birth?

Again, from the point of view of Bonn and Warsaw, Americans would seem to be prisoners of previous patterns in their stereotypes,

even as the old patterns are dissolving. They seek to squeeze the emerging Europe into a nineteenth-century mold of nationalism, into old cold-war definitions of power, or perhaps into Gaullist expectations. They have been strongly influenced—especially before Prime Minister Tony Blair brought a friendlier view of the continent to 10 Downing Street—by British Tory fears about being sucked into some homogenized, bureaucratic Europe. And, it must be added, they have been reinforced in their dismissal of the EU by the absence in Brussels of staff reporters for any major American periodical other than the *Wall Street Journal*. No journalist for a general quality newspaper or news magazine in the United States scrutinizes the increasingly central institution of the EU the way, say, the *Financial Times* does. The American political class therefore lacks the osmosis of the European system that it might acquire from daily exposure to it.

Judged by traditional categories, of course, Europe is ineffectual. It lacks the glue of any single nationalism or any other overarching purpose beyond the dry rationality of cooperation in an era of interdependence. Ever since Hitler's terrible abuse of patriotic loyalty, Europe's more responsible politicians have eschewed emotional appeals. In consequence, Europe as a whole has a "myth deficit," as Munich historian Wolfgang Schmale points out.<sup>17</sup> It has never articulated the goals of integration in a way that would stir the hearts of its citizens, let alone convince outsiders of its dynamism.

Besides, a superpower with the fierce national pride of the United States can hardly credit the willing surrender of sovereignty by smaller nation-states that is now occurring in Europe. Many American commentators argue, on the contrary, that resurgent nationalism is the key that explains everything since the dissolution of Soviet hegemony in eastern Europe. As proof, they point to the war in Chechnya, the war of the Yugoslav succession, and Abkhazian (and Flemish and Walloonian) separatism. Nationalism is patently growing, not shrinking, they assert. So why—they asked until a scant few months before EMU became a reality—should a reunited, newly sovereign Germany, with the third-largest economy in the world, voluntarily denationalize the Bundesbank and cede its might to a less predictable and more diffuse European Central Bank? Or, obversely, why should countries surrounding Germany rush to melt their identities into a greater Europe that the economic giant of Germany must necessarily dominate?

Furthermore, superpower America knows that Europe cannot make its military weight felt without the support of American airlift and



intelligence and nuclear umbrella. Even if it could, Europe has no single political authority to apply that capability. Oddly enough, for the country that invented the “soft power” of persuasion and example, the United States does not seem to recognize the potency of agenda-setting or the habit-forming nature of daily consultation and compromise across Europe on everything from drug running to passports.<sup>18</sup> These matters are low politics, Americans argue; when push comes to shove in high politics, only the British and French, acting as nations, are capable of dispatching troops and pilots to restore peace and order.

An additional reason for U.S. dismissal of confederation-plus consensus politics within the EU follows from American incomprehension of the consensual style of national politics in the Germanic and Low Countries. For all of their similarities, each democracy has its own peculiar mixture of cooperation and confrontation. The United States favors a robust clash of opposing interests until compromise is finally hammered out. Many Europeans, by contrast, practice a consensus or even corporatist style of politics that translates easily into the backroom give-and-take of EU tradeoffs.<sup>19</sup>

The U.S. sense of European impotence is only enhanced by a widespread continued fixation on the one-time superpower adversary, even though Russia’s army is in disarray and Russia’s GDP is now less than the capitalization of Wal-Mart. The preoccupation is understandable. The central Europeans do not have nuclear weapons to claim Western attention, and all Soviet successor states other than Russia that inherited Soviet nuclear missiles have renounced them. Besides, in Russia itself nuclear weapons are in some ways more dangerous now than during the cold war, since controls on them have slackened and since Moscow is compensating for its current weakness in conventional military forces with a new military doctrine of first nuclear use.<sup>20</sup> These circumstances—plus the need to avoid stoking resentment and humiliating a weak Russia as Germany was humiliated after World War I—require extra solicitude of Moscow, the argument runs, even at the expense of central European concerns. The overriding priority must be to ensure Russian adherence to START II arms control, and this requires sublimation of central European interests.

One final explanation for the downbeat American reading of European integration is perhaps psychological. Intellectually, it is less risky to be pessimistic than to be optimistic. It is always easier to reconstruct old shapes than to decipher new ones, in any case—and the old European configurations of hegemonic totalitarianism in this century

and balance of power in the last certainly invite pessimism. Then, too, predictions of failure take a long time to be proven wrong (rather than simply delayed in impact), while predictions of success, which presume that all key elements will succeed together, can be confounded momentarily by any single spoiler. Finally—since the German movers and shakers of European integration unconsciously use pessimism the way Americans use optimism, to galvanize corrective action—periodic German alarms can be overinterpreted by onlookers.

In the aggregate, these instincts colored U.S. commentary on Europe until the very eve of the launch of monetary union, the most concrete of Europe's integrative projects. In late 1997 Martin Feldstein, president of the National Bureau of Economic Research, went so far as to ask whether Europe's quest for a common currency might not unleash a new war.<sup>21</sup> Veteran diplomatic analyst John Newhouse still expected Germany to lurch in an anti-EU direction, saw EMU as a "massive distraction" that would very likely produce "economic chaos," believed that eastern enlargement was "unlikely in the foreseeable future," and called the whole sorry mess "a collective nervous breakdown."<sup>22</sup> Noting these and other "funereal" warnings, a *Financial Times* columnist rued the "intellectual gulf" between European perceptions and the American obsession with the "famine, pestilence, and war" that European monetary union would supposedly set off.<sup>23</sup> In February 1998 Irving Kristol, the dean of American neoconservatives, still expected the combination of a common European currency and statist continental economies to generate crisis and perpetuate high unemployment, thus "subverting the political institutions of the nations in the [European] union," leading to "ultimate impoverishment," and reinforcing the "hedonistic" refusal of young Europeans to procreate in adequate numbers.<sup>24</sup> *New York Times* columnist William Safire added his disapproval of "Alice in Euroland" as EU heads of government gathered to found the European Central Bank in May of 1998.<sup>25</sup>

By then straight news coverage, as distinct from commentary, in the United States turned at least neutral or even positive.<sup>26</sup> The shift came far too late, however, to prepare the general American reader intelligently for the realities of monetary union.

Despite the widespread "funereal" U.S. perception of Europe, the real surprise at this end of a terrible century is not the atavistic wars at the margins of Europe, but rather the absence of war in all those other

places where blind, repetitive history might have decreed it. Today the magnetic attraction of the voluntary Western system of peace and prosperity for those states in the cursed space between the Germans and the Russians has a benign effect, subduing chauvinism and reinforcing moderation. Europe's blessed zone of peace and prosperity is expanding—and thereby enhancing American security as well. The new paradigm is not, after all, the atrocities of the former Yugoslavia, or even the old nineteenth-century balance-of-power jostling. It is an unaccustomed reconciliation in the heart of Europe, between France and Germany, Germany and Poland, Poland and Ukraine, Romania and Hungary, Germany and the Netherlands. In Bartoszewski's simile, Europe is indeed experiencing, after a millennium, its second birth.