

# THE CHANGING GLOBAL ECONOMY AND POLITICAL ORDER: WESTERN EUROPE PERSPECTIVES ON NEW INTERDEPENDENCE

## INTRODUCTION

1. As recently as 1986 a Japanese scholar speaking about Western Europe declared the end of "euro-centrism". One of the signs he analysed was the fact that nothing was happening anymore in Europe. According to him at that time, the center of events was displaced from Europe to other regions of the world.
2. I must confess that I agreed with him then. Political life was stiffling, the economy was trapped into the impossibility of coupling control of inflation with full employment, and ideas seemed to circulate only within a small circle. Indeed, at that time - influenced also by events in my own country - I also had the sensation that imagination had deserted the centers of power. How far we were indeed from the hopeful slogans of May 68! Even the acceleration of the process of the European Community integration was somewhat alien to the day to day concerns of people.
3. And then suddenly the events in Eastern Europe have shaken that apparent stability! New questions emerge about Europe's identity; the European Community is confronted with radical choices about its scope and composition; issues that until recently were the concern of social movements more than of the established public powers became central in the public policies; well established beliefs of economic and social theories became subject to question-marks which are still waiting for adequate answers; the "cooperation" with other regions of the world is now necessarily viewed in reference to a new frame.
4. Interdependence may be one of the concepts through which we can examine not only the changes but also the new perspectives. It is particularly relevant when dealing with Western Europe.

## THE COMPONENT OF INTERDEPENDENCE IN WESTERN EUROPEAN HISTORY

5. Throughout the history of Western Europe we are confronted with a rather peculiar way to express interdependence. Practically all the peoples in Europe have had a historical moment of expansion within the continent, thus making a superficial analysis of our history a succession of wars, of temporary domination of some nations by others, of a frequent displacement of the core of the mercantile society in continuous attempts by nations or cities to commercial hegemony. In fact we may even wonder if this continuous attempt to expansion was already an embrionic form of interdependence - nations could not deal with the others unless those others were appropriated. (Of course, at the level of what we might still call the "super-structure", royal alliances were continuously in the making beyond the national borders thus constituting the first and permanent trait of Europe-without-boundaries that we may think of!)



6. The same pattern can be found in the relations of European States with other continents. The European States have always formed a system expanding outside Europe and moving towards an internationalizing system. In my country the discussion has never ceased about the real motives that led a nation of barely 1.5 million people to go across the Oceans and reaching as far as Japan and Brazil. Looking at the successive movements of expansion and contraction within the continent I cannot help seeing in the Portuguese expansion through the sea the same pattern at work.

7. Of course, looking from a distance to the events in Europe during the XV and XVI centuries we can place them into a broader context and consider them as part of migratory movements that have always led peoples to find new spaces. However the emerging concept of Nation-state soon changed the internationalized system into an "empire". Similar to the appropriation within the European continent, the empire was conceived as having a center where supreme power resided and as being formed by distinct and diversified parts. There was some give-and-take in that concept. According to their set of values, every European State was not only Euro-centered but very much centered on its specific national culture. This is why they brought their language, institutions and other expressions of culture to what constituted their empire.

8. However, the same is not true about knowledge. In this regard Western Europe was a single region. Science was shared as soon as new experiences were made and laws were established; philosophy was the very breathing of the European continent and even in the middle ages we see the great scholars teaching at different Universities during their lifetime; the arts - painting, sculpture, architecture - were shared throughout Europe thus creating "schools" whose disciples are of different nationalities. Together with a political and economic desire for power which has threatened a generous interdependence at the level of the nations, the Europeans have experienced a cross-fertilization of their talents and specific traits which constitute their greatest richness.

9. What is the situation now when we speak of interdependence from the Western perspective?

Two contradictory facts can be indicated.

10. To some extent we can say that what we are calling now interdependence is also a disguised form of the same pattern. The new system of communication has introduced into the whole process a variable that has changed its very nature. The instantaneous character of the communication obliterates the obvious concept of "center" that geography alone had created. By doing so, wherever centers emerge - in economic strength and political power - they become more obviously attempts to hegemony. We participate then in another reality that has been described as "the post-modern 'super-imperialism' of the computer and its correlate systems of knowledge and power."



11. Opposite to this fact, there is the awareness of equal dignity of all peoples and the search for justice which characterizes the Western thought. Equal rights have integrated in practice they are far from being fully put into practice. This explains that Europe took the lead in addition to the international law the right to interference, namely in situations where humanitarian aid is at stake.
12. We can then say that together with a still euro-centered approach to other peoples, Western culture is contributing to the enrichment of the panoply of human rights and their respect and defense.
13. Interdependence does not mean the same to all people. Within the space of Western Europe the different meanings do represent, in my view, the most important divergent stands that we are facing on this continent.
14. For some interdependence means in practice the way in which economic mechanisms function in order to assure that the market economy does not encounter any stumbling blocks in the satisfaction of the so-called "natural" conditions or the market.
15. For others interdependence is narrowed down to the management of the inter-relation among States at all levels of the common interests and planetary issues, through the existing international institutions.
16. None of these processes can be seen in isolation from history of Western Europe nor separated from the cultural assumptions that shaped Europe. Beyond the new mechanisms in the economic and monetary system beyond the new power relations and the emergence of a new geo-political picture, interdependence is also the emergence of a new culture, both in terms of identity and of vision about the other and the worlds at large. This is why the questions of interdependence lead us not only to the economic and political sphere but demand examining and questioning cross-cultural perception, communication and cooperation.

#### INTERDEPENDENCE INTRA-MUROS

17. The positive outlook at interdependence is at stake within the space of Western Europe itself. Since a few years the process of integration within the EEC has gained such a momentum that practically all the countries of Western Europe are now in one way or another already part of the process.
18. However, the attitudes they evoke within the Community vary greatly. For some - as I have been told - "it was enough to digest Spain, Portugal and Greece"!! In other words: for some the EEC is nothing else but the extension of the Nation-State, with the same desire for hegemony. Those are the ones who are above all concerned with competition with Japan and USA and idealistic all other

perspectives. They are to be found in all groups of the political spectrum. For others, it is a broader Europe that we are trying to build and there is no obvious reason for keeping at the EEC doors Sweden or Austria.

19. These two attitudes are the most important clivage existing now within the EEC. It is going to affect the attitude towards Eastern Europe as well as towards the countries of other continents. In my understanding, a strong zone - mainly when it will have its own currency and will be able to form a political union - behaves as the center of an empire if it does not want to encompass thr other nations, who according to the Treaty of Rome, have the right to aspire to be part of it.
20. Of course, we are far from the millenary history of confrontation between the nation-states in this continent. In this way the EEC has a symbolic value of true interdependence that is already bearing its fruits. It won't be accomplished fully unless it is translated into all aspects of the necessary union and until other countries from the same space are allowed to join.
21. At its root, this question can only be solved by an approach to culture which is faithfull to the tradition of Western Europe. Science and Technology were born in this continent. Since World War II Europe has lost its role of first protagonist in this realm. It has become obvious that one of the reasons is the fact that every country per se is not able to rach the critical mass necessary to accomplish decisive breakthroughs in so many diversified fields as those open by contemporary science. The full participation of all Europeans in the scientific and technological projects undertaken by the EC is a pre-requisite for providing the inhabitants of this continent with the capacity to exercise their talents in the greatest measure. By doing so, Europe will rejopin its tradition.
22. A specific question Europeans have to deal with are the alternative sources of energy. The Gulf war has shown very clearly how dependent the world is on oil as source of energy. At the same yime we know that in man research centers there are scientists who have gone very far in their research concerning specifically nuclear fusion and photovoltaics. Time has come for a true interdependence to be put at work: to repeat the conditions of the "Manhattan project" in the early forties, namely, to gather those scientist and all the material resources required in one single place so that the critical mass thus created may soon provide an answer to such an urgent matter.
23. Other issues demand also a creative interdependence. The ecological situation of this continent and of the planet is one of them. There is no doubt that questions like the warming of the climate, the disposal of toxic wastes, the use of fertilizers and pesticides, the urban wastes, have to be dealt jointly. It is the management of "the commons" that is at stake. This is an unprecedented respon-





sibility that changes totally the understanding of the nation-state and its responsibilities.

24. In order to be able to deal with all these questions adequately, there is one basic political condition: the reinforcement of democracy. Interdependence goes beyond the relation among states. In the Western European tradition individuals are those who carry with them the seeds of collaboration and joint effort. Interdependence is nothing but a stratospheric operation if it does not rest with the individuals and the associations he creates with like-minded people. This means that new problems do demand new social agents. The political parties as well as the trade unions though necessary are not anymore sufficient to embody the new interests that interdependence carries with it. Imbedded as they are in the very local struggle of party politics they often fail to see what is in question in the demands put by interdependence to the population in general and therefore to their own action.

#### INTERDEPENDENCE IN RELATION TO OTHER COUNTRIES

25. Western Europe could participate in the building of global interdependence by maintaining as a kind of super-state bi-lateral relations with other countries. This would be again the practice of expansion though in terms profitable for Western Europe as it is shaping itself now.

26. One basic contribution is its participation in the CSCE process as part of the architecture of what is now called pan-Europe, giving to its institutions the possibility to carry further the cooperation with USA and Canada. But, again, this is not enough. From different corners the idea of a conference for security and cooperation in the Mediterranean has developed. This is certainly one of the priorities if we don't want the world to be shaped by "economic zones of influence". Another conference on security and cooperation of Africa is taking shape. More important than isolated and fragmented help is the support and contribution to such initiative. Moreover it implies from Europe the drastic cut on the arms' trade as well as a definite commitment in relation to the elimination of chemical and nuclear weapons.

27. The interdependence of the modern world is, at degree 1, the interdependence of regions in the construction of a world free of the threat of wars and of any nuclear attack. Western Europe cannot fail in that task.

28. Western Europe plays also a decisive role in the interdependence expressed by the global economy. It is maybe there that interdependence appears more clearly as opposed to the state-centered economy (while in terms of security the new political attempts towards interdependence may - wrongly - appear as in the wake of former political and military treaties).

29. Global economy diversifies itself into several aspects:
- global economic forces are integrated laterally (beyond the borders of the Nation-State) in the production and distribution of goods and services they provide;
  - global financial mechanisms (institutionalized or as a mere consequence of the linkages established horizontally) pervade the whole scene and determine the national financial policies;
  - global population problems and migratory movements constitute a new factor in the determination of the possible economic scenarios;
  - global diversification of the renewable sources of energy are going to determine the equilibrium of economic force between countries and regions;
  - global evolution of science and technology is a pre-requisite for greater wealth at the world level and for just distribution of resources;
  - global redistribution of labour is happening through the delocalisation of enterprises in ever wider circles to all peripheries where wages are lower and, at the same time, provoke unemployment in Western Europe and the need to rethink drastically the very concept of employment and the policy of full employment.

Fundação Cuidar o Futuro

