

LA FUITE EN AVANT?

THE RHETORIC OF FEAR AND THE EUROPEAN CONSTRUCTION

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This essay will analyze several famous speeches pronounced throughout the European Project across thirty years, from The Hague Congress until the late seventies of the twentieth century. It aims to explore the rhetoric of fear in the European Construction, that is, recurring statements on the fear of losing Europe, going back to an era of division. It will aim at answering this question through the analysis of the speeches of protagonists of the European Project (mainly members of the European institutions). This essay will analyze how this fear is part of the constitutive matrix of the European idea as Dennis de Rougemont pointed out.

Keywords: Europe, Isaiah Berlin, Denis de Rougemont, Technocracy, Nation, Rethoric.

Este ensaio analisa vários discursos famosos que foram pronunciados ao longo de trinta anos de projecto Europeu, do Congresso Europeu de 1948 na Haia até aos finais dos anos 70 do século XX. Tenta-se explorar a retórica do medo durante a construção europeia, i.e., várias declarações que foram feitas sobre o medo de perder a Europa e vê-la regressar a uma época de divisões. Tenta-se responder a esta questão através da análise de discursos dos protagonistas do projecto Europeu (principalmente membros das instituições europeias). Talvez este medo, que parece estar presente em momentos pontuais e parece bastante residual senão irrelevante, faz na verdade parte de uma mundividência presente na teoria política que Isaiah Berlin descreveu com agudeza e é parte da matriz constitutiva das ideias europeias como apontou Denis de Rougemont.

Palavras-chave: Europa, Isaiah Berlin, Denis de Rougemont, Tecnocracia, Nação, Retórica.

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1. The European project at the light of continuities and ruptures in contemporary politics

Isaiah Berlin identified two major political trends in the nineteenth century, “humanitarian individualism and romantic nationalism” (Berlin, 2000, p. 59). Showing his proverbial talent to grasp complex phenomena in a simple formula, he noted that in spite of their dissimilarities — “profound enough to lead to a sharp divergence and ultimate collision of these two ideals” — these currents shared a common belief, that is, the conviction that the “problems both of individuals and societies could be solved.” Liberals believed in education, socialists in a complete change of distribution of property and the control of economic resources, conservatives believed in institutions, etc.

It was not without malice that Berlin also noted that “[I]f chronological frontiers are seldom landmarks in the history of ideas,” (Berlin, 2000, p. 68) the picture was altered with the entering of the twentieth century, and these trends “finally ended in exaggerated and indeed distorted forms as Communism and Fascism” (Berlin, 2000, p. 60). It became apparent that the administration of things would not replace the government of men and that no universal solution could be found to the most pressing problems. This implies that we can no longer believe that “great edifices promote solidarity, security and (...) strength” (Berlin, 2000, p. 60).

Some apparent lines of continuity can be discerned: “to the casual observer of the politics and the thought of the twentieth century it might at first seem that every idea and movement typical of our time is best understood as a natural development of tendencies already prominent in the nineteenth century” (Berlin, 2000, p. 61). This almost looks like a truism in the case of the growth of international institutions, from the old Hague Court to the post-war Hague Congress, passing through the League of Nations.

The European project is one of these cases of both continuity and rupture. According to Berlin, what marks the divide are two main changes in the political view (Berlin, 2000, p. 61): the role of irrational or unconscious forces driving events often outweighing the “forces of reason;” and a trend to remove the problems not by argument but by their “removal.”

Rhetoric is an instrument to “tame” these irrational forces. It is not only useful for a politician or a statesman to rationally explain what he has in mind in order to convince his audience, but also in academic circles or in rational argument. However statesmen need to add emotional dimension

to rational argument through the building of a narrative, the construction of a challenge, the appeal to a utopia or an ideal. Within the European project, fear is certainly a key aspect of this rhetorical narrative: the idea that Europe will fall back to an era of war, nationalism and divisions, if the project is not carried on.

The argument that, without the European institutions, Europe can recede into a state of war makes sense in a rational way. Nonetheless, when one gives enough emphasis to this idea by forcefully repeating it, making suggestive analogies, dramatizing and using specific key-words, then one is faced with a discourse that is reinforced by emotional appeal. A politician frequently uses powerful narratives in order to instill fear and hope in his public target, thus acquiring a new persuasive dimension.

The analysis of some speeches from protagonists of the European project can enlighten how Berlin's trends exist within the European project. As it will be shown, the diminishing of fear in those speeches coincides with the emergence of Berlin's trend of "removing" the problems instead of debating them. After some necessary historical contextualization, this article will proceed with the analysis of fear *per se*.

2. Tragic dimension of History and awareness of a common danger

Unreason and dreams — the tragic dimension of history — are in the deep roots of the European the situation after the Second World War.

We may follow Raymond Aron's efforts to understand the post war situation. After the guns of World War II went silent (Aron, 1948b, p. 13), nothing remained of the European concert of powers and Europe became a no man's land between two giants. No one expected a Russian-American idyll (Aron, 1948b, p. 1948), but many expected a truce. What happened were two important changes that were expected to last: the unification of the diplomatic field on the planet, which is the result of the solidarity between continents and the progress of technology; and the formation of a bipolar world, an almost mechanical consequence of the devastation of Europe.

Two other effects were to be less permanent but no less important. The first is the partial destruction of the equilibrium of the "balance of powers," that kept war within limits through the XIX century. The other is the expansion of the empire's rivalry in a "total diplomacy" that is not limited to military intervention: any election campaign is now an episode of the Cold War. This situation changes the normal concept of peace that, so far, involved the

limitation of what was at stake and of the means used. Now everything is at stake: economy, political system, ruling class. That is what Hitler called “comprehensive strategy” and that Raymond Aron had already analyzed in the draft text on machiavelisms written in 1939-40 (Aron, 1993).

If the world seems divided between the hegemony of the two “state-continent,” this does not mean that the choice between the American and Russian side are equivalent. The American ruling class does not want to shift its industrial potential into a military one and it sees its own action as a “burden” to endure. The United States also do not maintain a state police or the monopoly of power in countries occupied militarily, while the entry into the Soviet sphere is irreversible, which gives a peculiarly ironic meaning to the word “contention” in the Stalin’s mouth.

But “the absence of peace is not war” (Aron, 1948b, p. 26). It is not likely that war will be triggered by an incident like Sarajevo in 1914. There will be war only if any of the great powers desire it resolutely and, given the uncertainty of the military balance, no one wants it and, therefore, it will only happen if one of the sides wants to reach a goal that the other considers unacceptable. “In this way, the current balance that does not exclude precariousness is explained” (Aron, 1948b, 29). Stalin is not a romantic: he is as ambitious as Hitler was, but less impatient. Therefore, Aron predicts, he will first try to increase its industrial potential.

Europe is divided by an “Iron Curtain” (Baverez, 2006, p. 206)^[1] but, although it refuses to recognize this situation, it has a shared common culture with America - whose originality lies in science, industrialization and social rationalization - and West Germany is an integral part of this Europe, which despite the current vacuum, it is still a great power. The idea of European unity was more inspired by prudence than by enthusiasm, but “it would not be the first time that unity is born from the awareness of a common danger” (Aron, 1993, p. 68).

The common enemy was for a long time the communist danger. Against the hopes of those who mistook the communist regime with a personal despotism, Raymond Aron foresees a long period of time for this great schism, a schism that the death of Stalin will not overcome (Aron, 1981, pp. 329-340)^[2], because communism was not an ordinary tyranny.

1 A formula that Aron uses in his printed work of 1948, right after Churchill’s famous speech in Fulton in 1946, but he used this expression much before that. (Baverez, 2006, p. 206).

2 This idea is explained in a chapter that is lacking in the original version but that is present in the English translation of *Les guerres en chaîne*. Cfr. Raymond Aron, *The century of total*, Westport (Conn), Greenwood Press, 1981, (ed. or. Garden City (NY), 1954, Doubleday), pp. 329-340.

In spite of these circumstances, there has been in the European project two symmetrical discourses: one of fear and hope, and the other of experts and solutions.

3. Hague Congress of 1948

The first meeting to address the question of a federal Europe was, without a doubt, the Hague Congress of 1948. This is where many of the ideological foundations of the European Project would be established. Most notably, it was in this Congress that the duality between a “positive” way of thinking the Union (federation of common market) and a “negative” way (fear of war and nationalisms) saw the light.

Denis de Rougemont, an influent pro-federalist, reflects this duality in a speech he gave a few days before the Hague Congress: the European ideal is a kind of a reversed utopia, one that defines itself more by the fear of what it wants to avoid than by a positive plan. In the words of Rougemont: “The slogan of fear, ‘The defence [sic] of Europe’, defines today’s utopia.” (Rougemont, 1948, p. 2) But this, says Rougemont, is not sustainable: we need to desire a federation, a Europe without borders. The idea of fear as a stimulant to move towards a unified Europe is clearly present in this text, but always goes in hand with the idea of a positive plan. For instance, and after listing some reasons for why there should be such a Europe, Rougemont finally adds:

Lastly, we want Europe because without it the world is sliding towards war, and the only option we have left now is to prevent that war or to perish in it. Separated and isolated, none of our countries can prevent anything; we will be colonised [sic] one after the other, for all our national sovereignty (...) If we have a federation, on the other hand, we will be as strong as the two Great Powers (Rougemont, 1948, p. 3).

Those words of Rougemont were quite clear: divided, we are weak, close to war, and powerless. The only way is forwards, with a positive plan that will make Europe strong. At this time, the Russian threat was serious: Rougemont says that it is a danger which causes fear and that the Europeans can only counteract by creating a Western bloc. However, although Rougemont talks significantly about the Soviet Union, he did not consider this to be the most dangerous problem Europe was facing:

(...) the real obstacles to a federation of Europe are not primarily in the East; they are here among us. It all comes back to our internal problems, especially the two burning issues that I referred to a short while ago: the problem which nationalist prejudice causes us, and, parallel to that, the problem of partisan spirit (Rougemont, 1948, p. 7).

Nationalisms and their divisive spirit: those are, according to Rougemont, the real threat of a united Europe:

Ladies and gentlemen, if Europe, the mother of nations and parties, does not devise ways of overcoming nationalism and the partisan spirit, I cannot see who in the world could do it with any prospect of success.

This speech is quite representative of the spirit that would animate the Hague Congress some days later: a delicate combination between “positive” reasons for a federal Europe and “negative” reasons to do so. There were, on the one hand, speeches full of hope: many speakers supported a “European utopia” and freely spoke about it. Étienne Gilson, for instance, speaks about the necessity of a “foi animatrice” in Europe through a cultural and intellectual union (Gilson, 1948, p. 2). Paul Reynaud also made a speech on the necessity of involving the common people through a European Assembly, elected by universal suffrage (Reynaud, 1948). On the other hand, it is clear that fear and hope are always combining, even if in an unequal manner: there are more “positive” than “negative” reasons, more hope than fear. For instance, Reynaud’s speech criticizes the ones that have a too moderate and gradual stance on the European Project:

M. Macmillan, ancien ministre britannique (...) m’a oppose [sic] avec une charmante courtoisie un de ces dictons qui résument la sagesse française. Il m’a dit: Vous oubliez votre proverbe: « Hâtez-vous lentement ! »

To which he adds:

Mais, dire: « Hâtez-vous lentement » à un homme qui est en train de se noyer, c’est une ironie un peu macabre ! (Reynaud, 1948, p. 3)

There are no illusions throughout this foundational Congress: Europe must be done, not only for the sake of a greater good, but also to avoid something worse. Raymond Aron, for instance, speaks of a European Culture Center in order to avoid dictatorial institutions (Aron, 1948a). What is clear

for everyone is that things are not looking good for the European Nations: there is no other choice but to move on and, if not to forget nationalisms, at least to greatly diminish them. In the Hague Congress, the hope of an entirely new project is the norm, but this hope is always in some way intertwined with a sort of fear that pushes this movement forward. There is a positive and a negative impulse: a “we have to avoid something” that leads to a “we have to achieve something”.

This idea is reinforced in the very first sentence of the Schuman Declaration of 1950: “World peace cannot be safeguarded without the making of creative efforts proportionate to the dangers which threaten it” (Schuman, 1950). Therefore, the creation of institutions is necessary in order to create the basis of a European Federal order that will secure peace, i.e., avoid war:

By pooling basic production and by instituting a new High Authority, whose decisions will bind France, Germany and other member countries, this proposal will lead to the realization of the first concrete foundation of a European federation indispensable to the preservation of peace (Schuman, 1950).

It could be argued that, after all, we were in the aftermath of the war: it is therefore not surprising to see that fear is so present in those speeches. Nonetheless, and as I said, there is actually more hope than fear in these notable speeches that I quoted. In fact, what seems to be clear is that this mixture of fear and hope has never fully disappeared: the European Project is seen as an ideal, but also as an avoidance-mechanism.

For instance, at the Messina Conference of 1955, where the six foundational countries (France, West Germany, Luxembourg, Italy, Netherlands, and Belgium) started to draft a nuclear and economic union, the situation was desperate: the European Defense Community (EDC) Treaty failed to pass in France, which was a huge drawback for the European utopia. But, says Jean Monnet right after the Conference, the Europeans are assisting to a renewal of the European ideal: there must a progression toward the United States of Europe.

Il est très important que l'opinion publique comprenne la différence entre ces deux perspectives: l'une est l'avenir et le progrès; l'autre, le retour aux méthodes du passé dont nous avons connus l'inefficacité et qui entraîne la guerre (Monnet, 1955)

This dualism never disappears: the hope of progression in the European Construction is always present with the fear of regression. Even ten years after the Second World War, it is not necessarily the war that is invoked: it seems that the pro-European discourse recycles the events of the day in order to show that Europe is a necessity. For instance, in 1956, René Mayer, president of the Coal and Steel Community, talked about the fact that, after the setback of the EDC, there was a rebirth of the European ideal for two reasons:

In the first place, the successful experience of the European Coal and Steel Community points the way toward similar (...) formulations in the other areas. Second, just as was the case with the Schuman Plan, the initiative of the Messina conference proceed from no doctrinaire enthusiasm for constitutional-making but rather out of urgency, out of a recognition that national solutions to the problems confronting us are inadequate (Mayer, 1956, pp. 11-12).

Almost as a kind of pattern, the same “positive-negative” vision of Europe emerges. Mayer talks at length of future successes of a unified market that would embrace 160 millions of consumers. But he also speaks about the political security and stability that a unified Europe could bring: “United Europe, for us, is not only an article of faith, it is a policy of insurance” (Mayer, 1956, p. 13).

Because ten years have passed, there are no more references to the disaster of the Second World War, but more to the “frustration of Western hopes and policies”. What are they? If one takes a look to the European 50’s, they are not hard to spot: those were the years of the Korean War, of the Suez Crisis, and when the French IV Republic fell. Those were times where everything was happening. But Europe could only watch without acting. Then, it is not surprising to see that the “negative impulse” of the European Project was still present, but in a different form: the Second World War is not pointed out as the European fear anymore; the pro-Europeans leaders replaced it with other events, like the inability of Europe to act in the global chess.

This shift is very well highlighted by the first President of the European Economic Community (EEC), Walter Hallstein, right after the Treaty of Rome of 1958 that would create the Community:

The danger which threatens us is not that we shall be relegated to a lesser place among the powers which decide the fate of the world, but that we shall be completely eliminated. That is a deadly danger. Before our eyes, in this mid-twentieth century, a world tragedy is being played out which is nothing less than the tragedy of freedom (Hallstein, 1958, p. 12).

4. Technocratic discourse

Nonetheless, from the mid-fifties onwards, the speeches tend to be more dispassionate and reflect less the negative and positive dualism we have been analyzing. Part of this change may be related to unprecedented optimism during “les Trente glorieuses” year of economic growth in Europe. Again History seemed to follow a clear path, wars were far abroad and the new Europe an Oasis.

Hallstein’s speeches, for instance, are quite pragmatic: he is always cautious in talking about the direct vantages of having a united agricultural policy (Hallstein, 1958) or a common market (Hallstein, 1960), but he is not very extensive on the European ideals or fears.

Even in the famous “empty chair crisis” of 1965 where France was blocking the decisions of the European institutions, the rhetoric of fear seem to have considerably disappeared. There are many references to the fact that Europe needs a bigger market and a common security policy, but the “negative-positive” rhetoric that has been analyzed is clearly blurred, even though Hallstein, in 1965, described the empty chair crisis with these words:

For months now the European Economic Community has occupied the headlines in the papers and new broadcasts. It is going through a crisis, the most serious crisis since it was established in 1958 (Hallstein, 1965, p. 2).

Maybe this lack of rhetoric of fear is due to the fact that divergences in the European Process are gradually seen as being part of the process itself. Jean Rey, member of the EEC, said in a speech in 1965 that there was a negative and a positive aspect in the European Project: one based on the disagreements between governments, and the other based on the progresses that have been made despite those disagreements (Rey, 1965, p. 7). Hallstein is also convinced that, thanks to the treaties of Rome and Paris, the European Project has a basis to continue to carry on despite of the crises (Hallstein, 1965, pp. 15-16). Divisions do not seem to be so frightening anymore because they are seen as being part of the European Construction. As Pierre Werner, president of the Council of the European Communities, said in 1966 after the Luxembourg Compromise that would settle the empty chair crisis:

(...) nos industriels et nos agriculteurs raisonnent aujourd’hui en termes de marché commun et une crise institutionnelle, tout en les inquiétant, ne les en détourne pas (Werner, 1966, p. 5).

Time has worked in favor of the European Community, argues Werner. Now that the countries have created the first European institutions, it is impossible for them to come back despite the crises: they always have to find the equilibrium in their interests.

Those statements show that the Hallstein (1958-1967) and Jean Rey (1967-1970) years were periods of much pragmatism for the European Process. "(...) a German weekly tells me that the idealistic drive to unite Europe has given way to a mole-like activity concerned with regulation of the market for lard and cheese" (Hallstein, 1967, p. 3), says Hallstein in one of his last speeches. But this, for him, is great news. Europe finally made it from dream to reality, says Hallstein, from a rhetoric based on an idyllic "*esprit européen*" to a more down-to-earth politics. I would say that, in the end, this "realistic" discourse that toned down the positive European rhetoric also had the same effect on the negative part of its rhetoric. In other words: without grandiloquent dreams, there are no dramatic apocalypses and, therefore, no rhetoric of fear.

5. Warnings

But many members of the European institutions, throughout the years, have been advising against this too institutional and technical way of seeing Europe.

Voices raised saying that the youth had to be heard and that more political integration was necessary (Coppe, 1970, pp. 2-3; Deniau, 1969, pp. 5-8). Nonetheless, the 1974 energy crisis occurred and the first European elections had to be postponed for 1979. In the meantime, and because of the crisis, we can see a regain of the rhetoric of fear. Many speeches picture this moment of anxiety that took over the European institutions. For instance, the vice-president of the Commission, Wilhelm Haferkamp, says that the energy crisis is creating divisions among the states of the Union. In a speech he made in 1974, the vice-president warns that, if the member states persist, then they can paralyze the European market, the Commission, and Europe's ability to act politically in the world, problems which in turn can undermine the global peace and the very democracy of the European nations.

Que nous le voulions ou non: la rechute dans l'autarcie des petits Etats nationaux est désormais impossible sur le plan technique, économique et politique. Le repli dans la forteresse nationale entraînerait des effondrements structurels, la récession et un chômage massif dans une mesure telle que certains Etats démocratiques pourraient ne pas y survivre (Haferkamp, 1974, p. 16).

The same year of crisis, Altiero Spinelli, member of the Commission, repeats this idea: this crisis brought deep divisions in the Union and Nationalism is clearly coming back. Europe will be incapable to act in the world if it starts to dream, once again, of autarchy. In these gloomy speeches, the criticism that the Community has been undemocratic is recurrent: Europe has to open itself to its citizens. The idea that Hallstein and Rey cherished of a “necessary convergence” of the interests of the member states is explicitly criticized: all the political forces must be brought in the European process in order for it to grow (Spinelli, 1974, pp. 16-17).

Using Isaiah Berlin’s words, maybe we cannot expect to be completely free of hope and fear. What we put out of the door comes back through the window. Humanitarian individualism and romantic nationalism are at the front of the stage but no comprehensive solution seems available.

When we come to the end of this analysis, it seems that the years of the Hague Congress are long gone: if everyone spoke in very colorful terms in 1948 about the European utopia and the disasters that would arise without it, the European rhetoric on fear has been progressively toned down and, today, seem to be punctually used in moments of greater anxiety. The rhetoric of fear seems to be one that is mainly called upon in moments of crises.

It is nonetheless interesting to see this constant relationship between “positive” and “negative” rhetoric: in moments where great blueprints for Europe are absent, catastrophic scenarios seem to lack too.

In the Hallstein and Rey years, two commissions that were explicitly pragmatic and “unromantic” in their approach, both components strongly disappeared. The more the positive discourse of the Union is present, the more its negative side is altogether present. As Rougemont believed, the positive and negative sides of Europe are always together.

À l’origine de la religion, de la culture et de la morale européenne, il y a l’idée de la contradiction, du déchirement fécond, du conflit créateur (...) L’Européen typique sera tantôt un révolutionnaire ou un apôtre, un amant passionné ou un mystique, un polémiste ou un guerrier, un maniaque ou un inventeur. *Son bien et son mal sont liés* (Strenger, 2015)

Concluding, the idea of fear is an important aspect of the European Project, and not merely a rhetorical aspect that mainly appears in moments of crises. It is something structural to Europe, an essential side of it: it is more of an alarm bell that rings when the situation seems to be exceptionally desperate. In general, this alarm will trigger the words “nationalisms”,

“doubts”, “protectionism” and “divisions”, the eternal enemies of a deeper European integration. There is no way to deny that this rhetorical trick is very powerful to remember the European states and citizens that, in order for Europe to maintain a global leading position, there are still no alternatives to a deeper Union.

6. Concluding remarks

This paper intended to present just an “exploratory” analysis of a limited set of political speeches and did not aim to show the overall role of the rhetoric of fear in the EU’s institutional discourses, but nonetheless we conclude that Rougemont was right in saying that “the real obstacles to a federation of Europe are not primarily in the East; they are here among us.” And today’s Europe’s leaders understood this idea quite well. If Isaiah Berlin was right, sharp divergence and ultimate collision of the ideals, individualism and nationalism will be part of the European landscape for long time.

The actual *malaise* is often diagnosed as a lack of truer leadership that was maybe present in Adenauer’s era, or close to us, in Delors’ vision, but no longer exists. Today’s bureaucrats are not true statesman. It was also long ago diagnosed as a lack of democracy that the strengthening of the European parliament, a new constitution, and other great edifices could not however solve. The European project, to use Raymond Aron’s dichotomy, has “*not yet struck deep roots in society*” and “*no longer work*” (Aron, 1990, p. 110).

Our suggestion is that any analysis should take into account both the “irrational” and “unconscious” forces and the limitations of any institutional solution. We do not rule out that fear can be an emotional response expressing a valid cognitive assessment. It can foster social cooperation against common enemies and external threats. But we think that the “peoples” of the different European nations—the audience of “great institutional discourses” of European leaders—are maybe less sensitive and so this rhetoric is less effective, if the barbarians are within our borders. The clash of values and inner contradictions are now a given.

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