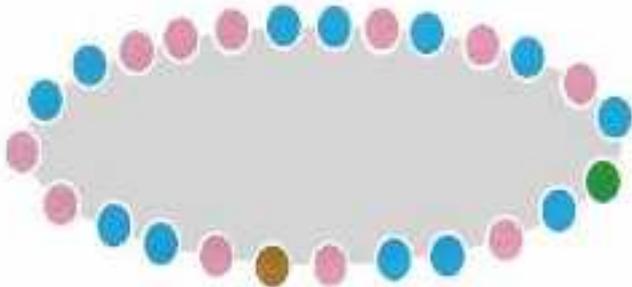


Let's make democracy flower in Europe

By radically transforming its institutions.

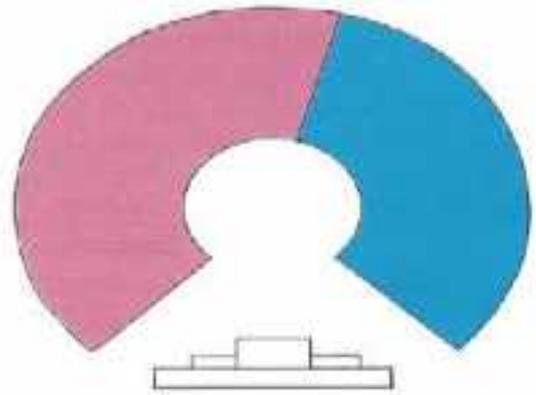
"The extension of Europe to include more countries makes fundamental institutional reform inevitable" said Joschka Fischer, the German minister of Foreign Affairs on May 12, 2000. " How can we possibly even imagine a European Council comprised of 30 heads of state? How can we escape paralysis with the existing institutions? **How can we avoid increasingly skewed compromises and prevent Europe's citizens from losing all interest in the Union?** There is one simple reply to that question: the transition to an entirely parliamentary system."

In an inter-governmental system (the present one), there are only HEADS of state and HEADS of government around the decision table. On an important question, it is almost unthinkable to vote a HEAD OF STATE into a minority position and risk humiliating his entire country.... In other words, there must be unanimous agreement among all 27 before any political change may be made.



With such a system, no political changeover is possible. Paralysis is sure to ensue. And when political leaders are paralysed, it's the technocrats or the market that end up making the rules.

But if we adopted a parliamentary system, as the Germans suggested in 2000, the European representatives of such or such a country could be out-voted without risking any national outcry because other European representatives from the same country would be in the majority.... A political debate (Left / Right / ...) decided within a legislative body ensues, and not a combat between nations.



It is not by improving candles that the light bulb was invented. It is not by patching up the institutions created in 1950 for 6 countries that a new democratic Europe will come to be. On the other hand, were we to adopt the parliamentary system proposed by Joschke Fischer, the European government would be of one political persuasion, that of the majority party in the European Parliament at a given time. It would intervene solely on issues regarding which no single country, taken alone, has real sovereignty, those issues for which we must necessarily join forces for increased effectiveness: defence, diplomacy, monetary policy, research, internal security, environment, regulation of globalization.....

Clarifying competences :

"The problems of the 21st century cannot be resolved with the fears and recipes of the 19th and 20th centuries," said Joschka Fischer. "A clear division of competences between the Federation and the Nation States should leave to the Federation only those questions calling imperatively for a European solution while the rest remain matters of state competence. A trimmed Federation would emerge, free to take action and, having corrected its democratic deficit, finally understandable to its citizens", said the German minister in conclusion to this speech which remains fully pertinent today.

Who would do what?

<i>Parliament and European government</i>	Diplomacy, Defence, Internal Security, Money, Research, Agricultural policy, Trade, Sustainable development.
<i>National Parliament and government:</i>	Education, Health, Culture, Housing, Employment, <i>Pensions</i> .
<i>Regional government and Parliament:</i>	Maintenance of Schools and Roads, Economic development, Adult education and training
...	...

It is actually unnecessary to insist on identical organisation within each country. We simply have to agree on the sectors in which any possibility for authentic action is tantamount upon European intervention: not the length of bananas or the size of avocados, but diplomacy, defence, research, regulation of globalization, etc.

Where the rest is concerned, each country does as it wishes: in France, school curriculum is decided on the national level, whereas in Belgium the local échevin (vice-mayor) is largely responsible. If either of these countries decided to fly in the face of tradition on this point, there would be millions of people protesting in the streets...

There's no reason we can't have research and diplomacy in common while still maintaining differing traditions in other areas. In America, the laws and life styles are very different in Florida or in Texas. The same kind of difference is seen in India between Kerala and Rajahstan whose social organisation and cultures are very distinct. That doesn't keep them from belonging to the same federation.



The Indian example is of particular interest. India is the world's largest democracy. The Indian constitution is clearly a federal one: the Indian Union only takes care of areas in which one of the 28 states would not, alone, have the means to act effectively (such as diplomacy, defence, research, monetary policy.....). The Indian Constitution includes a sort of "social treaty" which reassures those States that boast a more advanced social system such as Kerala.

Thanks to this social treaty, these states know that they will not regress nor be dragged down. Even if the elected Union government is not a very 'social' one, Kerala and its 32 million inhabitants are sure to maintain, if they so wish, their considerable advance in terms of housing, education and health care.

If we adopted a parliamentary system, the European government would be chosen by a majority vote of the European Parliament to carry out the program outlined to its citizens prior to the European elections. It would dispose of five years in which to accomplish its agenda (the Council of Heads of State playing only a limited role, like the Senate in France).

Europe would dispose of her own fiscal policy: a tax on dividends, an "eco-tax" (a kind of improved Tobin Tax), and a tax voted by the European parliament to finance defence, diplomacy, research, agricultural policy and infrastructure etc.

Every five years the European elections would offer the opportunity for a real political debate. Citizens could examine the results of the incumbent leadership and decide whether to accord it another five years or not... Europe would then have the means to act efficiently and rapidly on all the pressing questions whereas political decision-making, today, is paralysed by the unanimity ruling.

Joschka Fischer's proposal, quite close to the one put forward by Wolfgang Schäuble and Karl Lamers in 1994, also has the merit of respecting the fundamental principle of democracy : one man/woman (NdT: my feminist addition!), one vote. In such European elections, a member elected in Malta would carry the same weight as a German, the vote of a Polish citizen would carry the same weight as a Spaniard's. In the present system, on all the important questions, and despite the enormous difference in the number of inhabitants, Malta carries the same weight as Germany (although her population is 206 times less) -- hardly very democratic !

The Delors Proposal

If the power of the European Parliament is reinforced how can we ensure that the European elections are true elections in which the European questions are genuinely debated, and not just 25 simultaneous national elections? In 1997, Jacques Delors proposed that the European political

parties designate their candidate for the position of President of the European Commission prior to the elections. In the United States of America, the citizens elect a "ticket" (President and Vice President) at the same time as they elect their representatives. In this way the electors from Texas are fully aware they are voting in the same election as those from Florida.

Why couldn't the political parties participating in the European elections designate 3 to 5 personalities (from different countries) who they feel could best head the Commission for the five year period? This would oblige the parties to come to agreement upon programs truly European in nature and would stave off the kind of serious mismanagement that presided at the birth of the Barroso Commission.

Fischer's proposals drew enthusiasm from all those who wish to create a political Europe capable of weighing in with the hyper-powerful United States. On the Left, many militants and deputies immediately expressed their support for Joschka Fischer. On the Right, the convinced Europeans applauded as well: **"These proposals have come at just the right time. If we do nothing in this direction, Europe will no longer mean a thing"** said Hubert Haenel, RPR President of the Senate delegation to the European Union in the May 30, 2000 edition of *Le Monde* 2000.

A clarifying crisis with the British

Alain Juppé, certain of British opposition, said we should not be afraid of provoking a "clarifying crisis". What can we do if – at least for the time being - Great Britain refuses to go in the same direction? How can we clarify the relationship with London without endangering such a precious friendship?

Churchill was right !

In the speech he pronounced in Zurich in 1946, Winston Churchill put pressure on France and Germany to build the United States of Europe, but he declared even then that, given the culture and history of Great Britain, it should not be part of this Union but instead maintain its pivotal position between the United States of America and the United States of Europe ! Why not agree to accord this particular status to Great Britain? **No one can be forced to go further than he wishes. But no one has the right to slow down all the others.**

And don't let anyone convince us a unanimous vote is necessarily required to modify an international treaty. In the December 4, 2003 issue of the *Nouvel Observateur*, previous French minister, Robert Badinter, denounced "the straight jacket" in which Europe was likely to find itself confined. He reminded us that "many international treaties carry a clause providing for revision through a simple majority or 2/3 majority vote like the United Nations Charter." The Kyoto Protocol was applied despite the opposition of the US because 55 nations, representing 55% of CO2 emissions, ratified it. In the same way, a true European Constitution could see the day, even without British assent (the door will always be open for them).

Citizens speak your minds!

As this year begins, Europe is at a crossroads. The European treaties are being renegotiated but diplomacy is a something too important to be left to the diplomats. Had we waited for the diplomats to come to an agreement, the Berlin Wall would still be standing. It is the citizens, their elected representatives, the unions and associations who ardently hoped for and finally brought about the end of the Wall and the reunification of Europe. Today, it's up to the citizens to say what kind of a Europe they wish to build.

"Through our inertia, we rob the world of its human visage," wrote the philosopher, Alain. If we fail to provide ourselves with the means to become a political, diplomatic and military power, then Europe will have to take its part of the blame in the dehumanisation of the world. In 1993, the signatories of the Oslo Agreement asked Europe to help them build peace between Israel and Palestine.

Nearly 20 years later, Europe still has no structured diplomacy, and every week the media tell us how many men, women and children have died on the banks of the Jordan, the Tigris and the Euphrates ... and we feel horrifyingly powerless.

Between 1981 and 1984 the construction of Europe was slowed down by Margaret Thatcher who emphatically expressed her priorities. "I want my money back. I want my money back!!", she said, hammering on the table until she won. Why can't the citizens of Europe express themselves with equal conviction on their priorities ?



We want democracy ! We want social progress back !

We want democracy. We want further social progress ! Let's stop fussing around and say it loud and clear: Jean Monnet, Europe's founding father, used to say that Europe only moves forward thanks to the simplest ideas. Putting coal and steel together, creating a single currency -- these were enormous projects, yet they were ideas that a child of 5 can understand. Europe moves forward on simple ideas. Simple but radical.

For almost 20 years, the Germans, on both the Left and Right, have been offering one such simple idea : build together a European political entity, set up a European Parliament. And for nearly 20 years the French "establishment" has played for time... Why not tell the Germans we agree with their proposition? Why not apologise for these twenty years of procrastination? Let's share with them our ideas for a socially-conscious Europe and start working together with all the people who truly wish it to be democratic as well...

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