

Sommerhochschule Strobl  
Austrian and European politics and culture  
Opening Remarks of Ambassador Eva Nowotny  
July 14<sup>th</sup>, 2013

When Professor Meissel suggested “Austrian and European politics and culture” as a possible topic for my remarks here, I accepted quickly and without too much reflexion. However, when I started to think about it and to develop some ideas, I noticed immediately that this is indeed a very loaded question and not at all easy to answer. Is there a set of core values and standards common to all European countries – values and standards that are shared all over the continent and that hold true not only for Austria, but equally for Lithuania, Ireland or Portugal?

Ever since the times of Herder, of the German romanticists, culture in the broadest definition of the word was defined as a central component of national identity. Culture, encompassing also political culture, was instrumentalized to differentiate between countries and peoples, to set apart, to strengthen a sense of belonging to one’s own country or nation, to emphasize how special and how different from other people one might be.

Today, in an age of globalization, of international cooperation and growing international interdependence, this mindset has changed. While questions of national identity are still important and the post-Westphalian nation state is an essential frame of reference, while we still think of ourselves as Viennese, as Bavarian, as Swiss, the inevitable impact of living and dealing in a globalized world, in almost daily contact – one way or the other – with other continents and other cultures, has, I am convinced, also influenced our European consciousness. We might still be lacking a so-called European “demos”, but we are learning to live with multiple different identities. In that respect, the motto of the European Union “Unity in Diversity” is appropriate. I am Viennese and Austrian, and both are strong parts of my identity, but it is enough to land at JFK airport in New York or in Narita airport in Tokyo to feel strongly European as well.

Austria itself has gone through these experiences: from a long lasting supra national identity in the frame of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, which at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and prior to World War I was no longer tenable, to a massive breakdown of national identity during the First Republic in the years between 1918 and 1938, to a growing sense

of contentment and national wellbeing after World War II, in line with economic progress and international recognition. Now as a member of the European Union and in a globalized world we are again discovering living and dealing with multiple and changing identities, reconnecting to the memory of our supra national history.

It is also not be accident that the question of the protection of culture, of cultural production and cultural manifestations figure among the important and controversial questions in the first rounds of negotiations about a transatlantic free trade area. Nor is it be accident that one of the most important conventions of UNESCO deals with the question of cultural diversity – a convention that has been called the Magna Carta of culture, and which entitles states to protect their own cultural productions also in era of liberalized market economies, at the same time demanding that they also protect and encourage expressions of cultural diversity from other nations on their own soil.

There exists a map of Europe in which an ambitious historian has drawn all the border changes between European countries since the Middle Ages. What you see is a European continent that looks like a broken mirror in hundreds of splinters. This map, in my opinion, is the best visualization of any argument for European integration, for European unity.

Since the Treaty of Rome we have come a long way. The internal market, the implementation of the four freedoms, the Euro as a European currency, the Schengen agreement which the EU space borderless, they all were important factors in this the growing cohesion of the European Union. 1987 the Erasmus scholarship program of the EU started. Since then, more than 3 million students have profited from this program, have experienced another culture and dived into another language – among them more than 45.000 Austrians. They are at the centre of what one calls “Generation E”, the generation of Europeans who have no other memory and for whom this Europe without borders in which one moves freely as one pleases is a self-evident reality.

Would all political decisions be base on rational facts and rational reasoning, one might also assume that the impact of the global economic and financial crisis, the extent and the consequences of which are still difficult to fathom, would lead to more cohesion, to more common policy, to stronger common institutions. If there is one conclusion to be drawn from the struggles and upheavals of the last years with their devastating impact, it is the recognition that such a crisis can only be managed conjointly, in a common and concerted effort, and that there is no room

for populism and narrow ideologies to the detriment of others. The temptation of populist and nationalistic policies is tangibly there as well as the danger that some member states flirt with leaving the basis of common policy, of going it alone. And so one notices an interesting dichotomy: on the one side stronger joint measures, greater cohesion and stronger instruments to cope with the crisis, on the other populist rhetoric which clings to remnants of national sovereignty. The European Commission as guardian of the treaties carries a special responsibility in this regard. It also has some instruments at its disposal for a call-to-order to maverick members. The Commission has done that in the past and it is to be hoped that it will continue to do so.

A couple of years ago Jeremy Rifkin published a book which he entitled "The European Dream" and in which he predicted that the 21st century might very well turn out to be a European century. In this book he had to following to say: "The European Dream emphasizes community relationships over individual autonomy, cultural diversity over assimilation, quality of life over the accumulation of wealth, sustainable development over unlimited material growth, deep play over unrelenting toil, universal human rights and the rights of nature over property rights, and global cooperation over unilateral exercise of power."

It seems to me that this is an apt and comprehensive description of what one might define as European culture, and all these attributes have one thing in common – they point to a model of society which in spite of variations is held dear in all European countries: first and foremost a society kept in balance, keeping too harsh differences between the wealthy and the poor at bay, providing a safety net and a helping hand for those people who might be disadvantaged or find themselves in difficulty, ensuring economic and ecological sustainability.

It is also evident that with the traumatic and destructive history of the European continent, the European access to the issue of power, the display and the use of power sets it apart from other regions. In general, Europeans prefer so-called "soft power", the power of influence, persuasion, of presenting examples and alternatives to the display of "hard" – i.e. military – power. If they don't do what you want slap them and slap them down hard – this is definitely not a European motto. On this premise it follows that Europe attaches great importance to international institutions, to the United Nations and all forms of international cooperation, to global governance based on the rule of law and respect for human rights. It is on the basis of those tenets that post World War II a global order was set up which has served the world well. As the United States gradually withdraws from assuming international

responsibility and becomes more inward looking, it will be responsibility of Europe to maintain and safeguard this system for the future. It is at present undermined in many parts of the world. An international order, in which also the smaller and less powerful states prosper, does not arrive automatically and quasi by itself, it has to be nurtured, defended and constantly watched.

In view of the most recent developments around Edward Snowden, Prism and the extensive surveillance to which we all were exposed – yes, even Austrians, as the US Ambassador has just informed the Austrian Minister of the Interior – we cannot bypass the question of data protection and the protection of individual privacy. While the EU was obliged to enter into a few agreements about data exchange with the US administration, national legislation in almost all European countries is quite strong on the protection of personal data. Austria is a good case in point. The American insatiable appetite for data stems from their security concerns and it brings to mind the famous word of Thomas Jefferson: “Those who are willing to sacrifice liberty for security deserve neither”!

Also in view of the most recent political developments and discussions and particularly in light of the religious and political upheavals in the Arab world, I would like to underline the importance of the secular tradition of Europe and the concept of separation of Church and State. As a concept arisen out of European history and in particular out of European enlightenment it is something that even in today’s world sets Europe apart from other countries and continents which struggle with the notion of how much influence religion should be given in the conduct of political affairs.

I have lived and worked for many years in the United States and I have often wondered why so many Americans take such pleasure, even glee, in predicting the inevitable decline of Europe. Of course we ourselves are world champions in European downfall scenarios – it used to be eurosclerosis, then it was europessimism, now it is the demise of the Euro and the break up of the European Union. This may stem from a lack of self-confidence or from an exaggerated sense of modesty, but the American pleasure in painting such scenarios I found quite surprising. Given the extremely close economic and financial bond which unites the US and Europe a serious decline of Europe could have cataclysmic consequences for the US as well. In the same way, also we Europeans cannot watch American political and/or economic difficulties disinterestedly and with equanimity. We have become too close and too mutually dependent.

Nevertheless, think tankers as well as journalists love to play with the idea, that Europe is history. I will just give you two rather recent quotations. Fareed Zakaria, one of the international relations pundits whom one sees often as a commentator on CNN, said: “It may well turn out that the most consequential trend of the next decade will be the economic decline of Europe”. Kishore Mahbubani, his counterpart in Singapore, carries it a step further: “Europe does not get how irrelevant it is becoming to the rest of the world.” And in the recent presidential election campaign in the US a warning could repeatedly be heard: President Obama would –God forbid – turn the US into a European social welfare state!

Definitely there are problems in Europe, problems that are powerful and may well have dire consequences for the future: the ongoing Euro crisis and the issue of sovereign debt, a serious economic slow down with equally serious impact on social and political cohesion and democratic political systems, a cumbersome and difficult decision making process in the EU institutions, demographic stagnation and an aging population. But on the other side: the average EU GDP per capita is still nearly four times that of China, three times Brazil’s and nearly nine times India’s. It is also a gross exaggeration that the Euro zone is an economic disaster and that Europe as a whole is uncompetitive. According to the latest edition of the World Economic Forum’s Global Competitiveness Index three Euro zone countries (Finland Germany and the Netherlands) and another two EU member states (Britain and Sweden) are among the world’s ten most competitive economies – five out of ten is not a bad quota!

Since 1989 the EU has peacefully expanded and included 13 new member states,, politically, economically and culturally transforming a large part of the European continent formerly under Communist domination, reducing ethnic tensions and exporting a common understanding of the rule of law. On the global level, many of the rules, the standards and also the institutions that form the basis for global governance were created by Europe – such as the World Trade Organization or the International Criminal Court, to name but two.

Most importantly, the EU has profoundly changed the way its members think about security, replacing the traditional notion of power politics and non-interference in internal affairs with a model of shared sovereignty, guaranteeing security for all by working together. And it was European persistence which established “Responsibility to Protect” as a principle in international relations. The underlying concept of R2P as it is called that the international community not only has the right, but has the duty and

the responsibility to intervene once a state cannot or will not protect its civilian population from persecution and violence stems from the deep European commitment to human rights. A few decades ago this would have been unthinkable and would have been considered a clear violation of international law and of national sovereignty. In my opinion this case offers a good example how a persistent and relentless defence of a care value of Europe has influenced international law.

The fact that in spite of achievements and influence Europe is not perceived as a major player on the international scene – and perceptions are of course important – stems from the regrettable lack of a cohesive foreign policy. The Lisbon Treaty and the various instruments which have been created in order to promote a European foreign and security policy and a European external action service have not brought the expected results. Foreign policy is still very much in the national domain and in many important international issues a European voice, not to speak of European action, are conspicuously absent.

Let me conclude with a word about Austria: Austria has always considered itself a profoundly European country. I do not want to over-emphasize historic memory here, but of course remnants of the supra-national history of our country as part of the Holy Roman Empire, or the Austrian-Hungarian Empire are there in the collective memory and not only as tourist attraction. Since the end of World War II and more particularly since we regained full independence and sovereignty in the Austrian State Treaty of 1955 it has been a consistent Austrian policy to re-establish itself in the European mainstream. Austria has been an active and engaged member in all European organizations, from the Council of Europe, OECD, the European Free Trade Area, OSCE and this policy has culminated finally in the entry of Austria into the European Union. We are thus committed to the European value system as laid down in the so-called “*acquis communautaire*”, and when it came to a point, we have always argued for more Europe and for deeper European integration – not always in the political rhetoric of the day, but in factual European policy. On the basis of solid policy decisions we have weathered the economic and financial crisis a little better than many of our partners, but in the overall frame of our relationships an economically and politically strong and powerful Europe is of great importance for our future development.