

**WCFIA Fellows, CES Mark European Anniversary:
A Review of the EU@50 Symposium**

By Peter Watkins

The symposium was held at the
Center for European Studies, Harvard University
April 11, 2007

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Senior Harvard faculty, a top official from the European Commission, Weatherhead Fellows and some 50 participants from Harvard and neighboring schools gathered on April 11 for a half-day symposium to mark the 50th anniversary of the signing in 1957 of the Treaties of Rome – the foundation documents of the European Union. Speakers included the Directors of the two Centers, Jonathan Faull (Director General for Justice, Freedom and Security, European Commission), Karl Kaiser (Ralph I Strauss Visiting Professor), Peter A Hall (WCFIA and CES Faculty Associate), Richard Rosecrance (CES Affiliate), Katiana Orluc (CES Visiting Scholar), Giovanni Capoccia (Oxford University), Charles Maier (Leverett Saltonstall Professor of History), and Armando Barucco and Claude Rakovsky (Weatherhead Fellows). The symposium took the form of a keynote address by Jonathan Faull and two panels – the first addressing the EU’s structural arrangements and its relations with the US; the second addressing the question of the EU’s identity in a globalizing world with porous borders.

No speakers disputed that the EU has made huge progress in the last 50 years – it has become a zone of peace and prosperity built on common values and the rule of law. As an international actor, it has a unique status – neither an inter-governmental international institution nor a supranational one. Attempts to develop alternative models in Europe have soon fallen by the wayside. The EU has also reversed normal balance of power dynamics – rather than non-members seeking to balance against it, they line up to join (or at least form privileged relationships with) it. Despite tensions over Iraq, the EU is an obvious partner for the US as it begins to rediscover the virtues of multilateralism.

But there are problems. Although the EU still functions with 27 members, the rejection of the Constitutional Treaty by French and Dutch voters has left behind a “crisis of confidence” in the EU’s institutions. The attempt to re-launch the Treaty faces major political obstacles. While prosperous, the EU’s GDP growth rate is lower than the US’s and unemployment remains stubbornly high in many member states. Although the EU offers an innovative mix of “hard” and “soft” power in international crisis management –

it is the biggest provider of official development aid, for example – events on the ground in the Middle East and elsewhere have underlined its limitations. While a “European Army” is off the agenda, the EU needs to have a more common approach to security policy and capability – and to streamline decision-taking.

The EU’s “identity” is complex. Its identity has changed over time and looks different internally to its own citizens and externally. Internally, it has changed from being seen as a stalking horse for European federalism to an agent of market liberalization. Externally, most other countries accept the EU’s self-image as a force for peace grounded on multilateralism (of which it is both advocate and exemplar). The challenges of building a community based on values were illustrated by the EU’s controversial – and, in the short run, unsuccessful – response to the formation of a coalition government in Austria including a far-right wing party. But there does seem to be an emerging consensus that the EU can act – preventively if necessary – against member states that threaten to undermine the rights of minorities, immigrants and refugees.

These three categories have given rise to much debate about the EU’s identity. There has been a political consensus that Europe’s declining and ageing population means that it needs immigrants to sustain services and economic growth – although this view was challenged from the floor by a participant who pointed out that Europe has overcome previous population fluctuations and that immigrants bring costs as well as benefits. The two approaches to immigration at the ends of the EU spectrum – the French assimilationist model and the Dutch and British multi-culturalism one – both seem to be under severe strain. Equally, over the last decade, integration policies in most EU states have shown considerable pragmatism and flexibility, reinterpreting concepts like secularism and multi-culturalism and placing emphasis on the “nationalization” of immigrant communities.

There was no dissent from the view that it was questionable to try to build an identity based on a revealed “Judeo-Christian” heritage in an entity with a large and growing Muslim minority. Perhaps, one panelist suggested, it would be better to focus more on

building prosperity and expanding employment to address current discontents. And perhaps, as with some of its own member states themselves, the politicians need to build “Europe” first and the “Europeans” later.

Appropriately for a 50th birthday event, the symposium concluded with some mature reflection on the past and some self-deprecating optimism about the future – while the EU’s Erasmus Program has done much to break down barriers between the young people of the member countries, was not Erasmus’s most famous work entitled *In Praise of Folly*? The two Centers intend to be around to mark the 100th anniversary.