

Extract from:
Gérard Bouchard, "Europe in search of Europeans: The road of identity and myth", *Studies & Reports No. 113*, Jacques Delors Institute, December 2016.

SUMMARY

This study is a plea in favour of the European Union (EU). Yet, it is also critical of some choices it has made in the past, choices that now hinder its development. I seek to demonstrate that the EU needs to rebuild its symbolic foundation and to redefine its relationship with the nations (as configurations of culture, not to be confused with the states). It is assumed that any form of social link (or "polity"), however thin, must rely on some shared basic symbolic assets.

A first part recalls the founding cultural choices that have allowed the EU to take off and to enjoy a rapid development after WWII. The second part proceeds to show how the same choices can be linked to the major predicaments that are besetting the EU today. I submit that, after having efficiently propelled the EU, most of the founding choices have become somewhat counter-productive mainly because they have not been revised and adapted to the changing conjunctures.

The analysis then goes on to review the unsuccessful subsequent attempts made by the EU over the past decades to develop new myths and a European identity. As a result, the EU presently finds itself ensnared in a deadlock, in search of a symbolic platform to bolster and to further its integration process but seemingly unable to build it.

I contend that a particularly unfortunate choice made by the EU's pioneers and their successors was to distrust and sidestep the nations as well as the people, and to opt for a top-down process of governance. In order to break this pattern, I suggest that the EU will have to find a way to mend fences with the nations in order to a) put an end to a long-standing detrimental tension, b) harness rather than stifle the nations' still substantial symbolic resources and energy, and c) secure a platform to build new European myths.

Finally, examples of a new way to build the future myths are offered, essentially through what I call a europeanization of national myths. The goal is to carve myths that would resonate both at the continental and national levels. In other words: to fashion a true European voice with strong national echoes.