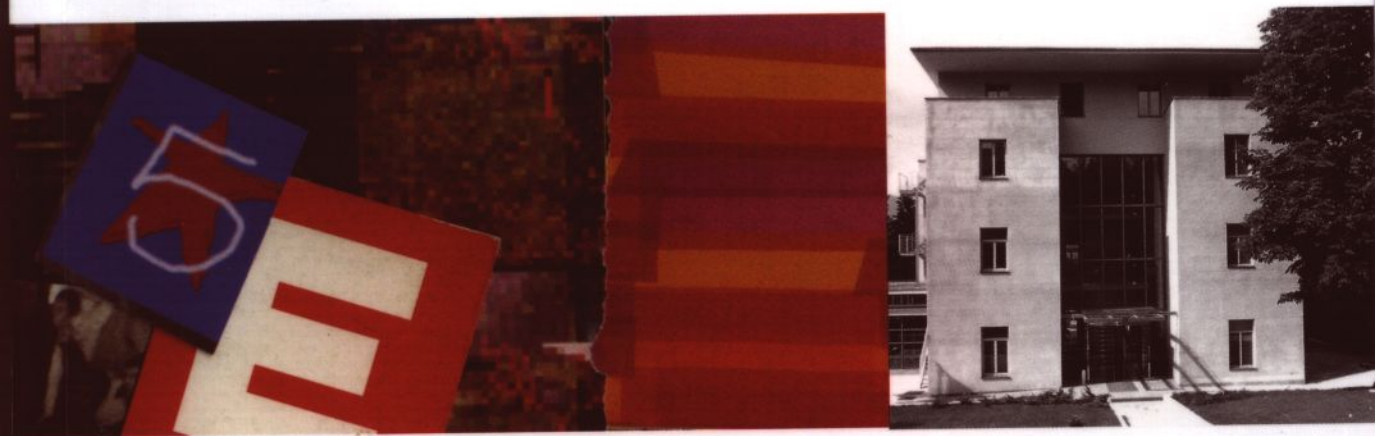


**2007**

# **HISTORICAL EUROPEAN LEADERS: WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THEM?**

**5<sup>th</sup> INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS**

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## **THE CONTEXT OF EUROPEAN LEADERSHIP AFTER 1940**

Thank you very much for inviting me to this event. I am a historian, born in Innsbruck, Austria, and brought up in Upper Franconia, Germany. I returned to Austria to study contemporary history and discovered there a very strong focus on the Nazi period and a lack of interest and research in post-war developments. Also, I noticed that the memory of the "Fuehrer" made the notion of leaders and the study of leadership unpopular. I think this is a big mistake. We need to examine the role of leaders in European history as well as in European integration.

I believe that leadership in the European Union context has a lot to do with legitimacy. It also requires a strong home base and political support. However, leadership is expected to involve an ability to lead even in the absence of strong support on the part of the public. I believe this is possible only to a certain degree. Beyond a certain point, leadership needs support. If that is not the case, and the political system is a democracy, the leader will fall. Think of Winston S. Churchill, Charles de Gaulle, or Tony Blair, and in the end also of George W. Bush.

I also think that leadership implies a combination of responsibility, ability, and convictions. It also requires a convincing communication style. Efficiency and favourable circumstances are also necessary, as are fortune and timing. By "timing" I mean an ability to use windows of opportunity.

During the Second World War, London provided shelter to many Europeans who escaped from the Nazi regime. Exiled politicians came together and exchanged ideas concerning the future of Europe. Paul-Henri Spaak was one of them. After that, the United States provided a number of leaders who played a significant role in the rebuilding of our continent. Think of George C. Marshall, William B. Clayton, and President

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Dwight D. Eisenhower. Thus, the United States was a major factor in Europe's early integration process.

Consider also Alcide De Gasperi, Konrad Adenauer, and Robert Schuman. They demonstrated leadership while accepting the division of Europe and Germany. Although Germany was a divided country, Adenauer pursued a policy of Western integration. Think also of the concept of a United States of Europe, pushed by Churchill. But what he meant was "Unite yourselves", not "Let us unite". This is the legacy of the great warrior whose historical contribution has more to do with the destruction and division of Europe than with its reconstruction and unification; therefore many critical Europeans see Churchill also as a failed European leader.

Schuman's concept of a united Europe, which was the concept of Jean Monnet, was based on the idea of merging the steel and coal production companies of France and Germany. That was intended as a first step toward a sector-based integration. Therefore lesson 1 is: The success of supranational integration resulted in the control of Germany, which was one of the main objectives of (Western-) European leaders. It was also important, for psychological reasons, to pave the way for closer Franco-German cooperation and reconciliation.

After Turkey and Greece (in 1952) and the Federal Republic of Germany (1955) joined NATO, the main purpose of that organization was clear: it was a step in the European integration process. It was also about what is called "triple containment" as NATO Secretary General Lord Ismay stated: "To keep the Russians out, to keep us in, and to keep the Germans down." Adenauer agreed.

That is why lesson 2 is: German politicians and political leaders have played a key role in European integration politics. For them, handling the German question has always been crucial. It has always amounted to containing German nationalism. This policy has been pursued by all German chancellors since Konrad Adenauer, although Gerhard Schroeder may not have devoted too much attention to it. Angela Merkel is fully aware of this challenge.

France and the Federal Republic of Germany have always been the leading players in the European Union. It is interesting to note that while Paris was in favour of atomic energy integration, Germany wanted to see a free market in Europe. Lesson 3 is: The success of European leaders is in

their ability to compromise and integrate positive and negative concepts of integrations.

However, we must not forget the importance of external pressure. Without the Suez Canal debacle in 1956, France would not have felt compelled to cooperate with the main Second World War loser - Germany.

Although Germany was divided politically, East Germany belonged to the EC market. Adenauer was trying to preserve the economic unity of Germany. Lesson 4 is: Interestingly, European leaders have always resorted to economic tools in order to surmount the political obstacles.

Charles de Gaulle caused a crisis through the so-called "policy of the empty chair". He blocked decisions at the Council of Ministers in 1965 - 1966 because of the controversial policies concerning majority voting and the financing of agriculture. However, that strong leader of France did not stop European integration. Rather, the opposite is true - with the devaluation of the French Francs, the rejection of the large free-trade zone proposed by the United Kingdom, and the exclusion of the United Kingdom, de Gaulle helped to consolidate European economic unity. He was supportive of the common market and much more pro-European than his contemporaries realized. Lesson 5 is: There is no contradiction between national and European leadership. European integration helped some leaders hold on to their popularity at home - consider once again the example of de Gaulle.

The United Kingdom has always been a difficult partner. For example, it has not backed a common social policy or a shared currency. In terms of its security policy, it often has been pro-American and sceptical of Europe. Lesson 6, here, is that when a policy is too strongly oriented toward national interests, it can stop further integration. With respect to the global scene however, and ongoing globalization, a strong, nationally-oriented policy is doomed to fail.

The 1970s were hard times. They were characterized by the collapse of the international monetary system, the escalation of the Vietnam War, virulent international terrorism, and an energy crisis. The circumstances were such that there was no room for common European policies, and nationalism thrived. This teaches us another lesson, lesson 7: if international crises are exceedingly serious, politicians and even political leaders have little room for manoeuvre.

The French after 1945 adhered to the concept of "planification" - a planned economy - whereas the Germans preferred a liberal "social market economy". If this is so, why did the French president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and his prime minister Raymond Barre accept an economic and monetary system in the European Communities that flew in the face of the French tradition? The background was provided by the Program of Blois in March 1978. Giscard d'Estaing and Barre initiated a fundamental shift in France toward economic liberalism and announced that they would like to see a major shift also in the "mentality" of the French. The idea was to introduce price competition and abolish subsidies and all other state interventions. The final goal of the Program of Blois was for France to catch up with Germany in the only area where it was falling behind: economic performance.

Lesson 8 is: we see from this example that European leadership has always accepted and encouraged change. The economic policy of France is a case in point. If you do not want to lose, you have to change. The need of change produced European leadership too.

It is very clear that the Maastricht Treaty was a new step toward a European Union constitution. It came into being for three main reasons. First, there was the idea of the European monetary union which originated from the Delors report. The second reason was the fall of the Berlin Wall and German unification. Finally, the common market necessitated a common currency. The French were especially interested in breaking the hegemony of the German Bank and the Deutschmark in the European monetary system. The whole endeavour was a great success for the Paris-Bonn-Brussels axis.

It was also important to provide a timetable, and Maastricht provided one. Today, the term that we would use is a "roadmap". It outlined a step-by-step integration policy and proposed guidelines for creating a European Union identity.

In spite of all the setbacks and the lack of leadership in Europe, as some speakers put it, the European Union policy of enlargement has been a demonstration of leadership in its own right. We have now 12 new members and that is a tremendous achievement. Lesson 9 will be: I would argue that we have witnessed European leadership without personal leaders. How is that possible? The thing is that we have a lot of actors on the stage: the European Court of Justice, the General Directorate of the

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European Union Commission, negotiating teams, and also non-governmental organizations and trans-national party political cooperation. All these are contributing to European integration. The process is based on rational, pragmatic considerations, even though a kind of leadership is hidden behind the scenes. Finally we can observe a revival of the rationalist methods of Jean Monnet from the 1950s: a consensus of the elite, behind-the-scenes negotiations, and decisions from above - take the accession of Bulgaria and Rumania - without asking or involving the people in the member states. That was European leadership too.