

GASPING FOR EUROPE

If Europe cannot agree on the small issues of defence and foreign policy, how can it do so on the big ones, such as the use of military force?

The answer, says Josef Joffe, is that it does not even want to

ONE OF THE pillars of our fabled Maastricht treaty, right up there next to monetary union, is the common foreign and security policy. In English, the acronym for this unwieldy concept is CFSP: in German, the abbreviation reads Gasp. *Gasp*, although an accidental pun, is a nice way of framing the issue. The term evokes choking, panting, wheezing, helplessness—an appropriate description of the problems Europe has encountered while trying to formulate a common policy in matters of diplomacy and defence.

Klaus Kinkel, the German foreign minister, has defined that ambition: "We want majority decisions [in the EU], above all in the common foreign and security policy." It sounds like a simple goal. But, if realised, the CFSP would signal the most profound break in the history of statecraft since Richelieu and later Bismarck formulated the essential tenets of *raison d'état*.

Reason of state knows no moral law other than necessity and no higher authority than the state. It is chained to another enduring imperative of the state system: sovereignty. Sovereignty means that the state, and no supra or sub-national institution, shall have the last word in the intercourse with other states. Sovereignty's embodiment is the veto, such as that retained by the five permanent members of the United Nations security council. Hence it is the very opposite of decision by majority. In such a setting, state A would stand ready to submit to the wills of states B, C, D. In other words, A would yield the very essence of statehood.

Will the members of the EU yield their sovereignty for the sake of Europe? Bismarck once scribbled in the margin of a letter from the Russian chancellor Gorchakov: *Qui parle d'Europe a tort; notion géographique*—whoever talks about Eu-

rope is wrong; merely a geographical notion. True, that was in 1868, during the classic age of cabinet diplomacy and *realpolitik*. Neither Klaus Kinkel nor Jacques Chirac, the French president, would today admit to the cynicism that Bismarck preached.

Since then, Europe has become much more than a mere geographical notion. It is no longer just the sum of the 15 EU member states. In many ways, these states have shared, relinquished, collectivised sovereignty. They submit to the verdicts of the European court. They allow Brussels to dictate the shape



and price of bananas their citizens may ingest. They have opened their borders to EU-wide competition, even where it comes to government procurement.

So why not share or relinquish sovereignty in foreign and security policy, although it is the most impenetrable bastion of sovereignty? When I interviewed CFSP *aficionado* Klaus Kinkel for my paper the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* last year, his answer was unequivocal: "In defence policy, there will be no majority decision." Does this principle not unhinge the very idea of CFSP? His reply: "Majority decision in foreign policy, yes; in defence policy, no."

This was too subtle a distinction, I said. Kinkel repeated the point: "We cannot have majority decisions on central issues of defence policy." And what is a central issue? "For instance, the use of military force." So where would Kinkel submit to a majority? "For instance, where the EU were to decide about the diplomatic recognition of another state." That is indeed not a central issue.

QED, the Eurosceptic would interject at this point. Although Bismarck is dead, he would have used the same language—as would Richelieu. To be sure, states have always yielded (actually, lent) pieces of autonomy to others—in hundreds of treaties where A promised this, and B pledged that. But yielding autonomy temporarily is not the same as yielding sovereignty, which, by definition, cannot be shared. Nor would any state, neither France nor Germany, yield this right today. Hence, even Kinkel only followed historical precedent when he said no majority decisions on armed force. Once this point is made though (and it would be uttered by all EU members), CFSP begins to gasp and wheeze.

Some recent examples dramatise the point precisely because they are far less momentous than war and peace. France, in 1995, continued to test its nuclear devices in the Pacific despite widespread EU opposition. Germany refused to countenance any interference in its "critical dialogue" with Iran. France consulted nobody when it tried to mediate between Israel, Syria and Lebanon in 1996, or when it decided to become best friends with China. Both Germany and Britain refused to join the stabilisation force in Albania. In short, if CFSP does not work in lesser realms, how would *e pluribus unum* arise when core interests come to the fore?

What is left? A beautiful theory.

It runs like this: Europe has to grow into an entity where the whole is more than the sums of the parts. Only in this manner can the EU finally take its rightful place alongside great powers such as the US, exerting the influence that its size, population and economic clout warrant.

That is the lofty ambition; the reality was nowhere more starkly exposed than in the Balkan wars that began in Slovenia in 1991 and ended, for the time being, at Dayton in 1995. In the beginning, the EU was so confident that the foreign minister of Luxembourg told the US (in so many words): "This is our war, hands off." The CFSP that the EU subsequently enacted turned into a travesty.

Success came only when the US intervened—a real power with the requisite will and hardware. The US emissary Richard Holbrooke could at last bring into play what Europe did not have: a single decision-making centre that could mobilise the appropriate means—that could not only cajole but also deter and compel. Theoretically the Europeans

could have mustered the necessary wherewithal, too. So why did they fail? Because the EU is not the United States of Europe. Because each member state is driven by its own fears and interests. Because there is nobody who could fuse the many into the one. France will not yield to German leadership, and neither France nor Germany will submit to Britain. They are *too* equal. For each of these countries, it is easier to submit to a real super-power such as the US than to one of their own. There is only leadership by committee, and such bodies tend to gravitate to the lowest common denominator, the enemy of decisiveness and dispatch.

Another example: France abolished conscription in 1996, Germany is adamant about its retention. France still hankers after a purely European defence; Germany and Britain just as doggedly insist on an Atlantic link to the US. Spain and Italy? The rest of Europe does not know, and they themselves probably do not know, either.

CFSP, a central point on the

agenda of Europe's post-Maastricht deliberations, will not generate more than an analysis and planning body that will assist the commission or the council of ministers or both. Such an institution will certainly help. It will keep a searching eye on the world and furnish its masters with astute analyses and compelling

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memoranda. Yet each paper will end with a proviso such as "if the governments so desire."

There is nobody in Europe today who would qualify for the post Henry Kissinger wanted filled—European foreign minister. The 15 national foreign ministers do not wish to vote themselves out of existence. To quote Kinkel again: "A kind of European foreign minister is out of the question for me." Why? "Because the council of ministers, that is, the governments, must have the last words." Richelieu and Bismarck would agree. ■

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