Welcome to SHIFT Mag – Europe talks to Brussels, a new quarterly magazine on European affairs with a focus on diverse, challenging and original views. Its aim is to help Brussels understand the needs and expectations of Europeans, a necessary step for the EU to bridge the growing communication gap with its citizens. SHIFT Mag provides a platform from which Europe talks to Brussels, so that Brussels can really start talking to Europe.

After decades of inward-looking and jargon-infused discourse, Brussels is finally taking communication seriously. This is visible in the increasing efforts by all EU players to convey information effectively to the wider European audience. But more often than not, Brussels still ends up talking to itself. Efforts to burst this bubble have to be encouraged by all, not least by the media themselves. Instead of being passive megaphones for the institutions, EU outlets must help Brussels take Europe’s temperature, by relaying ideas and feelings from the bottom up. To speak better, the EU must also work on its listening. This magazine will try to help.

SHIFT Mag is aimed at open-minded, dynamic and forward-looking Europeans in Brussels and beyond. Trends and events that shape the future of Europe are analysed from as many different angles as possible to tap into Europe’s unique diversity. The magazine’s added value lies in this pursuit of excellence, originality and diversity, putting together different political and national views to build a state-of-the-art platform for debating Europe. English is the vernacular, Europe is the language.

Our contributors come from a wide range of social and professional backgrounds, a diversity that lies at the heart of the magazine. From associates in established law firms to Cambridge PhD students and German video artists, they all have in common a passion for their topic and a talent to express it.

A blog version of the magazine is available online at www.shiftmag.eu to take the debate outside. Blog contributions are open to our readers, who can also register for free subscription to the paper version. For the next issues, paper and web will feed each other to make sure that SHIFT Mag really lets Europe talk to Brussels.

Every three months, we will tackle a general theme through nine diverse but related articles. The first issue explores the shifty ground of nationalism and identities in Europe, with nine contributions offering a diverse and comprehensive account of Europe’s nationalisms and identities today. Flags, sports and politics feature heavily as symbols of national expression, as we comment on Montenegrin independence and European success in the Ryder Cup.

Our second issue will look at Europe’s borders. In the meantime, we hope you enjoy this first serving of SHIFT Mag and look forward to hearing from you on www.shiftmag.eu...
The term “nationalism” is simply not part of the Italian political vocabulary. The fascist experience took it away along with those millions of Italians who died from Russia to Egypt during WWII to defend the brilliant idea of a new Roman Empire ruling over the Mediterranean.

Nationalism as a term has no political value in Italy, but some apparently harmless aspects of it are floating over the surface of the Italian political sea. Most of the time they are classified under different categories. Promoting the Italian identity is one of them.

These are little signs, not worrisome *per se*, such as a renewed and reiterated use of the national anthem, a better celebrated national day, or a new era of prosperity for the Italian flag, honoured as never before in the short history of the Italian Republic (and not only during the football World Cup). And if right-wing parties can only agree with such a new trend, it was former Italian President Ciampi who promoted this revived feeling of Italian pride. It is not surprising that a personality close to the centre-left was able to do that without being accused of nationalism: it is an old rule of politics, in the same way as budget cuts to the army can be more easily decided by...
right-wing governments who cannot be suspected of being anti-military.

If domestic Italian nationalism seems to be confined to small rhetorical symbols, the debate around the geopolitical identity of Italy is more of an issue. Freed by the Americans in 1943-45, but founder of the European Community just over a decade later, Italy seems to be split into two different souls. Is Italy deemed to be on the side of the US or is it the pillar of a strong and independent EU? And are these two options necessarily conflicting?

Freed by the Americans in 1943-45, but founder of the European Community just over a decade later, Italy seems to be split into two different souls.

If we take the last two governments, they do seem to be irreconcilable options. On the one side, Berlusconi’s government chose to stay on the side of the US on Iraq (and against France and Germany). Choices in foreign policy were accompanied by sharp criticism of the euro, the stability pact and even EU bureaucracy, accused of opposing true (US-style) liberalism. On the other side, Prodi’s government immediately endorsed a pan-European line in foreign policy (assuming there is one), on economic policy and on the need to revive the Constitution.

The debate, dating from the origins of the Italian Republic, is far from over. But while observers and politicians find it particularly engaging, the impression is that Italy is desperately looking for a new identity going beyond such a divide. Italy is no longer a successful and expanding industrial power, and not yet a modern services and innovation-oriented economy. It is struggling. If it does not find its own way in the world economy, no matter which geopolitical side it takes, it will be a marginal political player.

It comes as no surprise that the current government is being criticised for being naively pro-European and dogmatically anti-American. Someone would reply that for a European country and a founder of the EC, being pro-European is more of a natural identity than being pro-American. Some others hint that a compromised (but temporary) solution could be offered by the next US presidential elections, should they lead to a different American political model.

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No, Montenegro is not in South America, and although the country has yet to decide how to spell the exact name of its national language, it is neither Spanish nor French.

Following the “yes” vote in the May 2006 referendum, Montenegro became the “freshest” European state, and the last republic to fly out of once-upon-a-time Yugoslavia. This time, the separation was peaceful.

With a population of less than 700,000, this country, naturally endowed with magnificent landscapes, mirrors the complexities of identity and politics in the region. Essentially, most of the people in Montenegro would assert that they are European, although when asked about their nationality, different answers would abound.

The past twenty-five years epitomised the long-standing fissure among the population over the questions of Montenegrin vs. Serb nationhood, and independence vs. union with Serbia. The fluid character of Montenegrin identity appeared during the days of Yugoslav disintegration, when upon an ambiguously formulated and conducted referendum, Montenegro chose to remain in a union with Serbia. From then on, up until today, national identity in Montenegro has been entrenched in the political mists surrounding the interaction between the two concepts of Yugoslavia/Serbia and Montenegro.

In the wars of Yugoslav secession, Montenegro sided with Serbia and Montenegrin nationalism flourished under the umbrella of Milošević’s politics, with only a small portion of the population demanding outright independence. When Montenegrins started to distance themselves from Serbia’s war policies, the ruling party of reformed communists split in two in 1997.

As a result, internal political struggles progressively led to the creation of two political blocs: pro-independence and pro-union. After the demise of Milošević in September 2000, the future of the Montenegrin relationship with Serbia came to the fore of the country’s political discourse. From then on, the internal Montenegrin debate was channelled through amplified demands for independence on behalf of the government, and increased interaction of the opposition with the new Serbian elites to preserve the union. Given the level of discord, the EU proved to be a reference point in any debate regarding national identity – each pole constructing its own vision of identity in Montenegro as genuinely European.

At the same time, national identity went into two opposite directions – one envisaging Montenegro as a primary “loyalty”; and the other, channelling national sentiment towards Serbia. This fissure was also emphasised through the daily hustle of politics, which revived tradition as a catalyst in the entrenchment of internal divisions. As such, the quest for the “real” or “official” religion became the main battlefield for the two Christian Orthodox Churches, Montenegrin and Serbian respectively, which denied one another canonical legality.

The 2006 Montenegrin referendum was an interesting manifestation of the dividing line running across the nation, through the hardening attitudes of the two camps towards negotiating the rules of the plebiscite. Subsequently, as none of the two factions of the polarised Montenegrin society wanted to “swallow the bitter pill”, the two camps channelled their attitudes towards state and nation through vigorous electoral campaigns.

Since the “yes” won, post-independence politics in Montenegro has indicated a rather unusual trend considering the events of the past decade and a half. The intensity of the internal identity debate has surprisingly declined, with a clear impact on the internal political scene. The main theme of the September 2006 elections was the European future of Montenegro, which was especially visible among the major political factions. In the pre-electoral period, the streets of the capital - Podgorica - were filled with posters and symbols implicitly or explicitly associating with the EU. The city was painted in blue and yellow, unlike during the referendum, when it used to be red and gold; or red, white and blue.
The defeated opposition had already moved beyond the referendum, and new political forces entered the scene. A more radical faction of the pro-unionist camp, the Serbian People’s Party, stood alone in the Parliamentary elections. It won a considerable portion of votes by portraying itself as a guardian of the interests of the Serbian people in Montenegro. While during the referendum campaign, this party accentuated the Serbian origins of Montenegrins, within the new political context, it shifted towards the view that Serbs were a minority in Montenegro.

Although these changes indicate that the figures on the chessboard of Montenegrin identity politics have started to rearrange in a distinct manner, it is still quite early to discuss any dramatic change.

What essentially happened in the post-independence period was the appeasement of the bi-directionalisation of the national question, and its wrap-up into a perception of overarching European identity.

EU accession has become the major driving force of transition. Policymakers believe that owing to the small size of Montenegro, democratisation and economic recovery will be easier to achieve. Following the country’s recent entry into Partnership for Peace, Montenegrins also aspire to a “fast-track” EU membership, possibly along with the current candidate countries. However, much remains to be done in Montenegro when it comes to institutional and economic reforms, especially in terms of capacity-building. Hence, the switching from one Union to another will require a lot of effort from Montenegro before it lands in the EU’s nest.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THIS TOPIC, VISIT:
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“Things need not have happened to be true. Tales and dreams are the shadow-truths that will endure when mere facts are dust and ashes, and forgot.”
Neil Gaiman, The Sandman
“Being Belgian…” What does it mean? Being Belgian is more than a national identity. It is an artform. And like every art, it offers as many trends as artists. That is why writing on Belgian identity is a poisoned chalice. But it is also a beautiful challenge because everything is possible: just as creating a piece of art, putting words on Belgian identity is a perpetual new beginning.

Belgian identity is an identity by default, defined by all that it is not. The Belgian is not French, Dutch, German or Spanish. He is a little bit of all that. Successively part of Spain (Habsburg), Austria (Habsburg), France (first Republic and Empire) and, finally, the Netherlands (House of Orange-Nassau), independent Belgium is a mistake of History approved by the European powers.

This complex historical past has had a major consequence: inside his country, the Belgian’s sense of belonging is not primarily national. It is above all linguistic (Dutch, French or German) or local (city, historical region, etc.). But at the same time, despite this mixed identity or this lack of common identity, Belgium is a brand name all over the world.

To define the whole cultural and spiritual values considered as peculiar to black people, Léopold Sédar Senghor and Aimé Césaire, African politicians, spoke about négritude (which roughly means "blackness"). To define Belgian identity, some Belgians use the term belgitude. More concretely, it refers to their permanent questioning of their own identity. The concept of “belgitude” expresses the Belgian’s difficulty to define himself as such. Faced with this reality, the Belgian generally finds consolation by developing a cult of self-derision (self-mockery) based on the clichés conveyed by his neighbours: his folklore, accents, beer, mussels, chips, French-Belgian words, surrealism, etc.

Belgium is not a melting pot yet it is more than just a medley. It is made with cultures that touch each other without mixing but that cannot exist without touching each other. Belgium is diversity into unity. Being Belgian today is not being a patriot, even less a nationalist. No one is a born Belgian. He/she becomes Belgian when moving across internal borders (linguistic as well as socioeconomic).

Being Belgian is more than an identity; it is surpassing its own otherness, by altruism or by opportunism.

Too many Dutch-speaking and French-speaking people have forgotten how to be Belgian for years. Belgian
identity is fragile because it lacks a vital space, a public space. Into this shared space, Belgians could remind each other of who they are. Its absence contributes to the current mutual misunderstanding; it erases the nuances.

Being Belgian is more than an identity; it is giving a concrete meaning to an abstract common space.

If Belgian identity does not take its full dimension (does not express itself to the full) at the national level, the international success of the “made in Belgium” brand cannot be ignored. In the kingdom of Flemish, Walloons and Brussels natives, Belgium is no queen anymore. But on the international scene it stands tall, armed with a distinct economic, historical and cultural prestige.

Being Belgian is more than an identity; it is existing through other people’s eyes.

Today, Belgian identity is above all a badge that can be proudly worn abroad. This is perhaps the last national cement of Belgium. •
To be honest, it is almost impossible to assess Poland's national identity, all the more in less than a thousand pages, without falling for a double-faced cliché: pitting an ecstatic Polonophile against a stubborn Polonophobe. Yet with a bit of perspective and a disillusioned look on this side of Europe, you will find out that here as well appearances can be rather deceptive.

A Frenchman, who had been established in Warsaw for a few years, told me once with a malicious smile and a French self-centred sense of derision: “indeed Polish politics looks pathetic, but look at the bright side: they managed to make ours look serious.” Pathetic it is, to say the least, if you consider sex scandals and recurrent political gaffes. But also rather worrying in some respects. Mind the constant nationalist bickering about the defence of Poland’s interests and point of view on the European scene. “The tail wagging the dog” as one prominent figure of the Commission commented upon hearing yet another reiteration of the Polish stance on the EU’s neighbourhood policy and its Eastern dimension. Mind above all the blatant mess on the domestic political scene. The family affair that the state seems to have become is nothing trivial. Twin brothers for both heads of state and government, a national-scale spoil system hitting as deep and broad as environmental agencies, the Central Bank’s top position or the media control authority, etc.

Running the state seems to amount to little more than constant squabble and horse-trading within the coalition, which is an odd gathering of rather mainstream social conservatives with far-right Catholics and far-left populists whose leaders have a soft spot for major scandals, and the personal dimension with which almost everything is handled at state level... Yes, all these things can be worrying. One could say that now that Poland’s main goals of the past fifteen years have been achieved, namely NATO then EU accessions, the old demons are striking back. It seems that everything that had been kept in check for years during the journey home to Europe was only breeding and festering. Today, the demand for an ever sharper lustration of the communist past even seems to backfire since its thrust eventually came to hit the symbol of the anticommunist struggle, namely the Church.

The current situation basks in the gloomy light of never-ending battles, with the victorious side unable to find the moral resources to go beyond resentment and walk the thorny path of mercy and forgiveness. But the main victim of today's shenanigans from the Polish political elites is undoubtedly Poland – and its credibility. As Geremek once put it bluntly, “Poland is wasting the moral capital that it had gained during Solidarity times and its struggle for freedom.” Already in the early 1990’s, on a rather melancholic tone, Solidarność icon Adam Michnik had expressed his concern that the spirit of the anti-totalitarian struggle would be lost, diluted into the most gruesome nationalism. He recalled how much the forces that had faced down the communist dictatorship, however different, had all, secular or religious, shared a kind of spiritual momentum, filled with the virtues of solidarity and forgiveness, free of resentment, full of tolerance and generosity. And he insisted that this spirit should not be lost to a fundamentalist interpretation of the national identity.

National identity – there we are. The grand narrative that shapes a common sense of belonging. Story rather than history. With the good guys and the bad ones. In November 2005, the Polish Defence Minister boasted one (of many, you can bet) war game, unearthed from the archives of the Warsaw Pact, displaying a string of atomic mushrooms scattered mainly all over Poland – and incidentally Benelux and Western Germany. Failing to rally the potentially victimised Western countries to his indignation he nevertheless successfully put on a nice show for the national media in order to “educate the public [for they must be aware of] who were the heroes and who were the villains” in history.

Memories and their lasting emotional impact can become primal commodities in politics and...
the competition for power – post-war French or Italian societies or post-Franco Spanish generations present us with good samples of the same kind of misgivings. But the difference between Poland and these Western societies today probably stems less from their respective handling of collective memory than from the way some write their history as a common narrative instead of a methodical and objective appraisal of the past. Not that there are no historians able to write such books – they just do not seem to be heard or read beyond limited circles, if one can judge by comparing the general reception of Jan Gross’ book Neighbours, The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland (Princeton University Press, 2001) and that of Demokracja Peryferii (Słowo, 2003), by Zdzisław Krasnodebski, which aims at proving, and thus reproving, how the democratic liberal model is simply too western to fit Poland’s soul and hence should be rejected.

It must not be forgotten to what extent the Polish sentiment of Self has been tempered for centuries by an intense feeling of collective suffering, generating a crave for unity, a thrive for fusion of the entire society against its enemies, like in the Solidarność epopee against totalitarian rule. The national political scene was and remains shaped by this reflex, the compulsive temptation to draw lines and split between us and them, the heroes/victims and the villains/executioners. But the truth is: beyond a mere circle of hardliners, the population is growing increasingly insensitive to these constant quarrels. And Poland experiences now the same distortion as the next political scene, namely a deep crisis of political representation, a widening gap between the genuine aspirations of the electorate and the actual behaviour of the parties and individuals competing for power. Similar trends such as opposition between urban centres and rural areas, elites and commoners, liberal and social rhetoric make France or Austria appear extremely close to Poland. Undoubtedly this country has taken up the EU family pattern. With one exception though, that blurs this fact: whereas political elites in the West tend to be euroenthusiast and struggle with their increasingly eurosceptic constituents, the image in Poland is simply reversed. Hence the misunderstanding: for at this level, it is not with the people that you deal, but with their representatives.

But this too shall pass. Eventually, let us not forget that Europe is just about nations... As the French philosopher Pierre Manent once put it: “Each nation of Europe represents too much of a specific history for the European spirit to be anything else than the spirit of the European nations.”

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Edouard Gaudet >
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Edouard has been working between 2004 and 2007 at the College of Europe, Natolin-Warsaw, as an academic assistant and a project manager. He is currently working as a political consultant.
“Never in my life did I eat so much Bratwurst as last summer. But with a big reason... Football, friends and summer! Really for every game, someone turned on a grill, placed it right next to the TV, in the garden, on the street, in the backyard or in the garage. If there was a TV, there had to be a grill as well!”

These pictures were taken from Martin’s mobile phone during the World Cup in Germany. To see more of his work, visit http://www.rottenkolber.net.
At every place I went, they had different favorites for the title. Italy, Brazil, Argentina, France or Portugal.

The closer the Germans got to the final, the hands only millimeters from the Cup, a patriotic feeling overwhelmed most of the Germans. But some sort of friendly patriotism.

If there was a team that played better, they were honoured with respect.

Germany didn’t go to the final. I don’t care at all.

It was a great summer! People from all over the world were watching the games in the gardens, backyards and garages and had a bratwurst together. Bratwurst writer!
RIOTS AND BALLOTS

Thursday 23 November 2006, Paris. A young policeman trying to protect a visiting football fan from local hooligans draws his weapon and fires a shot at the angry mob. The hooligans are racist PSG fans, the away fan is Israeli, the policeman is black. The victim is a white racist hooligan, whose teammate, injured by the same shot, is called Mounir - a first name of North-African origin.

This multicultural cast could have featured in a photo shoot for an advertising campaign à la Benetton. Instead, a young Frenchman of Arab origin was shot and his unlikely white racist partner killed during an attack targeted first at a Jewish fan, then at the black policeman protecting him.

A few miles down the road, presidential hopeful Ségolène Royal had just declared at a meeting of regional leaders: “France is in a deadlock, some even say decline, which is not inaccurate”. Her solution? “We can release the country through the dynamism present at the local level throughout her.” If she means the raw energy of anger and frustration, she is spot on.

A year after the riots that provided some rare entertainment in the country’s deprived suburbs, the atmosphere is still ripe for a revolution.

In 2005, tensions in French society came to a climax with the crise des banlieues, when every night cars, bus stops, and schools were targeted by gangs of youth.

Although many observers linked these events to a failure of the French model of integration, philosopher André Glucksmann identified a typically French character trait in the riots: “It’s here in France that the fire raisers learned that to be strong, you need to harm. The more you destroy, the more you count. France, from the right to the left, should see herself in the mirror the arsonists are holding out to her.”

Comparisons with Britain in the early 80s, led by The Economist, are not far from the truth. But France’s case is heavier: we French people enjoy a good strike, even when we are the strikers’ victims. Every time, our media will remind us of the glorious times of May 68. “Is it back?” is the question passers-by frequently have to answer in random street interviews. In the French social climate, folklore plays a good part. We have been
taught in school that rioting can sometimes be a solution. The Fifth Republic’s constitution even gave us a removable king and the streets of Paris’ cobble stones to throw. But Paris and its suburbs are not the only battlegrounds. On EU matters, the rejection of the Constitution in 2005 as a typical vote protestataire is a form of “ballot rioting”, to show the “liberal” EU the right way (understanding that in French “liberal” is a very bad word). This fascination for the table rase (literally, wipe off what is on the table and available now as “burn everything”, one of the rioters’ mantra) has found, in the presidential election, a cooler catharsis as well as new victims: political parties, with the two major candidates for the presidential elections former outsiders pushed forward by the polls. Both are young compared to the French gerontocratic standard type and one of them even failed to enter the ENA, the Napoleonic school that has been breeding well-mannered political sharks to run the country for two centuries. The two candidates say they want to change the rules of the game, using a new form of speech and different symbols. This new approach to politics is in itself more refreshing than the old threadbare selling points. They both break taboos, like when Royal talks about altering the legislation on working time to make it more flexible. But will all their plans resist such a highly corrosive atmosphere? •

“BECAUSE HERE LIES ANOTHER FRENCH PARADOX: WE HOPE FOR CHANGE BUT INSIST ON STABILITY. AND NOT ONLY FOR OURSELVES BUT FOR THE REST OF EUROPE, TOO.”

> Baptiste Chatain
Journalist
Paris
French
Not all countries have the same interests. To give just two examples - holding an Olympic medal or winning an international championship does not necessarily have the same value in a small country as it might in a large country. There may be different aspects relating to the use of sport by states, hence the need to find out what role, or what part, a given country wishes or is able to play in order to determine how sport can best be used.

The period between the two World Wars is key to understanding the evolution of nationalism and how it would come to use sport. The rise of fascism in Italy in 1923 was to have consequences for sport that continue to this day. The Mussolini regime soon discovered the propaganda effects of sport in different competitions, the Olympic Games, and most significantly, the football World Cup. The team became the national selection, a key unifying factor in a diverse and multifaceted society such as Italy. The imposed switch from the English word to its translation in Italian, was one of the measures that would survive the Fascist regime: calcio replacing football.

Beginning at the Olympic Games in Paris, democracies responded to the Italian move with the same arguments of national pride using the exploits of their athletes: King and Country.

From that moment on, the part became the whole. For example, the Spanish selection became Spain, and competed not against another team, but rather against another nation-state. War soon advanced onto the playing field. Sport was not the winner, it was the country, state or nation. Sporting nationalism had been born as a symbolic element.

However, the dates we should bear in mind for gauging the new direction that sport was to take under nationalist auspices, are the two World Cup victories of Italy in 1934 and 1938 and the Berlin Olympics of 1936. The Italian victory in the World Cup in France in 1938 was welcomed by the transalpine press with an expressive headline: “The new Italy wins in the country of the Revolution”. We need not be reminded of the lengths Il Duce went to in order to see the Azzurri become world champions. The anecdotes and famous intimidating telegrams are now to be found in the annals of sporting surrealism. Berlin 1936 is the paradigm of the nationalist model taken to the limit. The only legacy to remain from these Games is the pagan practice of the Olympic flame and the torch that sets it alight. The flame, a symbol of national socialism.

The use of sport by dictators has become a classic. The 1978 World Cup held in Argentina, under the iron rule of the military dictatorship, is an example somewhat closer to home. Yet for Spaniards, there is no need to travel to the other side of the ocean. Over almost 40 years, the Franco regime provided countless examples. This Spanish nationalism is evident in the use of Spain’s victory over England at the World Cup in Brazil, the legendary goal of Zarra (“la pérfida Albion derrotada” – “perfidious Albion beaten”) or Marcelino’s winning goal in the final of the European Cup of Nations against the Soviet Union (“communism once again defeated”). The Di Stefano case in 1953, documented extensively by Xavier García Luque and Jordi Finestres (El caso Di Stefano, 2006), shares some similarities, where the different pressures put on the President of FC Barcelona, Martí Carreto can be seen with the dropping of the Argentinean star.

“Praising the victories or defeats as warlike operations has been a fundamental component in attempting to unite a diverse, multifaceted and multinational Spanish society.”
government in the closing stages of the dictatorship’s darkest period.

Spanish nationalism has used sport as an exponent of its ideology. Praising the victories or defeats as warlike operations has been a fundamental component in attempting to unite a diverse, multifaceted and multinational Spanish society, under the red colours of the teams representing all of Spain. However, there is a lack of understanding or willingness to understand, that such a practice of defending the notion of Spain from a nationalistic point of view has another side: peripheral nationalism. The claim of being a nation before the Spanish nation - viewing some as nationalists and others as not, is avoiding the problem. The example to follow for peripheral nationalism is the British model: the United Kingdom in four nations: England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. All have their national selections, with the exception of the Olympics. The logic of the Spanish nation-state is to deny evidence of the existence of other nations making up the common State. Spanish nationalism feeds peripheral nationalism, despite Spanish nationalists denying this to be the case.

This reminds us of the famous definition from Manuel Vázquez Montalbán (Futbol. Una religión en busca de Dios, 2005), referring to FC Barcelona as: “el desarmado ejército simbólico de una memoria desarmada” (“the symbolic disarmed army of a disarmed memory”). An anecdote illustrating the vision, not peripheral but rather from the centre, is the front page headline in the Madrid media following the victory of Barcelona in the final of the Champions League in Spring 2006: “España 2 - Europa 0” (referring to the victories of Seville in the UEFA Cup and Barcelona in the Champions League).

While 1714 might signify forced unity under a unitarian concept of the Bourbon Monarchy, the return to a Hapsburg vision of recognising diversity in unity is the step from a concept of a unitarian system to a multinational system, which Anselmo Carretero defined as a Nation of Nations: E pluribus unum. While the two visions keep feeding each other, we will continue with the centro-peripheral problem relating to politics and sport, where sport is one of the escape valves for getting away from the tension between two concepts of Spain. “The times, they are changing”, says the poet. But not so in sport...
France against Italy, Spain against Germany, Poland against Italy, Luxembourg against the Netherlands, Italy against Spain... This is not the calendar of the qualifying rounds for the next World Cup, but the current picture of market integration in the field of corporate mergers. Since the summer of 2005 the EU has been experiencing a surge in economic patriotism, with national governments fiercely opposing European cross-border takeovers. These efforts, however, will only delay the inevitable.

The list of examples of protectionism is almost endless: the French government's resistance against the entry of Italy's Enel in Suez and its sponsoring of a counter-bid by state-owned Gaz de France; its stern opposition (together with Luxembourg and Spain) to the acquisition of Arcelor by world steel giant Mittal Steel; the Spanish government's efforts to block German energy giant E.ON's takeover of Endesa, following its failed attempt to create a national champion by supporting the acquisition of Endesa by Gas Natural; Poland's move to protect state-owned bank PKO from competition created by the merger between the Polish subsidiaries of UniCredit and HVB; the Italian government's efforts to block the acquisition of Autostrade by Spanish public works giant Abertis; or Germany's clash with the Commission over the “Volkswagen Law”. These are just some of the most recent examples. Protectionist measures have adopted the most varied forms, including the retention of golden shares in privatised companies, the creation of legislative or regulatory frameworks intended to prevent or discourage foreign takeovers, or the state participation in corporate decisions of private entities.

The European Commission has reacted fervently to this rise of economic patriotism. Cross-merger activity is a driver for liberalisation of strategic sectors and the achievement of the single market, and protectionist measures directly undermine the Commission's role as the watchdog of the treaty freedoms and its exclusive jurisdiction over EU merger control. However, Brussels has limited powers without the support of the Member States. Besides political pressure, the only legal instrument available is the launching of infringement proceedings before the Luxembourg courts, a long and cumbersome procedure not exempt from political costs, which is ill-suited to combat protectionist measures in the fast-changing business reality.

What is the significance of this growing phenomenon of economic patriotism? The more optimistic see in this reaction a symptom of the healthiness of the economic integration process. In times of wild corporate merger activity in the EU – with over 20,000 transactions per year, more than 60% being cross-border mergers – the resistance by certain governments against a limited number of foreign hostile takeovers represents a hopeless battle against the relentless advance of market integration. The more pessimistic, however, view it as a sign of a deeper process of distrust by certain national governments in the marvels of European integration and globalisation and Brussels' institutions, with a risk of creating an “August 1914 effect” (the last time economic protectionism put a serious strain on intra-European relations).

Intermingled with this outburst of protectionist measures is the conflict between the industrial policy models that prevail in the EU. One camp is represented by France, where the government has proved willing to intervene when a national strategic industry is in peril. National champions play an essential role according to this model and state intervention goes as far as participating in corporate decisions of private entities, as the Gaz de France-Suez deal made clear. The French government recently passed a law that will allow it to veto foreign takeover in eleven different sectors, and rumours say that in Matignon there is a list with the names of French companies, including a food maker, that the government will never let end up in foreign hands.
EUROPE TALKS TO BRUSSELS

In the other camp there is the liberal approach represented by the UK, where industrial policy is focused on creating a competitive level playing field for private business, without any state protection of national companies. Some examples are the takeover by Spanish bank Santander Central Hispano of Abbey International or the acquisition by French group Pernod-Ricard of Allied Domecq. This takeover-friendly industry policy, which has also been described as the “Wimbledon model” – due to the similarities with the British tennis tournament, where national players are a minority and have almost no chance of winning – has proved very successful, and is said to have created more than 40,000 new jobs in 2005. The model proposed by Brussels is closer to this liberal model.

At least as important as the industrial policy implications is the attitude showed by the infringing governments. The main reasons adduced by the partisans of protectionism to justify this defensive economic model are the need to secure jobs, safeguard energy supplies or protect national security and strategic sectors. But also, issues of national identity and the loss of sovereignty have been publicly raised. Some governments – France and Poland being the best examples – supported by their political and economic elites, still present market integration (and globalisation) as a threat to the national interests. Far from being ashamed of violating EU law and confronting Brussels, as used to be the case in the past, they now pride themselves of overtly criticising the liberalisation process and acting in a protectionist anti-European way.

As it happens with immigration, these calls for national identity and sovereignty sound attractive to many European citizens, who naively – and irrationally – believe that state intervention will protect them from job cuts and restructuring (why do governments care more about protecting jobs than creating new ones?). This generates a strong demand for political response, and political parties are ready to sacrifice substantial economic costs to capitalise these votes. Yet, while free competition brings economic growth and consumer welfare, there is no evidence of the benefits that economic protectionism will bring to consumers.

It remains unclear to what extent the Commission will be successful in controlling this protectionist drift. Anyway, ultimately the market will do so. As it happened before, any state attempts to shape national industrial policies against the market forces of globalisation and European integration will prove to be a backlash against inevitable change.

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In the meantime, Europe’s merger frenzy continues...

**2005**

Europe 1,200
Rest of the world 1,500
(mergers and acquisitions volume in $ billion)

**2006**

Europe 1,600
Rest of the world 2,400
(mergers and acquisitions volume in $ billion)
Imagine a world where Britain leads the rest of Europe to take on America…

Imagine a world where French supporters cheer for German athletes, and an Irish crowd goes wild for a Northern Irish lad…

Imagine a world where the EU flag spurs on normal Europeans (people who don’t know the word Berlaymont) to achieve greatness…

Welcome to the Ryder Cup, an electric event that feels like a World Cup to golf fans on both sides of the Atlantic. For all the exclusiveness and class bias of the sport, this contest is a spectacular and adrenaline-fuelled reminder that Europe can be a very concrete notion. Sometimes…

Originally, the Ryder Cup was founded as a tournament between British and American golfers for the sport’s supremacy. But decades of American domination forced organisers to invite the rest of Europe in 1979 to create a more balanced contest. It was an inspired decision, turning the event into a major platform of sporting rivalry between Europe and America.

The 2006 edition, held last September in Ireland, confirmed Europe’s amazing run of success over the past twenty years. The special nature of the event seems to favour European values and solidarity over America’s cult of the individual. Like Pete Sampras & co in the Davis Cup during the nineties, team USA usually lands with the sport’s superstars freshly assembled to face a more cohesive team of lesser-known Europeans. And more often than not, American egos come crashing on the rocks of European teamwork.

The level of passion and interest in this unique contest is accentuated by the fact that no other sport can offer this level of confrontation between Europe and the USA. For some reason, the strong economic and cultural ties between the two Western powers – leading to competition in many fields – have never fully translated into sports. Forget foreign policy, sport is where the Atlantic gap is the widest.

American footballers wear pads and sky-rocket into each other in an explosive and commercial version of rugby. In the land of plenty, the idea of a 0-0 score is as marketable as bratwurst in Tehran. What Americans call soccer, known to everyone else as football and the world’s number one sport, has never really taken off in the US despite a successful World Cup in 1994. For their part, Europeans have only embraced one of the four main US sports: basketball. While Scandinavia has an interest in the American ice hockey league where European stars ply their trade, American football and baseball are widely ignored – or even mocked in the British Isles for being the lesser cousins of rugby and cricket.

In fact, the only events that can potentially compete with the Ryder Cup in terms of transatlantic competition are the Olympics and the world basketball championships. But the Olympics are a very national affair in Europe, with people more interested in the final medal count than in the actual action on the track. As for the world basketball championships, Americans are simply not ready to seriously compete at one of their national sports on a worldwide platform. Their recent defeat to Greece in a tournament that eventually crowned Spain was met with limited uproar back home, with the usual excuse that some of their best players did not bother to turn up. Like in baseball, American fans rest comfortably in the belief that whoever wins their national league is the best team in the world. National teams from other countries might as well come from Venus…

But the Ryder Cup is different. It matters to Americans as much as it does to Europeans. It also pitches a European team where national differences are put aside to vanquish a common enemy. The sight of EU flags being waved frenetically to the echo of “U-S-A! U-S-A!” leaves the observer in no doubt as to the patriotism displayed on both sides. English players get deafening cheers from an Irish crowd while BBC commentators can lose their renowned impartiality for two Spaniards.

But while this all seems very natural in the Ryder Cup, the idea of Europeans from different countries getting passionate about a pan-European team is very hard to conceive in other contexts. Not least in political life, where the level of popular support enjoyed by the EU Commission in most countries has rarely hit the heights. To those who doubt the potential of European projects to inspire ordinary citizens
from Glasgow to Palermo, golf seems to offer the perfect answer. Surely Mr Barroso could learn a thing or two from Colin Montgomery and his bunch…

Instead of relying on good will and idealism, EU institutions could try to promote a more competitive – and hence emotional – sense of collective pride and shame. It is all very well listening to classical music and holding each others’ hands every May, but time has come for the EU to be more than a peaceful club of happy regulators. Creating situations where Europeans win or lose together may be the key to a stronger and more cohesive EU.

In this perspective, increased competition from new challengers such as China and India could help make European citizens and governments pull in the same direction with more conviction. In other words, unite or die.

Well, let’s not get carried away…

The Ryder Cup may simply be a high-profile event for the exclusive golf elite, with the amusing side-effect of featuring EU flags on official scoreboards. Maybe it just warms conservative golfers to the idea of Europe and over-excited EU federalists to the idea of golf. But then again, getting a British businessman to wear an EU flag with pride can be seen as a momentous achievement in itself, n’est-ce pas Tony? •
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