I. The faces of violence

The spiral of suspicion and anxiety

European societies are trying to make sense of the changes they are undergoing; our values are being obsessively and painfully re-examined. The extraordinary improvement in our economic situation no longer assuages our anxiety and doubt. Terrorism, industrial accidents and resurgent epidemics are taking us into an era of great dangers.

Security has become a many-faced monster dominating debate in European democracies. During every electoral campaign political debate centres on insecurity and it is easy for political extremists to exploit the issue by caricaturing it. Democrats dread any event that demagogues might interpret for their own ends to justify their challenge to the present order. Extremist proposals are attacking our most firmly established legal principles head on.

We are no longer simply in an area of violence and crime, but an environment suffused with collective fears and anxieties. National situations, the future of Europe and globalisation provide the context. Industrial accidents, migratory upheavals, health problems, the corruption of some leaders, the negative effects of the introduction of market economies and terrorism are just some of the components of an insecurity which is finding expression in dangerous simplifications and the search for scapegoats. Nomads, foreigners, Roma/Gypsies and people from little-known countries are seen as the greatest of threats in this land of illusions, and Europe is experiencing a serious rise in racially-motivated acts of aggression. Even young people seem to be a danger, the source of every evil in an ageing society which perceives their demands and turbulence as violence and aggression.

Has Europe become an area of intolerance? Is the European Union triptych of freedom, security and justice already outmoded? Is security eating away at freedom and justice?

Every manifestation of a phenomenon fuels the constant testing of our ability to tackle it. Talking about organised crime raises awareness about a phenomenon that was for long underestimated, but also demonstrates our inability to deal with it. The opaqueness naturally cultivated by this type of crime adds to the anxiety. The legitimacy of a few international institutions suggesting reasoned approaches to the problem is not taken into consideration.

Now terrorism has been added to this bleak situation. The field is now open to the most demagogic, the most senseless types of discourse. After all, books maintaining that the New York attacks did not involve airliners have become bestsellers.

The speeches made by the heads of institutions often fuel this regrettable spiral of suspicion and anxiety. Demagogic impulses and the temptation to attract the media spotlight lead people to dramatise events and offer interpretations whose basic premises are never verified. The inadequacy of international research on crime is regrettable, the failure of politicians to take into consideration existing research is still more so.[1] The issue of immigration is a good illustration of such extreme attitudes. The essential link that has to be made between our economies' natural need for immigration, the need for free circulation of labour if we want to create a Europe of and for people, and the crime problems that may arise as a side effect of these policies is all too rarely established. When one looks at national statistics, one is stupefied to see how little foreigners figure in them. Combating a criminal economy that is trying to exploit migratory movements by organising illegal immigration and multiplying sexual supply by exploiting human beings in distress requires determined policies and cross-border co-operation, but certainly not a scandalous conflation of foreigner and criminal. The leaders of countries that "export" labour sometimes feel they are abused in domestic debates but have no possibility of replying. The repeated imprudence of public statement sometimes adds to the hysterical climate developing in Europe.

Doubts

If everything is becoming a source of anxiety, is it because our institutions and our technical and political leaders are no longer able to control, curb or reduce these phenomena? Should the system of insurance we have adopted in our private lives be extended to every domain, including those that are collectively managed?

Internal government agencies have for a long time been responsible for the problem of violence. According to Max Weber, citizens give the state the function of ensuring their security and, for this purpose, confer upon it the monopoly of violence. It is increasingly apparent that this model is now under serious challenge.

There is doubt about the ability of democracy to bring internal or external peace. Democracies also wage unjust wars. The idea that trade, science and culture inevitably lead to democracy has been called into question. The idea that our violence has been civilised or tamed by the evolution of moral standards, institutions and the economy is faltering.

Some countries are emerging from the communist era with difficulty, and this difficulty finds expression in a state that is particularly weak with respect to security functions and therefore the monopoly of violence. The proliferation of gangs and Mafia-like groups that carve up territories and take charge of security within them for the benefit of their own activities is a sign of the weakness of the state. The corruption of political leaders adds to the discredit of the state. In most developing countries, international aid is linked to the establishment of criminal justice models inspired by the northern countries. The World Bank has a programme to ensure

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1. Philippe Robert and Laurent Mucchielli, *Crime et Sécurité, l'état des savoirs,* Editions La Découverte, Paris, 2002.

the security of commercial transactions through minimum legal regulations and *ad hoc* courts. The little use local people make of those courts and policing arrangements and their suspicion of them leads one to wonder if they are relevant to the needs of the population, who continue to use more traditional methods of settling disputes, including the summary execution of offenders.

When one looks at the nature of the international aid that treats all countries and cultures as if they were identical, it is astonishing to see how many west European experts from countries that are having enormous difficulty harmonising their legal systems nonetheless reach consensus as to what other countries should do. These countries then find themselves working with judicial systems based on prison just like the most classic western systems, with the negative results with which we are familiar.

Let us remember the advice of the Beninese philosopher Hountondji:

> Given the plural nature of every society and the remarkable ability of cultures to accommodate and/or take on new values, what, in general, are the factors that accelerate or hinder such developments? Moreover, what means can be used to optimise these developments without harming a culture's identity, and ensuring that the new values are internalised rather than experienced as being of foreign origin?[1]

The Secretary General of the Council of Europe said at the European Union Regional Conference on Conflict Prevention at Helsingborg (August 2002) that our capabilities in conflict prevention and peace-building were directly linked to the values we defend. In order to increase stability and prevent conflict we should not simply help build democratic institutions, but encourage the appropriation of our values by all sections of society. Mr Schwimmer went on to say that the Council of Europe had this kind of know-how and could also contribute to the fight against terrorism.

The background of democracy might be the culture of peace promoted by Unesco, the culture born of our diversity that respects human dignity and wishes above all to confront violence with lucidity and fairness.

The world changed radically after the Holocaust. Violence and horror no longer surprise us. History must be part of the democratic debate on violence. We should adopt an approach that helps us to secularise our violence, place it in its historical context and elucidate the degrees to which we accept it.

The duty of memory

European nations believe they experience their violence, fears and anxiety within their borders. Citizens believe they experience them in their immediate environment. Everyone forgets the globalisation of fears and violence and the globalisation of reactions and what they believe they experience in a limited area is simply the shock wave of fears and violence coming from elsewhere. The shock waves mingle and accumulate, hampering every effort to localise and establish the cause.

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1. Paulin Hountondji "Brainstorming – or how to create awareness of human rights" in *Taking action for human rights in the twenty-first century*, Unesco 2000.

The tendency to hunch up over one's fear isolates individuals, so fear of terrorism does not bring people together: "It strikes other people and what I must do is take care that it does not strike me," people say to themselves.

Nations and individuals confront violence without memory, with no memory of the violence they have experienced or of their own violence.

The founding of the Council of Europe indicated the will of European countries to escape a logic of confrontation, war and violence in order to build the Utopia of an area of freedom and dialogue in which custom and civility would no longer depend on the use of violence. Utopia remains a Utopia, confrontations between states have waxed and waned. Violence is still with us, but the context has changed.

Sixty years on, the Council of Europe feels the need to re-examine the problem of violence by introducing a transversal programme on violence and implementing it in conjunction with another programme on the development of democracy. The two themes are closely related. Democracy is the most developed form of exchange, dialogue and free discussion. At the dawn of philosophy, Plato presented the search for truth through dialectics and opposed the "might is right" incarnated by the sophists for whom, it has been said, right was based on the most likely, but above all, the most politically useful reality, with in the background, as was then possible, the use of force, irrationality and violence.

The Council of Europe's initiative, "Responses to violence in everyday life in a democratic society", should help us to talk about our violence in the contemporary context of international crises, terrorism, and economic and social upheaval, elucidate the factors that have altered the course of violence in recent years and at the same time analyse everything that has changed in our perception of it, our way of presenting it and also of condemning it, in short, to find the meaning of this many-faced violence.

This is necessarily an international task since it is connected with our civilisation, the civilisations of which Europe consists. The idea that we can do this alone is obsolete. "Peaceful optimism is now based on the interdependency and globalisation that mark the victory of an individualist economic society over the political and military state".[1] This peaceful confrontation should take place without any type of moralising anathema.

The speeches of the president of the United States pointing the finger at "rogue states", the planet of evil states, advocating the struggle of good against evil in the temporal order, show clearly the danger warlike crusades to eradicate violence may lead us into. If there is one thing that all religions and philosophies teach us it is that evil and violence are in each one of us and that what Georges Bataille referred to as the "the cursed part" is also part of our humanity.

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1. Pierre Hassner, "Par-delà le totalitarisme et la guerre" in *Esprit,* December 1998.