Europe and its Historians

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Histories of Europe and the nation-state

Histories of Europe have a long genealogy, whose origins can probably be found in the defence of Christian Europe, above all in humanist circles, against the threat of Muslim Ottoman expansion.[1] In the course of the Enlightenment and the Napoleonic years, earlier elements that were regarded as characterising all Europe crystallised into a sense common to European elites – described as 'civilisation'– of the distinctiveness and superiority of Europeans and Europe from all other regions of the world. If we analyse what was understood by this 'idea of Europe', as I have argued elsewhere, we can identify a number of constituent elements of Europe's progress that, for their authors, explain its distinctiveness, particularly when compared with the historical experiences or contemporary condition of states and societies elsewhere in the world.[2] These elements can be summarised as: (i) a secular cultural tradition, originating in classical antiquity, that revived (after the 'barbarian' interlude) with the Renaissance and culminated in contemporary France; (ii) individual entrepreneurship as the motor of European economic dynamism and strength; (iii) liberty as the defining quality of governance; (iv) the balance of power between a limited number of leading states; and (v) civilised manners, or *civilités*, understood (in Norbert Elias's sense[3]) as publicly accepted regulatory mechanisms of the forms of social relationships. The Restoration, as Federico Chabod has clarified, extended this corpus of values attributed to Europe through a recovery of the Middle Ages and Christianity.[4]

'Civilisation', a noun that entered French and English usage in the 1760s,[5] was synonymous with Europe, as was 'progress'. The two words incorporated the different

[1] Denys Hay, *Europe: the Emergence of an Idea* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1957).

[2] Stuart Woolf, 'The construction of a European world-view in the Revolutionary-Napoleonic years', *Past and Present*, 137 (November 1992), 72–101.

[3] Norbert Elias, *The Civilising Process: the History of Manners*, trans. E. Jephcott (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978).

[4] Federico Chabod, *Storia dell'idea d'Europa* (Bari: Laterza, 1961), ch. 6. Chabod only included François Guizot – the major exponent of the importance of the Middle Ages for European civilsation – in his third (and last) lecture course on the idea of Europe: Stuart Woolf, 'Reading Federico Chabod's *Storia dell'idea d'Europa* half a century later', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 7, 1 (2002), 279–80.

[5] Lucien Febvre, 'Civilisation: évolution d'un mot et d'un groupe d'idées', in *idem*, *Pour une histoire à part entière* (Paris: Sevpen, 1962).

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facets of the idea of Europe, any of which could be emphasised, according to place and circumstance, as the European powers carried their mission and duty to less fortunate parts of the world. The triad – Europe, civilisation, progress – are commonplaces in the rhetoric of nineteenth-century imperialism. For the purposes of the present discussion, it is important to stress their profound influence as underlying assumptions in the history of European historiography. The meanings attributed to European civilisation by historiography have changed in emphasis over the past century and a half: in the age of positivist, 'scientific' history writing, Europe was identified with its nation states; in the decades from the First to the Second World War, the values of Europe deriving from the Enlightenment matrix were vindicated in reaction to what was seen as the nationalistic self-destruction of European civilisation; in more recent times, Europe's past was read by a generation of historians (and non-historians) close to European federalism, with ingenuously teleological intent, as leading to the construction of a united Europe. Let me illustrate these three (artificially clear-cut) phases.

The grand collective histories of Europe – from *The Cambridge Modern History* conceptualised by Lord Acton at the beginning of the twentieth century, to the interwar series *Peuples et Civilisations* edited by Louis Halphen and Philippe Sagnac, or the recent *Propyläen Geschichte Europas* – are conceived and structured as the history of Europe's nation states – which is hardly surprising, since modern historiography, from positivism onwards, is the product of the age of nation states. Historians were active participants in the construction and legitimation of their nation states, identifying a thread of continuity in the history of their peoples and territory as if they were destined, in teleological mode, to end up in an independent state.[6] The individual volumes in these ambitious and impressive syntheses of the state of the art, dedicated to successive chronological periods, consist of separate chapters on the leading states (with more summary treatment of the lesser ones, usually grouped in regions, like Scandinavia or pre-unitary Italy); on international relations; on the wider world, treated as the backcloth to European expansion (at least until the twentieth century, when the United States and Japan gain separate treatment); with a chapter or two – icing on the cake – on the culture, arts and science of the age. Europe is never under discussion.[7] The earlier tradition of a common European culture is ignored, perhaps (although this is a less than complete explanation) because history had become scientific and its proponents had little patience for the literary story-telling of a Voltaire or a Gibbon. Europe was a geographical area and assumed for this reason always to

[6] Effi Gazi, '*Scientific' National History. The Greek Case in Comparative Perspective (1850–1920)* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000).

[7] *The Cambridge Modern History*, 13 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1902–11). *The New Cambridge Modern History*, 14 vols. (1957–79), does not differ in structure, although there is a greater awareness of the extra-European world. Louis Halphen and Philippe Sagnac, eds., *Peuples et Civilisations*, 22 vols. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1926–75); the final volume – Maurice Crouzet, ed., *Le Monde depuis 1945*, published in 1973, is structured in a far more modern manner, dividing the world between rich and poor states, with the first concerned with Europe, the United States and Japan, and the second dedicated to 'Les pays pauvres et la naissance de nouveaux mondes'. *Propyläen Geschichte Europas*, 7 vols.(Berlin: Propyläen Verlag, 1975–8).

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have existed and, through its existence, to possess some common characteristics that distinguish it from other areas of the world. Because these general histories of Europe are primarily political histories, their common denominator is identifiable essentially in two forms: on the one hand, Europe is understood as providing the natural geographical arena for the expression of the political–economic power – or (a more subtle statement of power) the cultural influence – of its competitive national states; on the other, the superiority of Europe as a whole relative to the rest of the world is regarded as self-evidently apparent in the military and economic strength that enabled the European states to expand their control and empires across the world.

In terms of the history of the idea of Europe, the age of the nation state, particularly from the late nineteenth century, effectively constitutes a break in continuity.[8] The ever more intense level of state rivalry and potential conflict of realpolitik implicitly denied the peaceful expectations of a European cultural community expressed in the Enlightenment paradigm of civilisation. In the historical narration, until the First World War, material prosperity, scientific and technological advances, creative artistic progress and the assumption of the absolute civilising benefits of European rule could mask such tensions. The First World War removed all veils from the contradiction between the realities of the political history of Europe and the historiographical representation of Europe as a community. This became ever more apparent in postwar Europe, as fascism and nazism challenged the nineteenth-century liberal-democratic principles previously assumed to be the 'natural' path of progress, the culmination of the Enlightenment – Revolutionary achievements.

The return of European histories

It is not accidental that European histories – that is, histories of Europe viewed as a unitary whole and understood to signify far more than the aggregation of its states – should have been written at the worst moments of this prolonged crisis of European civilisation – in the latter years of the First World War, in the 1930s as the fascist and Nazi regimes forced the pace, and during the Second World War. Henri Pirenne set the precedent with his *Histoire de l'Europe*, written in a German prison camp in 1917–18, but only published in 1936.[9] Oswald Spengler's pessimistic *Decline of the West* (1918–22) was dismissed as mere philosophy of history without any solid historical basis by professional historians like Lucien Febvre; but it certainly influenced Arnold Toynbee (also dismissed by Febvre), the first six volumes of whose *A Study of History* (1934–9) originated in his sense of the crisis of the European nation state.[10] A cluster

[8] For Chabod, Bismarck's Germany was – virtually exclusively – responsible for the decline and end of the Enlightenment idea of Europe: Woolf, 'Reading Federico Chabod's *Storia dell'idea d'Europa*, 276, 283, 286.

[9] Henri Pirenne, *Histoire de l'Europe* (Paris: Alcan, 1936); Cinzio Violante, *La fine della 'grande illusione'. Uno storico europeo tra guerra e dopoguerra. Henri Pirenne (1914–1923). Per una rilettura della 'Histoire de l'Europe'* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1997).

[10] Oswald Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes. Umrisse einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte*, 2 vols. (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1918–22); Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, 10 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1934–54). For Lucien Febvre's savage review, 'Deux philosophies opportunistes de

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of histories of Europe and its civilisation appeared in the 1930s, from Benedetto Croce's *Storia dell'Europa nel secolo XIX* (1932) and Christopher Dawson's *The Making of Europe* (1932) to Paul Hazard's *Crise de la conscience européenne* (1935). For Johan Huizinga (1935), the decline of European civilisation had become undeniable with the economic crisis of 1929. H. A. L. Fisher was explicit about the *raison d'être* of his massive *A History of Europe* (1935): 'the tides of liberty have now suddenly receded over wide tracts of Europe . . . the spread of servitude' threatened progress. The Swiss historian Werner Kaegi reflected critically, in 1938, on the phenomenon of state rivalries, to conclude – *pro domo sua* – that, because of their empires, the great powers were inevitably aggressive, a fate that small states escaped through their republican tradition.[11] With the Second World War, the sense of the destruction of European civilisation caused by the excesses of nationalism emerged clearly in the anguished writings of leading European historians, all distant from contemporary history in terms of research field and reputation: Huizinga and Kaegi both returned to the theme, new to Lewis Namier and Chabod: the lecture course on the idea of the nation and the idea of Europe, delivered by Chabod in Nazi-occupied Milan in the winter of 1943–4, can (and, I believe, should) be read as an anguished *cri de coeur*.[12]

What was common to these European histories is their affirmation (*re*affirmation, for their authors) of the values of civilisation and progress that are intrinsic to the history of Europe. Different thematic approaches are adopted, inevitably so in that they are the product of the particular interests and expertise of the individual historians; but also because the concept of the historical evolution of European civilisation incorporated a range of very different constituent elements, any or various of which could provide the basis for a European history. For Pirenne, the 'grand movements' that can be followed in the centuries of European history explain the characteristic social and economic specificity of the continent; but, as Pirenne's classic work ends with the sixteenth-century Reformation, we do not know how he would have confronted the profound divisions of religious and state conflict. For Dawson, the roots of Europe were to be found in Christianity; for Hazard, the crisis came with the end of the classical age; for Chabod with the breakdown of the tradition of the balance of power resulting from Bismarck's policy of a strong Germany. Common to all these European histories, although rarely rendered explicit, was the cultural

l'histoire: De Spengler à Toynbee' (1936) in *idem, Combats pour l'histoire* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1953), 119–43. There are perceptive comments on Toynbee's great enterprise in Perry Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity* (London: Verso 1998), 5–6.

[11] Benedetto Croce, *Storia dell'Europa* (Bari: Laterza, 1932); Christopher Dawson, *The Making of Europe* (London: Sheed & Ward,1932); Paul Hazard, *La crise de la conscience européenne (1680–1715)*, 2 vols. (Paris: Furne Boivin, 1935); Johan Huizinga, *In de schaduwen vam morgen* (Harlem, 1935); Herbert A. L. Fisher, *A History of Europe*, 3 vols. (London: Longman, 1935) I, 'Preface, vi; Werner Kaegi, *Historische Meditationen* (Zürich: Fretz & Wasmuth, 1942), 249–314.

[12] J. Huizinga, *Geschonden Wereld* (Amsterdam: Pantheon Press, 1943). Lewis Namier, 'From Vienna to Versailles' (February 1940), in *idem, Conflicts. Studies in Contemporary History* (London: Macmillan, 1942); Federico Chabod, *L'idea di nazione* (Bari: Laterza, 1961); *idem*, *Storia dell'idea d'Europa*; Woolf, 'Reading Federico Chabod's *Storia dell'idea d'Europa*', *passim*.

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need to refute the barbaric regression of Nazism and fascism by utilising the tools and commitment of the professional historian: *L'Europe. Genèse d'une civilisation*, was the title Lucien Febvre chose for his inaugural course at the freshly liberated Collège de France in 1944–5.[13]

The intensity of the ideological battle between the Western democracies and the Nazi–fascist regimes that accompanied the military history of the Second World War also led to a number of European histories with a more obvious political motivation. The propaganda related, directly or indirectly, to the Nazi 'new order' in Europe prompted the education ministries of the Allied governments in London in 1942–3 to enrol leading historians to counter with a reaffirmation (so weighty that the three volumes only finally appeared well after the end of the war) of the Enlightenment–liberal-democratic heritage of Europe.[14] What is probably the first work that specified *The Unity of European History* was written mostly during the Second World War.[15] Given that European federalism was a deeply lived conviction, at least within the elite of anti-fascism, and that the immediate origins of the political movement for European integration are dated by its historians to the Resistance movements,[16] it is hardly surprising that in the postwar years, particularly after the creation of European institutions, starting with the Council of Europe and the European Economic Community, the theme of European civilisation should have returned to the fore. This time such histories were written with open teleological intent, in which Europe's past was read as leading to the construction of a future united Europe. Their discursive tone is modelled on that of national histories and replicates what I regard as the original sin of such narrations: namely, that the identity of the nation – in this instance of Europe as a commonality of peoples – can be traced historically, through the centuries, as an ideal continuity, even if the peoples were not always aware of this.[17] I shall return shortly to these federalist European historians (see 'Histories of Europe and the European Union'). But, first, it is opportune to add some brief remarks about the implications that derive from implicitly assuming that there is a unity to the history of Europe, and the ambiguities and distortions that result from this.[18]

[13] Lucien Febvre, *L'Europe. Genèse d'une civilisation. Cours professé au Collège de France en 1944–1945* (Paris: Perrin, 1999).

[14] Ernest Barker, George Clark and Paul Vaucher, eds., *The European Inheritance*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954).

[15] John Bowle, *The Unity of European History* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1948).

[16] Walter Lipgens, ed., *Documents on the History of European Integration*, I (Berlin-New York: De Gruyter, 1985); Claudio Pavone, *Una guerra civile. Un saggio sulla moralità nella Resistenza* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1991), 304–7.

[17] Given the longstanding hegemony of the Hegelian tradition of historical writing, in which the nation was destined to end up in the state, the adoption of such a model was probably inevitable. An Italian nationalist historian expressed the metaphysical concept very clearly, as an ideal 'red thread' that was present in spirit across the centuries, even if successive generations of the 'nation' were unaware that it existed. Ettore Rota, *Genesi storica dell'idea italiana*, 2 vols (Milan: Vallardi, 1948).

[18] For an earlier but fuller discussion of the issues in this paragraph: Stuart Woolf, 'Europea: una sola storia, un'unica identità?', in Furio Cerutti, ed., *Identità e politica* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1996), 213–36, 263–6.

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It is obviously always possible to write the history of Europe, as it is to write that of a single country. The history that will result will be very different according to the particular interpretative axis, the level of observation or the chronological cycle that is adopted. Christianity, for example, is one such approach, because of its continental scope (even if it was always more than European). But although most exponents of the European tradition insist on Christianity's unifying character – and Pope John Paul II insists on its inclusion in any European constitution[19] – it could be interpreted, with equal plausibility, as dividing Europe through the doctrinal splits to which it has proven repeatedly prone since the fourth century AD. It would not be difficult to propose many other themes affecting the evolution of Europe in its entirety that would be as convincing and legitimate as Christianity, or the European cultural tradition. Europe's history could be interpreted, for instance, through forest clearing and agricultural colonisation (from classical Rome, if not Greece, until the Middle Ages), or trade routes (from the tenth century onwards), or the emergence of national cultures (starting with the regionally based peoples of the post-Carolingian empire), or the common institutions of feudalism, or the trait of economic individualism, or capitalism, or class, or state formation, or Europe's economic growth and penetration of the world, and so on. No single approach is exclusive or adequate, and the relative importance of each will change over the centuries and according to the theme privileged by the historian. But precisely because their weight varies, objectively according to period and subjectively in terms of level of observation and the historian's intent, the very multiplicity of interpretative axes of the history of Europe will pull in different directions, and are as likely to lay emphasis on ruptures and divisions (both chronological and geographical) as they are on what is common to Europe.

This is not to deny that princes and elites have attributed a positive value to 'Europe', at least since the early modern period. As Michael Müller has argued,[20] political groups and social elites, particularly in the peripheral regions, turned to Europe in search of recognition or legitimation of their identity: the revolutionaries of 1848, the nationalist leaders of the nineteenth century, the regionalists of twentieth-century western Europe, the xenophobic nationalistic leaders of ex-Yugoslavia, all claimed (or claim) to belong to Europe. But precisely because Europe is, at the very least, the sum of its component parts - the societies and states that, at various moments, have occupied its territory (whose frontiers were variable over the centuries) – what was (and is) understood as the system of values considered to be European could (and can) be very different, because the perspectives change according to the area of Europe from which the writer comes or where he has been trained.

[19] John Paul II's insistence on the Christian roots of Europe dates back to the earliest years of his pontificate: a major congress was organised by the Vatican university jointly with the Catholic university of Lublin to demonstrate that Slav culture, particularly its Polish variant, was as important as Western culture in the historical formation of the spiritual unity of Europe: *The Common Christian Roots of the European Nations*, 2 vols. (Florence: Le Monnier, 1982).

[20] Michael Müller, 'In cerca dell'Europa: realtà e rappresentazioni di un continente', *Contemporanea*, 1 (Jan. 1999), 81–7.

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The dominant interpretative version – the concept of civilisation of the Enlightenment-cum-nineteenth-century liberal progress – is an exclusive self-description of western Europe, in which the values developed in the West are regarded as spreading to the less developed societies of eastern, central and south-eastern Europe. Since well before the Enlightenment to the present day, the representation of Europe has been divided into two unequal parts, in which Western values constitute the norm, to which the 'other' parts of Europe are expected to conform; those that resist Western ideals are considered as being outside Europe. The frontiers of Europe, indeed, were historically variable precisely because of the exclusion of Turkey and Russia. In the case of Turkey, little comment is needed, given the millennial role of the Ottoman empire as the 'other' in the distorting mirror of Europe's self-image.[21] 'European' perceptions of Russia – and the corresponding Russian perceptions of Europe, from the slavophiles to the Soviet Union – are more revealing, because of their historical shifts, dependent on the particular conjuncture of international relations, which conditioned the West's acceptance or exclusion of Russia as part of Europe: under Catherine the Great and Alexander I in his anti-Napoleonic period, Russia was (more or less) regarded as European, only to be vociferously evicted with the Polish revolution of 1830, and even more violently after the Bolshevik revolution, and during the Cold War.

The West/East divide constitutes the fundamental division in the historical representation of Europe, not surprisingly contested by historians from, or specialists on, eastern Europe, from Oscar Halecki to Norman Davies. As Halecki observed in 1950: 'Those who call European civilization Western are inclined to decide in advance one of the most difficult and controversial questions of European history'.[22] But reduction of the level of observation multiplies rather than reducing what is understood by Europe. 'Eastern Europe' is itself an invention of eighteenth-century Western political publicists, replacing the earlier term of the 'North', in recognition of the new role of the Russian empire as a major European power, following Peter the Great's defeat of Sweden. 'Central Europe' or, even more telling, *Mitteleuropa* are concepts with little geographical precision and constantly fluctuating frontiers: the term is deployed in the first instance as a way of distancing one's own country from Russia, but – depending on whether the writer is Habsburg, Hungarian, Polish or Czech – it also stakes an implicit claim to the European status of one's own nation by exclusion of those further to the east or south-east of the country's frontiers. Antonis

[21] Eighteenth-century travellers' guides clearly distinguished between the European and the non-European parts of the Ottoman empire: Boucher de la Richarderie, *Bibliothèque universelle des voyages*, 6 vols. (Paris, 1808), II, 50–267. The power of such ancient prejudice is illustrated by the extreme position of the distinguished rural sociologist Henri Mendras, in his *L'Europe des européens* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), that the territories long dominated by the Ottoman empire need to be excluded from the *'true'* (*vraie*) Europe – besides the Balkans, a good part of Hungary, but (curiously) not Slovakia.

[22] O. Halecki, *The Limits and Divisions of European History* (London-New York: Sheed & Ward, 1950), 11; N. Davies, *Europe. A History* (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); E. H. Dance, *History the Betrayer. A Study in Bias* (London: Hutchinson, 1960), 108–16; D. Groh, *Russland und das Selbstverständnis Europas* (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1963); 'L'immagine dell'Occidente nella società sovietica', *Europa Europe*, 2, 1 (1993), *passim*.

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Liakos has argued that the negative image of the Balkans was constructed by European diplomats and writers after they had dismantled the Ottoman empire to the point that – analogous to Edward Said's 'orientalism' – it became interiorised as a form of 'negative conscience' by local intellectuals.[23] National perspectives are little better: the history of Europe looks very different when narrated by an English, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, Polish, Serbian, Greek, Romanian historian – not to speak of a Scots, Catalan or Belorussian, Estonian or Albanian . . . The images, representations and implicit expectations of European history and values change according to the cultural environment and (quintessentially national) education of the author: each embodies hierarchies and exclusions. Given the longevity and variety of experiences that constitute the millennial history of Europe, it is hardly surprising that its past offers a multiple and composite treasure-house, as great in its potential usage as any single national (or nationalistic) history. It is enough to compare narrations of the history of Europe written in the leading nation states with those originating in minor states, or in Scandinavia and the Mediterranean, to realise that they are not only multiple but incompatible: all can claim to be heirs and deep-rootedly part of Europe precisely because the history of 'Europe' serves as a common object of appropriation.

Histories of Europe and the European Union

Histories of Europe and European histories are both fashionable today. This is hardly surprising, given the decision of the European Commission in the mid-1980s to extend its activities to the cultural field, and the commitment of the Maastricht Treaty of 1992 (Title IX, Article 128) to 'bring the common cultural heritage to the fore'.[24] At the institutional level, major funding was provided from the 1980s to heighten the visibility of the European Community (EC) in universities, first for lectureships and courses on European integration and then for mobility of students through the Erasmus/Socrates programme. But it had been a longstanding concern, well before any policy decisions, of supranational European institutions to encourage, even to commission, professional (scilicet academic) interest in the history of Europe, viewed as a whole, with the implicit understanding of its unity: Max Beloff, a passionate Europeanist, and Geoffrey Barraclough, more sceptical, both wrote essays on the European idea at the invitation of the Council of Europe,[25] and an informal group of contemporary historians of Europe was sponsored by Brussels in the 1960s, which presumably is at the origins of Jean-Baptiste Duroselle's volume on the idea of

[23] Antonis Liakos, 'The Canon of European Identity: Transmission and Decomposition', in Luisa Passerini, ed., *The Question of European Identity: a Cultural-Historical Approach,* IUE Working Papers (Florence: HEC, 1998), n.1; E. Said, *Orientalism: Western Concepts of the Orient* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978).

[24] Chris Shore, *Building Europe. The Cultural Policies of European Integration* (London: Routledge, 2000), ch. 2.

[25] Max Beloff, *Europe and the Europeans* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1957); Geoffrey Barraclough, *European Unity in Thought and Action* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1963); to which can be added René Albrecht-Carrié, *The Unity of Europe. An Historical Survey* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1966).

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Europe.[26] It would be unfair to attribute such concern purely to growing awareness and worries about the imbalance between the economic success of the EC/EU (European Union) and the emotive deficit of its symbolic appeal in the process of the construction of a future Europe. But it would be difficult to deny that a causal relationship exists between the abundance of textbooks on the history of Europe that have appeared recently, the cultural policy of the EU (and other European institutions) and publishers' expectations of the university market.

Until recent years what was common to such histories was their often explicitly teleological message. During and immediately following the Second World War, given the intensity of the reaction against the disastrous consequences of nationalism, this was understandable: as John Bowles wrote in 1948, his aim was 'to present the unity and development of the great cosmopolitan traditions of Europe, to relate economic and cultural achievement to the political background, and to set the mythologies of current nationalism in their proper place'.[27] The Cold War, with US encouragement of collaboration between the nation states of Western Europe, then offered a powerful justification for identifying Europe with the West. With the collapse of the communist regimes, in some countries, markedly in Germany before and after the reunification of its two states, the promotion of European history at the textbook level was also seen as a counterweight to the revival of national and nationalistic history.[28]

There has always been an intimate link between the writing of history and political developments, as the merest glance at the historiography of national histories illustrates. Consequentially, in our postmodern age, to pretend that professional historians are immune from political influences can only sound disingenuous. Nevertheless, too close a relationship with public institutions in the production of history books – especially textbooks – is worrying, in terms of both methods and intent. Heavy-handed Stalinist censorship and rewriting of history has always been an easy target of criticism and mockery. No such censorship exists in Western democracies, but the persuasions of public policy have become influential. 'The cultural politics of European integration', to quote the sub-title of Chris Shore's recent book,[29] have been actively pursued by European Commission officials and federalist oriented historians and politicians in order to produce histories of Europe that would counteract the hegemony of national histories, on the one hand by insistence on Europe's cultural continuity, presented as of universal significance, on the other by underplaying

[26] Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *L'idée d'Europe dans l'histoire* (Paris: Denoël, 1965).

[27] Bowles, *Unity of European History*, 7.

[28] Thomas Risse and Daniela Engelmann-Martin, 'Identity politics and European integration. The case of Germany', in Anthony Pagden, ed., *The Idea of Europe. From Antiquity to the European Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press and Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2002), 287–316. As against this, it is important to bear constantly in mind that, in various of the post-USSR and Yugoslav states, history texts became more markedly, sometimes virulently, nationalistic: Paolo Pezzino, ed., 'I manuali di storia contemporanea. Esperienze nazionali a confronto', *Passato e Presente*, 55 (2002), 53–80.

[29] Shore, *Building Europe*.

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the conflictuality of Europe's political and religious past. Denis de Rougemont's anthology of decontextualised quotations from Hesiod to the contemporary world, proclaimed to express 'prises de conscience successives de notre unité de culture' can easily (and correctly) be dismissed as mere political federalist froth; Jean-Baptiste Duroselle's identification of the idea of Europe with the rare occasions when Europe was discussed as a whole at the end of exhausting wars (Westphalia in 1648, Vienna in 1815, Versailles in 1919) and the historically recent creation of international mechanisms (International Court of Justice, EEC), bears the authority of a Sorbonne professor.[30] One of the problems of so close a relationship between public policy and professional historians is that the credibility of the latter is only too easily diminished: the hesitant, intermittent and belated constitution of supranational institutions to prevent or regulate conflict – of which the European Community certainly forms part – is far more convincingly argued in Hinsley's *Power and the Pursuit of Peace* than by Duroselle, precisely because Hinsley studied this major issue in its own terms and contexts, without *arrière-pensées* about a (predestined) point of arrival.[31]

In recent years the role of public policy in the preparation of school history textbooks has become more intrusive than the activities of the initially small group of Europhile contemporary historians close to Brussels. Like the League of Nations after the First World War, the objectives of the Council of Europe and the *raison d'être* of the Georg Eckert Institut für internationale Schulbuchforschung at Braunschweig are politically more than correct: to combat the dangers of nationalistic, ethnic, xenophobic, racist intolerance and prejudices, particularly in the ex-communist old and new states of the former USSR and south-east Europe.[32] Their proposals on how to achieve this end, however, amount to directives on the writing of history and geography textbooks, in which the centrality of Europe is to be stressed relative to that of national histories: 'Pupils must realise that Europe plays a highly significant role in the course of twentieth-century history', in the words of Falk Pingel, director of the Braunschweig centre.[33] The Council of Europe only makes recommendations. But since the choice of school textbooks in many European

[30] Denis de Rougemont, *Vingt-huit siècles de l'Europe: la conscience européenne à travers les textes d'Hesiode à nos jours* (Paris: Payot, 1961); Duroselle, *L'idée d'Europe; idem, Europe: A History of its Peoples* (London: Viking, 1990). For a collection of claims to Europe's past and hence its destiny by the former rector of the Collège d'Europe: Henri Brugmans, 'Europe: une civilisation commune, un destin, une vocation', in H. Brugmans, ed., *Europe: Rève–Aventure–Réalité* (Brussels: Elsevier, 1987).

[31] F. H. Hinsley, *Power and the Pursuit of Peace. Theory and Practice in the History of Relations between States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963).

[32] *Against Bias and Prejudice: the Council of Europe's Work on History Teaching and History Textbooks*, Council of Europe Report (Strasbourg, 1986); Falk Pingel, *The European Home: Representations of 20th Century Europe in History Textbooks* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2000). The Council of Europe recommendations on the teaching of history, as an essential basis 'for the formation of a responsible and active citizen, and for the development of respect of all forms of difference, respect founded on an understanding of national identity and the principles of tolerance' can be found on the website: *www.coe.int*.

[33] Pingel, *European Home*, 110–11. Duroselle was responsible for the particularly unfortunate initiative of a European history textbook written by twelve historians from different countries and published in

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countries remains subject to varying degrees of official control (I suspect that in only a minority of European countries, including Britain, is free choice among the products of a competitive publishing market the norm), such recommendations cannot but create concern.

For a period of a century and more, the practice of historians – often a consciously self-assigned role, particularly in the phase of nation-building – was to write narrative histories and textbooks that were structured around the assumption of the 'naturalness' of a linear evolution to the nation state. In this sense, there is nothing intrinsically different between the expectations of these national historians that they were forming patriotic citizens and the direct link proposed by European institutions between guidelines for history textbooks and the formation of European citizens. In practice, as I have argued elsewhere, it is likely to prove more difficult to convey the message of European identity as an element of 'Europe-building' than that of national identity through nation-building, precisely because the emotive appeal of nationalism has been rooted so effectively: in a context of accelerating modernisation, 'nation-builders' weakened, absorbed and transformed pre-national ties of identity and solidarity, whereas Europeanists have, so far, bypassed the obstacle of national sentiment by the empty phrase of 'unity in diversity'.[34]

On the other hand, the role played by historians in nation building and the persuasion exercised by European institutions for the adoption of unitary histories of Europe are radically different, on the one hand, in terms of the self-critical awareness of contemporary historians of the limits of positivism and the traps of bias, conscious and unconscious, in the use of sources; and, on the other, because of the profound transformation of the forms of social communication. This is not the place to elaborate on the former theme, which has become a well-rehearsed debate, much stimulated by postmodernism, about the intervention of the historian as filter and interpreter. But it is necessary to be more precise about the second issue, and in particular about three interrelated aspects of the forms of social communication: the relationship between public authorities and ordinary citizens, the profession of writing history, and the ways in which historical knowledge is transmitted today. These are major issues, which certainly merit fuller discussion than the bare agenda I am listing. The first aspect derives from the undeniable extension and ubiquity of the role of the state in the daily life of the population in the course of the twentieth century: a (minor) consequence of this has been that directives from above are passed down to citizens with a frequency, rapidity and directness unprecedented in earlier periods, and that the citizens have become accustomed to receive and (generally) to accept them. Recommendations by public authorities, although obviously distant from censorship (in intent as well as language), function as a blander form of persuasion and have a (perhaps progressively) constrictive effect on the autonomy and liberty of enquiry of

1992, which identified Europe with member states of the EC (plus Scandinavia, Austria and Switzerland, but forgetting Greece): Davies, *Europe. A History*, 42–5.

[34] Woolf, 'Europea: una sola storia, un'unica identità?', 232–4.

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the professional historian.[35] The second and third aspects are specific to a far shorter time span. In recent decades, visibly since the 1970s, there have been profound changes in who writes history, how it is transmitted and how it is received. Until well after the Second World War, the historical profession could claim a monopoly of historical writing and feel confident that the historical narratives of its more productive members would be read (or leave approximate traces, via memories of schoolteachers and textbooks) and discussed within the context set by the author; or exploited, in lieu of original research, by writers of 'popular' history. But over the past three decades, the history 'market' has been transformed by communications technology. Historical fiction has a respectable genealogy, as (albeit of more recent lineage) have historical films. Cinema and television have facilitated the construction of images of the past that can ignore the critical use of sources of the professional historian, and reach an infinitely wider public: instantly produced history has become a form of entertainment in its public usage, placed on the same level of credibility as that of the profession.[36] The certainties of history appear to have vanished, threatened from within by the linguistic turn, from without by public and political usage of the past.

Whether this has contributed to the ignorance among adolescents of their national history, lamented by historians in most Western countries, remains to be analysed. What appears evident among school students is a selective lack of interest in the traditional (what I would call official) narratives of national history and in the ritual commemorations of the two world wars or Resistance movements, that – if widespread – must be a cause for worry because of the intimate connection between national identity and civic consciousness.[37] It is evident that analogous concerns underlie the preoccupation of the European Commission and the Council of Europe with the content of history textbooks.[38] But endeavours to construct an 'official' version of the history of Europe, which stresses 'a common historical and cultural patrimony' as the basis for a democratic Europe, risk losing plausibility – like official national histories – by becoming part of a ritualistic rhetoric, in this instance by the remoteness of the recital of collective memories and identities common to Europe that downplay the conflictuality of Europe's past. Perhaps the greater the geographical scale, the more difficult it is to invent symbols that arouse collective sentiments by evoking associations with personal memories, places or events. There is little evidence that the abundant invention, from above, of European symbols - from flags and anthems to maps and remembrance days – can create links with popular collective memories or traditions, which are, almost by definition, local or national.

[35] This has been particularly visible in Italy since Berlusconi's victory in 2001, where the postfascist and Catholic parliamentary majority press for an enquiry into what are condemned as ideologically slanted textbooks: Gabriele Turi, 'Una storia italiana', *Passato e Presente*, 59 (2003), 89–96.

[36] Nicola Gallerano, *L'uso pubblico della storia* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1995).

[37] E.g., Keith Robbins, 'National identity and history: past, present and future', *History*, 245 (Oct. 1990), 369–87.

[38] 'Council of Europe recommendation on the teaching of history in Europe in the 21st century', 31 Oct. 2001.

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The apparent crisis in the reception of professional historical narratives has left a fertile terrain for the sowing of historical myths. While the Council of Europe recommends textbooks on the history of Europe that will encourage values of reciprocal understanding and tolerance, the decade since the dissolution of communist regimes has confirmed the coagulating political power of nationalistic myths of territory, language and history, even of blood ties, not only in ex-Yugoslavia, but in the Basque country, Corsica or 'Padania'. I may be too pessimistic, but there is a risk of backlash when the rhetoric of historical myths of Europe no longer appeals.

Is a European history possible?

The profound shift in historiographical interests over the past generation has inevitably led to a more critical approach towards earlier modes of writing the history of Europe. The move away from political–institutional and economic history towards the social and the cultural, the retreat from explicatory models based on *grandes thèses* to the detailed and the micro-reconstruction, the influence of methods of literary, linguistic and philosophical textual analysis applied to the traditional sources of historians, have all rendered more problematic what we understand by a history of Europe.

Perhaps only in the field of economic history has the specificity and superiority of Europe's economic growth over the long run been upheld, most notably by David Landes and Eric Jones.[39] Within the context of the classic Enlightenment–liberal paradigm of Europe's historical evolution, their sophisticated analyses reinforce the identification of Europe with the West – or, more precisely, the north-west. But even in economic historiography, Sidney Pollard's questioning in terms of the depth and persistence of regional economic disparities of the aggregate national statistics produced by the state as the basic unit of comparison, and the numerous local researches that emerged from the fertile debate on proto-industrialisation,[40] marked a shift towards a more complex and contradictory interpretation of economic development within Europe as a whole.

It is enough to compare the classic histories of Europe discussed earlier (the first two parts of this article) with those produced in recent years to appreciate the differences that have resulted from the radical reorientation of historical research themes, approaches and methodologies. Chabod's *Storia dell'idea d'Europa* (1943–4) was a study in the grand tradition of the history of ideas as linear progress, centred on great writers; for Peter Rietbergen (1998), the cultural history of Europe is embedded in the socioeconomic evolution of its different regions.[41] The classic theme

[39] David S. Landes, *The Unbound Prometheus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969): Eric L. Jones, *The European Miracle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). For an interesting and courageous counterbalance to growth as the dominant theme: James K. J. Thomson, *Decline in History. The European Experience* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998).

[40] Sidney Pollard and Lucian Hölscher, eds., *Region una Industrialisierung. Studien zur Rolle der Region in der Wirtschaftsgeschichte der letzten zwei Jahrhunderte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980); Sheilagh C. Ogilvie and Markus Cerman, eds., *European Proto-industrialization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[41] Peter Rietbergen, *A Cultural History of Europe* (London-New York: Routledge, 1998).

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of European civilisation is proposed, with considerable sophistication, by Krzysztof Pomian (1990) in terms of alternating centripetal and centrifugal cycles between national sentiment and European unification, from Christianity to the EC.[42] Norman Davies, in his massive, polemical, eccentric and entertaining history of Europe, self-consciously devotes as much space to central-eastern Europe as to the west, to the Mediterranean as to the north.[43] The ambitious collective history of Europe published by Einaudi (1993–8) poses the question as to what alternative Europes might have developed by focusing on why the different areas of Europe should have followed such distinctive paths.[44] The most recent book on the history of the idea of Europe (2002) consists of a collection of essays that query and problematise the concept itself.[45]

Is it possible to write a European history responsive to the questions and methods of historical research today? My response is tentatively positive on condition that it be conceived from the outset as an essay in comparative history that downplays the inbuilt tendency to identify what is common to Europe, by paying at least as much attention to the responses and reactions in the different regions of Europe as to the trends common to each chronological phase. I would suggest that it might be possible to arrive at such a balance by structuring the study at three levels.

The first level is a comparative history of Europe *from above*. By this I mean a history of Europe that uses the process of state formation as the unifying theme across the centuries, comparing the vast range of differences across geographical areas in order to explore their significance over the short, medium and long term: for example, the implications (institutional, legal, military, of social organization) of the frontier dividing imperial Rome from 'barbarian' Europe, as, later, Christian Europe from the Arab and Ottoman states; the precocious experiences of state formation in France, England and Iberia; the city states of Italy and Flanders; the spatial (and climatic) conditions as constraints on state formation in Scandinavia or Russia; and so on, through to nationalism and the role of the twentieth-century state (fascist, communist and social). What we, as historians, regard as the dominant 'mode' of each period – feudal states, absolute monarchy, republicanism, liberalism and the science of administration, economic planning, and so on – would need to be brought out clearly, not to assume that the more economically or militarily 'successful' states set the norm of European progress, but in order to describe and explain the implications in terms of power relations in a changing Europe of the chronological belatedness of processes of state formation. Such a framework would render more plausible why being part of Europe was seen as desirable (or necessary) by elites and rulers, as later by nationalist movements.

The second level is a comparative history of Europe *seen from below*. The historical framework in this instance would be the forms of social organisation specific to

[42] Krzysztof Pomian, *L'Europe et ses nations* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990).
[43] Davies, *History of Europe*.
[44] *Storia d'Europa*, 5 vols. (Turin: Einaudi, 1993–8).
[45] Pagden, *Idea of Europe*.

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the period, again with insistence on the profound differences across geographical areas of Europe – feudalism, merchant cities, peasant societies (in plains, mountains, islands, etc.), religion, urban forms, and so on. The unifying approach that could avoid the dangers of static descriptive typologies would be to focus on the impact on communities and their social organisation of major exogenous developments, such as merchant-, proto- and industrial capitalism, state formation, transformation of communications (roads, railways, sea and air transport), what social scientists facilely call modernisation. Once more, the range of responses in the different regions of Europe would characterise the approach, as would the implications of the period and the length of time during which such exogenous processes of change penetrated and were absorbed. There is little need to stress the significance of the experience of migrants at this level, as conduits of novelty (techniques, beliefs . . .), but also, in their persons, catalysts of power, suspicion and discrimination.

The third level relates to the social experiences of Europe lived subjectively by individuals and groups. How and in what ways was 'Europe' experienced? It is probably the most difficult to explore until recent times. But it is also the dimension where research methodologies over recent decades have most to offer, for example in the study of the reception, adaptation and appropriation by local elites of religious beliefs and heresies, or of the printed word, or of national ideals among 'minority' communities. Again, the role of migration is central, as *Schicksalgemeinschaft* in a continent that, over the centuries, has experienced massive movements of populations and individuals, internally and across the seas.

It should be evident, even from these briefest of notes, that such a European history will never be written. Not least because it would need to keep constantly present non-European economic, social and cultural processes of evolution – for example, Arab society and culture in the Middle Ages, China into the early modern period, the United States in the past two centuries. Few historians in recent times, to my knowledge, have dared to take on such a challenge.[46] But as an 'ideal-type' proposition, perhaps it can serve a purpose, in line with contemporary historical research, as a step towards a European history that concentrates on the variety of societal developments rather than the history of Europe's states.

[46] William McNeill is probably the major exponent: W. H. McNeill, *A World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); *idem*, *Polyethnicity and National Unity in World History* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1986); Eric Jones is certainly meritorious in this respect: Jones, *European Miracle*; idem, *Growth Recurring. Economic Change in World History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

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