

## **Etienne François: Between National and Global: Europe as a Research Area<sup>1</sup>**

Lecture on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the All European Academies at the

ALLEA General Assembly 2014

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Dear State Secretary Haugstad

Dear President Stenseth

Dear President Stock

Dear colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

In the twenty years since the creation of ALLEA, the discourse of the humanities and social sciences in all the European countries (and frequently in those outside Europe as well) has been dominated by two theses:

The first is that the nation and the nation-state are out-dated realities and that therefore the national level must be abandoned.

The second is that our world is now global and for this reason the global level is the only one that counts.

This point of view could be summed up by adapting a notion that was central to European culture for hundreds of years: “Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus” - “No salvation within the Nation; No salvation without Globalisation”.

Because these two theses have always been presented and perceived as self-evident, we tend to forget that they in fact belong to two distinct, if not contradictory, orders (in the sense that

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank warmly Godfrey Rogers for his English translation.

Pascal gives to the notion of order): on the one hand, the order of empirical and analytical observation, on the other, that of normative, almost ritualistic injunction.

What is the truth of the matter? Does everything really happen on a global scale? Is the national level definitively outmoded? And what of Europe in this context, this Europe that is the reason for the existence of ALLEA?

These are the questions my lecture hopes to go some way towards answering. Far from being speculative, the answers it tries to provide are all based on the observation and experience gathered in the course of a career that it has been my good fortune to pursue in both France and Germany, and that has made me equally at home in both French and German research and academic environments.

Following the well-established rules of French rhetoric, my exposition is in three parts. The first deals with globalisation, the second with the nation, and the third, of course, with Europe.

### **Part one: Globalisation, reality and limits**

That “globalisation” is an undisputed reality of the world in which we live is too obvious to require further commentary. The first domain where this is valid is of course that of the economy, with the consequences we all feel in our everyday lives. It applies no less in the field of research. From this angle, the growth in the historical sciences of the new approaches grouped under the names of “global history”, “connected history”, “shared history” and “entangled history”, represents a progress I am certain will contribute greatly to a better understanding of the past and the present. All the more so given that with new approaches have come new practices. These include the increased opportunities for meeting and exchanging at a truly global level; the development of pluri-national and transnational research projects and extended periods of foreign research and teaching; and the widespread movement to establish Institutes of Advanced Studies, where researchers from varied disciplinary and geographical backgrounds are invited for year-long stays, to pursue projects of their choice. The results appear finally in the generalisation of English - or more accurately of international English, the so called “globish” - as the global language of scientific communication, but also in the increasing place taken by this language in teaching and in research training. The possibilities for communicating and collaborating with researchers

from around the world have never been greater. All this adds up to a not insignificant benefit, far outweighing the “collateral damage” that is the inevitable drawback. Woe betides the historian today who dares to approach a funding body with a research project that lacks a global or at least transnational dimension!

Once the above points have been duly noted and reiterated, however, the fact remains that the practical reality does not correspond exactly to the ideal of universality proclaimed by the champions of globalisation. Researchers with a genuinely “global” reach - with a command of international English and one or more western languages but also of at least one non-western language - are the exception, especially in the English-speaking countries and in Western Europe, although Eastern Europe, Africa and Asia tend to perform better in this respect. And yet just as it is unthinkable that one could claim to be an expert on Antiquity without knowing at least Latin and Greek, so use of the new approaches and fluency in international English do not on their own make a “global” researcher, at least not in the humanities and social sciences. It may be added that as regards research, what is described as the “international scientific community” closely reproduces the characteristics of economic and political globalisation—namely the domination of the “globalised” sphere by the top Anglo-American universities and to a lesser extent by those who follow their model, whether in research topics and scientific “codes” or in the way research is organized and researchers are trained. In other words, the result in reality is a hierarchical and unbalanced system, one that includes but also excludes, and functions in a way that restricts as much as it increases opportunities. An exception in this respect is the Institute of Advanced Studies at Nantes, where I had the good fortune to be a fellow in 2009, in that it admits equal numbers of “western” and “non-western” researchers in its annual intake.

As a historian, finally, perhaps I may be allowed to remind that today’s globalisation, often presented as radically new, is itself the continuation of several earlier phases of globalisation going back to the late fifteenth century. A reminder all the more relevant since these earlier phases were European in origin. They were intrinsically linked to a European urge to world mastery, and to what was its main driving force - the competition between the states and nations of early-modern and then nineteenth-century Europe, to expand and to colonize and dominate the world. Without the expansion of the leading European nations - first Spain and Portugal, then France and England, Denmark and Sweden, and finally Russia, Germany and Italy—and their implantation beyond Europe’s geographical boundaries, would the world

have ever been globalised? From a historical perspective, globalisation is a pure invention and creation of Europe and its nations.

### **Part two: The nation: a lively corpse**

So we come back to the nation, which far from being moribund, as some are fond of saying, shows on the contrary every sign of vigour. In his famous lecture “Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?” [What is a nation?] given at the Sorbonne in 1882, the French scholar on Middle East languages and civilisations, philosopher and writer, Ernest Renan declared that “nations are not eternal. They have a beginning, and they will have an end. They will probably be replaced by a European Federation”. If there is wide acceptance today for Renan’s view of nations as constructs, there seems nothing to suggest that nations are threatened with imminent demise. This observation applies in particular to some of the main actors of globalisation—the United States, China, India, Brazil, Japan and Korea, are all well established and self-confident nations, committed to promoting and defending their respective national interests. Besides, the first political body with a truly universal remit, is it not called the “United Nations”?

The same observation is no less valid for the continent that prides itself on having done most to go beyond the level of the nation, namely Europe. National tensions and even conflicts, as seen between Russia and Ukraine, Flanders and Wallonia, Catalonia and Spain, Scotland and Britain, not to mention the resurgent nations in the former eastern and south-eastern Europe, or the nations like Norway and Switzerland that have chosen to stay outside the European Union - provide striking illustrations of this point and bear out the remark made over fifty years ago by the German medievalist Herman Heimpel: “Dass es Nationen gibt, ist historisch das Europäische an Europa” [The existence of nations is what is European in the history of Europe]. It is true that the Member States of the European Union, and particularly those in the Eurozone, have delegated large amounts of sovereignty to the institutions of the European community. Nevertheless the nation continues to be the prime framework in which politics is exercised and in which citizenship and democracy find expression. Similarly, the nation remains the main framework for the construction, expression, and evolution of collective memory. National memories are of course inter-linked and in constant interaction. But each retains its own unique characteristics and we cannot speak of a “European memory” in the singular. The remembered reality of Europe is composed rather of “divided and shared

memories”, and our efforts should, as Luisa Passerini has so aptly remarked, be focused on making these memories “shareable”.

Above all, let us not forget that nation-states played a key role, particularly from the nineteenth century onwards, in the development and organisation of modern science and research. This observation holds for Europe as a whole, but is equally valid for the non-European countries to which European teaching and research institutions have been exported (starting with the USA) or where they have served as models (as in Japan). The dynamics of this process, based on competition and emulation but also rivalry between the different nations, explain the strong similarities observed between the countries, be it at the level of academies or universities. Within Europe, considerable efforts have also gone into forging closer ties and encouraging exchange and cooperation. But this does not alter the fact that scientific cultures can vary considerably between countries (and not only in the domain of the humanities and social sciences), nor - as has been my experience all through my own career - that the training and careers of researchers continue even today to be organized primarily in the national (and disciplinary) framework. In this sphere as in others, Europe, because it is the product of distinct nations, languages and cultures, is quintessentially pluralistic.

### **Part three: Creating an authentic European research area**

Europe - in the true meaning of the term, that is, Europe that goes beyond the European Union - has become steadily more important. The creation of ALLEA twenty years ago was one consequence of this deep-seated trend towards what can be called the “Europeanisation” of Europe and Europeans, a process that has increased in intensity and scope since 1989. This structurally transnational process, reflected in the growth of mobility, circulation and exchange, in the standardisation affecting consumption, behaviour and mentalities, and in the development of foreign language skills, amply compensates for the doubts and uncertainties over the future of Europe and indeed for the rise of Euro-scepticism. It has affected not only our research subjects - witness the growth of research projects on European topics - but also our scientific practices and research training procedures. We see evidence of this in the creation in 1972 of the European University Institute in Florence, followed two years later by the European Science Foundation seated in Strasbourg, and more recently in 2007 of the European Research Council. Evidence too in the growing numbers of universities who are re-establishing themselves as “European universities”, like the European University Viadrina at

Frankfurt (Oder), and in the proliferation of multinational graduate schools and bi-national or European Ph.Ds. This represents a quantum leap forward and corresponds to the emergence of a new dimension of the European reality - Europe as a research area. What can be done to enhance the reality and substance of Europe as research area?

It seems to me that this objective involves two priorities. The first is the need to embrace the European legacy in its entirety, characterized by a long-term historical perspective, a unique nature, a complex form, and by openness to the rest of the world. The long-term perspective inasmuch as the history of Europe goes back to the eleventh century (even though the word Europe as understood today is of more recent origin, going back no further than the seventeenth century). Then its unique nature, since as the philosopher Rémi Brague has observed, the reference points for European civilisation - namely Christianity as a religion of Middle Eastern origin, Greek literature and philosophy, and Roman law - are external to and older than Europe itself. The complexity of its form, in that from the outset Europe was pluralistic, and this diversity was the source of its dynamism. And finally its openness to the rest of the world, because from the Middle Ages onwards and even more so after the era of discovery and European expansion, Europe has always construed and defined itself in relation to the rest of the world.

The second priority is to revive the European vision and our belief in Europe as a project for the future on the base of common values. The motivation here should not be negative, in compensation for Europe's loss of influence, the European population representing less of 10 % of world population, albeit still producing more than a quarter of global income. On the contrary we should emphasize the positive reasons: Europe has already gained enormously in cohesion and substance since the end of the Second World War and the "turning point" of 1989; Europe is a continent of science and knowledge par excellence; we Europeans still have a unique message for the world; and finally the rest of the world expects Europe to be a continent of the future.

This dual objective represents a major challenge and only a combination of diverse measures will allow us to move forward while at the same time consolidating what has already been achieved. So as not to make my lecture excessively long I propose to outline just six of these measures.

The first comprises action to improve the foreign language skills of future researchers. The Scandinavian practice, requiring proficiency in a minimum of three languages (the mother tongue, English, and at least one other language) combined with knowledge of the literature and culture of each language, should be made the norm across the continent. This would in fact represent a return to one of the oldest European traditions, that of multilingualism. It is a tradition exemplified by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz - the last universal scientist of early modern Europe and also its most impressive researcher, who wrote with equal ease in Latin, French and German, who was at the centre of a network of more than thousand correspondents covering the whole of Europe (a genuine “*res publica litteraria*”), and who was also behind the creation of the Academy of Berlin in 1700, and those of Vienna and Saint-Petersburg.

The second measure is to make standard practice in the training of all early career researchers what the Erasmus programme has already begun to do for a minority, namely provide long study periods in foreign countries - beginning with those of Europe. It is important that these study periods be long enough for researchers to begin to question their own mental habits and preconceived ideas, at the same time fostering awareness of the diversity of the practices and cultures present in Europe, and a willingness to accept pluralism and reciprocal learning. It is also important that these study periods take young researchers not only to Oxford and Cambridge, Berlin and Paris, Barcelona and Florence, but also to Lublin and Bratislava, Cluj and Tirana, Belgrad and Rethymnon. This measure also implies reconnecting with a longstanding European tradition: that of the “*perigrinatio academica*”.

A third key measure would be to have more frequent meetings and exchanges between those in charge at national (or regional) levels of research and research training programmes on a multilateral and Europe-wide basis. This reinforced interaction should aim to encourage working together in mutual respect for the European pluralism, and promote closer coordination and harmonisation of programmes, with a particular focus on ensuring a larger place for the dialectic between the local and regional, the national, the European and the global. At the same time they should give more consideration to transnational changes and to the use of comparative analysis, multiple perspectives, and interdisciplinary approaches - what in French we call “*regards croisés*”. This would be in line with the views of the historian Marc Bloch, who in 1928, here in Oslo, at the sixth international congress of historical

sciences, only ten years after the end of WWI, called for a “comparative history of European societies” in order to promote a new European understanding.

The fourth measure, about which a great deal was heard in the scientific symposium, involves offering young researchers real career development, enabling them to undertake research projects that are not dominated by short-term considerations and that include opportunities for experimentation, innovation and risks with all that this implies. Career prospects need to be compatible with the construction of a personal and family life, which, in the case of women, includes the possibility—and indeed the joy—of also having children. In this respect, the German practice of multiplying short-term contracts combined with the de facto impossibility of obtaining a tenured position before the age of forty, is a good example of what NOT to do — one that I very much hope does not become a model in Europe and will on the contrary be the object of far-reaching reform.

The fifth measure would encourage the development of truly European careers. On the lines of what already happens in many multinational companies, extended foreign study trips that give researchers the possibility (and good fortune) to work in another European country, to experience different research and teaching methods, and to consolidate their foreign language skills, should become the rule instead of being the exception as is the case today. Support for mobility on these lines will not become a reality without Europe-wide technical, legal and administrative procedures to make it possible (such as harmonisation of earnings, language courses, adapted career paths and profiles, and new regulations for pensions).

The sixth and last measure is action to resist the tendency to a growing separation between research and teaching. Consistent with the conception developed in the early nineteenth century by Wilhelm von Humboldt, but also as a result of my own experience in both France and Germany all through my career, I now believe more firmly than ever - and at the risk of stating the obvious - that research and teaching exist as two sides of the same coin, in a relationship of mutual inter-dependence and mutual profit.

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This brings me to my conclusion - I hope I have not tried your patience too greatly. Support for the “Europeanisation” of research and research training will require combined initiatives on a wide front: national and European actions, unofficial and official measures, experiments by grassroots actors and incentives from decision-makers, new European structures and

programmes. All of which will not only take time and resources but will necessarily call into question long-established practices. With what tangible benefits? No one can say, and it is better like this. An attempt to define hard and fast objectives from the outset would be totally counter-productive because the change I have described must be based on free experiment, discussion and comparison, and involve a recognition of Europe's fundamental diversity and a joint search for original solutions. What matters most is that this movement should develop and grow stronger as a partnership between those most directly concerned, that is to say, established and early career researchers, and ministries, academies and universities, transnational networks, international foundations and European institutions. In this way alone, and true to its own memory - what Valéry so aptly termed "the future of the past" - will Europe reconnect with the best of its traditions and become a research area that is genuinely open and creative.

Thank you very much for your attention.

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