

# THE PROFESSION

## josé manuel barroso: political scientist, ecpr member

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### **Abstract**

The following transcript from an interview with the President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso (conducted in July 2007), illustrates how bridge-building between the academic and policy worlds can bring profit to both sides. Barroso discusses his time as a student and teacher of political science at the University of Geneva, Georgetown University, and in his native Portugal, as well as his active membership of the European Consortium for Political Research, and how his academic experience shaped both his world view and political career.

**Keywords** European Commission; José Manuel Barroso; European Union; reform treaty

**M**ore than the readers of most academic journals, those who regularly imbibe *European Political Science (EPS)* are used to seeing work published in these pages by those with experience of the 'real world' of policy-making (see e.g. Pasquino, 2005; Bruton, 2006). Not everyone in the academy believes that exchanges between that world and our world are productive ones, or at least not always. To illustrate the point, one of the most perceptive scholars of our generation<sup>1</sup> argues that 'most academics are poor policy-makers. It is not our profession. Those other guys do it a lot better' (Begg *et al*, 2003: 16).

When one of the 'other guys' visited the University of Edinburgh in November 2006 to receive an honorary doctorate, he impressed upon his hosts that he very much considered himself an academic. In fact, on this occasion the President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, spoke at length about how his formative years as a student and teacher of political science at Georgetown University, the University of Geneva, and in his native Portugal had shaped both his world view and political career. Specifically, he emphasised how important had been his involvement in the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR),

which connected him to a network of scholars much wider and more diverse than would ever be possible to construct in any European country, let alone a small state such as Portugal.

Before leaving Edinburgh, President Barroso told the present author, 'we should do something together, something academic', without being more specific than that. After reflection, various ideas for possible projects were rejected such as (say) trying to replicate George Ross' legendary stint as a fly-on-the-wall for six months in the *cabinet* of Jacques Delors in the early 1990s (see Ross, 1995). Instead, it was proposed that a 'reading list' of the most influential works published on European integration in (say) the past 10 years would be prepared for President Barroso on the basis of an open poll of European Union (EU) academics. The list would be presented to the President several months before a scheduled interview, during which his views on the works selected – as well as his general perspective on the value (or not) of academic work for those living in the policy world – would be solicited.<sup>2</sup>

The transcript that follows is based on just such an interview. It was conducted in Brussels on 12 July 2007 (the works that President Barroso read and commented on were Pollack, 1997; Moravcsik, 1998; Manners, 2002; Scharpf, 2002; Hooghe and Marks, 2003). *EPS* readers will particularly wish to note President Barroso's thoughts on his past association with the ECPR (towards the middle of the interview). More generally, President Barroso expressed considerable respect for the work of the political scientists he read as part of this initiative, while also hinting that the 'other guys' may 'do it a lot better' in part because academics often suffer from a complex which derives from their compelling need to be *scientistes*. Whatever our view of the relative value of exchanges between the academic and policy worlds, this initiative certainly

bridged the two worlds in a way that is unusual, and yielded interesting food for thought.

## JP

Welcome President Barroso. You know that these readings were chosen for you in an open poll of EU academics, who were asked to nominate the most influential works published in the last ten years. You've now had a taste of the best scholarship the academy can offer. Do you generally recognise in these theoretical treatments of the EU the same European Union that you confront in practice on a daily basis?

## JMB

First of all, I really admire this kind of work: it is serious work, into which a lot of time, effort, research has been invested. As you say, there is a great concern with theory and theory-building. I personally have a remark – a more general comment – which comes out of my academic experience. I think that sometimes we, if I may refer to myself in this way, we political scientists have a tendency to give too much emphasis to what in France is called the *scientiste* complex: we want to show that we have hard data, statistical correlations and scientific demonstrations. Personally, I would favour more qualitative works in terms of what, for instance, C. Wright Mills called 'intellectual craftsmanship'. Take the subject as kind of an art object and look at it from different perspectives and points of view. We have to invest in knowledge, and perhaps be more realistic about the limitations of hard science. Because honestly – and this is, of course, my bias from the practical side of things – I really believe that sometimes...well, to give you a very simple example: if you have a theory, and you say, 'I have tested this theory about the importance of

something, and in 80 per cent of the cases it has worked; we found how something was initiated and here were the consequences'...and so what? Maybe the other 20 per cent of the cases were the most important ones.... First of all, great respect – really respect – for the academic work here. But, I would try to be more qualitative in the way that things are analysed and assessed. Now, the problems they are addressing – I recognise they are very important and, in fact, I find they feature prominently in my life here as President of the Commission.

## **JP**

That was about to be my next question: if you think about the issues on which these pieces focus – Europe as a global actor, the relationship between the member states and the institutions, 'the unravelling of the central state', and so on – are these the most vital issues of European integration in practice?

## **JMB**

Yes. These are the issues with which we are confronted every day, maybe not always with so much conceptual and theoretical overload [laughter]. But, for example, the issue raised by [Fritz] Scharpf – the question about asymmetry between economic and social Europe: it is a political problem which has confronted me almost every day here. And a lot of my own political communication is to explain exactly this asymmetry. I had to explain by saying: 'look, we in the Union, we do not have the social instruments that you have in the member states. It is not feasible to have a social Europe at the same level that we have internal market Europe'. So, no one is seriously proposing to have national health systems or national education systems or social security systems at the European level. But what can we do at the European level

to show that we also are committed to social principles and solidarity? There are things we can do – for example, we have proposed the European Globalisation Fund, and that was subsequently adapted. That was a precise response. But all of the issues on which these pieces focus are very important from a concrete political point of view and I congratulate the authors because they have brought fresh insights and, in some cases, very useful insights to these cases.

## **JP**

You mentioned Fritz Scharpf's piece: he's written very perceptively on the European social model and was presented with a lifetime achievement award at the same (EUSA) conference at which you spoke in Montreal.<sup>3</sup> I asked him and all of these authors what I should ask you, and he wondered – and here we're asking you to be a visionary – could you imagine a day when we might have common European minimum standards for social assistance and, say, minimum wages (perhaps defined relative to each country's GDP or average wage level). The simple question, I guess, is can social Europe ever be Europeanised in that way?

## **JMB**

It depends on the decisions of the member states. We certainly would not object. But, not in the foreseeable future, honestly, because today some of the member states in Europe – not only the new ones, but also some of the older ones – resist the temptation to harmonise in principle. And this is very, very deep. So what we can do, in fact, is what we are doing so far. In terms of principles, just look at the debate we've had on the Charter of Fundamental Rights. The opposition coming from Britain was because of the social aspects of it, we know that, more than any other consideration. Yes, we can

agree on some principles, but to have regulations that impose a minimum set of standards that are very different from the standards that we have now? Honestly, I don't think that is likely because we don't have the consensus for that at the European level. And some people don't think it would be desirable even if it was possible, and there are contradictory reasons for that. Some of them are opposing because they don't want to go further with integration, and it is not a question of them being more or less social. It's about giving more or less to the EU and concerns the principle of subsidiarity – that's a factor. And in other cases, it's because of competitive reasons and concerns about competitive advantages of their countries in terms of the fiscal systems and the labour legislation they have. So what we can use are soft instruments: from benchmarking to the Open Method of Coordination, which Fritz Scharpf writes about in his article. By the way, since he wrote this article, we've made a lot of progress, since it was written during the initial phase of the Lisbon strategy. Now, in fact, we have enhanced this Open Method of Coordination regarding Lisbon because now we have national reform programmes – OK maybe it's not enough, according to some – but it is the first time ever in economic history that you have twenty-seven countries willing to submit their national reform programmes at the same time to a common, independent institution. We have the national reform programmes, we have the so-called Mr or Mrs Lisbon – a special appointment in all of the member governments in Europe, sometimes at a senior government level, a sort of focal point – and we have the reporting to Brussels with some kind of collective monitoring. So, we have reinforced the Open Method compared to the initial phases of Lisbon, including on social matters. For example, we now have – it was our initiative – a debate on

'flexicurity' based on our communication and, in fact, we are pushing the member states to reflect on whether we can do more and come up with new ideas for reform of their social systems. Some kind of benchmarks have been established. But, to answer very candidly your question, I don't think in the foreseeable future that we will have this kind of hard legislation, if I may use that word, or regulation from Brussels.

## **JP**

Well, we're welcoming you back to the academy today. But you're also the President of the European Commission. You mentioned the Lisbon process and monitoring and benchmarking, none of which is about the Commission proposing legislation using its traditional monopoly on the right of initiative. You've seen our colleague Mark Pollack's piece, which tries to identify both the sources of the Commission's power and authority, as well as the limits on that power and authority. Do you think the Commission has lost power and authority over time?

## **JMB**

No. I think it has been, on the contrary, reinforced. And for a very simple systemic reason. Today we have twenty-seven member states plus the Commission – that's the composition of the Council. So what happens is that the more you enlarge, the more the institutions at the centre naturally have a more important role even in discussion. I can make the comparison because I was Foreign Minister in the early 1990s and was participating in many European Council meetings then. When we were twelve member states, sure, the Commission was making a very important contribution but then the member states – at the European Council level – could change positions more easily and be more decisive in the discussion

itself. Today, together with Council Presidency, the Commission really helps set the agenda. And the conclusion is that it has a much greater say in the shaping of the outcome because with twenty-seven member states and the Commission around the table, honestly, you cannot follow with the same degree of attention twenty-eight speakers. You cannot. So you have to concentrate on what comes as an initiative from the Presidency and the Commission. The central role of the Commission is, indeed, reinforced. And it is reinforced also because of the new member states: they look at the Commission as the honest broker and the fair partner. So this is why the Commission gets, I think, more attention today and why the focal point dimension is reinforced. The dimension factor, from that point of view, works in favour of European decisions. This is sometimes counterintuitive. Some of the analysis that I've seen assumes that it is now much more difficult and much more complex because we are too many. Yes and no. In a way, it is easier. For instance, in the Commission itself: in some ways decision-making is easier because to get a majority against a proposal is much more difficult. Let's put this frankly and put this almost mathematically: if you have around the table twelve or twenty-seven discussing a proposal, it is easier to have a minority against – a strong minority against – if you are twelve than if you are twenty-seven. So if a member of the Commission comes with a proposal that is supported by the President of the Commission, to find a strong majority that objects to it is very difficult. Paradoxically, it is easier to take a decision now. So far, we have not had a single vote during the present Commission – but that is another story. To tell you the truth, I believe the same reinforced role applies to the Council. The European Council has become a more decisive institution in terms of orientation, giving impulse,

putting things in motion. It may also become easier to take decisions in the Council at the level of Heads of State and Government, particularly if the Presidency and Commission work well together. But the role of the Commission is being reinforced now, with twenty-seven, compared with previous years. It is true that we have had some rough history and in the past there were some problems that, honestly, were used by some to undermine the very authority of the Commission. Of course, I'm not the best to judge this – I am not speaking here as someone who is politically objective – but when I take a serious introspective look at the role of the Commission, then I believe it's the real 'stable' power in the EU. Precisely because we now have more countries in the EU, we need to reinforce the institutions. It's a systemic demand. Of course, we need to see afterwards what is the concrete outcome in terms of issues. But systemically I think the role of the Commission is reinforced by enlargement.

## **JP**

May I ask now about the role of the EU as a global actor? Hedley Bull's conclusion in 1982, quoted by Ian Manners in his article, was: 'Europe is not an actor in international affairs, and does not seem likely to become one'. Just today, I read in Zbigniew Brzezinski's new book his claims that: 'today's Europe [is] more extensive in scope yet more distant from America while still impotent globally'. Writing twenty-five years apart, are they both wrong?

## **JMB**

Look, I want to give you an honest answer once again. Is Europe more influential today than it was twenty plus years ago when Bull made his claim? Firstly, it is clear that the way in which the Americans

and others look at us today is by far with more respect and consideration precisely because we are larger. I have no doubts about it because I was participating in a lot of those meetings twenty years ago. President Bush came here, as President of the United States, to the Commission. Not just to the member states, to the Commission, as a supranational institution. And he was seated exactly where you are now. I was, in my current capacity, several times invited to the White House – it happened only once in the history of the EU before, with Jacques Delors. Why is that, just because they like us? No, it is because the European institutions count more now because we are a much bigger player than before – we are now twenty-seven countries, almost 500 million people, the most important trade bloc in the world, the most important donor of foreign aid; all of these things count. Now, of course, being honest, we cannot say that we are a political or defence actor as the Americans or others are, precisely because of our diversity. But look at the literature you sent me: in terms of normative power, I broadly agree, we are one of the most important, if not the most important, normative power in the world. Look, for instance, even beyond the case that he talks about: the death penalty. The candidate countries were adapting their norms to our norms. There is not another case, I'm sorry, where the United States or China or Russia, has been able to have so many other countries following their patterns. We have gone from originally six countries and now we are twenty-seven. It means that all those countries have completely adhered to our standards and our norms. First of all, can you show me any other entity that has achieved this? Not at all. But we now have these common standards in terms of internal market and competition and the environment, you name it. Even foreign policy. Yes, it gets the media's attention when

*'In a way, we are  
a laboratory  
of globalization. The  
most advanced ever.'*

we are divided. But most member states of the EU vote the same way in the United Nations. The pattern is impressive. There is no group of countries in the world that have the same degree of homogeneity. And it is not only the member states but also the candidate states – so it is a form of 'projecting influence' in the 'near abroad'. Look at climate change. We are the ones who are setting the benchmark. It doesn't mean that everybody is going to follow it but the reference point is now the targets that we have agreed. There was a recent analysis of accounting standards that showed the same. Why is that? It is because we have been successful in establishing norms, and applying them to different realities. In a way, we are a laboratory of globalisation. The most advanced ever. That is why I think that Europe is now much more influential than before. And if you look at the global issues, those discussed in the United Nations – such as climate change, environmental protection, human rights, demography – the positions of the EU are setting a trend more or less in the direction of an operational compromise. It is not the American position, so I can understand why Brzezinski is not happy with that outcome, but at the same time it is also not clearly the so-called Third World position. Topologically, if I may use that word, we are in a good position. It is in fact the EU that sets standards for others much of the time.

Now, where we lack influence – and this is really what Brzezinski is talking about – is that we don't have an integrated defence policy or foreign policy. We have made advances in defence cooperation and we have the Common

Foreign and Security Policy, but that does not mean we have one diplomacy replacing the policies of the member states. That we do not have. Now, to be a little cynical: is this necessarily always negative? The fact that we have different positions among ourselves also gives us sometimes the possibility to adapt to the positions of others and help find compromises. Now this is of course very risky territory but you see what I mean. I think that the variety of positions you have across Europe sometimes makes us better able to adapt to a variety of circumstances. We can make ourselves part of different coalitions globally. The variety of the system is sometimes a positive resource in that it makes us able to cope with greater complexity and diversity. So although I am committed to a strong Europe in terms of foreign policy and defence, I'm personally not as anxious and depressed as some of my European friends are about our lack of an integrated foreign policy. The world also needs some variety and sometimes this is good in that it gives us time and flexibility to adapt to different realities. We have to live with this. If we compare the level or extent of European coherence with that of the United States or China or Russia, we will always be disappointed. Of course. But if you compare the level of integration in Europe with any other group of countries, you would say 'what a great achievement'. So it depends on your perspective. You don't have any other group of countries in the world that act so coherently externally. But of course we are not a United States of Europe as you have a United States of America and will certainly not be for the foreseeable future. After all, if you look at it in terms of popularity abroad, are we less popular because we lack an integrated foreign policy? Are European values less popular because we are not a United States of Europe? I don't think so. In terms of quality of life in Europe, is it worse than

in other parts of the world for that reason? I don't think so. What counts for me is the result. The result so far in Europe is that, sure, we have a lot to do on global issues with our main partners including the United States. We don't have the levels of competitiveness of some areas of the American economy, but we have mechanisms of social inclusion that we don't want to give up and are not ready to give up because we believe we can reform them and in fact we are pushing for their reform. And we certainly have higher social and environmental standards than the rest of the world. So my answer is: Europe today counts more. But it is true that we are not an integrated polity, and that means on some foreign or security issues we don't count as much as one might expect looking at our demographic or economic power.

## JP

Mr President, in an interview you did with our colleague Joseph Weiler a few months ago, you mentioned some of the scholars whose work you've found inspiring: Max Weber, Karl Popper, Nicholas Luhman. In the broadest sense, these are works that would be admired by a *comparativist*. You also mentioned courses you've taught in the past on comparative transitions to democracy and comparative European foreign policy. If you had narrowly pursued the wish of your mother that you become a Professor, would you be a Professor of Comparative Politics?

## JMB

I really believe comparison is essential in terms of investigating the essence of politics. I am also a great admirer of Juan Linz, a Spanish national who has done extensive work – mostly in America – in comparative politics. Even if we take *La Democratie in Amerique*, one of the greatest works ever from my point of

view – a true classic – it is a comparison, an explicit comparison between France and America. By the way, sometimes I think Tocqueville didn't need so many statistics or so much operational research [laughter]. But his qualitative work remains essential and some of the most important work of political analysis. And I think to understand Europe, we need to compare. And this is a point I'd like to make that may not make me popular with some of your colleagues. One of the most important issues is still languages. In journalism as in academia or in politics, we find a lot of bias. One of the most important biases is linguistic bias. When I look at the way that people look at Europe in English, it is completely different from the way people look at it in French or German. So my first advice to anyone who wants to study in Europe is to be able to understand four or five languages, and if possible more. Otherwise, you might get little more than an instinct about how the EU is viewed in other languages, and this is not enough. If you read the English literature on the EU, and compare it to the German or French or Spanish or Italian literatures, it seems that they are all focusing on different worlds. It is essential at least to be able to read and understand the media in multiple languages, and to be able to compare these very different 'windows' on Europe. The best way to understand what is happening is to compare. To compare how Europe is viewed in different member states, to compare it with other parts of the world – that's how one gets a sense of perspective. And to use all the tools available: I'm for an eclectic use of different methodologies. I learned them and in fact at certain points I was asked to teach them. If Europe were a painting, it would be some kind of 'mixed media': it's oil, it's acrylic, it's tissue, it's plastic – it's whatever you want to give your final impression. Reality is so eclectic that we have to be eclectic as well. We have to use all the

instruments available. But comparison is really a key because it is the best way to get rid of our own prejudices and biases, and to understand the biases of the system. All systems have biases. It is always important to understand the bias of the system. That was the message of Schattschneider when he wrote of the 'mobilisation of bias'. Politically, the EU is a product of a rich variety of biases: it is biased, it is naturally biased, as every system is naturally biased because of genetic factors or geopolitical ones. But the best way to understand our biases is to try to get rid of them, and this we can achieve by comparison.

## JP

Can we compare the EU as a system to anything else? There's this thing that EU studies people say to each other: 'we have an N of 1 problem'. If you're studying federalism, you have a number – say an N of 5 – Germany, Switzerland, Canada, the United States, Australia – but with the EU, we have an 'N of 1'. Is that a problem analytically?

## JMB

Not really. There are very good comparative works using an approach comparing the EU to Switzerland and the United States and other federal systems. And we can compare the EU to classic international organisations as well as to federal systems and other common markets, and that all sheds light on it. But it's true, we have an 'N of 1': I believe that it is a unique experiment so far. There are others who are inspired by it and by the way, this is precisely what is being discussed in the African Union. I was recently in Accra for the African summit and that was the discussion. What about integration, the African leaders were asking themselves. Should we go for political and economic integration? Or take a

step-by-step approach? Could we agree a sort of Schuman Declaration? My friend, the President of the AU Commission, Mr Konare, the former President of Mali, and President Kufuor of Ghana and all the others were discussing what they could learn from European integration. African leaders were asking 'why can't we do what they've done'? It is a very interesting debate there: should it be original or on the European model? MERCOSUR is the product of a similar debate that has gone on for nearly forty years now. ASEAN is another comparative case: I'm going to Singapore at the end of this year, invited by ASEAN, to a conference to celebrate the 40th anniversary of ASEAN, and ten years of cooperation between Asia and Europe. So, we are by far the most advanced case of regional integration, and there is still a basis for comparison. We have to recognise the uniqueness of our European model but that is not a reason not to compare us to other cases of regional integration and federal systems.

## **JP**

You have had a distinguished background as an academic, with affiliations in Geneva, Georgetown, and in Portugal. And I believe that you were active in the ECPR during your time as an academic. How did that come about?

## **JMB**

It was in Geneva. I was a member of the Department there as a teaching assistant with Professor Dusan Sidjanski. But assistants, as you know, in many European countries have autonomy to some degree and unique opportunities, and often put on their own courses and are sometimes called lecturers. I was a young assistant in Geneva after graduating with a master's there. My Department, of Political Science at the University of

Geneva, was a member of the ECPR network and that gave me opportunities to participate in work with other colleagues from Europe and elsewhere. I remember I attended the Salzburg and Aarhus ECPR conferences and it was mainly comparative work, in fact. It was an opportunity to meet and work with very distinguished scholars, one of whom is now here as the current European ombudsman, Nikiforos Diamandouros. But I also met leading Spanish scholars, from Josep Vallès to (José María) Maravall, and many distinguished German, Italian, British, and Scandinavian scholars. That's how I made contact with a *milieu* that, honestly, was just not in existence in Portugal because political science as a discipline did not exist in the same way. I created the first political science review in Portugal and was the editor; we had a very good advisory board with some of the big names in political science, which helped us achieve very high academic standards. But in Portugal at that moment, in the early 1980s, political science was mostly a discipline of legal studies and that is one reason I went to Switzerland. Yet, the main reason was personal: I expected to go to the States to study, where I had the promise of a scholarship, but my father died and my mother asked me not to move too far away from Portugal to study. So when I was offered a scholarship in Geneva, I accepted and Geneva offered me the possibility of involvement in wider networks. It was a very international Department in which most of the faculties were not Swiss and many of them had extensive international links.

## **JP**

One of the most important works on European integration is Andrew Moravcsik's *The Choice for Europe*, an excerpt from which you have read. Following Moravcsik, do you think European

integration can be explained as a result of rational choices made by national political leaders?

## **JMB**

First of all, I know the works of Moravcsik and have met him personally once. I think he has made a very interesting contribution both to EU studies as well as the debate about Europe. And not just with his book but also a number of articles, including a very interesting one that I remember in particular in *Prospect* magazine about the constitutional settlement. I want to congratulate him not just for his academic work but also his contribution to the debate. Now, if you ask me if I'm an intergovernmentalist or a supranationalist, I think we have both. If I understand him correctly, I think Prof. Moravcsik's point of view is that we have rational choices and institutional rational choices. It starts with national preference formation, then interstate bargaining followed by institutional choice...

## **JP**

Good student!

## **JMB**

...but he explicitly says that he prefers to speak about a framework instead of a model or theory. This is certainly a very interesting perspective but it is not *the* perspective. Why? If I want to understand what's going on about any subject at play in Europe, the logical place to start is to ask: what does Germany or France or Britain want? What does Portugal want? There clearly is a system of national preference formation in each state, which is important to know and understand. It affects how states negotiate with each other and how much and what kind of shaping of the result can be done by EU institutions. That is a point of observation,

and a very interesting one from a realist or classic international relations point of view. From that perspective, it is probably the most accurate. But we can also take another perspective. We can also think systemically – we can look at the system and ask how it integrates contradictory demands. The problem with the choice of perspective, as you know, is that the perspective sometimes also creates the topic, the subject, the language, the discourse – this is one of the problems we have in social sciences generally. The choice of terminology is never neutral or pure. That is why we need to take different perspectives and to have intellectual mobility. For me, as a scientific or academic work, the book of Moravcsik conveys knowledge and brings to my attention factors that I had not understood or thought about. From that point of view, Moravcsik's work is inspiring. But if you ask me my view of which academic concept tells us the most about political and social reality, it is the idea of unintended consequences. I think it was Weber who said there is a very important fact of life in politics, and that is the final result very rarely corresponds to original intentions. And in the EU, this is very true. If one country wants something, it has a strategy. But that strategy often conflicts (or may correspond with) twenty-six other strategies. And the Commission and Parliament also have their strategies – and even inside the institutions, there are other strategies. Take the European Parliament (EP) – you have committees within the EP that are highly autonomous, such as the budgetary committee. So we are talking about a highly differentiated, highly complex, multi-layered system of decision-making in which it is almost a miracle when we arrive at a final outcome or resolution that is exactly as it was originally planned. The EU lacks a clear system of leadership. There is no *direction*, there are only shifting coalitions. I prefer to look at the EU as a very complex

reality or system in which governments make what they believe to be rational choices but that afterwards enter into a highly complex system of unintended consequences and feedback, and in which the institutions themselves have a lot of autonomy. One of the other articles (that of Pollack) talks about the autonomy of the institutions, and, from my own experience, the EU's institutions are far more autonomous than institutionalist theory (much of it focused on American institutions) would lead one to believe. Much, much more. Of course, we are acting in a system in which the member states are the most powerful stakeholders. I'm too young to write my *memoires*, but I have already had some of the Heads of State or Government asking me or pressuring me, saying you have to do this, and we did exactly the opposite....

**JP**

Can't wait for that book!

**JMB**

We are independent. And the institutions are more independent than people usually think. Take the example of DG Competition, and its well-established track record of independence. The level of sophistication and autonomy is straight out of Almond and Verba. They consider that the level of autonomy of the system (amongst other things) is a signal of development. From that point of view, the Commission is one of the most developed political and administrative systems in the world. The Pollack article is very interesting where it speaks of the 'in theatre' agent – I would suggest that we are actually more autonomous than this article suggests. But of course we are working in a system in which the constraints exist systemically but afterwards, in terms of concrete decisions, each decision is to a large degree autonomous.

*'The [EU's] institutions are more independent than people usually think.... The level of sophistication and autonomy is straight out of Almond and Verba.'*

**JP**

Is there any plausible rational choice explanation for the Reform Treaty?

**JMB**

Yes, because of the costs of not having a Treaty. One of the biggest reasons why we need a Treaty is to put to an end to all this discussion about the Treaty.

**JP**

So it is a rational thing to agree to end that discussion.

**JMB**

It is a rational thing. There is, of course, one view held by those who were less enthusiastic about the Treaty that 'oh, the Treaty is not important, the important things are delivery for the citizens'. I agree, that's part of my own discourse, about a Europe of results. But precisely because of that: please, help us solve it, because otherwise we're going to spend four or five more years discussing the same institutional issues. It's a rational thing to have a Treaty. Apart from that, I believe the Treaty we've agreed represents progress principally in terms of clarification of competences. It is an improvement on the current situation in terms of institutional decision-making, qualified majority voting; also in the

external field, if we create a high representative who is also Vice-President of the Commission, it will give us the opportunity to do precisely what others are asking of us: to act more coherently globally as the EU.

**JP**

This is very unfair to put this question to you last and expect a short answer: but you've seen the Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks article. They write of the 'unraveling of the central state', with authority being reallocated upwards, downwards, and sideways – but in all senses away from the central state. Do you think that central states in Europe are becoming weaker, or are they finding new and more creative ways to empower themselves through collective action?

**JMB**

I think that, maybe paradoxically, they are more important in some ways because they can act more globally through the EU. Honestly, what is the leverage of my country, Portugal, a medium-sized country, globally, on the most important issues? Not very much. But even the biggest member states have the same problem. There was a famous quote, I think made by Paul-Henri Spaak, who once said that all states in Europe were small states but some haven't yet noticed it! If you compare them with China or Russia or India or US in terms of geographical size or demographic or military power, all EU member states are relatively small. So what is the new function of the EU? It is precisely the indispensable level of articulation between the global and local for Europe. Europe is the indispensable level of articulation between the national and international. Even the biggest states – what chance do they have on, say, climate change in asking for the Americans or the Chinese to make tough

*'One of the biggest reasons why we need a Treaty is to put to an end to all this discussion about the Treaty.'*

decisions and change their policies? None at all. But if you look at the recent experience of the G8, you see the EU acting in a coordinated manner and really having an impact. By the way, I'm not at all attracted to the naïve theories about the end of the nation-state, not at all. They remain the most important political organisations we have. The first allegiance most people feel is to the nation-state. Honestly, Americans are Americans, and the same goes for Portuguese or French people, and it will be like that for a long time... But the intelligent thing to ask is how can the state use the strategic space in which it finds itself to shape the common policy agenda? Those who are able to do it are in fact reinforced. Are European countries more or less influential because they belong to the EU? Far more because they have the capacity to shape the European – and global – agenda. Does Britain have more or less authority than before 1973? There's no comparison, because it is shaping – to a large extent – the European agenda. Are British institutions or the British government weaker than they were before joining the EU? Not at all. They have much more leverage globally because they can shape the European agenda. The same goes for Germany or France or Belgium. A concrete example: the Prime Minister of Latvia told me recently 'when we became independent from the Soviet Union, we were building borders with Lithuania and Estonia and now we are putting an end to the borders only fifteen years afterwards because of

Schengen'. This is one of the best ways to illustrate the success of the EU. Look at what's happened between Portugal and Spain, or between Hungary and Romania, or the UK and Ireland. Yesterday, I received a photo of myself together with Iain Paisley and Martin McGuinness, and the Irish Ambassador told me that it was the first time they had ever appeared together in a photo. It was a great moment. And they told me that the first time they'd ever spoken to each other was concerning an EU programme. It's amazing. We should be – this is not an academic remark – we should be prouder of what we've achieved so far in European integration. This is not the end of the state – I think it is a mistake to think so and it's been a mistake sometimes made by political figures, to pose the legitimacy of the EU against the member states.... It's a mistake: I was a Prime Minister so I think I understand the strengths and

limitations of both sides. The member states are democratic and they have a legitimacy that means we have to work with them. At the same time, they have to realise that they need to be part of a group of countries that is credible. And to be credible they need to support European institutions that are independent. And this is the game: the trade-off. I accept a pooling of sovereignty because in the end that gives me more influence, especially globally. So I think the member states are not losing authority – if they act properly, they can in fact exert their leverage and include very important national agendas in diplomatic terms as part of a wider European agenda.

## JP

It has been a great pleasure to welcome you back to the academy, and my privilege to be able to do it.

## Notes

1 Although the work referenced here had multiple authors, the specific text cited was penned by J.H.H. Weiler. Interestingly, Weiler conducted his own interview with President Barroso – following the latter's Emile Noël lecture at New York University on 26 April 2007 – videoclips of which are available from [http://ec.europa.eu/commission\\_barroso/president/multimedia/videos/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/commission_barroso/president/multimedia/videos/index_en.htm).

2 Full data on the results of the open poll are available at <http://www.eu-consent.net/content.asp?ContentId=1442>. This initiative received valued support from the EU-Consent Network of Excellence, funded by the EU's Framework Programme VI, in which the present author leads a research group on 'The Commission and the European civil service' (for details, see <http://www.eu-consent.net/content.asp?ContentId=534>).

3 Fritz Scharpf and President Barroso (by videolink) both addressed the biennial EUSA conference in Montreal on 18 May 2007.

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