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Voices for the *Res Publica*: The Common Good in Europe

A pan-European project

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Introduction to the project

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'Voices for the *Res Publica*: The Common Good in Europe' is a three year project funded by the Ford Foundation and housed within the JPR. In this part of the JPR website you will find all the reports, papers and programmes which have been produced since its inception in August 2006.

The original remit of the grant was to address one of Europe's most pressing problems today: the loss of a sense of the common good in our pluralist democracies, with a consequent erosion of feelings of shared belonging and the emergence of new types of tribalism. The project has deliberately used the Latin term for the public good to distinguish its goals from other types of intercultural or inter-religious dialogues, seeking to promote a more harmonious 'living together'.

The *res publica* project chose to bring together independent critical voices from different religious, cultural, ethnic and secular backgrounds, each speaking in his or her personal capacity, in a series of small, closed and off the record national round tables – each lasting for two and a half days in a residential setting outside big cities. The national round tables were intended to open the way for a more pan-European shared reflection on the *res publica*.

Each round table tackled the conflicts, underlying fears and deep defensive reflexes that exist in each country and within each minority or majority group; in other words, those factors which have led to a weakened common public space. The project intentionally sought to broach difficult questions in a context of mutual trust – questions linked to national identity, the role of the law, citizenship, the role and rights of (often silent) majorities and (often vocal) minorities, secular responses to collective religious demands, and the link between civil society and the state. The round tables were also intended to address the tensions between national cohesion and a 'Europe without borders', especially their impact in two areas: integration and the struggle against racism, Islamophobia and antisemitism. To facilitate the discussions, round table participants received a carefully planned set of questions and issues that they were free to address, challenge, or revise in the round table discussions.

The project was launched with a European Jewish round table held at Missenden Abbey in England in December 2006, which brought together over twenty participants from ten countries. It aimed to test some of the hypotheses which underpinned the project as a whole by focusing on the European Jewish context. We wanted to explore the key issues of identity and belonging, the positive as well as the negative aspects of integration, the impact of internal group divisions, community organization and historical commemoration in the renewed dialogue between Jews, the state and their non-Jewish fellow citizens. In brief, we used the European Jewish post-1989 experience as a test case for the *res publica* questions we wished to address during the project as a whole.

This preliminary round table proved to be most useful and instructive, not least because its participants emphasized in their debates the difficulty of trying to isolate a given group (in this case 'the Jews') as a discrete entity within society. The Jewish 'case' allowed us to refine our questions and encouraged us to pursue the search for the *res publica* in a more nuanced manner, with a preference for individual voices rather than group statements.

The project itself comprised six national round tables (in the UK, Poland, Sweden, France, Germany and the Netherlands) over slightly more than eighteen months (from April 2007 to November 2008), ending with the first European round table. Each national round table was held in conjunction with a national partner: the British round table with the think tank Demos, the Polish one with the Warsaw university Collegium Civitas, the Swedish one with the publishing house/Foundation Natur och Kultur, the French one with the review Esprit and La Republique des Idees, the German one with the Einstein Forum and the Dutch one with the Felix Meritis Foundation.

Choosing the round table participants was one of

the most demanding aspects of the project. They were selected in close cooperation with each national partner. The participants had to include a mixture of 'old' national voices, and 'new' immigrant ones, Christian, Muslim, Jewish and secular voices, while respecting the different hues within. The same voices also had to double up in professional terms: academics, judges and lawyers, social and political activists, writers of opinion pieces, ensuring that different generations and geographical regions were represented. Personalities were also taken into account. We deliberately sought out those who were able to listen to others and rethink their own positions, but above all, the key criterion was that these voices had to be independent and unofficial, and not representative of any formal group. The choices did not meet strict sociological or political criteria; nor did we wish to invite the 'usual suspects' whose views were already widely disseminated in the media and research. The 'proof' of the project was in the 'talking' and in the 'networking'.

You will find here the analytical reports which I wrote after each national round table. In keeping with the 'off the record' policy of the round tables, the reports do not identify those who spoke, and specific attributes (such as a 'Muslim voice', a 'Catholic view' or a 'Jewish position', a 'judge', or a 'civil society activist' were only mentioned when the person specifically chose to speak in that capacity. It is important to stress that each round table was held in the national language, so that we could have access to the best possible participants while allowing them to express themselves fully on these complex topics with all the hues of their mother tongue. We were aided in this by a superb team of simultaneous translators in each of the countries, apart from the UK and the European round tables, which were held in English. The reports will allow you to get a feel of the interactions as well as the 'spirit' of these round tables.

At the end of the six national round tables we began composing the first European round table, bringing together a cross-section of 'voices' from each of the national round tables. To set the tone of the debates, we commissioned a set of five papers from each country which addressed the five key themes which emerged from the round tables: national

identity, the status of minorities, the law, religion, and the state and civil society. The papers (which are also available on this website) constituted a basis for the debates for this round table.

We are now beginning the second half of our project which will involve one or two more European round tables and the public dissemination of our findings. This website is part of this new phase, which we hope to supplement with comments, interactions and reflections. We are now setting up a steering committee which will prepare the second and third European round tables with their reports and policy recommendations, before the Ford sponsored part of the project ends in the autumn of 2009, to be followed by a continuing intra-European dialogue.

February 2009

Manifesto

One of Europe's most pressing problems today is a loss of a sense of the commonweal in our pluralist democracies. Religious and ethnic groups, whether majorities or minorities, are growing apart from each other. This is due to a combination of two factors: the weakening of the post-war ideal of reconciliation, integration and open borders, and the upsurge of xenophobia, racism, antisemitism and cultural intolerance.

As a result, feelings of shared belonging have been eroded and new types of tribalisms are emerging. The current multicultural and integrationist models of democratic life do not seem able to contain these tendencies.

To address these problems and the issues they raise, the London-based Institute for Jewish Policy Research has launched a pan-European project, 'Voices for the *Res Publica*', funded by the Ford Foundation and directed by Dr Diana Pinto. Pointedly using the Latin term for the 'public good', the project will cover six countries,[1] bringing together independent critical voices from different religious, cultural, ethnic and secular backgrounds.

This carefully chosen group of opinion-formers and academics will meet in small national round tables designed to foster a more frank and in-depth exchange of views than the highly publicized inter-religious and intercultural dialogues or the official European-level meetings addressing issues of identity. Each round table will tackle the conflicts, underlying fears and deep defensive reflexes that exist in each country and within each minority or majority group: in other words, those factors which have led to a weakened common public space. Difficult questions will be broached in a context of mutual trust. They include questions linked to citizenship, the role and rights of silent majorities and vocal minorities, secular responses to collective religious demands, and a variety of specific controversies, such as public commemorations that focus on the historical suffering of a particular group. The round tables will also address the tensions between national cohesion and a 'Europe without borders', especially their impact in two areas: integration and the struggle against racism, Islamophobia and antisemitism.

The project will be carried out in a critical, independent and non-sectarian manner. It was conceived in a Jewish think tank which believes that the Jewish experiences of the last two decades cast a useful light on the above-mentioned questions. European societies and all groups within them must confront these issues together in the years ahead in order to restore a sense of common purpose.

The goal of the project is to work toward a *res publica* of newly reformulated, shared universal values. The round tables are conceived as the starting point of ongoing policy debates, and the participants as part of a functioning pan-European network. The analyses, ideas and policy proposals emerging from these meetings will be widely disseminated through the media and in other public fora, both at the national and European levels.

1 The six countries are (in alphabetical order): France, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden and the United Kingdom).

Report on the UK round table

Dr Diana Pinto

The first national round table in the Ford Foundation funded project 'Voices for the *Res Publica*: The European Common Good' was held in the UK on 21-23 April 2007, under the auspices of the London-based Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR) and the British independent think tank Demos. The purpose of the round table, as defined in the project's manifesto was to bring together a carefully chosen group of opinion-formers and academics to foster a frank and in-depth 'off the record' exchange of views on the conflicts, undelying fears and deep defensive reflexes that exist within each minority or majority group; in other words, those factors which had led to a weakened common public space.

It is of course very difficult for the person who conceived the entire project, and planned the round table programme to write an 'objective' report on the round table's outcome. I trust that my non-British astigmatism will compensate for my deep involvement in the very shape of the project. I can only hope this will contribute to a more detached reading of the proceedings. I hope the British participants will feel challenged by this summary, much as I was throughout the entire two days of debates. Nevertheless, when reading what follows, please bear in mind this personal caveat.

Preliminary remarks on the round table

The British round table included sixteen participants (two more were unable to come at the very last minute), constituting a very diverse group both in terms of their professional activities (academics, writers, journalists, policymakers), as well as their ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds. The participants ranged in age from their early 30s to their early 60s and this inter-generational composition allowed for quite different readings of the British situation. To further offer a 'different' European angle on the British case, a Swedish participant was included beyond my own French-based presence.

Finally, one last procedural comment before sum-marizing the round table debates. The participants, most of whom did not know each other previously, were able to transcend very quickly any formal 'identities' to form a lively and highly convivial group at ease with each other. They fully implemented the Project's call for a frank and in-depth exchange of views. And in an unusual form of thoroughness, they adhered to the round table's programme, tackling head-on its heavy load of critical questions.

The debates

The discussions were characterized by a great deal of openness and very little ideological stiffness, in what many could call a perfect proof of British pragmatism. Many speakers openly claimed that theirs was a partially incoherent, even fuzzy, description of society, something they considered normal given the complexity of the issues at hand. As a result, the group as a whole was able both to deliver searing critiques of British institutions and equally strong criticisms of many civil society players, including the minorities themselves, without ever claiming that the country was in dire straits or submerged by a crisis of the commonweal. Most accepted the vision whereby the UK was quite good at 'muddling through', thus avoiding major crises. Its ad hoc handling of social issues, while often criticized, was also considered as a plus in the country's ability to avoid all out identity wars. The only, often repeated, question was whether these debates were really relevant to the proverbial 'man in the street', but there was a rhetorical quality to the question which did not prevent those who asked it from participating fully in such a potentially elitist debate.

Such shared global feelings did not imply that there were no major differences of opinion and even profound political disagreements within the group. Clear political, cultural and even generational differences emerged on every single major issue addressed during the round table. Yet the participants could not be lined up systematically in one coherent camp against another. Their positions changed in function of the issues at hand and were thus, taken individually, far richer and more nuanced than, one assumes, would have been the case in other far more ideologically divided national contexts. Indeed, every single participant considered

Britain to be far better off than any other European country on all issues linked to the *res publica*. This effectively meant that the 'European factor', which will undoubtedly play an important positive or negative role in the other national round tables, was most notably absent from the British one. It was a non-issue, and as such must be underlined.

I shall summarize the debates by examining how the group chose to dwell on a series of key concepts: the 'Britishness' and integration debate; the government, civil society and the state debate; issues of national security; multiculturalism; identity politics; the media; citizenship and secularism; ethnic communities and faith communities and their representatives; and finally, the *res publica* itself.

The 'Britishness' and integration debate

The majority of the participants considered this to be a false and unhealthy debate since it tried to define who was 'British' by cultural exclusion. Others claimed that it was a bad debate because it sought to impose on different groups 'values' that were most closely linked to the mindset of the governing 'white middle classes.' This reference to the 'white middle classes' was to occur repeatedly throughout all the round table sessions and was used both by the white and black participants, but not, interestingly, by the Jews, Muslims or Sikhs present...as though the white/black fault line based on past slavery and anti-black racism had its own unique, ongoing, powerful tension irrespective of Britain's larger multicultural debates.

This debate was also intertwined with the debate over fair distribution of national resources and social justice. When one participant emphasized the fact that there was an increasingly alienated and poor white underclass, the 'ethnic English', who had no recognized identity and who chafed at what they considered to be government favouritism toward other ethnic minorities, others were irritated by this reference, even though he had made it quite clear that there was an inexorable difference between voluntary and ascribed identities. Similarly, the idea that there was significant racism vis-à-vis the new eastern European immigrants was not picked up in the debate as though racism with a capital 'R' was above all the historical appendage of the blacks.

It was thus quite interesting to observe that those who favoured the 'Britishness' debate were the Muslims and the Sikh in the round table, who never invoked racial categories, and who felt they blurred as much as they clarified precisely because of the presence of poor marginalized whites. These supporters of 'Britishness' argued that it was important to refer to common national values that were also universal, whereas the opponents of the idea had specifically tried to show that 'Britishness' could only convey a national bias, because there could only be a tension between 'Ethnos' and 'Demos'.

A similar divide characterized the debate over 'integration', with once again the blacks, and some whites present considering the term insulting and irrelevant to their lives, since they did not wish to be 'integrated' as if they had been defective or amputated parts of British society. The other participants, irrespective of their Jewish, Muslim, or Sikh identities, were more nuanced in their acceptance of the term, which they considered to be more neutral and hence better than the previous political references to 'tolerance' and 'assimilation.' One participant stressed that 'integration' applied to all citizens alike, since the goal was to create an 'integrated' and therefore functioning society, in which everyone had to chip in, not just minorities trying to imitate majorities. Most felt that there was a need for a word to describe the desire to 'belong' in the wider society, and that, for the time being, 'integration' would have to do, for lack of any better alternative.

Government, civil society and the state

From the very first session on 'The condition of Britain today' until the end of the round table, many of the participants spoke of 'the government' in a very detached manner. It came as somewhat of a surprise to my 'continental' European eyes that, with respect to this topic, party politics and parliamentary decisions were never mentioned. No names of political leaders were pronounced and classical notions such as 'Left' and 'Right' were only rarely used. The 'government' thus came through as an abstract impersonal entity whose presence seemed to matter only when it manifested itself, often incoherently, at the local level. This clearly shared

attitude could not simply be attributed to the advantages of 'ad hocing' but carried with it an undercurrent of implicit, if not explicit, political alienation from the British state system, which was, perhaps, what the non-British participants (the Swedish intellectual and myself) noted most.

Conversely, civil society was referred to far more often in a positive manner, as an ideal to be pursued, and as the level where conflicts could be solved, and where activists had to take responsibility rather than assuming 'government' was in charge of the 'common good'. This stance was shared by all the participants who were affiliated with the policy making and foundation sector. But once again, 'civil society' in this context was very loosely defined, as a sum of individual and collective community initiatives, and without its conceptual alter ego (at least as perceived in continental Europe), i.e., the State. The State was even more absent from the debates than 'government'. It simply did not exist as a category, even though in pure political terms, it had the responsibility for ensuring the equality of all of its citizens and the fair distribution of national resources and justice. The round table as a whole was quite 'British' in somehow not dwelling on the complex equilibrium of a constitutional monarchy without a constitution.

Significantly, when the Swedish participant comented that the space of civil society was created by eroding the space of the state, community groups, and the market (by which he meant private economic forces), he was not understood by the British participants, who did not see the market as in any way a hostile force with respect to community life or a future civil society, but rather as one of its most important underpinnings.

Some of the younger participants, however, did seem to plead for a stronger state that would take on its classical responsibilities. One even mentioned the need for a Bill of Rights. A specialist of citizenship stressed the fact that Britain historically confused the reference to 'civic' with the reference to 'civil', so that there could be no clear hierarchies of belonging, in a country deprived of federalism and where devolution simply added yet another layer of identity without streamlining any. Yet, devolution, even when mentioned, was not considered an

important factor in the *res publica* debates.

On the whole, this entire topic was treated in ways that proved the degree to which historical and political traditions live on powerfully. The debate on government, civil society and the state made a non-Briton, whether European or American, feel that he or she had entered a very different land. Such burning questions lost their edge in the context of the British round table and seemed to provoke very little passion. The whole issue seemed best relegated to the British art of 'ad hocery.'

Issues of national security

In what could only be striking for a non-British observer, 9/11 was briefly mentioned as the given that had changed many debates on British identity, but the home-grown London suicide bombings of 7 July 2005 were barely evoked. They were treated as a 'local' fallout of 9/11 and not as the 'wake up call' on British multiculturalism that most foreign analysts, myself included, had instead chosen to emphasize. Two younger participants did refer to the terrorist attacks as part of an ongoing danger to British society. The others, at least from my outsider's perspective, seemed to skirt the issue for a mixture of reasons. For those who could be considered as older multiculturalists, there was a feeling that to dwell on 7/7 could only encourage Islamophobia and the anti-immigrant positions of British conservatives, when it was instead their responsibility to defuse such 'provocations'. One also had the impression that for the other minority groups, 7/7 was a way of paying too much attention to the Muslims to the detriment of other groups, be they blacks or poor whites. There were also those who sought to relativize the issue by pointing to past terrorism on British soil, whether Irish or anarchist. Either way, it seemed as though the threat of terrorism was mainly perceived in function of the enemies who used it rather than as a very real danger that required any rethinking of national 'belonging', or a collective national response in terms of shared democratic values.

Speaking again as an outsider, I had the impression that the reference to '7/7' was a difficult one to handle for the group as a whole: perhaps because it was a pain best left to heal in silence, or because the

'Britishness' debate that followed the bombings had somehow distorted the ability to evoke in a politically non-controversial manner any kind of national 'cohesion'. Only one participant referred to the ongoing danger of Muslim terrorism, and to the fact that there was an 'enemy' within, but his Cassandra-like pronouncement did not generate an ongoing debate.

What caused concern for most of the participants was Britain's involvement in the war in Iraq, and the possible repercussions it had on its Muslim communities. Here also, however, some younger voices stressed that problems of Muslim adaptation to British and Western ideals of democracy, and Muslim extremism on British soil should not be excused away through the war, but squarely confronted, since these extremes well pre-dated both the war in Iraq and 9/11. But the war was also subsumed under the category of the many failures of a distant 'government' without any expressed feeling that the imminent stepping down of Tony Blair (never mentioned) might change the British political landscape.

Multiculturalism

Even without the 7/7 reference, multiculturalism was clearly the topic that provoked the greatest passion in this quite moderate round table. I would be tempted to say that this was the topic where generational differences were the most visible. The post-war generation was the one which defended multiculturalism most strongly as a philosophical and political ideal. It was old enough to remember when multiculturalism had been the fruit of deliberate government policy, as a way of allowing different communities to live in harmony before they moved on to a greater national unity.

For those who were younger and moving into positions of power, multiculturalism was no longer an ideal but a very workable 'ad hoc' tool from which they benefited and which they considered to be a good glue for a disparate country, especially for blacks. It was among the youngest that the appeal of multiculturalism seemed to be waning. One participant went so far as to refer to it as something so ever present and bland that talking about it was like talking 'about the weather'. Another participant

felt that the time had come to think more in terms of civil society, with its many cross-cultural organizations, rather than in terms of a multicultural society with clearly defined identity communities. Yet another stressed that multiculturalism by now had only perverse consequences, since it empowered well established community leaders to keep their communities in a static mould to ensure their own personal power.

These younger critics felt that 'the government' played with multiculturalism as a convenient way of finding single interlocutors rather than allowing independent and critical voices to emerge with their more varied and *res publica* demands. The result was that people were 'boxed' into hermetic categories and entire groups such as Muslim women, according to one participant, were caught between the government's desire to promote equality and its equally strong desire to preserve different cultural identities, thus sacrificing women's rights to universal principles and multiple loyalties in the process. Another participant added that such identity politics were increasingly unable to cope with mixed race populations.

What emerged from this round table were the profoundly inevitable transformations linked to the passing of time. The multicultural ideal of a first (white) generation of reformers became the everyday reality of the second generation (where blacks mainly benefited). and the old dysfunctional static system of the third generation (with its problems for Muslim or Sikh identities), which considered that multiculturalism ultimately treated ethnic minorities in a patronizing manner, and caused as many problems as it 'solved', since it had become the entrenched political norm, one that had to be fought to instigate major change.

Some felt that multiculturalism should be praised as a 'living experience' and condemned as state policy. Some stressed that it was the 'ism' in the word that should be eliminated, leaving an adjective 'multicultural' as a more neutral defining term. Yet others went so far as to stress that the very idea of multiculturalism should be abandoned since it was hurting the ethnic minorities that were supposed to benefit from it, in what one participant called the 'soft racism of lowered expectations.'

Identity politics

There was just as much debate concerning the lived experience of 'identity politics.' The discussion pitched, once again, those who found identity politics to be useful and pragmatic against the newer voices who chose to stress the new dangers lurking behind such identity politics. Even though many felt that Britain could muddle through toward new solutions, others stressed that the time had come for a cleaner break with the past. It did not matter how positive the original identity politics had been; one now had to deal with the practical consequences of evolving concepts, especially their increasingly perverse effects. The current danger was that identity politics was 'essentializing' both the members of given identity groups as well as those on the outside.

More than one participant spoke about the 'dark side' of identity politics, foremost among which was the unacknowledged inherent racism of many ethnic minorities, be it black and Muslim antisemitism, black and Jewish Islamophobia, or even anti-white racism. They stressed that multiculturalism was increasingly trapping people in sterile boxes, preventing the birth of more complex multiple identities and even stultifying national debates. This was particularly true in the realm of competition for social and state resources. Jews and Hindi were envied by both blacks and Muslims, and many whites felt left out or discriminated against, particularly in the realm of housing. The result was that each group sought 'victim status' to maximize its collective bargaining for privileges. And the failing or absent state was not able to cut its way through this imbroglio. Above all it was unable to take 'sub-narratives' into account.

Some participants lashed out against the entrenched power of established communities, arguing that institutional representations should transform themselves into 'lobbies' and stop pretending that they were truly representative bodies. Unfortunately there was an unholy alliance between such bodies and 'the government', since both considered alternative voices either as a distraction against group 'unity' or as a hindrance in coherent state-endorsed multicultural policy. Some of these alternative voices, coming from Jewish, Muslim and Sikh identities, were present in the round table and all stressed the need for the state to stop legitimizing identity 'black boxes.'

It was in this context that the issue of problematic ethnic minority positions arose most visibly, with one reference in particular, to the Muslim Council of Britain and its hard line stances, for instance choosing not to attend Holocaust Remembrance Day activities. The consensus on this front was that one had to engage with the more radical elements to slowly bring them into the fold. It remained unclear, however, whether one did so as 'one brother within the community toward another brother' or by referring to external national or universal principles. The assumption on the issue of the MCB was that if the state intervened too dramatically by cutting the Council's funds, the MCB, which was increasingly turning to UK funding sources, could always go back to getting money outside of the UK – a far more dangerous move. Another Muslim voice stressed instead that one had to openly combat the radical fringe whose ideas and values were totally incompatible with democratic and multicultural ideals.

What was significant from an outsider's perspective was the fact that the debate did not become a general one, but remained confined to those who were ethnically or religiously concerned by the issue. Most participants seemed to think that identity politics would gradually dissolve into new forms of belonging at the very local and at a more regional level. They all stressed ethnic minorities had no trouble claiming that they were 'black Welsh' or 'Scottish Muslim', with some slowly accepting the notion of being 'British', but no one seemed willing to accept the idea of being hyphenated 'English.' The other identities were deemed compatible with ethnic belonging since they all shared a similar cultural and ethnic opposition to powerful 'England'. Many participants stressed that such a shift from local to national identity away from purely ethnic politics had already happened during past immigrant waves, be they Irish or Jewish, and that the same would occur with the new immigrants.

The media

Relatively little time was spent on this crucial issue,

except to debate whether there should be a vibrant ethnic minority media. Those who argued on its behalf felt that it was the proper vehicle with which to debate identity issues and to break official representative monopolies. They saw such organs as important stations on the way to national debates. Others instead felt it was a political 'distraction' that prevented groups from truly entering mainstream debates. Reference to the powerful role Jewish media played in showing community dissent and in relaying Jewish concerns into the wider media did not provoke much comment.

The younger advocates of multiple identities and the breaking of boxes felt that the 'left-wing media' (one of the rare moments when the notion of 'left' was invoked) were responsible for the hiding of the 'dark side' of identity politics, because they were battling the conservative camp. Some went so far as saying that the left-wing media were condescending and did not want to disturb their 'patronizing' use of ethnic minorities, whose real problems they often ignored.

As with all things, internet and blogs were referred to as both liberating and dangerous communications vehicles, but more emphasis was put on their potential to dissolve identity boxes and allow new voices to come forth in more committed civil society debates. Minority media ties with the market were seen as a plus, particularly by eliminating the need for an increasingly paralyzing government support.

Citizenship and secularism

The solution to the identity politics quagmire, according to one participant, was to stress a relatively new concept in the British debate, that of 'citizenship', in a country where people were traditionally defined as 'subjects' of the Crown. Not all agreed that this semantic change and its extension in citizenship education could produce much in and by itself. Some argued that citizenship still had an 'Athenian sound' to it, with its effective omission of anyone who was not a white man. Citizenship education was then defended as being for all, not just immigrants, and that it set the bases for a new integrative society. Others felt that this ambitious education programme was perhaps too 'elitist' in formulation and that it could only fall foul

of community organizations and their faith schools. A lively debate ensued on whether the problem with faith schools was the fact that they were linked to a given faith, or whether the problem resided instead in the fact that many of them were 'mono-cultural', with children of only one social stratum in attendance. But this, of course, presupposed that faith schools be open to far wider enrolment than just their own self-defined religious group, something that, from an outsider's perspective, seemed less clear with respect to Jewish and Muslim schools, with only Christian schools being truly open.

Secularism and the issue of faith schools were addressed all too briefly, with the religious voices present making a case for religion being included in the wider secular space, and with others arguing that it should be kept out. The religious voices argued for 'less religion, and more of the right type of religion', citing that often it was the lay voices which were politically radical, not the truly religious ones which tended to be moderate. One lay voice stressed that for many identity groups, to be secular was equated as being without morality or values. Another voice excoriated the liberal elites for being blinded by their hatred of religion into failing to understand its importance in a new age. Others chose to stress its pernicious effects in the public sphere. One participant summed up the tensions most cogently by saying that the public sphere should not be 'identity-blind' nor 'identity-driven', but 'identity-aware'.

One had the impression that, as with citizenship, secularism was a new 'animal' in the British political zoo, and that battle lines, as well as convincing arguments on both sides, were still in formation (compared to the far more developed debate in France). Fuzziness seemed to prevail, with remarkably little said about the fact that the UK still possessed an established religion.

Clearly this remained a field with much left to explore.

The *res publica*

Despite some initial fears among the round table organizers that the British participants would not

feel at ease with the concept of the *res publica*, all participants seemed to feel at home with the concept and assumed it to mean something more than just 'living together'. One participant was clear in defining it as 'an idea of the common good based on a common space, defined by certain values and principles that is inclusive of everyone irrespective of their cultural, religious, ethnic or other identities.' Those who felt that there was a specific Muslim fundamentalist danger were willing to specify the nature of the common values as a cross between 'Britishness' and universal values. Another participant suggested a definition of the *res publica* as the equivalent of a family surname which did not mean that much by itself until it was given full meaning and individual identity by the person's first name.

There was agreement that this 'common space' had to be built, and that it was an ideal that could only exist in the future. There was no 'rebuilding' possible since it had not existed in the past. The need for such a space was deemed to be increasingly acute because identity considerations had reached their limits. One participant stressed that they had led to the following impasse, that identity was now perceived as the only qualifier to competence: a white person was not deemed capable of 'representing' the interests or feelings of a non-white person, with dangerous consequences for the very idea of democratic representation.

Another participant felt that the best way of forging such a *res publica* spirit lay in educating all groups to the sufferings of the other groups, so that each could understand their problems and work together towards common goals. Many concurred in the belief that change was indeed being inaugurated but that it would take time. The first step lay in stopping the idea that 'victimhood' was a powerful motor for social and political clout. Another participant made a powerful argument for the return to the notion of 'universal human rights' as a common goal that could counter identity politics, and transcend the old Church/Enlightenment divide. On the whole, with the exception of the participant who stressed the dangers of Islamic fundamentalism for all of society, the rest of the group felt that time was on their side, and that one could be moderately optimistic about the future, with one participant

even claiming that there were blacks who felt perfectly comfortable with the idea of calling themselves 'black English'.

The two-day round table ended just when the participants had begun to dig more deeply into their respective differences. They acknowledged that there were divisions which were worth exploring even within the progressive moderate camp, and that there was no conservative 'foe' on the other side. At the very end of the round table, one participant even felt that there were some Tory recommendations that made more sense than Labour ones for his identity group, finally breaking the silence over party associations. The political words were beginning to come out.... just as the round table ended, making calls for further meetings, with wider identity groups and representatives from different political families even more pertinent.

Beyond the round table

I came away from the round table with the feeling that the moment was truly ripe in the UK for further reflection on the *res publica*. Without necessarily using this term, all the concerns of each participant pointed in its direction, since everyone seemed to be sketching an alternative space to the multicultural idea. The round table thus marked a beginning of a reflection that corresponded to a changing Zeitgeist. The *res publica* ideal seemed able to federate concerns linked to social cohesion, transcending identities, the need to avoid 'essentialization' of identities, overcoming old political cleavages, opening up to the 'other side', moving from consumers to citizens and a general clearing of the air in an often too silently polite British context. More importantly, the participants all agreed that they had begun a useful process of re-examining most of the conventional words of political dialogue, and that this reflection should be pursued, particularly with respect to the term 'ethnic'. There was a shared feeling that many important issues (for instance secularism, citizenship, alternative voices, or the role of religion in public life) had been touched upon too briefly and that further meetings should be devoted to a deeper investigation of these terms and issues. The confusion on these issues, which everyone seemed to openly admit, was

deemed to be the right beginning for these future discussions. One participant suggested that a lexicon be slowly built up from these discussions, to which another immediately replied that mapping the current 'lexiconfusion' would be the most efficient way of carrying further the debate.

The 'Where to next?' issue is currently being discussed. Promising suggestions include:

- The setting up of further round tables, perhaps with a clearer intellectual/policymaking distinction.
- The flagging of debates and conferences with the '*res publica*' imprint in already existing JPR and Demos calendars, to spread the initiative.
- The spreading of the concept in blogs, editorials, and in future activities, which are in the process of being defined.
- The creation of a *res publica* network among the participants, a network expanded to include those who could not attend the original round table and also new voices. This network can be pragmatically built bottom-up, with ever growing use of the *res publica* term.
- The possible creation of *res publica* debates bringing together different student organizations in a few universities where multiculturalism is prevalent, to begin to embed the issues in a living as opposed to intellectual context.

The British round table thus marked a most promising beginning for the entire pan-European Project.

Diana Pinto
May 2007

The programme for this round table is available online at:

http://www.jpr.org.uk/common-good-in-europe/downloads/round_table_uk_programme.pdf

Report on the Polish round table

Dr Diana Pinto

The second national round table in the Ford Foundation funded project 'Voices for the *Res Publica*: The Common Good in Europe' was held in Poland on 16-18 June 2007, under the auspices of the London-based Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR) and the Warsaw-based Collegium Civitas. The purpose of the round table, as defined in the project's manifesto, was to bring together a carefully chosen group of opinion-formers and academics to foster a frank and in-depth 'off the record' exchange of views on the conflicts, underlying fears and deep defensive reflexes that exist within each minority or majority group, in other words, those factors which had led to a weakened common public space.

It is, of course, very difficult for the person who conceived the entire project, and planned the round table programme to write an 'objective' report on the round table's outcome. I trust that my non-Polish astigmatism will compensate for my deep involvement in the very shape of the project. I can only hope this will contribute to a more detached reading of the proceedings. I hope the Polish participants will feel challenged by this summary, much as I was throughout the entire two days of debates. Nevertheless, when reading what follows, please bear in mind this personal caveat.

Summarizing a two-day round table with such a diverse group of participants inevitably implies confronting several risks. The first is that of generalizing on the basis of what a given number of individuals present said, when other participants in their place might have raised different issues or addressed the same issues in a different manner. The second risk is that of 'essentializing', i.e., attributing a given person's comments to his or her ethnic background, religious affiliation, age or gender. Each individual is, of course, a sum of different experiences and identities, which at times clash or reinforce each other in defining that person's outlook. Essentializing is a particularly dangerous proposition, especially for a project which seeks to build a new *res publica* on a wide set of intertwined multiple identities.

Yet it is impossible not to generalize at some level if one is to use the round tables as a starting point for further *Res Publica* debates. In the pages that follow, I have referred to given group identities (such as Catholic, lay, Jewish and Muslim, conservative or progressive) only when what was being said stood out for having been said by a member of a given group who clearly invoked his or her given identity while grappling with the issue at stake. Similarly, I felt it was worth reporting when only members of a given group took stands on a given issue while others who belonged to other groups did not jump into the debate. Lastly, I refer to 'generations' when there was a clearly defined cluster of statements cutting across identities by persons of the same age group.

Preliminary remarks on the round table

This round table took place at a particularly tense moment in Poland's political life, when a common Polish public space was weakened over the politics of lustration, Poland's relationship to Europe, the role of the Church in public life, the ever present weight of a series of badly 'digested' pasts, and a general climate of political, social and cultural tension between the progressive camp and an increasingly conservative government. In brief, a round table discussing how best to create or recreate the Polish *res publica* could not have been more timely, nor more complex.

The round table included fourteen Polish participants (two more were unable to come at the very last minute), two British representatives of JPR, an American representative of the Ford Foundation and myself, with a more continental and French perspective. The Polish participants constituted a diverse group in terms of their professional activities (academics, journalists, inter-cultural dialogue specialists, and NGO activists involved in work with immigrants). They were also diverse in terms of backgrounds. There were Catholic activists, including a Jesuit, a Jewish intellectual/activist, as well as a Tartar Muslim, and a variety of lay voices, both moderately conservative and somewhat more radical. The participants ranged in age from their early 30s to one in her early 70s, with the majority in their late forties and in their fifties. Among the latter there

were one or two former *Solidarnosc* activists. Missing from the round table discussion were voices coming from the right-wing political camp in power, as well as from the conservative Catholic camp. Contrary to what one would assume however, their absence did not unbalance the round table discussions. It actually facilitated them. It allowed the group (which the right-wing camp would have defined as composed of left-wing opponents, and even 'traitors') to engage in very open discussions and even dissent because both were based on an implicit trust. The result was that what initially appeared to be a 'too' coherent progressive bloc, quickly revealed profound intellectual, cultural and political differences at the very heart of the Polish malaise.

For one should call a spade a spade. The two-day round table opened up bleak vistas of a deeply troubled, divided and pessimistic country, best defined by the strident tone of its political debates, and by the belief that the 'other' side did not constitute a valid interlocutor because it was politically illegitimate. Some of the stridency of the national debates filtered, albeit in a very civilized manner, into the round table, rendering it far more 'representative' of the Polish situation than its actual composition might have indicated. And yet, this bleakness was in itself paradoxical. It contrasted markedly with the 'booming' aspects of Warsaw's modernity and with the very clear economic improvement of the country as a whole. An external observer was thus left wondering whether the political and intellectual tensions merely reflected the last (passing) chapter of a long and complex Polish political and historical saga before one 'moved on' toward a far more pragmatic, even if mediocre, European-compatible political life. Or whether these strident debates pointed to a badly digested past which would continue to poison the national future, despite a better economic life... or perhaps because of it, since the best minds were deserting the political arena for the marketplace.

The round table offered no clear indications on this count. Especially since the youngest voices present, even those who were fully committed to working for a more open, tolerant and progressive Poland, stressed just what an uphill battle theirs was. They stressed time and time again that the important Western migration of Polish youth to the UK and

Ireland was only partly due to the far higher wages these countries offered and far more the product of their wish to escape a stifling national setting, which offered them no optimistic future vistas. And yet, despite these highly pessimistic statements, no one would have contested just how far the country had come since 1989.

The current climate of political conservatism, however, had made them forget the progress accomplished, and thrown the group into either a nostalgic or a furious mood, whose contents varied in function of the person's background, but which led to the same conclusion: that 'others' had 'stolen' the Polish *res publica*, hijacking it for their own divisive ends, thus depriving the country of its own ideals. The prevalent mood was thus one of nostalgia. Some participants were nostalgic for a certain internationalist ideal, as opposed to the present-day national stridency. Others regretted the spirit and passion of the first years of *Solidarnosc* with its liberating struggle against a clear enemy, Communism, and the attendant fight for freedom. Others regretted a far more recent past, the years which immediately preceded the coming of the Kaczynski twins to power, when politics did not aim to exclude. Still others were nostalgic for a more open and civically engaged Church which rallied people to it rather than excluding them, while others regretted a more lay setting where the Church did not exert pressures on one's private life. Some were nostalgic for a more ethnically variegated Poland; others for a more culturally homogeneous one sharing similar values. Still others were nostalgic for a European Poland predicated on the Enlightenment, while others hearkened back to prewar Poland or to the Polish national memory before the 20th century. In brief all were nostalgic for their own vision of an ideal *res publica* which others did not necessarily share. Even the younger voices seemed to be nostalgic: for a childhood past of parental ideals, and above all for a Poland that cherished the dream of fully belonging in a throbbing outside world.

Keeping this complex collective nostalgia in mind, one can turn to the ten topics which dominated the two-day round table. These were: 1) The nature of Polish political discourse, and the role of the intelligentsia; 2) The legacy of *Solidarnosc*; 3) The role of the Church; 4) The role of the state; 5)

Nationalism and patriotism; 6) Polish myths and values; 7) Identity and otherness; 8) The weight of the past; 9) the role of Europe.

The nature of Polish political discourse and the role of the intelligentsia

Everyone in the round table agreed that Poland was a country fraught with massive political divisions and identity tensions. They also agreed that public discourse had reached a low point since the election of the new President and the arrival of his twin as prime minister. There was a consensus that political discourse was predicated on outlawing the other camp by considering it as an 'enemy of Poland'. In brief, national life was based on a 'we' against 'them' mentality.

Participants disagreed however, on the origins of this problem. For the more liberal and lay participants, those in power today and their allies (the party of Law and Justice, as well as the Church) were the principal culprits in this degradation of public discourse. One participant cited that the political language pitting the *Solidarnosc* camp against the former Communists of Kwasniewski in the presidential elections of 1996, considered very strident at the time, had never reached today's levels, with the government side refusing the other the right to exist in the national debate.

For the more conservative and Church-affiliated participants, instead, all sides were to be blamed, since, in their view, the liberal camp was just as aggressive and exclusionary in its tone and demands. For these voices, Poland's political tragedy was linked to the fact that all sides were convinced they incarnated the only correct approach, refusing any notion that stable and 'normal' political life was the result of compromise and acceptance of the other. They were quick to stress that having a strong identity should not be equated with being aggressive, rather the opposite. One could be most open to others when one is sure of one's own beliefs and values. Those present were willing to compromise to a certain degree, but they were also highly defensive of their own camp if they thought it was being attacked. Few accepted one participant's call to try to put oneself in the shoes of others, particularly of the absent camp.

What existed in Poland, instead, was, in the words of a human rights activist, the intellectual concept of '*sur-réalité*', a constructed setting of absolutist values, traditions, and world-views which were imposed from above and to which everybody had to bow in order to enter the national discourse, and which as a result, imprisoned thinking in unyielding corsets. One independent sociology professor, who refused to be associated with either side, commented that such political wars were well nigh inevitable in a country where the measured social science level of interpersonal trust between 'Mr X' and 'Mr Y' was the lowest in Europe after Greece. If there was no trust within civil society, there could not be any trust in the state either.

In a way that seemed a throwback to the Communist past, the debate then focused on the responsibility of the intelligentsia in these political wars. One participant, partially nostalgic for the internationalism of yore, claimed that the strident political climate of the day was linked to the disappearance of the intelligentsia as a class that was able to unify, steer, and elevate political discourse, while thinking of the greater good. The same 'neutral' sociology professional countered him by saying that, defined as a class of persons with higher educational degrees, the intelligentsia, was, on the contrary, thriving because it was present in many different sectors, and no longer considered politics as its only purview. The lay progressive voices regretted, instead, the passing of those intellectuals who incarnated 'the common good' and universal values, (and who contributed to the success of the *Solidarnosc* movement) and dared hope that the current political climate would stir them into a renewed civic commitment because their values were once again under attack. But they also claimed that in a democracy, intellectuals could no longer have the power they had in combating anti-democratic regimes.

The debate then shifted focus to address a related issue: namely, whether one was not witnessing the in Europe Report on the Polish round table return of conservative and even right-wing intellectuals, who took ever more extreme public views, and who bore no relation to the intellectuals the old left had traditionally adored. Such intellectuals, according to one lay participant, were

most willing to celebrate power over democracy, instrumentalizing the social divisions of the country for their own political ends. The allusion here to the lustration debate was quite clear. At stake was how to understand the government's desire to extirpate former communists from the body politic who might have collaborated with the secret police, but after such a long time period.

In this reading, one could then find bona fide right-wing intellectuals, and could not simply define the Poland of today as a populist mass media conservative (a sort of Berlusconi) camp against the old Poland of progressive ideals. The implication was quite strong: namely, that today's Poland increasingly resembled pre-war Poland with its extremist political factions and hatreds, and the facile use of the term 'traitor' that characterized the national radical right-wing intelligentsia of the time. Not all participants agreed with this historical reading, if only because of the dramatically different international situation, and the presence of Europe.

Some disagreed with it in purely historical terms, stressing that many conservative intellectuals of the 1930s believed in a common civic culture, were not antisemitic and had not excluded anyone from the nation. Others countered that such intellectuals had been responsible for some horrible laws, and that the dividing line between national democrats and national radicals was not always easy to draw. From an external perspective, the still living power of a nearly 80 year-old past in a present-day Polish round table was interesting to observe, especially since, when referring to the 1930s, little mention was made of the fact that Jews, through anti-semitic legislation, had indeed been marginalized and then excluded from the nation.

The debate was highly interesting because it revealed the degree to which the 'intellectual' continued to incarnate a lofty figure in Polish society (in ways that were no longer the case in France), perhaps because of the long Communist period. Only one participant claimed matter-of-factly that the power of the intellectuals was now limited to their voting numbers. For all the others, the question of the intelligentsia's role in Poland's divisive political culture remained central.

Beyond the discussion over the intelligentsia one could find a deeper reference to the lack of moderate elites who could address issues in a responsible manner across political divides. In the words of one NGO activist, there simply were no courageous advocates of the common good to be found in such a badly fractured country.

The legacy of *Solidarnosc*

This topic flowed directly from the previous discussion, and in many ways lay at the heart of the entire round table. Some of the older participants had been important *Solidarnosc* activists from the onset and discussed its legacy with conviction, passion and nostalgia. Others had been less involved in the movement and examined it with a more critical eye. Still others had been too young during its heroic days, and could only adhere to its ideals in a secondary mode. It was interesting to observe that the youngest participants to the round table did not feel drawn to the discussion, perhaps because the movement had dominated their childhoods, and they wanted to move beyond debates that seemed to them to remain relentlessly generation-bound as the old ones replayed their differences once again. The discussion did distinguish between Solidarity's three phases: the original trade union movement; its fusion into an all-encompassing force for change combining all classes in society, led by a trade union-intellectual spearhead, and the final phase of Solidarity in power with its inevitable bureaucratization and politicization.

For some of its critics, the liberating force of the past could no longer be the same liberating force needed for the future. The time had come for the heirs of *Solidarnosc* to make their own autocritique and to realize that by abandoning their original working-class base and trade union identity, once in power, they had indirectly created the bases for the conservative and populist Law and Justice Party in power. For there were aristocratic penchants in the group, which felt it knew best what was good for the workers. The result was that they too were responsible for the current polarization of Polish society, for once the Communists were removed from power, *Solidarnosc* no longer incarnated the common good.

Supporters of the movement replied that Solidarity had managed to unite the nation around a set of common ideals of freedom and justice in what were extraordinary difficult conditions. They could not understand why it was no longer possible to replicate this movement in today's Poland (perhaps forgetting that it is far easier to unite people 'against' than 'for'). They felt that the conditions for such a struggle were present once again, citing the lustration debate as an example.

In the opinion of one former activist, *Solidarnosc* had based its power on the fact that all were equally guilty, each in their different level, for the misdeeds of Communism. Above all it did not respond to violence with violence. In the current climate, instead, no one was willing to share the guilt for the sad state of affairs, preferring to demonize the other side. To which another critic rebutted that Polish factions suffered from the 'syndrome of a clear conscience', for which *Solidarnosc* was also to blame.

Two younger voices involved in NGOs on behalf of the poor and immigrants stated that on the lustration debate, what mattered most was not the past, but whether those who were accused were working on behalf of the common good at present, in which case they should not be dragged into any judicial accounting. They also stressed that *Solidarnosc*, (of which they only knew the phase in power) had sinned just like every other political group in not taking into account the needs of those who were left out of society, be they the unemployed, the marginal, the immigrants, or other outcasts. This pragmatic attitude was not to the liking of everyone in the round table, particularly those who had been close to *Solidarnosc*, but it did incarnate a desire to 'move on' beyond an older generation's debate.

The importance of this debate lay in the fact that *Solidarnosc* had now also entered the overfull closet of Poland's contradictory and controversial pasts, whereas in its heyday it had sought to transcend them all by uniting Catholics and atheists (and Jews), socialists and libertarians, patriots and pro-Europeans, workers and elites, in one major national movement. Addressing the issue of this complex, and now also divisive, but increasingly historicized

legacy constituted, in my opinion, an important step in the fashioning of a future Polish *res publica*.

The role of the Church

As might be expected, the role of the Catholic Church in Poland was hotly debated during the round table. The liberal lay participants contested the Church's centrality in Polish political life and lamented the passing of the *Solidarnosc* years, when an ideologically besieged church fought back by being particularly open to the world. Today instead, they lamented, since the Church was no longer under attack, it was free to return to its obscurantist and authoritarian penchants. The result was that it played a major role in fomenting the country's political divisions and in spreading the language of intolerance against its 'enemies'. One participant went as far as saying that the Church was the equivalent of a 'black cloud' casting its shadow over the entire country, an obvious reference to the polluting and highly toxic Chernobyl cloud. Others stressed that the Church refused all dialogue with other sectors of society, in essence incarnating or even guiding the present government's negative politics. Most lamented the fact that the Church no longer incarnated love, tolerance and peace, but was now perceived as standing for three major 'anti's': anti-homosexuals, anti-abortion and anti-immigrants.

Those in the group who were close to the Catholic Church either because they were priests, students of theology or committed Catholics reacted violently to these lay accusations, by making the classic distinction between the holy Church and the often imperfect men and women who composed it. They stressed that the lay presentation of the Church was a cheap caricature and that they could not recognize their own institution, which was full of dialoguing and tolerant activists whose actions were never taken into account by the secular camp. In other words, things were changing inside the Catholic world, but no lay people were willing to admit it. Such a refusal to see the virtues on the other side thus led many Catholics to consider the *res publica* as a shallow and valueless playing ground, against which one had first of all to defend the Church as an institution, before engaging in any critique which could be used by the other camp.

To which the lay people present curtly replied that unfortunately these 'nice' Catholics did not have the policymaking power within the Church, and were often marginalized within their own institution, which was deliberately cutting all bridges between the conservative and the progressive camps. One professor of a generally conservative bent, who considered himself a practising Catholic, made a powerful plea for another type of Church, one which united rather than divided its flock, one which accepted internal discussion and stopped associating dissenters with sinners. An intercultural activist stressed the degree to which the Church was closed and backwards in the Polish countryside and how it thrived on the general public indifference to contemporary social issues.

Foremost among these was the question of homosexuality in the body politic. The lay participants present stressed that, irrespective of religious debates, one could not deny the existence of Polish homosexuals, who, as citizens, had the right to be listened to and protected, because they were a part of society and could not be extirpated from the body politic. The Jewish participant to the discussion evoked the highly sophisticated response of Jerusalem's mayor, an orthodox Jew, when he had to decide whether to permit the Gay Pride Parade. The mayor opened his speech by condemning homosexuality in religious terms but then explained that he would allow the Parade to take place because he was the mayor of all the city's citizens and therefore had to respect all identities. This plea for multiple identities that were reconciled in the name of the *res publica* elicited no response from the Catholics present, who preferred to remain silent on the question of homosexuality. They limited themselves to saying that, indeed, the Church needed to learn to use more 'subtle' language but that one had to give it the benefit of the doubt, because it was 'huge and old', and not at all like a black cloud.

This debate was most instructive because it showed to what an extent the round table participants suffered from the very flaws in Polish political discourse which they had condemned in the first session. The Church reformers stuck to their 'holy' Church, while the lay reformers of society stuck to their social camp with no attempt being made to

join forces in the name of a shared *res publica* to transform the hard liners in each camp together, via the building of intellectual bridges and the underscoring of the common stances that united them. One participant spoke of the need to clean up 'one's own backyard', but no one suggested crossing yards or pooling gardening tools to help the neighbour in this task.

Each group, instead, positioned itself in the defensive mode with respect to their camps, stating, in the case of the Catholics, that it was difficult to carry out reforms while 'under attack'. This led the lay camp to protest that it was they who were under direct attack by the conservatives and the Church, and that the two attacks could not be compared since one camp held power and refused to dialogue with the other, while the other one was fighting to preserve its rights. Such was the power of the Church, they affirmed, that even a leading liberal lay voice such as *Gazeta Wyborcza* was afraid of taking on the Church establishment in its columns. On this count, both sides seemed to suffer from the fear of losing their lay or religious identity by falling into the trap of relativism. In this 'chicken or egg' debate over who was most attacked, there were no clear winners but only one loser: Poland's democracy and its common good.

The role of the state

Each country has its historical lacunae and institutional weak spots. In the Polish case, the state constituted the missing link in any possible *res publica* chain. It simply did not exist as an independent overarching presence, as a neutral self-standing locus whose civil servants survived the changes of different governments as stable institutional pillars.

The round table discussions pointed to a state that was perceived by different political camps as a passive entity (not unlike a ball) that was either forfeited, confiscated, regained, deserved and finally possessed, depending on who did the describing, and this in the wake of nearly two centuries of foreign domination. The Polish state, reborn after World War I, had thus 'belonged' to one camp or the other since its inception: first to the conservatives, then to the right, before being taken over by the

Communists after World War II, and returned to Polish society (via *Solidarnosc*) with the demise of Communism, only to be 'retaken' by the right in recent years. In addition, any Polish state was in direct competition with the Church, which still claimed to incarnate the nation in moral terms, and could not think of itself as belonging to only a part of the Polish population. For such a reading could only lead to an attendant shrinking of its official and political power.

In brief, hearing the participants refer to the state during the round table, it was clear that it had never really belonged to all Poles, each state incarnation excluding a different sector of them, and, in the opinion of the Tartar Muslim, almost always the country's minorities. The result was that rather than transcending partisan politics, the state had simply come to incarnate them.

For many moderates, the question of lustration thus amounted to one state faction seeking revenge over another, so as to better (re)appropriate the state for itself. The insignia of the country moved from one camp to the other without retaining any symbolic stature, since they were lowered to fit partisan politics behind the cover of a national ideal.

The result in the words of one of the younger participants was that she felt a 'stranger in her own country' because she was a prisoner of historical and political divisions that were unimportant and even irrelevant to the political and social concerns of the day. This tug of war over who 'owed' or 'deserved' the state distorted all the other levels of Polish society as well, since the state failed in being the 'facilitator' or the neutral locus between different camps. The result was that the state became one of the divisive factors responsible for the weak Polish *res publica*.

Nationalism and patriotism

These two terms were evoked in virtually every session of the round table. Since there were no adamant 'nationalists' in the group, a consensus emerged that patriotism was a positive value linked to the love of one's own country for its virtues. Nationalism, instead, was perceived as a negative stance based on antipathy towards other nations,

with a related wish to defeat them or exclude them from close contact.

How to avoid confusion between the two terms was deemed crucial, particularly at a time when the Polish government seemed to be moving in an ever more nationalist direction. Here again opinions diverged. The more conservative members of the group felt that nationalism had made a strong comeback precisely because *Solidarnosc*, once in power, had minimized the importance of patriotism among its working-class constituency. It had also minimized (and this one Solidarity activist admitted was true,) the Polish need to rejoice in national independence after the fall of Communism, and to bask in this newfound patriotic liberty. The result was that *Solidarnosc* abandoned patriotism to the opposition, which was more than ready to turn it into nationalism. In a vicious circle of consequences, Polish politicians then became ever more nationalist in following the 'opinions' of the masses, who, in turn, followed their politicians into ever greater nationalist stances.

The result was that no positive idea of 'Polishness' emerged. Nationalism was a frustrated negative reaction to what 'outsiders' had done to Poland, be they the historical occupying powers, followed by the so-called internationalism of the Soviet Union, and now the supranational 'diktats' of Europe. In the words of one participant, weak identities were the ones that reacted violently; hence the renewed nationalist wave. Poland's problem, according to one of the younger participants, was further compounded by the fact that nationalism transcended generational divides and found echoes even among the young who had never known a foreign-dominated Poland.

The result was tragic, according to most participants. No one celebrated Poland's positive heroes, those who adhered to universal values, those who preached tolerance and humanism, or who had saved Jews during the war. For the lay camp, the Church had played a major role in defining a narrow and defensive Polish nationalism that saw 'enemies' everywhere. And either through passivity or obedience, the rest of society, including the media, simply followed in this path, which was the one of least resistance, and the most rewarding one in terms of national popularity.

Polish myths and values

The participants coming from the more liberal and lay camp felt that Poland defined itself in terms of strong values that were largely mythical. The first was that of Polish 'uniqueness', which rendered any comparisons with other countries impossible and even undesirable. The idea of a Polish 'destiny' based on suffering and martyrdom, before national liberation ensued at last, remained very strong. It was accompanied by another myth: that of Polish 'tolerance' towards historical others in its midst, be they Jews, or members of neighbouring countries. Reality, for the lay camp, was not so sanguine. Part of the national problem lay in the fact that no one wanted to explore these contradictions or to really try to define Polish 'values'. Referring to them was, in itself, a political act linking the upholder of these abstract 'values' to a conservative and Church-dominated camp.

One more radical participant linked to the feminist cause went so far as to claim that even Poland's quasi sacred 'family values', when examined analytically, were bad for the future of Polish democracy. For the cult of the family, which went hand in hand with inequality between sexes, went against that of civic virtue and facilitated selfish family behaviour. The result: underhand deals, opaque transactions, all in the interest of family life and which only reinforced the national penchant for not trusting others.

More important, once a given trait became a 'value' it was elevated to a level of loftiness which precluded any possible compromise. Hence patriotism, in this context, could not brook any compromises with other nations or groups. Some felt that this inability to compromise originated in Poland's old codes of nobility based on 'honour', even in its most populist incarnations. As a result, values based on reason, on the Enlightenment and on universal rights, as well as values based on the *res publica*, were perceived as alien to the Polish tradition, which remained conditioned by what one participant referred to as a 'Baroque religious mindset'.

The response of the more Catholic participants to this onslaught on Polish values was to stress the value of 'diversity', in what one Jesuit voice considered the Bible's exaltation of 'difference' in God's creation. But this call for 'difference' could be interpreted both ways: as a way of protecting all, or as a way of protecting the Catholic Church's 'difference' with respect to material, lay values. It remained unclear whether all sides in Poland meant the same thing when they were celebrating 'difference', for one needed other commonalities to celebrate it.

The term 'tolerance' led to even greater debate. Most participants mourned its passing in an era of ever greater political aggressions. Some even claimed that the word had disappeared from the Polish language, thus precluding any consolidation of the *res publica*, since the extremists on all sides carried the day. Without 'tolerance' words became bombs in the war between camps.

Not everyone agreed with this reading. One of the young participants involved in NGO work expressed her intense dislike of the term 'tolerance', which she found to be condescending toward the person or group supposed to be 'tolerated'. She felt that where there was equality and justice, there was no need for 'tolerance.' The consensus of the rest of the group was that Poland was so far from such ideal conditions, that priority had to be given to rescuing the term and its positive meanings, when confronted with national intolerance and uncompromising stances.

Identity and otherness

Not surprisingly given all the above, the participants at the round table agreed that Poland was particularly unreceptive to the 'others' in its midst. The 'others' in question during this session were not those Poles the conservative-populists chose to extirpate from the nation, but those who were genuine outsiders: immigrants, refugees and visible minorities. The priest in charge of the Catholic Vietnamese community, as well as the younger NGO activists present who also dealt with the rising number of Byelorussians, Ukrainians and even Russians who were immigrating to Poland, were unanimous in condemning the Polish inability to 'see' these 'others' in the nation's midst, much less to develop policies on their behalf. There were many references to the 'Stadium' on Warsaw's outskirts

where these foreigners gathered to trade and to network among each other, in what appeared to be a total insularity from the rest of Polish society. Obviously Poland, long a land of emigration (continuing among its younger generations as well) had difficulty imagining itself as a land of immigration (not unlike Italy two decades ago), so that it still possessed no tools with which to come to terms with what had become a key issue in Western Europe's attempts to define a new *res publica*.

The Polish problem, however, ran deeper, according to the Tartar Muslim, whose family, like that of other Tartar Muslims, was settled in Poland for over five centuries. For the majority of Poles, the definition of a Pole in both ethnic and Catholic terms was so ingrained that they could not imagine being able to integrate citizens with other identities inside the Polish nation, unless such people took on Catholic names and Polonized themselves with respect to the country's 'values'. Other participants concurred with this reading by stressing that it was impossible to be a Jewish Pole, a Protestant Pole, a lay Pole, and even a 'feminist' Pole.

As for the old multicultural Polish identity of the 17th and 18th centuries, when the country had 30 per cent of others in its midst, one Jewish participant shut that past out as a possible model for the future, by saying that it had been oversold and that anyway, history had done away with it by destroying the minorities. Nevertheless, with the return of such populations on Polish soil, including the small Jewish community and the wider world Jewish and Israeli presence, one could make a case that such a past could at least be evoked as a counter-scenario or even memento to the closed nationalist Poland so many participants had condemned in all of the round table sessions.

Interestingly enough, with respect to 'otherness', the metaphor with which most of the group felt at ease was that of the 'hedgehog'. In this view, all identities, whether those of the majority or of minorities, were deemed to be sharp and and prickly. One participant, deeply involved in human rights struggles, initiated the comparison by stressing that dealing with 'others' was the equivalent of two hedgehogs courting each other, with the mutual request of 'do not get too close, dear'. The same person made an

eloquent plea for separate spaces, and for the right to one's environment to which one could retreat without having to be in too close a contact with 'others' all the time. Behind this stance, lay the philosophy of 'live and let live', provided there was a 'safety zone' to which one could retreat, but also provided one addressed the 'other' in the terms with which he or she wished to be called. This message was neither multi-cultural nor identity-blind; it seemed to come from a very different, almost pre-modern world.

The Catholic inspired participants celebrated diversity because 'God loves diversity', and encouraged the full respect of 'otherness', but at the same time they emphasized the fact that Poland had no facilitators for such an open stance, neither within the state nor within civil society. The lay opponents within the group replied that the Church only praised diversity when it suited its own needs, and not as a universal precept. As with nearly all topics, the issue of identity and otherness simply brought the group back to the old cleavages they were trying to condemn.

The weight of the past

One NGO activist summed up the whole burning issue of Poland's many competing pasts by claiming that confronting the past 'did not heal', that the past could not be 'solved', and that it would never come to an 'end'. One had to learn to live with it. All in the group lamented the fact that history was just as divisive and politically motivated as politics. For some Poland had always been historically divided between two visions of itself: a closed one linked with the old Piast dynasty, and an open one linked with the far more 'cosmopolitan' Jagellonian dynasty, and these divisions continued to shape world views to this day.

Beyond this historical incursion into the distant past, the session was dominated by two key historical references which, in many ways, underpinned in an incompatible manner the crusades of the two Polish camps: Jedwabne and the politics of lustration. The group agreed that those who fought for the truth to come out, namely that it had been their Polish neighbours who had killed the Jews of Jedwabne in the context of the Nazi-Soviet redistribution of power in 1941, were often the same who refused

the present-day government's politics of lustration of all those who had had too close ties to the police organs of the Communist regime. While those who wanted the truth about Communist collaboration to come out so that the 'traitors' could be identified, were to be found among those who steadfastly refused to acknowledge Polish responsibility over Jedwabne. This camp was quick to condemn the bringing out of the truth as merely anti-Polish defamations at the hands of 'international pressure groups', against what they continued to define as an innocent and martyred Polish nation.

On this count, the group agreed that there seemed to be no third conciliatory reading of this bitterly contested past, no possible compromise, and no desire to build an inclusive and honest parallel history. In both cases, suspicion, even hatred, and falsified memories seemed to preclude any dialogue within Polish society. More significantly, the group agreed that no one was asking the deeply troubling questions about Polish society as a whole and its historical self-presentation, nor, in the words of a younger participant, analyzing competing pasts from the perspective of human rights.

In brief, history in Poland continued to be an absolute zero-sum game. The Jedwabne controversy, which had so inflamed passions in 2001-2003, and according to many at the time, transformed Polish society by making it confront previous taboos, had petered out, leaving behind more bad feelings than the previous silence, for the simple reason, according to one participant, that it had ended in an incomplete and even botched catharsis, with each camp entrenched in its certitudes. On this count, the lay camp insisted that the Church bore a major responsibility for the degradation and stiffening of the historical context, while the Catholics present sought to spread the blame to include all camps. One participant mentioned that initially, the citizens of Jedwabne were amenable to a review of the town's past, until church officials intervened and turned the Jedwabne affair into a war of identities.

There could be no historical consensus as long as many Poles considered Jedwabne as a 'Jewish affair' and therefore normal that 'the Jews' would defend their own particular past in such a way that the Church then felt the need to defend its own

contrasting interpretation of the same events, with the result that no shared civic reading was possible. Those who wanted the truth to come out on Jedwabne agreed that any plaque specifically accusing the then citizens of Jedwabne of the murder of their Jewish neighbours would be taken down immediately by the current citizens of the town. They also commented on the fact that the woman who had saved some Jews from being murdered lived in poverty and exclusion, ostracized by the rest of society. This was, according to them, a perfect proof of ongoing antisemitism. For the lay non- Jews, it was a proof of the total lack of civil courage of a society still held hostage by its past. For the Catholics present, Jedwabne was perceived as an exception, compared to what they considered to be the far more prevalent Polish saving and helping of Jews. Those who had turned it into a symbol of Polish politics were equally guilty of historical distortion for their own political struggles.

As for the politics of lustration, there was no clear consensus on whether or how it should be done. The group did not go into any details about it, as though exhausted from the battle fatigue of the previous months, since this had been the central topic of Polish political life. Furthermore, no one present agreed with the official government position. But it also seemed quite evident that if the discussion had focused on the issue at greater length, critical divisions would have emerged even within the round table, for there were different positions on the question based on different criteria of investigation.

The misunderstandings of the past therefore just seemed to gain weight with each passing year, as new divisive layers were added. It is no small wonder then that the young voices present kept on reiterating that their generation was fleeing Poland for its stifling political and intellectual climate. They did not wish to be saddled with the weight of an undigestible past.

Europe

The round table took place days before the Brussels EU summit over the mini-treaty which was to relaunch Europe after the French and Dutch 'no's' to the Constitution, a mini-treaty which was

particularly endangered by the Polish government's demands to maintain Poland's weight in any new voting system. Interestingly, for an outsider, the round table, which had been quite critical of the current Polish government on most counts, did not excoriate it with respect to the European front. No one in the round table criticized Poland's belonging in the EU, since everyone agreed that the EU had been good to Poland. But with the exception of the former *Solidarnosc* activist, who feared that Poland would henceforth stand at the margins of the EU, given its stubbornness, no one took Europe's side against Polish policy in this matter. Most of the participants felt that Poland had the right to stress its national interests and present a strong Polish 'voice' in the European setting, for the simple reason that every other country did the same. Britain and France, to cite one participant, were not paragons of European selflessness. They too gave priority to their national interests.

Having said this, most participants agreed that the Polish government's hostile EU stance was perhaps a bit exaggerated and was the logical outcome of a national stance based on the old 'we' against 'them' scenario, which preferred a negative presence to any positive international accomplishments.

Equally surprising to an outsider was the fact that Europe scored few positive points even among those, particularly in the lay progressive camp, who had set many hopes on it. One participant claimed that 'Europe' was a hybrid artificial way station which was not very useful in a globalized world. A second, engaged in many European cultural projects and who had been an enthusiast of the EU, now voiced clear disillusion with a European project that had lost any deep 'meaning'. 'Europe', in his view, had not created culture, nor had it sought to spread each country's deepest cultural patrimony in the lands of others. It had become a show case for each country's 'separate room'. In cultural terms, Europe had also become the purveyor of ever more costly 'bread and circus' events—shows that cost massively and lasted only a few days without leaving any significant cultural or intellectual legacy behind. This position found a clear echo among the younger members of the round table, who also felt that 'Europe' preferred to offer 'tolerance shows' where young people danced, without ever discussing the

issues that might divide them. There was no true will to tackle head on the prejudices which continued to thrive throughout the continent.

The debate over Europe took on a Muslim-Christian dimension when the Tartar Muslim present stressed that Europe was simply a 'Christian club' and had failed in Bosnia, because it 'naturally' supported the Christian Serbs against the Bosnian Muslims in a clash of civilizations. He predicted that the EU would become a bloc against the Muslim world. His views were particularly rebutted by the Jewish participant who felt that the conflict had pitted authoritarian nationalists against the advocates of democracy, but that Islam had not lain at the heart of the Yugoslav wars. The Catholic voices present did not enter into the fray in this debate.

Overall, one could feel a large dose of Euro-fatigue in the room, probably because, as one participant put it, 'Europe' had not managed to improve the Polish style of politics nor curb its corruption, but might actually have reinforced them, by giving them national legitimacy in a twelve-starred setting. But at least 'Europe' was not blamed for Poland's deeply acrimonious political setting.

Beyond the round table

As was manifest throughout, the round table offered a perfect mirror for Poland's current *res publica* void. But it also offered a positive setting for any easing of the conflicts. Tensions within the group were high at the onset, and significantly less so at the end of the meeting. Difficult issues were broached and even addressed directly. Perhaps the most important outcome of the meeting was the universal call on all sides for the need to stop demonizing the 'other'... clearly something that did not come naturally. Since many participants stressed that it was impossible to 'clean up one's backyard' until the attacks from the other side were curtailed, it is important to pursue this metaphor in encouraging them to clean up together in the name of the *res publica*.

Given the tensions within Polish society, two possible continuations emerged from the round table. The first is the continuation of further round tables, which would progressively bring together members

of different camps in an exercise of 'confidence building', in order to break the current zero-sum game approach to political and social issues. The second is the providing of a *res publica* forum for NGO and other activists, particularly for the younger generations, who often have more contacts outside Poland, than within Polish society as a whole. One must take seriously the comment of one young Catholic activist who stressed that much was happening within the Church but that no one knew about it. There should be a place where different *res publica* initiatives can come together.

The Collegium Civitas would be the ideal venue for the first initiative by structuring a series of ongoing round tables, which could meet regularly (not unlike a seminar) so that dialogue could be encouraged and maintained. The round table showed to what an extent divisions ran high even in an academic context, so it would seem logical to start round tables in such a context, by having different professors from the different camps (lay, Catholic liberal, Catholic conservative, progressives, conservatives, etc) act both as liaisons to their own group and as 'guarantors' that there is no 'hidden agenda' behind the round tables.

The second initiative should be more 'hands on' and might be best housed in an inter-cultural institution such as The Borderlands Foundation, where political and cultural activists could come together to exchange their practices, problems and experiences.

One final comment

The often bleak conclusions of the round table must not be taken as definitive judgements. They were as much *cris de coeur* of a group of participants who had been given the chance to speak out candidly, as irrevocably black judgements. One cannot forget the dynamic Poland one sees in the streets as one plans future round tables. In forging a *res publica* debate, younger voices will prove crucial in ensuring that one does not simply fight the battles of the past, but truly engage in the challenges ahead. I considered this round table as a very positive step in this direction.

As I finish this text, there is talk that Poland may be heading toward election in the autumn. Whatever the outcome of such elections, there will still be a major need for further round tables and a slow 'patching up' of all sides in the name of the *res publica*.

Diana Pinto
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The programme for this round table is available online at:

http://www.jpr.org.uk/common-good-in-europe/downloads/round_table_poland_programme.pdf

Report on the Swedish round table

Dr Diana Pinto

The third national round table in the Ford Foundation funded project 'Voices for the Res Publica: The Common Good in Europe' was held in Sweden in September 2007, under the auspices of the London-based Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR) and the Stockholm-based publishing house and foundation, *Natur och Kultur*. The purpose of the round table, as defined in the project's manifesto, was to bring together a carefully chosen group of opinion-formers and academics to foster a frank and in-depth 'off the record' exchange of views on the conflicts, underlying fears and deep defensive reflexes that exist within each minority or majority group; in other words, those factors which had led to a weakened common public space.

It is, of course, very difficult for the person who conceived the entire project, and planned the round table programme to write an 'objective' report on the round table's outcome. I trust that my non-Swedish astigmatism will compensate for my deep involvement in the very shape of the project. I can only hope this will contribute to a more detached reading of the proceedings. I hope the Swedish participants will feel challenged by this summary, much as I was throughout the entire two days of debates. Nevertheless, when reading what follows, please bear in mind this personal *caveat*.

Summarizing a two-day round table with such a diverse group of participants inevitably implies confronting several risks. The first is that of generalizing on the basis of what a given number of individuals present said, when other participants in their place might have raised different issues or addressed the same issues in a different manner. The second risk is that of 'essentializing', i.e., attributing a given person's comments to his or her ethnic background, religious affiliation, age or gender. Each individual is, of course, a sum of different experiences and identities, which at times clash or reinforce each other in defining that person's outlook. Essentializing is a particularly dangerous proposition, especially for a project which seeks to

build a new *res publica* on a wide set of intertwined multiple identities.

Yet, it is impossible not to generalize at some level if one is to use the round tables as a starting point for further *res publica* debates. In the pages that follow, I have referred to given group identities (such as Christian, lay, Jewish and Muslim, conservative or progressive) only when what was being said stood out for having been said by a member of a given group who clearly invoked his or her belonging to a given identity while grappling with the issue at stake. Similarly, I felt it was worth reporting when only members of a given group took stands on a given issue, while others who belonged to other groups did not jump into the debate. Lastly, I refer to 'generations' when there was a clearly defined cluster of statements cutting across identities by persons of the same age group.

Preliminary remarks on the round table

The round table included nineteen Swedish participants, one of whom lived in France, a British representative of the JPR and myself, with a more continental and French perspective. The Swedish participants constituted a diverse group in terms of their professional activities (academics, journalists, inter-cultural dialogue as well as youth and education specialists, self-employed business people and consultants, a municipal mayor, a member of the Swedish parliament, a top-level state functionary, a European activist, and a person from the theatre world. They were also diverse in terms of backgrounds. There were varied Christian, Jewish, and Muslim voices and also a strong atheist one, in addition to the usual variety of lay voices. Politically, there were classical Swedish social democrats, but also more conservative representatives and a few older (1968 generation) radicals. The majority of the participants were in their early 30s and 40s, with a few in their mid-fifties and early 60s.

Several aspects of Swedish society gave a unique quality to the round table debates. First, Sweden may have a relatively small population, but it is a huge country. The round table participants were specifically chosen to reflect geographical differences, so that there were voices from the rural great North, as well as from the more industrialized

South, and above all from smaller provincial towns, well beyond cosmopolitan and multicultural Stockholm. Their points of view were quite refreshing compared to the prevalent 'big city' positions, and gave greater depth to the round table.

Secondly, in Western Europe, one has grown accustomed to think in terms of 'old' rooted national populations and then of a large group qualified as 'immigrants', whose different national and ethnic origins seem to matter less than their relatively poor status as new arrivals. Sweden in this context, offers an important third category: that of immigrants who arrived in the country as political refugees, and are therefore far better educated than those moved by economic need alone. This openness to political refugees still makes Sweden stand out among Europe's countries. It is calculated that Sweden will receive around 20,000 refugees from Iraq this year alone—not a small feat in the Western world as a whole, including America. It is therefore important to stress that three of the round table participants were first generation refugees (one from Poland, one from former Yugoslavia, another from Iran) and two others were the children of such refugees (one from Central Europe during the war, one from Poland immediately after the war, both of Jewish origin). Their experiences, but also their understanding of the fundamental values underpinning a *re publica*, coloured the debates of the round table in ways that were quite different from those of more 'conventional' immigrants, prevalent in countries such as the UK or France.

Thirdly, Swedish postwar society has had a long tradition of adopted foreign children who looked very different from their adoptive parents. It has also had a far longer tradition of single mothers, who have had children with fathers from different racial origins. Two people with such backgrounds were also present in the roundtable, and were thus able to convey the complexity of a visually different non-immigrant 'old' Swedish belonging.

A comment on the round table dynamics. The Swedish participants were a bit more formal in their interactions than their British equivalents, who were far more used to such an exercise. The Swedes were, in effect, asked to interact with persons coming from widely different social and geographic backgrounds

and identities from their own, so that there was a collective sense of discovery and a concomitant relativization of one's own identity inside the same Swedish house. As the British participant to the round table commented, some of the Swedish debates reminded him of similar debates that had occurred fifteen years earlier in Britain. But this was not to imply that Sweden was just a latecomer to the same evolutionary process—with any implication that it lagged behind the UK while remaining ahead of France. On the contrary. The Swedish participants, not having to rethink, unlike the British, old multicultural models, whose outcome proved not to be as positive as predicted, admitted to far less 'confusion' than their British peers. As a result, heavy identities clashed more frequently, thus ensuring that the dividing lines of the Swedish round table were clearer in what remained (unlike the Polish round table) a serene atmosphere.

Participants to the round table seemed to agree on two points. The first was that Sweden as a whole was much more open to multiple identities today than in its previous village-dominated, homogeneous past, but that there were *re publica* limits to such an openness (and of course the positive or negative nature of these limits shifted depending on whether one spoke as an insider or as an outsider). If the majority of the participants of the British round table agreed that the UK would 'muddle through' with an upwardly positive 'time line', most of the participants of the Swedish round table felt that society as a whole had to work hard to make sure such a 'time line' did indeed move upwards. On this front, what was most striking to an outsider was the degree to which the participants present, perhaps echoing Sweden as a whole, defined their country on the issue of the *re publica* with a national nemesis in mind: Denmark. Their neighbours' growing intolerance, populism, right-wing extremism, terrorism, and lost cohesion acted both as a 'wake up call' for the Swedes, and also as a reassurance of sorts, that 'it could not happen here', if only because Sweden was historically different and could also learn from Denmark's negative example.

The second point of agreement among the participants was the ongoing importance of the Swedish state as a defining actor of Swedish identity

and as the fountainhead of necessary reforms and changed mentalities. On this front, the Swedish round table seemed to prefigure the (upcoming) French round table, thus differentiating itself from the British round table where the state was hardly, if ever, mentioned. But with a fundamental difference with respect to France. In Sweden the state (never the constitutional monarchy) was invoked with a matter-of-factness and ease that showed to what a degree it literally was an important familial presence in daily life, rather than an absent father or distant foe.

Finally, the Swedish round table confirmed what had emerged in the preceding two round tables as well: the near total absence of Europe as a positive reference, as an ideal, or as a possible source of *re publica* solutions in what is becoming, vis-à-vis the threats and fears of globalization, a tendency to turn inward into an increasingly nation-bound context. Keeping these points in mind, one can now turn to the six major topics which dominated the two-day round table. These were: 1) the issue of 'Swedishness'; 2) the status of minorities; 3) the role of the state; 4) the relevance of religion; 5) the importance of the law; 6) what constituted the necessary bases for a *re publica* ideal.

The Swedishness debate

This debate occupied a central role in the two-day round table. At stake was the issue of whether one should define 'Swedishness' and whether there were specific Swedish values that had to be respected in any building of a new *re publica*. All participants agreed that it was becoming increasingly difficult to determine the opposite, namely what was 'un-Swedish', in terms of identities and values, and that such a situation was preferable to a past when the term 'un-Swedish' implied clear-cut differences. They also agreed that no political party sought to use 'Swedishness' as a deliberate political slogan, unlike in Denmark, and there was a collective rejoicing over the fact that no 'old Swedish' group demanded such a definition in Sweden. One participant stressed that literature was an important vehicle for this widening of horizons, with a growing presence of 'others', be they old minorities or recent immigrants, in essays and novels.

Opinions diverged widely; however, over the issue of whether there were specific Swedish values that had to be respected in the building of a *re publica*, and if so, what these values might be.

All participants evoked the metaphor of a necessary 'glue' to hold the country together. For some the 'glue' lay in a combined allegiance to the state and to national sports teams. For others the glue was to be found in 'shared norms and values best incarnated in the Swedish constitution', or in the Swedish tradition of 'freedom and modernity'. For still others, the 'glue' could only emerge through group interaction, with any definition best suspended in favour of blurred lines which each individual or group could cross to be both 'in' and 'out' of 'Swedishness' in function of specific needs. Some referred to the theatre and literature as a new glue. Others stressed the need to build local level and regional arenas where different types of people could meet to discuss shared daily problems as a vital first step, before people could begin to think in national terms.

One participant stressed the complex cultural values that were inherent in any reference to 'Swedishness', including those of village closeness and closedness, and the continued existence of enclaves. She suggested that a distinction be made between ethnic belonging and nationality by coining another term for citizenship, that of 'Swedlander'. No one followed her on that point. One immigrant voice argued that coining new terms would not change the social reality, but simply shift it from one word to another, not unlike calling street sweepers 'surface technicians'. In his view, the very core of the notion of 'Swedishness' had to be changed, to become far more culturally neutral. As the child of Muslim immigrants, what counted most for him was that Sweden should no longer exclude 20 per cent of its population which came from non-Swedish backgrounds. He also felt there was a fundamental contradiction within the Swedish state, when it tried to both promote a policy of diversity, while seeking to inculcate national unity.

Others felt that behind this tension lay a question of timing rather than essence. In the past 'Swedishness' had developed as a way of promoting unity among very different agricultural and urban populations.

Today, instead the challenge was to use 'Swedishness' as a way of promoting diversity in a society in which culture was no longer homogeneous since it was no longer insular. One 'Swedish- Swedish' participant of mixed racial origins commented on the fact that there had been very little local opposition when she wore the regional folklore costume and sang a national song in a public celebration. Another participant, a refugee from a Muslim country, stressed that Swedish culture itself was an open house full of other foreign influences, including those coming from classical Islam, so that it made no sense to set up cultural 'barriers'.

Yet another participant, a former refugee involved in political life, felt that the notion of 'Swedishness' was really a code word for 'class'. Social categories remained crucial. Immigrants who worked and who were educated passed as Swedes, whereas those who were on welfare or unemployed were seen as 'foreign'. This was contested by an immigrant of Turkish origin, who stressed that, even when they played by all the Swedish rules, Muslims still remained 'alien', whereas an American was not perceived as an immigrant, and no one contested his right to remain an American in Sweden. Another participant, who had been an Iranian refugee, even claimed that being Swedish and being Muslim were incompatible categories, to which a Jewish participant,in order to relativize these tensions in a longer time frame, replied that the same had been true for a long time with respect to the Jews. Finally, one participant quipped that 'old Swedes', which the round table agreed on calling 'Swedish-Swedes', defined who was an immigrant, whereas the immigrants could not define who was a Swede.

In this debate, there were no clear winners or losers. The upholders of 'Swedishness' were sufficiently refined to define it as a receptacle which should be filled only with positive traits that could be adopted by all, while discarding bad traits that should be forfeited by all (for instance the old Swedish tendency toward eugenics). While the opponents of the concept stressed that too blunt a definition of 'Swedishness' as an ethnic culture could paradoxically reinforce some minorities in their understanding of themselves as 'separate' (for instance because they did not drink or eat certain foods, or enjoy the sauna), prodding them to turn inwards in a defensive and at times even aggressive mode. However, if 'Swedishness' were defined in more universal and egalitarian terms, then such a definition could actually be of use to newly arrived immigrants who would have a set of maps devoid of all ethnic content with which to orient themselves in the society.

The debate ended with a general consensus that 'Swedishness' could be applied as a value from the bottom up and with the understanding that it had to encompass new groups who were not objects but actors of their own future, and who had to be brought into a national setting whose values transcended simple democracy and human rights, because as one participant bluntly put it 'Sweden was not Italy'.

The status of minorities

The presence of very different types of Swedes at the round table allowed this session to cover more than just Muslim integration in Western societies, all the more so that since the 1990s Sweden had four established and recognized national minorities: Finns, Suomis, Roma, and Jews.

A participant from the Swedish 'great North' highlighted the very tense and difficult relations that existed between the Swedish majority and the Suomi minority over fishing and grazing rights and access to minerals in the land attributed to the Suomi minority. She evoked issues of village wars and the destruction of agricultural lands by moose that moved to the coastal areas, since they could no longer find food in the higher lands because of global warming. This exotic reference to minority tensions opened up the debate to the very many types of minorities to be found in Swedish society. One participant stressed that poor white Swedish of old working-class stock had now become a social minority which had every right to be listened to, and that it was wrong to associate their grievances with unpalatable extreme right-wing groups. Another participant asked whether one should not think of the elderly and the handicapped as another minority.

Most participants concurred that the category of 'national minority' was a complex and unsatisfactory

one, since it lumped together very different groups. Jews and Roma simply could not be compared in terms of cultural or social status, and the big question remained, of course, whether Muslims should strive to obtain, or would ever be granted, such an official minority status, defined as a proven two century-old presence in Sweden. A politician with a Muslim background eagerly sought such a status with its attendant financial packages and cultural payoffs, on the grounds that Muslims were very much victims of discrimination, whether in the courts, in the labour market, or even in restaurants (where they did not drink alcohol). He further stressed that on the sensitive issue of Mosque building, the state and local communities refused to pay such religious places out of their own money, arguing that the Muslims themselves should foot the bill, while at the same time fearing, that if they were to do so, it would surely be with the help of foreign countries. This Catch 22 situation could only be solved, according to him, by having the Muslims become an official minority.

A younger Muslim voice disagreed and argued for the elimination of all official minorities on the ground that such status 'labelled' people and flattened out their multiple identities, while also encouraging the non-democratic tendency of the state to seek out one 'official voice per minority.' The question then would arise of 'who' actually represented the minority group, and with what criteria. He argued that there was no such a group as '*Muslims in Sweden*' and that it was dangerous to create one at a time of growing youth alienation, since it could spark off the creation of a violent sub-community. Speaking in his own name, he added that, while his parents knew Pakistan and its traditions intimately, he, as a second-generation immigrant, did not. So that it was artificial for him to be defined by a previous identity which he barely knew. He was rebutted by the politician who had been the leader of a Muslim youth group, who stated that as long as the leaders of such groups were elected according to Swedish by-laws, no one could question their representative value. To which the younger Muslim replied that if such persons spoke uniquely in terms of their small association it was all right, but that the tendency was for such leaders to take on far more symbolic power in the name of a larger constituency. On this count, he was

seconded by a non-Muslim social scientist who stressed that of all groups in Swedish society, the Muslims were the only ones who wanted to become one highly unified group, a local *Umma* of sorts. Such essentialism could only lead to further internal tensions. Another non-Muslim commentator, stressed, on the other hand, that it was normal for some kind of Muslim representation to exist within the country because the state needed to have visible interlocutors from groups that were discriminated against, persons who could then command some form of moral authority within their community.

The debate then focused on the problems of a 'we' versus 'they' vision of society fixed along majority-minority lines. The same young Muslim voice stressed that such a dichotomy could only lead to a national *cul de sac* at a time when there was little visible progress for Muslims within Swedish society. The only definitions that mattered were those that were sufficiently dynamic to allow all citizens to move in between ever more blurred 'we' and 'they' categories in function of given aspects of their multiple identities. He stressed that there was no way that old Swedes and new (mainly Muslim) immigrants would ever integrate to the point of disappearing into a new type of Swedish person. What mattered was to define 'we' and 'they' in such ways that they became shared and porous pronouns. Denmark was again pointed to as the villain, since it was a society, in the words of one social psychologist, that expected 'real Danes' to drink beer and swim naked, thus permanently excluding Muslims with their own traditions and cultural values.

The blurred identity line seemed to gather general approval especially when 'old' Swedish voices stressed the degree to which Northern and Southern Swedes very much engaged in their own 'we' versus 'they' definitions, further compounded by city versus countryside divisions. Muslims were not the only ones who were in the minority. The same could apply to Suomis, Kurds and Jews, and even, until recently, to Catholics. Interestingly enough, the debate over minorities was enlarged by some of the participants to include both women and homosexuals, on the ground that these two groups had managed to win rights for themselves and to redefine the notion of 'Swedishness' beyond that of

the heterosexual male. They did so by pooling their strengths and transcending their own internal divisions and different life goals. The assumption was that if they could do it, so could Muslims in the long run.

This optimistic message drew forth passionate rebuttals, which were based on a clearly stated (given the off the record setting) fear of Muslim violence and terrorism. This explicit fear kindled its own debate. Some stressed, in a conciliatory manner, that given the local but also global situation, Swedish Muslims (again unlike their Danish equivalents) were surprisingly peaceful. Others stressed instead that Sweden was succumbing to a Muslim separatism, a community living with its own codes and references that had no desire to integrate. An academic with Muslim roots wondered whether Muslim diasporas were not less advanced toward an enlightened Islam than some of the Muslim countries where progress was apparent. He also stressed that Muslims were the greatest victims of Islamic terrorism and that much of the fear expressed in Europe did not take this element into account, worrying only about European deaths. A Jewish participant stressed that if Muslims were keen on following the Jewish example of keeping a successful specific identity, then they had to adapt, like the Jews, and assimilate into many of the wider values of Swedish society.

In an equally candid manner, some participants around the table felt that too much attention was being placed on the 'Muslim question'. Some felt that 'Islamophobia' was only a subset of a far more prevalent xenophobia, which encompassed Jews as well as many other 'others', including Suomis and Finns. Others stressed that there were not really that many Muslims in Swedish society and one should not fall into negative fantasies. Still others blamed the media for creating a culture of fear by confusing terrorists with the religion. One Muslim voice stressed that Swedes were quick to say 'what is wrong with Islam?' with regard to terrorism, but no one asked 'what is wrong with Western democracy?' with respect to the war in Iraq. A few voices said that terrorists were as much the creation of the alienation they experienced in Western societies as of the precepts of a violent fundamentalist Islam.

One participant directly asked the younger Muslim voice why he expressed such immigrant bitterness: after all, he had succeeded. There was no secret 'in' place where elites plotted to keep Muslims out. Women were also 'out'. Education and jobs were open to all. To which two Muslim voices replied that while there were a few 'lucky ones', there were many more left out, not to mention the women who could not find jobs because they were wearing the *hijab*, and that even when Muslims had good jobs, they continued to lack the proper 'presence' for their new status. The debate was surprisingly frank, as though neither side had learned the British version of political correctness which simply provided non-conflictual language with which to avoid tackling certain questions so as to better defend one's own community interests.

The state

As an outsider with some passing knowledge of Swedish politics, I had assumed the group would concentrate above all on the impact of the declining welfare state and the current political turn away from social democracy. In reality, there was very little nostalgia for the old social democratic past. References to the welfare state were made in terms of its weaknesses and inabilities to tackle the new problems confronting both Swedish society and above all the future Swedish *re publica*.

One participant stressed that there had long been a myth of the Swedish Welfare State as an actor trusted to 'fix things' thanks to its social engineers. The idea was that these specialists would allow citizens a maximum of equality that would then free them to pursue their own individualism. This individualism was best defined as a refusal to be bogged down by family responsibilities or local community needs, both of which were judged to be, until now, the responsibility of the state in a 'modern' age. For one participant there was always something supremely self-interested in the welfare state, since one received compensations for loss of work in function of how much one had earned. For another, the welfare state had arisen in Sweden because the country had had no colonial entanglements... and therefore a highly homogeneous population.

The group concurred that the very premises of such a welfare state were now gone. The population was growing older, the state had less money, and needs were skyrocketing. This meant that Swedes had to realize they could not just pursue individualism as the supreme personal value, but had to develop new bonds, which implied a fully-fledged integration of the country's immigrants. Put simply, older Swedes would increasingly need to be taken care of – given the demographics – by Kurds, Iraqis and other immigrants. On this count, one participant stressed that it was less an issue of transmitting to them Swedish 'values', than of having Swedes learn the 'immigrant values' of family unity and collective responsibility for its weaker members. Such a Swedish-immigrant give and take would be a perfect example of two-way integration.

A leading commentator stressed that this decline of the welfare state also implied a full reassessment of how one became 'Swedish'. In the past 'Swedishness' was defined as being 'modern, progressive and individualistic'. But such modernity implied one gave up older skills, cultural belonging and historical identities. As another commentator stressed, modernity itself was now under question, not unlike the symbol of Volvo that had been sold to a foreign car manufacturer. Individualism was no longer possible, and the very progressivism based on an ever-expanding modernity was increasingly contested. As a result one had to rethink the state's role in a fully democratic setting. One former refugee stressed that the state should, above all, promote equality, freedom of speech, justice and protection against violence. Another added that the welfare state was incompatible with political pluralism, since it assumed it had the 'one and only' solution. Another participant stressed that the welfare state had destroyed civil society, without which one could not have a functioning pluralist democracy, for one risked being left 'naked' vis-à-vis a state that was increasingly less committed to intervene.

One had the impression (as an outsider) that the group was progressively lifting the social democratic 'veil' of, in the words of one participant, the 'galloping rationality' that had covered Swedish-ness and the Swedish state for so long. It was now possible to rediscover the more fundamental traits that bound the country together. On this front, the discussion turned, rather surprisingly (again for an outsider) to the topic of religion.

Religion

One participant kicked off the debate by claiming that Sweden had been defined historically in religious terms as a non-Catholic state and that the Lutheran religion was so thoroughly integrated into the national mythology as to have become invisible...but it remained there nevertheless. He further stressed that the welfare state had its roots in this religious subsoil. Another participant agreed and stated that for centuries, Swedish citizens could not leave a given Church except to enter into another, in what remained a closed religious and political context. There simply was no secular alternative available, for knowledge, reason and belief went hand-in-hand. This led mainstream Swedes according to one Jewish participant, further corroborated by the Muslims present, to think that both Judaism and Islam were qualitatively different from Lutheran/ Swedishness....to which one participant also added Catholicism.

The round table then discussed the triangle between secularism, religion and democracy, agreeing that the latter two belonged to very different spheres. For one Muslim voice, the decline of the Church could only be problematic for Islam, for it weakened the very idea of religion as an actor in the body politic. For the majority of the non-immigrant Swedish participants, the issue of religion transcended the question of faith. Perhaps because of the inroads made by Islam, perhaps because the social democratic veil had been lifted, religion in Sweden had once again become a national cultural issue, in what one participant called the 'hugging of religion' (to be compared to the ecologists' 'hugging' trees by chaining themselves to them in order to protect them from destruction). There was also a consensus over the fact that many non-religious people still believed that religion was 'important', and wanted it to play a role, as an ultimate reference against existential loneliness. One participant even spoke of 'reverential atheists'. A participant interested in theological matters stressed the important role religion had played in Sweden in creating a community of values and feelings. In her

view, this sense of community could be transposed to other religious groups beyond Lutherans, in what she called the 'silence with respect to finality', a stance that went against all religious intolerance and excluded any specific opportunistic demands of any given religious group. Another participant close to the Swedish church stressed that for Swedes religion was an internal spiritual emotion that did not manifest itself externally. The round table seemed to accept such a reading of the 'secular' space in Sweden in the past, as essentially a non-visible religious space protected by the veil of social democracy – a veil that Sweden's new immigrants, mainly Muslim, had helped to lift, even if one participant expressed surprise that religion had played such an important role in the discussions.

Only one person argued militantly for the incompatibility of religion and democracy. Among the others there seemed to be a consensus that Swedishness, democracy, pluralism and religion could enrich each other, provided they did not encroach on individual rights and on a growing explicit secular space. Significantly in this context, the issue of religious schools (called 'free schools') was barely touched upon – as though (this is my impression) no one had really given it much thought in political terms until now, although there was the feeling that it was an important and complex issue, whose repercussions were still not fully visible in society.

The law

If religion was the hidden side of the classical Swedish state, the law was very much its visible, and in many ways, more important, underpinning. On this topic, the group chose the 'high road' by discussing fundamental (one would even be tempted to call them, Hobbesian) issues of state power, duties and responsibilities, not so much in making daily life easier for its citizens, as in providing the necessary universal norms of security and equality. Some participants conceded that many problems in Swedish society, especially those linked to immigrants, could be explained in part by the poor implementation or even disregard of already existing good laws (for instance, allowing the building of mosques).

The group as a whole preferred to dwell on a loftier

plane centred on the types of laws which should underpin the *re publica*. There was total agreement that all laws should be universal and none case-specific. *Sharia* law was 'naturally' out of the question, but so was 'playing creatively with the law' (as suggested by the British participant when it came to accommodating specific group needs). British multiculturalism is said to have begun when the Sikhs won the right to be exempted from wearing compulsory motorcycle helmets, because of their turbans. There was no similar sympathy for such an initiative in Sweden, even if the country had possessed the more flexible type of British common law rather than the more rigid continental European civil law tradition. One participant simply stated: 'if one wears a turban, then one can't ride a motorcycle'. There was also zero tolerance for bigamy (for the Muslims) or the right to carry a knife (for the Sikhs). On this count, the round table definitely sounded more 'French' than 'British.'

The question of culturally bound laws that needed to be changed given the transformations of Swedish society evoked far more understanding and even sympathy. One participant, in asking 'who should write the law?' referred specifically to Sweden's sixty year-old ban on Jewish ritual slaughtering, the result of Swedish traditions rather than of any rational law. In his opinion this was an example of laws that could be taken off the books to make the life of different types of Swedes simpler, without in any way destroying the precept of the universal validity of the law. Another example, the law calling for a mandatory closing of stores on Sunday, could also be changed to read that every store had to have 'one day of closing'. The participants agreed that legislation had to evolve to distinguish between habit law and 'The Law.' A Muslim participant gave another example of traditions that became laws that should be amended: the fact that high school commencement ceremonies were still held in churches, a habit that no longer reflected the identity of all Swedes.

The most interesting part of the debate took place over the issue of uniforms. A participant from the great North with a military background stated that she would feel immensely uncomfortable if someone wore a turban with a police symbol on it. She wondered whether there should not be limits as to

who could attend the schools that prepared the law enforcers and soldiers of a country. If one wanted to wear a turban or a *hijab*, then one had to accept that certain careers were not open to you. No one countered this statement in the round table. There seemed to be an agreement that in order for such officers to do their jobs properly, their appearance had to be physically neutral. Wearing an identifying symbol could only invalidate such neutrality. One Muslim voice made a plea for the *hijab*, not in the service of the state, but in private business, for instance in the uniform of an airline hostess. Another Muslim wondered how one could hide the 'defining' colour of a black person to make him/ her appear 'neutral', or questioned the fact that policewomen wore skirts, only to be told that they were only allowed to wear them on formal dress occasions, never on the job, and that the issue was about 'neutral values' and not skin colour.

This entire debate would have been unthinkable in the UK but not in France, or for that matter in the US. At any rate, it seemed clear from the round table that most of the participants agreed that religious identity politics had no place inside the founding pillars of the state.

Building the *re publica*

The Swedish round table was the first to have actually devoted an entire session to the issue of 'how' to build a future *re publica*. The metaphor used to convey such a task was that of a common bus heading toward the same destination. The general conclusion was that Sweden was such a bus. Very few were opposed to the general direction of the trip. Even fewer insisted that the bus be an old Volvo, in the sense that no one was actively arguing for a 'majority society'. The laws of passenger safety within the bus were accepted, as well as those for open and equal seating with no privileged seats for any specific type of citizen. Given adherence to these lowest of common denominators, and the acceptance of a final destination of equality, freedom and individual rights, the rest could be negotiable. One participant stressed that during the recently created National Day, a young Kurdish woman, who shared none of the old Swedish customs, defined 'Swedishness' as support for the Constitution, simply because this austere legal

document was what protected her best from her father, brothers and cousins.

Two participants disagreed with this search for a *re publica*. They felt that people were more easily united by common tasks at the local level, or global challenges such as climate change rather than by shared minimum values. One stressed that today's youth had lost faith in the political arena, and that on many counts 'Sweden' was no longer the best working framework with which to tackle these issues, either because it was too big with respect to local challenges, or because it was too small in a European framework. The other claimed that in a global world, the nation state was becoming increasingly irrelevant. People were connected beyond borders and mobile phones between diasporas and countries of origin, united more than by dint of living with others in the same physical neighbourhood.

Most of the round table disagreed with these readings. There was a shared feeling that the *re publica* had to be strengthened precisely in those areas where the state still counted: law, rights, equality, all of which still remained within national purview. It was important to define *re publica* parameters, and only when these were established could one determine the fine tuning of the commonweal by political and social choice. What remained to be seen was the level of solidarity the society was willing to uphold in terms of risk sharing and providing of safety nets. The round table participants agreed that the lines between 'us' and 'them' had to be blurred to avoid barriers and divides. And it was important to stress that such lines could also be simply socio-economic and not only ethnic. Only one participant was pessimistic about breaking up the new Muslim 'islands' to be found particularly in Southern Sweden near Mälmo, where immigrants could lead their daily lives without knowing a single word of Swedish, and where, according to him, new generations were growing up with no Swedish language skills and no desire to integrate.

From the other end of the spectrum, others living deep in Sweden's provinces stressed the need to expose children growing in what were still extremely homogeneous areas to the possibility of meeting

those who looked 'different' or had different religions, in order to counter the rise of extreme right-wing xenophobia. Furthermore, in an ever more global and varied world, such 'Swedish-Swedish' children risked becoming the 'backward' future citizens of a vibrant and diverse country. There was also much discussion about how to make people connect with one another within the *re publica*: via mixed housing and mixed schooling as places where minorities could meet Swedish-Swedes, via new neighbourhood fora, exchanges, even religious exchanges, via rejuvenated libraries, and what one participant called the creation of 'mini res publicae' at the local level.

The round table ended with a discussion about another highly significant metaphor, that of the nation as a 'safe harbour' against the tumultuous waters of the outside world. The reference was quoted, initially disparagingly, by one participant as a dangerous right-wing demand both against immigrants and the impact of globalization. To which other participants replied that there was nothing intrinsically wrong with such a metaphor, that it was precisely the *re publica*'s task to build such a 'safe harbour' for all of its citizens and legal residents. All the more so that a safe harbour could only be achieved through a social redistribution which could only be national, not European. There was agreement that under no circumstances should the right-wing parties be allowed to monopolize the concept, and even the fact that right-wing Danes used it was no reason to scorn it.

Sweden as a 'safe harbour' held together by a strong state. By lifting the social democratic 'veil', the round table restored old values in a new, open and diverse guise. The guidelines it sketched for a Swedish *re publica* combined the power of tradition, culture, and innovation with a willingness to relativize the past. They are well worth pondering in other national contexts.

Diana Pinto
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The programme for this round table is available online at:

http://www.jpr.org.uk/common-good-in-europe/downloads/round_table_sweden_programme.pdf

Report on the French round table

Dr Diana Pinto

The fourth national round table in the Ford Foundation funded project 'Voices for the Res Publica: The Common Good in Europe' was held in France in November 2007, under the auspices of the London- based Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR) and the Paris-based policy centre, La République des idées, as well as the review Esprit. The purpose of the round table, as defined in the Project's manifesto, was to bring together a carefully chosen group of opinion-formers and academics to foster a frank and in-depth 'off the record' exchange of views on the conflicts, underlying fears and deep defensive reflexes that exist within each minority or majority group, in other words, those factors which had led to a weakened common public space.

It is, of course, very difficult for the person who conceived the entire project, and planned the round table programme to write an 'objective' report on the round table's outcome. I trust that my non-French astigmatisms will compensate for my deep involvement in the very shape of the project, and the fact that this round table took place in the country where I live, and whose political vicissitudes are most familiar to me. When reading what follows, please bear in mind this personal *caveat*.

Summarizing a two-day round table with such a diverse group of participants inevitably implies confronting several risks. The first is that of generalizing on the basis of what a given number of individuals present said, when other participants in their place might have raised different issues or addressed the same issues in a different manner. The second risk is that of 'essentializing', ie, attributing a given person's comments to his or her ethnic background, religious affiliation, age or gender. Each individual is of course a sum of different experiences and identities, which, at times, clash or reinforce each other in defining that person's outlook. Essentializing is a particularly dangerous proposition, especially for a project which seeks to build a new *re publica* on a wide set of intertwined multiple identities.

Yet, it is impossible not to generalize at some level if one is to use the round tables as a starting point for further *re publica* debates. In the pages that follow, I have referred to given group identities (such as Christian, lay, Jewish and Muslim, conservative or progressive) only when what was being said stood out for having been said by a member of a given group who clearly invoked his or her given identity while grappling with the issue at stake. Similarly, I felt it was worth reporting when only members of a given group took stands on a given issue while others who belonged to other groups did not jump into the debate.

Preliminary remarks on the round table

The French round table was highly particular on more than one count. To begin with, it took place at a highly sensitive (and of course unplanned) political moment. It was held at the very end of ten days of massive national transport strikes, perceived by all to be the test of the entire Sarkozy political mandate for major structural reform. The outcome of the strikes was so uncertain that the organizers had to rent a bus to ensure that the participants could attend the round table. The round table ended on an equally uncertain note, since the night before the final sessions, a banlieue in the Paris region experienced the return of youthful anti-police violence, fires, looting, and rioting after two youths were killed when their small motorcycle hit a police car. The group adjourned not knowing whether a new cycle of riots along the lines of those of November 2005 had just begun, or whether the violence would remain a localized incident. Given these events and the fact that the round table was held six months after the election of Sarkozy as President, it was also inevitable that immediate and highly political issues received far greater treatment than in other national round tables, particularly in a country whose national history was best defined by clashing political cultures.

The round table faithfully mirrored France's endemic contradictions, but also its strong points. During most of the two-day debates one had a sinking feeling of *déjà vu* best conveyed by the other anglicized French motto: '*plus ça change*, *plus c'est la même chose*', particularly for any student of France who has seen the same problems diagnosed

for over forty years without any real 'cure'. France, however, is a highly complex and contradictory country. Society in all of its structures is far more positive than it is made out to appear, even as the political structures that accompany it are far more negative than meets the eye. But as is the case for elderly persons, one can wonder whether such an old country has not found some kind of inner balance linked precisely to this precarious equilibrium.

The round table stood out for a second reason: the extraordinarily high number (six) of last minute 'no shows' to be added to a more normal 'fallout' of two among the original nineteen slated participants. The previous ten days of strikes with their attendant exhausting commutes, as well as the onset of the 'flu' season, may have played a role in these unexpected absences, but their last minute nature made any replacements impossible. The fact remains that the round table lost six carefully calibrated 'voices', among which a local conservative mayor, member of the Conseil Général of an agricultural region; a social therapist and university professor of North African origins, with a practice in the highly sensitive banlieues outside Paris; a social and cultural entrepreneur from Marseilles' socially disfavoured area of La Castellane; an academic specialist of Islam; a Jewish community specialist; and a black academic specializing in France's problems of ethnic and social discrimination. Their voices would have added breadth and scope to the debates, but fortunately, there was enough diversity among those present to cover the key identity problems and classic obstacles in France's growingly complex social and political kaleidoscope.

The participants included a judge for minors from the banlieues, a national secretary from one of France's main trade unions, a high level adviser to the President of the French railroads from a North African background based in Marseilles, a black entrepreneur active in social issues, lay and Catholic intellectuals and editors, one with Polish and Swedish roots, as well as two historians, one Jewish now teaching in the UK, the other a deeply committed Catholic active in Church affairs, plus two people with a strong American and British experience. Despite the fact that most of them were left of centre, and perhaps precisely because of the vast disarray of France's multiple lefts, the participants

managed to raise all the pertinent issues with sufficiently contrasting opinions – some even quite conservative – to ensure that the round table addressed France's key problems through a sufficiently wide-eyed lens.

The French round table differed from all the others for one final, far more structural, reason: the risk of inherent confusion between the reference to the *re publica* and the reference to France's own specific institutional political framework, *la République*. Whereas in the UK and in the Swedish round table, and to some extent also in the Polish one, participants had to grapple with a Latin reference to the 'common good' that did not come naturally, the danger in the French round table was the opposite: that linguistic familiarity with the term would either skew the debates toward *la République*'s own everyday politics or bury them under untold layers of historical references based on a political and social tradition going back to the French Revolution.

These two dangers could not be avoided entirely. France's structural inability to carry out reasonable reforms in time, her penchant for strong solutions promulgated from 'above' with the concomitant, equally predictable revolts from 'below' do not just belong to the country's tumultuous political past. They continue to define France's deepest living cultural political identity. If the British are proud of their ability to 'muddle through' by finding *ad hoc* pragmatic solutions to most of their problems, one can say with little provocation, that the French are also proud of their ability to 'muddle through', by which they mean surviving the disturbances provoked by their repeated political and social crises. These crises—one could call this the 'other' French paradox– are so embedded in the national culture that they do not really prevent the long-term functioning of the country.

'Politics' was thus more central in the French round table than in any other, but this did not prevent the group from agreeing on several key issues. They agreed that France had become a more open and pluralist society, particularly at the local and regional levels, even though this new openness was not necessarily reflected at the central political level still plagued by the ongoing paralysis of the political elites. They also stressed that the social welfare

aspect of the *re publica* still functioned by and large satisfactorily, thus defusing some of the more violent consequences of this political paralysis. One could not really speak of entire groups of people having been 'left out' of the social contract, even though budgetary restrictions rendered all of these positive nets inherently more fragile.

If Britain had 'the Continent' as a reassuring spectre, if Sweden feared becoming Denmark, if half of Poland had the other half as its own internal enemy, France, in the eyes of most of the participants, was not only better off than the rest of Latin Europe, but it was also more 'just' and 'convivial' than either the UK or the USA, with their separate ethnic communities and weak safety nets. In other words, France, like every other country in the round table series so far, had its own reassuring 'negative' mirror.

The participants also felt (and in this they reflected a far larger French consensus) that France, unlike most of her neighbours, had no restrictive 'Frenchness' (in the sense of 'Britishness' or 'Swedishness') debate. This was due in part to the fact that national identity in France was not 'ethnic' but irremediably bound up with the Nation State and its most recent incarnation, *la République*. There was also another major reason: the country's 'others' or 'immigrants', unlike elsewhere across Europe, had come, in their vast majority, from former French colonies, and their parents had been French *indigènes* (natives), even if they themselves were not French, but most important, their children were French citizens. Most of France's immigrants already spoke French, and their children, even at the heart of the *banlieues*, were making their own contributions to French culture and counter-culture. Their integration was thus an increasingly social issue, not one based on irreconcilable identity clashes with ultimate foreigners, separated by language and culture from an older French ethnic population.

These shared readings, however, led to two very different ways of evaluating France's current political blockages, social crises, and immigrant problems. The round table participants could be divided into two camps. There were the 'structural' pessimists, who believed that France's problems were deeply ingrained, predated current identity considerations and were unmanageable irrespective of the type of political elites in power. A second group of *ad hoc* pessimists believed instead, that things had got much worse and that a new political class was needed to confront entirely new types of social and political problems. Paradoxically, the 'structural' pessimists were also those who believed that France would continue to 'muddle through' in her very own special manner. For them what counted was to reassert the fundamental principles of '*Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité* which were the creed of *la République*. The ad hoc pessimists instead felt that the traditional equilibria of the past had been toppled and that *La République* could only be saved with new forms of authority and new social blueprints that would bring her closer to other national models from Europe and North America. These two camps were separated by an extremely fine line and it was not uncommon to see participants shift from one side to the other, depending on the specific topic addressed.

These latent tensions came out in the open over a highly symbolic issue which has been in the forefront of French intellectual and political debate in the last two years: the legitimacy of statistical tools that would count France's inhabitants in terms of self-proclaimed ethnic, racial and religious belonging, thus breaking with *la République*'s tradition of considering its citizens as equal in an identity-blind manner. The round table was held days after France's Constitutional Court reaffirmed its opposition to any ethnic or religious statistical breakdown, but the issue of 'statistics of diversity' (their official name in the French debate), continued to hover over every session, not unlike Banquo's ghost. The 'structural' pessimists were largely opposed to such statistics, whereas the ad hoc pessimists argued for their vital need.

With these preliminary considerations in mind, one can now turn to the round table discussions. They all hinged around one central *leitmotif*: whether one could speak of a 'crisis' of *la République* in the following realms: 1) social cleavages; 2) the educational system; 3) secularism; 4) citizenship; 5) the law; 6) political representation.

It is worth stressing that none of these crises was directly related to the presence of 'others' inside the French context. In other words, contrary to other

national experiences, and even contrary to what one saw on television, France's structural problems predated the arrival of new black or Arab immigrant populations. Depending on one's way of looking at the perennially half-full glass, this could lead participants to either relativize the weight of ethnic problems (since France's problems preexisted this issue) or instead, to consider them as aggravating variables in an already blocked national context.

The crisis of social representation

When asked to define France's current divisions, most participants agreed that some of the old defining splits such as 'Paris versus the Provinces', a very popular reference for most of the postwar period, or generational cleavages (in the spirit of the protests of 1968) were no longer pertinent. The pursuit of individual needs versus collective institutional progress had transformed French society and deepened social fractures, without, however, creating new places of social cohesion. This was particularly true for France's 'others', of immigrant origin, who did not, unlike in the UK, aggregate in clearly defined communities—something most of the participants considered beneficial for society as a whole, in that they did not voluntarily form separate ethnic clusters. Since the French République only recognized religious identities (in a highly limited manner) and no ethnic ones, the French round table did not discuss the issue of 'minorities' as such, but was forced to address it in a far more indirect manner.

Many participants agreed that French society was increasingly divided between those who were 'active' and those who were not 'active' because they did not have a job or because they were retired or were on social welfare. All agreed that the current fracture between 'active' and 'non-active' persons, was leading to a badly distorted redistribution system, with the older populations both having far more money than the younger generations, but also costing proportionately more in terms of social and economic services. These imbalances were particularly visible, according to one participant, in the smaller towns and villages of a vast country such as France.

Others stressed that France's major social divisions were, instead, territorial in nature with the rural

areas and the *banlieues* being proportionally poorer and less privileged in terms of state services than the cities. To this fundamental injustice one then had to add another, namely the type of employer who gave work to the 'active' populations. Those who worked for large state companies which offered virtual life-time jobs were on the other side of the benefits divide from those who worked for small private enterprises at the mercy of market forces and with no guarantee of long term employment. The strikes that had just ended were sparked off by the government's non-negotiable declaration that henceforth workers in some protected state sectors had to pay forty years of social contributions like everybody else, thus losing 'privileges' that had been negotiated decades before in another economic setting. Some participants felt that the government was responsible for the strikes by having refused any calm negotiation. Others felt, instead, that the trade unions had to be 'curbed' in their corporatist demands. Both agreed that political ideology had won the upper hand over pragmatism.

The greatest conflict among the round table participants centred around the issue of ethnicity and race. Some believed that ethnic and racial cleavages were becoming important benchmarks of an increasingly conflictual French society. Others adamantly claimed that 'ethnic' differences were secondary, mere smoke screens, with respect to the deeper social injustices of a society where the children of the old working-class were just as discriminated against as the children of black or Arab immigrants in terms of their social mobility or the much tougher rise into France's elites. The dispute was not solved, but time and time again, different participants complained that concrete aspects of France's educational, legal and social problems could not be properly addressed simply because one did not know enough about the nature of the populations under study, nor could one count them in terms of their identities. The conclusion was that one could not possibly fight against discrimination and injustice if one did not know 'who' was being discriminated against and in what proportion with respect to the rest of society.

Since the 'statistics of difference' had been turned by some political activists and intellectuals into an ideological symbol of a fully fledged attack against *la*

République, along with the notion of 'positive discrimination', few were willing to turn such a pragmatic sociological tool into a concrete political demand. One participant, with North African Muslim origins, proclaimed his shock upon hearing that one of Sarkozy's campaign promises had been to have a 'Muslim Prefect'. The very idea that la République would fall into the trap of 'affirmative action' by defining ethnic typologies seemed for him to be a total denial of its quest for meritocratic excellence. Another participant from the trade union world stressed that the trade unions were a closed middle-aged 'club' with no tradition of bringing in 'new blood' and that this generational blockage also explained why there were so few black or Arab cadres within the trade union movement. Age and territorial belonging could account for this discrepancy, beyond any 'ethnic' discrimination. The round table did not pursue this discussion, as though held back by ideological 'taboos'.

This debate may seem off the mark or at least exotic with respect to other European experiences, but it is important to stress that it has become a powerful dividing factor among persons who share the same political will to fight discrimination on behalf of a more open and just society, and this division traverses both France's 'right' and 'left'. Those against ethnic statistics claim that social and economic data suffice to determine social inequality, and that the state should simply fight all discriminations, all the more so that there is no such thing as 'ethnic solidarity.' Rather than speaking of targeted ethnic groups, it is best to speak of targeted 'neighbourhoods of discrimination' Those who favour ethnic statistics claim, instead, that racial discrimination further embitters social differences, and that by not counting, one continues to present a skewed picture of a racially dysfunctional French society. Blacks, in this view, suffer from specific racial discriminations that have nothing to do with social status, since such discriminations also affect the black middle classes with higher education, who simply do not get the jobs for which they are qualified.

It is important to stress that France's blacks have taken the lead in demanding these 'statistics of difference' far more so than France's North African Muslim populations, and in the round table it was significant that the person who came out most vociferously against such statistics was of North African Muslim origin and a very committed upholder of *la République*, who had always worked in a major state company, while the person who upheld them most was a black entrepreneur. He had specifically told the round table that he had been forced to become a self-employed entrepreneur after sending out 1500 unsuccessful job applications despite his high, doctorate-level, professional qualifications.

All participants agreed that France's crisis of social representation was exacerbated by the political class' inability to take social problems into consideration. This was translated by a structural inability to promote ongoing and open social dialogue. As a result, there simply was no efficient relay between social demands and political solutions. Only the effectiveness of the social welfare net allowed society not to explode more often. Yet, for many participants, this safety net was becoming only a social palliative which could no longer hide the fact that France had a growing number of 'working poor' who simply could not make it on their salaries alone.

Disagreement arose on whether this cleavage between society and the state was 'spontaneous' or 'orchestrated' from above. The debate that followed was over hues of pessimism, which I could call 'standard', 'deep' and 'global'. 'Standard' pessimists seemed to think that there was a political 'will' to divide and conquer different groups within French society by consciously pitting them one against the other, and that Sarkozy incarnated this tactic. 'Deeper' pessimists felt that at best, Sarkozy revealed cleavages that were already there, and that it did not matter who was in power, whether from the left or the right. In both cases, there was no real political will to make reforms, and no desire to engage in a fruitful dialogue with social actors. 'Global' pessimists felt that France's problems stemmed from deep-seated cultural trends, namely the historical tradition of hostility to the 'big ones' in power. This led to very strange unintended results, namely that those who were in the most precarious jobs often sided with and supported the demands of those who had safety cushions and corporate privileges, thus blocking society's need for reforms

while misunderstanding their own self-interest. The 'global' pessimists seemed to carry the debate, arguing for the impossible goal of achieving greater social transparency. 'Standard' pessimists argued for a more cohesive political organization within the left. 'Deep' pessimists felt that France could only lurch between the Scylla of ineffective reforms and the Charybdis of Bonapartist authoritarian shaking-ups of the country to make it catch up for its non-reformist sloth. In this reading, Sarkozy merely inaugurated a new Bonapartist phase in French society....hardly the sign of a flourishing *re publica*... even though one could argue that this was the French way of 'muddling through'.

As a small counter-argument to this general pessimism, one participant stressed, that, in terms of family finances, Frenchmen were beginning to think in more 'capitalist' terms, by subscribing massively to life insurance as a form of savings– to which another replied that they did so because it was the only way of ensuring that they could leave an inheritance to their own family members rather than to the state, via its heavy inheritance taxes.

The crisis of education

France's highly centralized public educational system was historically conceived as the main pillar of *la République*, first turning peasants into Frenchmen, then integrating the working classes, and slowly taking in the new more upwardly mobile strata which were produced during the years of postwar economic growth. The participants at the round table agreed that the educational system was no longer performing its integrative role. In saying this, they were basically claiming that *la République* itself was in crisis. They disagreed however, on the level where the system was weakest and on their assessment of some of the private educational alternatives that had risen in the last decade.

One historian stressed that France had managed to bring ever larger numbers of students into the *lycée* level of secondary education from 35 per cent immediately after the war to more than 65 per cent of the population today, a record which he deemed to be better than that of the UK.

Most participants replied that this colossal jump

could not hide the fact that so many students left high school without any qualifications...many of them 'pushed on' even when they clearly had not attained the level of competence necessary to move on to the next grade. Furthermore, those who entered the universities (as opposed to the prestigious *Grandes Ecoles*), were basically entering a vast garage, if not a rubbish dump, and that even those who left with training, often did not find corresponding jobs in a static labour market, which was compared most unfavourably to the open job market of the UK. The debate about the perverse effects of France's double track system of well–financed elite *Grandes Ecoles* and financially strapped general universities, was not dwelt upon much, since it has been a topic of never-ending French discussions since at least 1968, with no seeming solutions in sight. The rate of attrition in the first two years of university studies remains appalling, in what could only be defined as a vicious cycle of indifference and bad counselling on the part of highly strapped universities that have no institutional autonomy. Sarkozy's reforms in this sector were awaited by some with great interest, but also with a hefty dose of scepticism.

Moreover, the French educational system was no longer fulfilling its function of conveyer belt and great integrator of French society. Although technically and juridically equal, French lycées and universities offered very different results in function of the territories in which they were situated and the populations who attended them, but the lack of statistics prevented any serious study of the actual social mobility of the 'visible minorities.' The question of ethnic statistics came up again in this context, with their opponents claiming that France's education system was failing because entire 'territories' were allowed to live with poor quality schools, thus preventing their inhabitants from participating in the meritocratic educational tradition. Those advocating such statistics claimed instead that the students who were really 'left out' all happened to belong to 'visible minorities' and that French whites could still get ahead even when they came from socially underprivileged neighbourhoods.

One participant stressed that educational systems could not single-handedly give 'values', but could only serve as 'relays' for the values which the state

and the elites wished to convey, but also society as a whole. This brought the debate back to the fact that entire sectors of society (mainly blacks and Arabs) were not given due consideration, were often humiliated, and treated as potential criminals or thugs, and thus marginalized with respect to the very values la République was supposed to incarnate. One participant stressed that the left-wing presidential candidate, Ségolène Royal, had behaved as badly as Sarkozy in her failure to address the banlieues. For another participant, the origins of this mistreatment were to be found deep within France's colonial past, whose perverse effects had still not been acknowledged.

What appeared to most foreigners as the highly controversial issue of the Muslim headscarf in schools was barely touched upon, because it had become a non-issue in terms of numbers. Contrary to pessimistic predictions, the number of girls who refused to take off the scarf in schools was merely anecdotal. The round table felt that the French educational system was suffering from far worse problems than this refusal to accept identity demands. And these problems were simply not being confronted at the political level.

The question of faith schools and their role in strengthening or weakening the *re publica*, offered grounds for a more fruitful debate. Religious schools in France under state contract were required to fulfil the same curriculum requirements as state schools. One participant with a Jewish background who had also taught in a private Jewish high school, felt that such faith schools were still producing 'good Frenchmen' (in his terms), if only because most graduates were so tired of Jewish references by the end of their schooling that they had only one longing: to plunge back into the wider space. This backhanded compliment did not convince everybody. Many felt that parents sent their children to faith schools, simply because they wanted to avoid the growing violence and 'ethnicization' of state schools. Some neighbourhoods might still be 'mixed', but only superficially, so at the level of shopping in open markets, but in reality, families and their children were no longer integrating via the schools of *la République*.

The participant with Muslim origins told the group

that he had initially sent his children to a Catholic school, hoping it would give them a stricter moral education and above all 'values'. Upon realizing that the school did not do so, he had pulled his children out and sent them back into the state school system where they could at least encounter all types of children.

Another participant with a strong Catholic background warned that new types of faith schools were emerging that were able to forfeit state accreditation because they could finance themselves via religious orders or parental contributions. These schools came about because many Catholic parents were disillusioned with the lukewarm values taught in most Catholic schools, and by the fact that they were attended by so many non-Catholics. They wanted their children to have a strict and 'proper' theological religious education. Similar schools also existed among the Jewish ultra-orthodox, and in both cases students were not really taught to respect the *re publica*. The unspoken question on everybody's lips was what would happen one day when similar ultra-orthodox Muslim schools develop. For the time being the very first Muslim state accredited schools were just coming into being and not without controversy.

The crisis of secularism

The session was kicked off by the Catholic participant who did not mince his words in denouncing France's tradition of *laïcité*, which had been erected as one of the founding principles of *la République*. His criticisms did not stem from any wounded Catholic sensitivity but on the contrary, from a feeling that French secularism was (in his words) 'brutal, unbalanced, and intolerant'. French *laïcité* was brutal because it was the child of the life and death struggle between the Catholic Church and *la République*, whose roots lay within the French Revolution. The state continued to mistrust any type of spontaneous religious life, preferring, instead, to rigidly codify its statutes and rights. (Indeed, religious affairs within the French state come under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Interior...as though religious practice could only lead to social disorder).

Laïcité was also unbalanced because it gave far more

privileges to the Catholic Church than to the other two religions which fell under the 1905 separation of Church and State: the Jewish and the Protestant. These privileges were highly 'terrestrial' in terms of financial and social rights but also in terms of the Catholic Church's ability to maintain much of its internal financial 'opaqueness'. This helped explain why the Catholic Church was so committed to the accords of 1905, which gave her the lion's share of state consideration. Finally, *laïcité* was intolerant since it refused to accommodate religious newcomers, namely Islam, which was not present during the original separation of Church and state, while according virtually no statute to the new evangelical Protestant groups, and even banning Scientology as a dangerous sect. In brief, France was a country with severely amputated religious freedoms, that alone practised such secularism as a fourth religion, and therefore hardly served as an example for others to follow.

The round table's response was quite mixed. One resolutely lay participant was shocked to see that 'religion' was even on the menu for discussion in what constituted for her a breach of *laïcité*. She even felt that any reference to the 'return of religion' was irrelevant to discussions on the *re publica*. Most participants disagreed, feeling that 'religion' had become an important factor in national life, one which could no longer be avoided. In other words, the ideology of *laïcité* was outdated. They were, however, still not sure how to take this change into account, for rethinking such a delicate and outdated equilibrium could be just as disastrous as not wishing to overhaul it. Either way, one was opening a Pandora box.

Another lay voice stressed that France was not unique in this religious unfairness. Germany was just the same, particularly with respect to Islam. A lay voice with Muslim roots, stressed the degree to which Islam was discriminated against, since its faithful were forced to pray in makeshift mosques since the state could not finance them after 1905 ... the problem being that Christians and Jews already possessed their houses of worship before the separation of Church and state. To which a Jewish participant replied that synagogues in 19th and early 20th century France were still not allowed to have entrances on main roads but were built on far

smaller side streets, presumably so as not to offend the sensitivity of the Christian majority. Muslims, in other words, were not the first to have been in a situation of structural inferiority.

Another participant stressed that Islam could not really be 'integrated' until it had been purged of its association with terrorism, which brought on a Muslim response that French '*laïcité*' was perceived as an excuse with which to reject Islam (and those who practised it) altogether from the French national context, in what he called the three 'V's' of anti-Muslim abuse.... with Muslim youth first being accused of being voleurs (thieves), then *violeurs* (rapists) and finally *voileurs* (seeking to impose the veil).

The session ended with references to how the private sector dealt with religious demands from its employees. There was a consensus that private enterprise could be more flexible than the state, which discriminated among its citizens even inside the prisons, where no provision was made for those inmates who wanted to observe Ramadan, their food being served at the usual hours...or which exaggerated on the other hand, by bringing foreign Imams into prisons, who brought with them fundamentalist ideas that were not controlled. State schools were better since they proposed eggs for Muslim children on the days when school lunches contained pork. The major industrial companies allowed for some religious practices to exist, and the law allowed three days of paid holidays for religious occasions for all workers. But the round table participants agreed that there was still much to be done with respect to Muslim workers, particularly adult women who wanted to wear the veil, and who were looked upon with suspicion by fellow workers as potentially dangerous.

The crisis of citizenship and immigration

This particular session squarely confronted the situation of the *banlieues*, no longer as a territorial phenomenon but in terms of the specific populations who lived there. The participant who kicked off the session, the editor of the review which co-sponsored the round table, chose to stress the positive aspects of the situation, namely that in France different ethnic groups were converging with

good levels of intermarriage... with older populations but also between different immigrant groups He added that France's good fertility levels were the product of French citizens, and not recent immigrants, so that France did not have to fear a demographic explosion of non-integrated 'others'. He acknowledged that some of the older immigrants might still be living under polygamy, but asserted that their children were totally opposed to the continuation of such a practice.

There was a major discussion on whether the French *bête noire* of *communautarisme* (ie. people choosing to live within their own ethnic or religious groups with little outside contact) had any validity inside the *banlieues*, and the consensus seemed to be if that if such *communatarisme* existed it was above all the work of the French state, which had isolated recent immigrants in neighbourhoods where they were stuck together, without proper transportation into city centres, and without any 'traditional' French citizens with whom to integrate. The judge for minors confirmed that young blacks and Arabs belonged to the same gangs and that 90 per cent of the rioters of 2005 were French and perfectly socialized into French life. Clearly citizenship did not protect them from marginalization or prejudice.

The crisis of citizenship was linked to the fact that a portion of France's citizens were excluded from the national compact for social reasons, and trapped in neighbourhoods where the political elites of the country referred to them as 'enemies' in what one participant called 'war metaphors', coming from a state that invested little in public policies and did not know how to have recourse to mediation. This reading was partially rebutted by another participant who stressed that the state had pumped millions of euros into these neighbourhoods but that nothing had come out of this intellectual and financial effort, and that there was a crucial need to have new elites tackle these issues.

The participant with North African roots from Marseilles stressed that he was not convinced the *banlieues* were inevitably explosive and that they could remain quiet for years or explode the day after (it turned out that hours after he spoke, one Parisian *banlieue* was again up in arms after two youths on a light motorcycle died when it collided with a police

car). But then Marseilles had remained far calmer than any of France's other cities, for reasons linked to its geography—its *banlieues* being in the midst of the city – as well as to its numerous 'para-legal' activities, which gave the city's youths jobs in what could be euphemistically called a 'grey' economy.

The crisis of citizenship in these neighbourhoods was further compounded, according to one participant, by the fact that the youths no longer had any political demands and were totally disinterested in political life. This was due to the fact that France's political elites had never known how to open up to the best voices from these new groups, even when they had marched in the name of 'republican 'values during the *Marche des Beurs* (young people of North African origins) in 1983. The state's only reaction at the time and under the left in power was to create ineffectual local associations with no links to the conveyer belts of political representation, thus parking these new voices in dead-end streets. The same was true according to the participant from Marseilles with respect to the 2005 riots, which produced no new leaders in the making and no political demands.

Other participants were less pessimistic. They stressed that many youths from the *banlieues* were making it, and that only a highly visible small number were utterly 'lost.' With a bit of effort, most could be integrated into real jobs. The adviser to the president of the French rail company explained how the SNCF had started to recruit actively in the *banlieues*, because most young adults there had not even thought of applying for a job in the rail sector, assuming it was the given right of the children of railway workers. Breaking caste mentalities was a crucial first step in changing France's social landscape. The fact that young women were moving far more quickly towards integration was emphasized by several participants who also stressed that many French women married men from immigrant communities. The general consensus was that 'time' was on the side of integration.

There was one dissenting voice. The black participant stressed the degree to which France contained virtually all of Africa's populations, which were extremely different one from the other, and the culture gap that separated lifestyles of those who

left Africa to come to France from the older French populations. The only possible way of integrating such populations was through work, which was sorely missing at this point in time. Others pointed to the fact that given globalization, France was beginning to have truly 'different' populations in its midst, ones that no longer came from its empire, such as Pakistanis, who had to be taught the very basics of French values and habits, unlike the previous generations of immigrants. So that 'time' could also be double-edged.

The historians present sought to relativize today's tensions by showing just to what extent previous immigrants were also judged to be problematic and the extent to which they retained their very separate identities for long periods of time before disappearing in the French melting pot. Taking such a long-term perspective things would work out in the end even for France's new citizens. One participant even stressed the degree to which the French state had become far 'gentler' since the police had not killed anybody during the entire three weeks of riots in 2005, whereas they had systematically shot to kill in the midst of working class crowds as late as 1947. The historian with a Jewish background compared today's situation with that of the 1930s, when other immigrants, mainly Jewish, arrived in the midst of the French economic depression, at a time when Frenchmen were denaturalizing newly minted citizens and tightening the nationality laws....with tragic consequences for the immigrant Jews who were then deported first. Thus was the French present relativized, at least for those who stressed that France's problems were inherent to its own structures and not brought in by immigrants.

The crisis of the law

The judge who participated in the round table set the tone for the session by stressing that France's laws were not the problem. They amply covered all of the legal needs of *la République*. The problem stemmed from the fact that governments, whether from the left or the right, were constantly promulgating new laws, many of them not even passed through parliament, as a way of showing the public that they were politically 'active'. This was one of France's major problems because laws, of course, could only create a framework for political action but did not constitute political action in and of themselves.

This particular French trait of excessive legislation led to major problems for the *re publica*. Those responsible for applying the laws could barely keep up with their new promulgations, so that the entire judicial and administrative system of la République suffered from these excessive innovations, which often had ideological or populist intentions. One example given was the newly acquired right of the homeless to sue the state for not giving them proper lodgings. But this implied that the homeless had the means with which to sue the state. Not only were the courts already crumbling under piles of dossiers, but such legal action would fail to produce non-existent social housing out of thin air.

As a consequence, the *re publica* was suffering from administrative practices gone awry, from a lack of transparency, and from the impossibility of measuring the social needs of all types of minorities. As a result, judges were expected to carry out the political and social tasks that politicians were not performing. For the judge, as for many other participants of the round table, the fact that there were no 'statistics of difference' meant that they could not perform their work properly, since they did not know 'who' from 'where' was doing 'what'. On this count the judge confirmed that young persons from the banlieues had a far higher chance of getting into trouble with the police, even at the level of first contacts, simply by their style of conversation, which policemen (who had not been specifically trained for these neighbourhoods) often interpreted as 'offensive' and 'provocative'. The youths were then taken to the police stations with charges of 'affront to an upholder of the law' and thus began the infernal spiral of having a 'police record', for which any second offence, small as it might be, would be punished even more severely. These sociological reflections, the judge stressed, had been reached by an indirect process of trying to equate family names with a given ethnic origin.

For many of the participants who were actively involved in society, it was clear that the Sarkozy government, eager to ram through Bonapartist solutions to France's stalemated society, was not

interested in leaving any discretionary powers to the judges, accused of being too 'soft' on crime. It was no longer possible to apply the law while taking particular family or individual circumstances into account. This was particularly true in the case of African immigrants with highly complex family structures, where uncles were considered as important as fathers, so that children 'belonged' to a larger 'tribe'. The Law had to be equal for all and thus blind, but many feared it was also becoming deaf to the country's social realities. France was the only country so far in the round table cycle where participants looked to European laws and their trickling into the French law as a possible source of help in breaking longstanding stalemates.

The round table then addressed the issue of minority rights within the law. These were evoked with respect to religious and sexual minorities. The debate focused on whether such specific demands (as the right to turn the Christian derived calendar into a more neutral one in terms of school holidays, or the right of homosexuals to marriage) were 'specific' rights or simply 'universal' rights applied to specific cases. A Catholic participant asked whether one should construe the Law as being the product of the 'General Will' (in which case the rights of minorities to change well established traditions would be perceived as irrelevant) or whether the Law should protect minorities as specific groups. There was not much debate on the question of gay marriage, all the more so that a civil contract existed which provided homosexual couples with the key social and legal protections. Most participants seemed to plead for a pragmatic case by case approach on the issue of religious rights with respect to the school calendar. The Stasi commission that had recommended forbidding the scarf in schools, had also suggested that the major religious holidays be turned into 'days off' for all schoolchildren, so as to make the Republic less Christian-derived, and also as a way of teaching all children about other religious traditions and the need to respect them. This provision was never enacted into law, perhaps because it might have been strange to have all French schools have a day off for Yom Kippur even when there were no Jews in a given city or region.

The discussion then moved on to the question of whether schools should be teaching religion as a

historic 'fact' in the first place. One religious participant scoffed at the idea that one could call oneself a 'Christian atheist' (the self-definition of a prominent French intellectual, Régis Debray who had proposed the teaching of the *fait religieux* in the first place, by suggesting in a typical French fashion that a law be promulgated to allow this teaching in schools). The old taboos of *laïcité* hovered over the debates, with the fear that 'religion', rather than its history, might be taught instead. Most participants seemed to agree that it was best to avoid such a slippery path into religious tensions, all the more so that one participant stressed that learning about the Koran would not help explain terrorism. Others felt that it was crucial instead to show that Islam had no built-in connections to terrorism, and that only the teaching of Islam in school could defuse such a twinning. One voice waxed pessimistic by saying that in the past, students discovered the 'other' and his or her religious background by having different classmates in school. This was increasingly less the case, since schools were de facto becoming segregated because of the territorial divisions.

There was a general consensus that France was crumbling under too many laws and that the national tradition of amending them often and promulgating new ones as a sign of political change was highly detrimental to the *re publica*.

The crisis of political representation

This crisis permeated all the debates. There was a widespread consensus that France's political institutions no longer represented French society and that the National Assembly was particularly deficient in this realm since it was basically a club of middle-aged white males. Such a reading did not emanate only from within the left but was shared on both sides of the old political divide. Indeed many of the participants felt that when the left was in power, it had been particularly guilty of not having sought out new political talent from within the ranks of the new popular classes, failing to bring into its ranks the stronger voices of the *banlieues*, including Arabs and blacks. The left was accused of having become a club of self-promoted 'notables', particularly among the younger politicians of the 1980s, one or two of whom had come out of the less privileged 'territories'. Paradoxically, Sarkozy was the first

President to have brought 'visible minorities' into his government.

The group did acknowledge that French politics had done away with the most extreme parties, with Mitterrand having wiped out the Communists in the 1980s and Sarkozy now having wiped out the National Front. These parties, however, had listened to and given recognition (and jobs) to groups in French society that no longer felt represented, and which were still 'out there', such as the old working-class. No political party now showed any interest in or respect for the 'lower classes' be they 'old' French or from immigrant origin.

Old adherents to the ideals of *la République* stressed that France's political malaise stemmed from the loss of an ideal, that of the 'general interest', as incarnated in France's grands corps who ran the state. One should strive to make them more meritocratic and 'colour-blind'. *La République* would be endangered if politicians started courting or playing up to specific groups, particularly since every group contained its own highly different sub-groups, in what could become a bottomless layer cake (*mille-feuille*), losing any vision of the 'whole' in the process. The way out of the problems of the banlieues was simply to make sure their citizens had all types of mobility: social, professional and even transport, since they were often symbolically locked inside housing units without access to real public transport, hence their burning of cars which symbolized mobility only for the better off.
Those who espoused a more pluralist understanding of the *re publica*, stressed, instead, that it was normal for politics to reflect group interests, and that France had made great progress on this count at the local and regional levels where group politics was acceptable. One participant gave as an example of this 'new' France a town where the mayor had appointed a deputy in charge of Armenian questions.

Decentralization was perhaps offering a new context for political reform. The problem was that these new political activists were not represented at the national level. There was a debate on whether it was simply a matter of time, or whether there were structural blockages that would persist, foremost among them the tradition of parachutage– having

the major political parties send candidates from Paris with no local base to run in parliamentary elections, bypassing the local grassroots politician. One participant stressed that local voters often preferred the parachuted candidate to their own local hard-working politician, because they assumed the former would carry more clout in Paris.

Furthermore, given Paris' temptation to centralize all major political decisions, one encountered an added perverse effect. Local and regional actors who could reach pragmatic and useful agreements among themselves along bipartisan lines at the local level would automatically reintegrate their respective political camps and the attendant language of conflict, if the same issues were then debated at the national level....so that local progress in no way prefigured a change of French political traditions. And there could be no hope coming from Europe because politics was deeply anchored inside age-old national political traditions. France thus ran a very real danger of remaining quite frozen in political terms.

Some participants felt that Sarkozy, and his ministers, none of whom had come from France's *Grande Ecoles*, (unlike the Socialist candidate and her advisers) might finally break the French political corset. But one could just as easily say that Sarkozy, the Bonapartist 'doer', still remained trapped in the old French political tradition. The jury was still out, and for many, the true test would be whether the banlieues could be 'defused', and their residents brought into national politics. A more pessimistic voice referred to the act that France's electoral map had not changed since 1986, even though the Constitutional Court had specified that it had to be revised every few years. No political party, however, had pressed for such a revision since it was not in their interest, as it would have entailed changing well-established reflexes. As a consequence, the *banlieues*, which were already discriminated against in social (and ethnic) terms, were politically underrepresented, not only in the distant National Assembly, but above all in local and regional politics as well. What was needed for French politics to become more representative was a larger dose of proportional representation....and stronger counter-powers, since the National Assembly did not have sufficient legislative clout with which to oppose the Executive.

Does *La République* still incarnate the *re publica*?

The round table debates all pointed to a loud 'no' as an answer to this question, if only because of the sheer amount of time the participants spent denouncing the dysfunctions of the French state and its political system, and above, all the divorce between French society and its institutions. (The contrast with the UK round table where 'government' was barely mentioned was particularly glaring).

Yet that would be too simple an explanation. Behind the massive political criticisms, behind the feeling that the 'common good' was short circuited by irresponsible and static political elites, loyalty to *la République* and to its longstanding principles remained strong. In the words of one participant, priority had to be given to ensuring that *la République*'s values triumph over the 'incantatory' and rote reference to *la République*, used by those (on the left as well as on the right) who wanted to block all change. Only with such a gamble could 'republicans' ensure that France did not fall into the 'Anglo-Saxon' trap of identity politics....the only foreign reference in a round table that had very little to say about 'Europe'. Yes, the criticisms were all there, but in the end one should not underestimate the power of love and even patriotic pride for France's 'difference'.

One participant's last comment in the round table was that things were really not so bad in France. The welfare state still worked, even if the left had betrayed its political responsibilities. Ultimately it did not matter that there was no effective division of powers within the French state. The 'street' would always be there to control the executive. This was not said in a rueful manner but as a philosophical piece of political analysis. The country that gave birth to the French Revolution cannot really be expected to turn itself into a modest and predictably boring political setting. The unanswered question was whether this miraculously counter-balancing 'street' would henceforth also include the *banlieues* and the local powers. To which one had to add an even more disturbing question, whether one could really introduce change in a country that, by and large, liked itself as it was.

The *re publica* in France thus faced an uphill battle to reconquer *la République*.

Diana Pinto
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The programme for this round table is available online at:

http://www.jpr.org.uk/common-good-in-europe/downloads/round_table_france_programme.pdf

Report on the German round table

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The fifth national round table in the Ford Foundation funded project 'Voices for the *Res Publica*: the Common Good in Europe' was held in Germany in February 2008, under the auspices of the London-based Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR) and the Potsdam-based Einstein Forum. The purpose of the round table, as defined in the project's manifesto, was to bring together a carefully chosen group of opinion-formers and academics to foster a frank and in-depth 'off the record' exchange of views on the conflicts, underlying fears and deep defensive reflexes that exist within each minority or majority group, in other words, those factors which had led to a weakened common public space.

It is, of course, very difficult for the person who conceived the entire project, and planned the round table programme to write an 'objective' report on the round table's outcome. I trust that my non-German astigmatism will compensate for my deep involvement in the very shape of the project. I can only hope this will contribute to a more detached reading of the proceedings. I hope the German participants will feel challenged by this summary, much as I was throughout the entire two days of debates. Nevertheless, when reading what follows, please bear in mind this personal *caveat*.

Summarizing a two-day round table with such a diverse group of participants inevitably implies confronting several risks. The first is that of generalizing on the basis of what a given number of individuals present said, when other participants in their place might have raised different issues or addressed the same issues in a different manner. The second risk is that of 'essentializing', i.e., attributing a given person's comments to his or her ethnic background, political or religious affiliation, age or gender. Each individual is of course a sum of different experiences and identities which at times clash or reinforce each other in defining that person's outlook. Essentializing is a particularly dangerous proposition, especially for a project which seeks to

build a new res publica on a wide set of intertwined multiple identities.

Yet, it is impossible not to generalize at some level if one is to use the round tables as a starting point for further *res publica* debates. In the pages that follow, I have referred to given group identities (such as Christian, lay, Jewish and Turk– rather than Muslim – conservative or progressive, 'Wessie' or 'Ossie') only when what was being said stood out for having been said by a member of a given group who clearly invoked his or her given identity while grappling with the issue at stake. Similarly, I felt it was worth reporting when only members of a given group took stands on a given issue while others who belonged to other groups did not jump into the debate. Lastly, I refer to 'generations' when there was a clearly defined cluster of statements cutting across identities by persons of the same age group.

Preliminary remarks on the round table

The German round table was composed of fourteen German participants, plus two Americans – the director of the Einstein Forum and the Vice-President of the Ford Foundation – plus the British representative of JPR and myself, with a more continental and French perspective.

The German participants constituted a highly diverse geographical, sociological and professional group which mirrored quite faithfully Germany's composite identities and generational shifts. They came from the West German Rhineland and Ruhr, the East German Länder, from 'special' Berlin, as well as from Frankfurt and Hanover. The older participants were formed in pre-1989 Germany as members of the Bonn Republic or as dissidents of the GDR, while the younger participants reflected the new more homogeneous stakes of the Berlin Republic. Even the members of the 'minorities' incarnated the complexities of their respective groups: there was a postwar-born Jew with Mittel-European origins and a younger Jew from the post-1989 Russian migration. There was a German-born lay woman of Turkish background and a German-born Kurdish Turk veiled woman, as well as the usual mixture of Protestant, Catholic and secular voices, with very different readings of their own German pasts.

In professional terms there were several academics and social and political activists with grassroot ties to Germany's main political parties, one social worker, a cultural activist, plus several specialists of education, immigration, intercultural relations, a judge and a constitutional law specialist. Two participants held political positions at the local and regional levels and there was a historian to give greater perspective to the debates. Missing were a journalist and an entrepreneur who were unable to come at the last minute.

This mix turned out to be ideal, for in a country as large and as varied as Germany, all participants were able to discover new viewpoints and sensitivities coming from other Germans they rarely, if ever, encountered. Bringing together 'Ossies', 'Wessies', 'old' Germans, Jews and Turks meant that each group had to confront new interlocutors beyond the usual bilateral dialogues so favoured by every German foundation and forum. The *res publica* debate in the German context was thus devoid of any partisan rhetoric. The round table format was particularly fruitful in a country which had begun to define itself, both in function of, but also beyond, the weight of its past.

The German round table stood out with respect to all previous ones for four highly specific reasons:

1) Given its Nazi past and the long period of post-war political division, 'Germany' as a united country with recognizable majority and minority populations was very much still 'in the making.' All participants stressed the degree to which the national image still had not 'jelled', so that everyone was confronted with an identity quest, not just immigrants. The image that came to my mind was that of tectonic identity plates interacting with one another and sliding one above the other, to reform a new national setting, but without causing an earthquake or provoking major political tensions or violence.

2) Because of this still unclear national image, the Germans in the round table were far more willing to compare their country with other European nations. On nearly every topic addressed, voices could be heard either stressing how similar problems occurred elsewhere in Europe or the degree to which problems were indeed unique. Interestingly,

the same people could take opposing visions on this count depending on the issue at hand, so that no group advocated, as in past German history, the need for a special and different German path, *Sonderweg*, to the *res publica*. The German round table was particularly fruitful because it lacked all self-centred national blindfolds.

3) The voices of the East German participants stood out because they brought very different nuances to the debate. First of all, they clearly considered themselves as members of a 'minority', and one that had not been given a proper hearing. Secondly, they proved the degree to which Germany today also had to face non-Western problems (also confronted in the Polish round table), linked to the Stalinist legacy and to the importance of the prescriptive state. Thirdly, they were carriers of old national cultural reflexes which Western countries did not need to confront, but which were becoming an integral part of the new German *potpourri*. These 'eastern' voices turned out to be those of the most geographically 'stable' Germans, those who neither migrated after the war nor were forced to adjust to German resettlement, but remained, instead, rooted in their lands. These voices were not submitted to the decades of West German commemorative repentance, with its concomitant internalized political correctness. They also had virtually no immigrant experience, and once, liberated from the Communist repression and demoted to a minority position inside united Germany, they were remarkably free in their opinions and outlooks. I had the impression that they brought 'ancient' sounds to the round table, which were in the process of acquiring a highly relevant 'modern' ring.

4) Finally, and for obvious reasons, the German 'past', including the Holocaust, was not just an important historical reference, as in the other round tables, but very much of a living, still not fully integrated, factor with respect to the future. The past hovered over all the debates and influenced all groups, including the new immigrants. Religion, on the other hand, was virtually absent from the debates as a topic, as though its impact had been too ferocious in the long German past, starting with the Thirty Years War, to be able to be handled in passing. Or perhaps Germans had still not truly factored Judaism and Islam into their own careful

Protestant-Catholic balance, so that the religious issue (solved between Protestants and Catholics) had still not appeared on present-day radar screens. Whatever the reason, this failure to evoke a topic which lay, instead, at the core of France's fractious identity, Britain's daily life, Poland's essence, and Sweden's search for roots, set Germany apart from all the previous round tables.

A comment on the round table dynamics. The German participants turned out to be surprisingly informal and direct in their discussions. I was amazed by the degree of familiarity and friendliness that developed among very different types of participants who had not known each other before, far more so than in either France or Sweden. Perhaps this openness came from the fact that the Germans all considered themselves as relative newcomers to a new German context that was still being defined. It was as if they all felt on more or less equal footing in a new national setting where no one could claim to be the rightful 'owner' of the country. As one younger participant from the Ruhr stated, for the longest time no one felt good about being German, including the immigrants who did not wish to take on such an identity, so that there was no precious 'old timer' pride to be found within the country, where everyone seemed to be new to the task of defining a German *res publica*. Armed with this double awareness, participants were truly free to talk with the openness and questioning of neophytes, but neophytes endowed with a particularly strong sense of moral and historical responsibility. This responsibility, beyond the friendliness, gave a special tone of gravity and soul-searching to the debates.

As a result of this collegial spirit, the image of Germany that emerged from the round table was a remarkably calm one. All sides agreed that Germany was a 'work in progress'. To the question, whether the 'time line' was moving upwards or downwards in terms of progress, the German responses all pointed to a national setting that was finally able to tackle its identity problems and 'think' in a global and mature manner.

I left the round table with the strong impression that the very different voices present had enriched one another. There was a contrapuntal air to the round table, as though each participant were singing his or her part in a political and social cantata with a potentially serene rather than tragic outcome.

This spirit very much prevailed in addressing the five core topics of the round table: 1) Constitutional 'patriotism' and the German 'identity' debate; 2) The past and its role in the shaping of contemporary German identities; 3) The role of the state in the creation of German society; 4) The integration of minorities; 5) The necessary building blocks of a new *res publica*.

Constitutional patriotism and the German identity debate

This topic turned out to be one of the most important and interesting of the entire round table since it covered the very foundations of the new postwar German democratic order. The round table began with a positive interpretation of Germany's present-day identity. The West German philosopher who launched the discussion stressed the degree to which a German consensus had been crafted around the core values of the *Grundgesetz*, the German Basic Law, an equivalent of the 'Bill of Rights' at the heart of the West German postwar Constitution. He was convinced that Germans of all origins had slowly accepted the idea of 'constitutional patriotism', as the new glue of a German state that eschewed all ethnic or historical definitions of 'belonging'.

He also stressed that Germans had become increasingly aware that Germany had become a country with immigrants, if not an immigrant country. Furthermore he felt that the recent elections in Hesse had proved that xenophobic statements no longer paid off in electoral terms, neither for the extreme right nor for the extreme left across the political spectrum. He also felt Germany had made major strides in confronting its black past, citing Holocaust commemoration and the Berlin memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe as a case in point, and this statement was rendered more powerful given the fact that he himself was a Jew. Finally, he felt that Germany had achieved a consensus based on a 'thin' identity. The only viable, leading culture or Leikultur could only be grounded in the constitution, in loyalty to a German fiscal

regime, and above all in the acceptance of a common language....everything else being negotiable and left to the desires of the individuals.

This sanguine 'kick-off' immediately elicited a spate of reactions. Several participants, including a former 'Ossie' dissident voice who thus came late to the political culture of the Federal republic, questioned whether all Germans truly adhered to this constitutional patriotism, or even knew the rights and values inscribed in the *Grundgesetz*. Others added that constitutional patriotism did not prevent strong racism in everyday life and that values did not necessarily lead to proper behaviour, as witnessed by countless racist incidents. An educator argued that knowing these rights did not automatically lead to their practical implementation since, for instance, human rights were not even taught in schools, and that it was very hard to determine whether political literacy should precede or follow democratic experience. The judge with Turkish origins argued instead that people did know the spirit of the law and lived by its values, as could be seen by the growing number of cases in court dealing with domestic violence. Immigrants had to accept, and were slowly accepting, that to be 'German' meant subscribing to these fundamental values.

The debate took an even more interesting twist when a political and social educator from the former East Germany declared quite simply that 'constitutional patriotism' was too cold and abstract a concept to serve as a glue for national belonging, especially for the weaker and less politically literate target populations with whom she dealt. She argued for a warmer and more emotional definition of 'being German', one based on love of the country and a visceral feeling of physical belonging in the country's landscape. Only with such a feeling could one then ask citizens to display the necessary political courage and involvement in the democratic contract. The former 'Ossie' went even so far as saying that she was happy to know that her grandfathers were buried in the cemetery near her house, that this constituted her deepest feeling of German belonging.

This candid and outspoken emotional vision (which could only have been uttered in a closed and off the record setting) went against all the aseptic official

language of Germany's postwar democratic identity, which carefully avoided any reference to 'love of the fatherland', emotional ties to its soil, or ancestral definitions of belonging. Inevitably it produced a cascade of reactions. Some were just as emotional as hers, particularly that of a Jewish voice who stated that not everyone was lucky enough to know where their grandparents were buried. Others defended 'constitutional patriotism' by saying that it was not a cold, bloodless concept but one which contained its own emotions in its plea for the dignity of man. One could flesh it out a bit, but it was out of the question to replace it with 'love' for the fatherland.

A conservative politician with close ties to the old Bonn Republic mused that embedding any German identity in the past led to an insoluble dilemma, for the Nazi years stood as an insurmountable barrier, with the attendant question of how it had been possible for an entire people to have been led astray into barbarism with such relative ease. Since there was no clear answer to such a question, it was just as unclear to see how warm feelings toward the 'past' could be of any use in shaping a German present. Constitutional patriotism was the only answer to this dilemma, a way of trying to create a new glue, and perhaps, in the long run, it could be perceived as a temporary aid on the way to a new, inclusive and healthy patriotic reference.

A younger politician, also from the West, stressed that the group agreed on fundamentals and was merely divided by adjectives. He felt that the new generation of young Germans was among the most tolerant and responsible, fully committed to the principles of the constitution, while also emotionally tied to their part of Germany, as he was to the Ruhr. In this vision, even the use of verbal slurs in schools against Turks was a way of integrating them into the wider German identity. As if to confirm this trend a political science professor from East Germany stressed that those youths who practised intolerance and racism were mainly to be found among the losers of globalization, those who had no hope for the future and no clear identity, and found no sympathetic ear in any political party. This extremism did not reflect German society as a whole. The judge with Turkish origins and the younger Jewish voice were far less sanguine about

such a reading of youthful extremism.

The debate then shifted to the subject of *Leitkultur*. The term had originally been coined by a conservative politician in the late 1990s to convey the fact that Germany had a core culture and that immigrants had to adapt to it if they wished to integrate. Since then, there had been much discussion on just how 'thick' or 'thin' such a leading culture had to be, and whether Germany should even have one.

Those participants who came from the former East Germany clearly believed that there was a specific German culture, in the landscape and in the past for the political educator, even in the flag and above all in the state. For another former 'Ossie', who had been trained as a theologian, German culture was closely intertwined with Lutheranism and with its tradition of singing as a cultural phenomenon that bound Germans together, initially against Catholic dogma, but then as a community.

They were rebutted by the judge with Turkish origins who flatly stated that she had absolutely no feeling or empathy for any German tradition or custom or anything that could be described as 'typically German', a position that could have been shared by many of Germany's new Jews as well. What interested her were democratic values. A Berlin-based cultural activist with a brief political experience in the Berlin Senate made a plea against any *Leitkultur*, claiming that only artistic and non-verbal cultural forms could integrate people from different cultures in a context where national states were losing their importance. While another participant from Western Germany stressed that local patriotism was an inherently German trait deeply rooted in the European tradition, a trait that could be used to ground German culture against its Nazi past. This part of the debate ended when the judge argued that she could very easily accept the Lutheran feelings of belonging shared by some of her fellow citizens, as long as she did not have to comply with them to be considered a 'good' German.

The historian and the philosopher in the group both stressed that a society with immigrants could not invoke the depth of field of its 'dead' as a founding

element of its identity. Democratic societies were the product of both 'Space' and 'Culture', with the key word being 'Space', since it was the place where different types of citizens integrated and that this meeting space could not be defined by ancestral traditions. Across Europe, traditions might resurface but only as 'invented traditions' that could be adopted in a symbolic and playful manner, even by people with no blood ties to the 'old' Germans. Only in this sense could one reconcile 'constitutional patriotism' with a quest for a 'thicker' German identity.

What characterised this first getting to know each other session was the unusual degree of frankness and strong beliefs which all participants exhibited in responding to the sessions' questions. The era of silent German consensus over democracy was clearly over. What one could witness in the round table was the rebirth of a vibrant contrarian culture, but one based on the acceptance of everyone's shared belonging.

The past in the creation of group identities

This issue was debated heatedly in the round table given the fact that the past, in particular the Nazi past, continued to mould all German identities, including those of recent immigrants. The participants focused in this context on the Holocaust and its commemoration, debating whether this reference would ultimately play a constructive or far more ambiguous role in the creation of a future German *res publica*.

Perhaps because the round table setting allowed participants to transcend 'political correctness', the debate was particularly honest and may have signalled a shift in the wind. The majority of participants were no longer sure that Holocaust commemoration was the effective panacea with which to combat all German problems or ills. The perverse effects of this commemoration were beginning to make themselves felt, not just among 'old' Germans or 'new' Turkish immigrants, but also among the Jewish voices present in the discussion.

Only one, that of the Western philosopher, spoke convincingly of the benefits stemming from Holocaust commemoration, interpreting it as a

founding moment of a new German identity, one which had to be shared by all citizens irrespective of their ethnic or religious origins. He pointed to the fact that some Muslim students refused to integrate the Holocaust past, skipping class when special days were devoted to the topic in school with the presence of survivors, thus refusing, in his view, to integrate the wider German consensus. In his view, being 'German' implied sharing history's dark load, even when one was a Jew.

The other Jewish 'voices' disagreed. One, speaking as a mother, stressed the degree to which even her own children were suffering from Holocaust 'fatigue' in school, with the Nazi past becoming increasingly equated with rote learning. More important, she stressed the degree to which one should not be moulding future generations with only the lessons of past horror and with examples of resisters, such as the members of the White Rose student group or of the Stauffenberg assassination attempt against Hitler, who had all been killed for their heroism. The time had come to present living, positive examples of successful resistance, rather than remaining stuck in a past-dominated society.

A younger Russian-born Jewish voice also wondered whether the emphasis on historical narrative was not an obstacle to the integration of immigrants. It could only sharpen the divide between 'them' and 'us', since the past implied that there was a collective 'we'. He did not feel that Germany's Jews had to take the Nazi past unto themselves as part of their own contemporary German identity, and could thus implicitly understand that the Turks might feel likewise. Furthermore he was not convinced that Holocaust monuments carried permanent 'lessons' which would resonate convincingly through time, and even less convinced about the 'universal lessons' that could be extracted from the Nazi horror against the Jews as a specific people.

A specialist of education among immigrants stressed the need to rethink the entire question of Holocaust education. She described a pre-2001 study done on Turkish responses to the Holocaust, specifying that many Turks thought in terms of a multi-cultural citizenship which transcended national borders and were thus not interested in fitting a German mould with its attendant commemorations. Some did

perceive Holocaust awareness as an 'entrance ticket' to German life, but most transposed the Jewish horror into universal terms, thinking of it mainly as a crime against humanity. The specialist did say, however, that apparently some of the immigrant youths felt 'German' for the first time when visiting a concentration camp and seeing the glances that students from other countries threw at them as presumed descendants of the perpetrators. Participants then wondered how the second *intifada* and 9/11 might have changed the conclusions of the study. There was a general agreement within the group that if Turks in Germany had truly integrated the Holocaust in their socialization, then they should prove able to counter any rising Arab antisemitism in Germany. They should also counter any extreme left-wing distinction made between Jews as victims, and Israelis as 'perpetrators.' The group was however, careful in separating the German Holocaust debate from passions over the Middle East.

The group did not just dwell on the Holocaust chapter of the German past. The former 'Ossies' present stressed that Germans had also lost a piece of their own past identity with the loss of the eastern provinces now in Polish territory and that it was virtually impossible to either find their traces or to engage in a conversation with Poles over that spent chapter, where the question of 'responsibility' without 'guilt' was equally applicable for all younger generations. Similarly, Poles did not want Germans to interfere in their own debates over Jedwabne, even though the issue concerned everybody, Germans, Poles and Jews. While another East German voice stressed that those with a plurality of identities, for instance Poles who were also German, were often unable to come to terms with any past, and lived with shattered identities.

Another former 'Ossie' stressed that no reference to the past could be complete without taking Stalinism into account, not just in terms of domestic German history but also in terms of German involvement with the other countries of the Warsaw pact and of course with the former Soviet Union. The young Jewish voice with a Russian background felt that before East Germans contemplated their own role within the Warsaw Pact, they should first confront their own Holocaust past, which had been conveniently forgotten thanks to the regime's anti-

fascist rhetoric.

The young politician from the Ruhr stressed the degree to which 'Auschwitz' did not make Germans more sensitive to other cultures and their own pasts, not even those of the Volga Germans who had immigrated from the former Soviet Union, but whose histories no one cared to learn. But he also stressed that many Turks were eligible for German citizenship but did not apply for it because they did not really want it, since a German passport came with a full load of German history, including Auschwitz.

The cultural activist from Berlin stressed that Germans were uniquely interested in 'their own Holocaust' and 'were very good at it', building impressive memorials in whose shadow even silly teen age boys behaved in a more serious manner. But the same Germans expressed little concern for ongoing genocides in Africa, for instance in the Darfur, or for other human suffering elsewhere. She even wondered whether an excessive 'philosemitism' had not prevented Germans from looking at the Middle East in a more even-handed manner, to which the younger Jewish voice replied that Jews were the first to suffer from excessive 'philo-semitism', far more than the Arabs. As for linking the Holocaust to African atrocities, the older Jewish voice made the point that the Holocaust stood out with respect to the African horrors, not in terms of the suffering of the victims, but because it had been implemented at the highest decision-making levels in a highly developed society and had not been the work of child soldiers or violent masses.

A psychologist of Turkish origins changed the nature of the debate by stressing that the 'past' was not just the shared historical one, but, particularly in the Turkish immigrant community, a family/tribal one. Younger generations felt loyal above all to a family past and often knew or cared as little about Turkish history as German history. As a result they could only 'belong' and identify with a German past once their families felt integrated and not the other way around. This was his answer to a question raised as to why so many German-born Turks were still buried in Turkey rather than in their native Ger-man soil.

The group split over the long-term consequences of this complex link to the past. One pessimist stressed that Germany would remain a 'Swiss cheese country' full of holes for a long time and that identities (such as 'German', 'Jewish' or 'Turkish') would endure, the descendants of each group having to renegotiate their relations with one another and their specific memories in each future generation. An American voice stressed that there were other significant German 'holes' linked to the post-1968 violence and repression, as well as to the handling of 1989 (meaning, presumably, what happened to the 'Ossies').

The West German elder politician argued that one should not link the reference to Nazism to integration. For integration could only come about with a minimal shared *Leitkultur* which would take a long time to come about. He was also aware that integration implied changes both on the German side and on the side of the immigrant minorities. Above all, these changes had to be constructed in a positive manner. The reference to Nazism, instead, could only be based on an ongoing, totally negative narrative. Furthermore, he stressed, the time had come to move from the description of the horror to its interpretation. Otherwise, there would be no guarantee that the Holocaust would retain its 'universal singularity' over time. What counted was to refer to it sparingly and to ensure that similar horrors did not occur again.

The optimists argued, instead, that time would eventually solve many of these tensions. The historian was convinced that in two or three generations many of these divisive issues would have sorted themselves out. He felt that one could not make excessive demands on immigrants (and perhaps even on the old Germans themselves). In this he was seconded by the older Jewish voice, who agreed that integration at this point should be exclusively defined in legal rather than in cultural terms. What counted was the strengthening of a legal community of citizens. One could not wait for ten generations of cultural integration to produce such a community. The rest would come on its own and perhaps even *à la carte*. The judge of Turkish origins brought home this need for a legal community by stressing that what counted most was for Germany to further open up its citizenship laws.

She was frequently faced with distraught immigrants who had committed themselves to entering the German body politic, and who had been turned down for citizenship because they lacked some exceedingly technical prerequisite. In brief, there could be more integration if the country presented a more welcoming attitude.

The most important aspect of this extremely varied session was the manner in which it took place. First of all, Germans of all stripes were able to speak their minds and dialogue one with another (at times even in a brusque manner) on acutely sensitive topics, which would have previously been swept under the carpet in any politically correct exercise. Coming from totally different backgrounds and with often incompatible pasts, they proved able to engage in what I would call a 'pan-German' conversation. Secondly, in this round table the Holocaust was removed from its 'holy black pedestal' to become a living issue in a future-oriented German discussion. Ten years after the Walser-Bubis psychodrama, Germans of all stripes could discuss the perverse effects of the Holocaust's commemorative centrality without anyone accusing anyone else of any possible 'antisemitic' overtones. To me this was perhaps the most encouraging sign that Germany was slowly moving toward a positive future-oriented and eventually integrated society.

The state and German identity

Perhaps because the first two sessions of the round table had been so passionately intense and had touched upon the most serious topics in depth, the session devoted to the German state turned out to be far lighter in tone and more pragmatic in content than I had anticipated.

In the Swedish round table, I had assumed the participants would discuss at length the slow decline of the welfare state which I, as an outsider, considered to be the true pillar or 'glue' that held Swedish society together. It turned out in that round table, that Swedes, instead, had a very strong sense of a Hobbesian legal state, going back to the founding Wasa dynasty, so that the declining welfare state (whose decline was, of course, extremely relative compared to other countries) did not lie at the heart of their *res publica* discussions,

which were far more centred on the law.

For the German round table, I had assumed that given the past, the discussions would centre on pondered analyses of the state and its functions in a rapidly evolving German society, but also given the extremely important philosophical and historical tradition of thinking on the regalian state.

Instead, the discussions centred almost exclusively on current politics and on the decline of the welfare state. One could palpably measure in this session the hole that Nazism had left in the nation, cutting it off effectively from its past. The protectionist welfare state thus became the identity 'glue' of the two Germanies that had rebuilt themselves out of the shambles of the past. Its slow weakening did not just constitute an economic and social problem, but above all an identity problem for a country that had no other state references to turn to and which was beginning (as shown in the first session) to feel the limits of constitutional patriotism.

Everyone agreed that the German welfare state was fraying, as elsewhere throughout Europe. But unlike the rest of Europe, this welfare state, whose roots lay in the paternalistic Prussian tradition and in the pioneering social reforms, pension plans and insurance systems inaugurated in the late 19th century by Bismarck, constituted the only viable and positive Ariadne thread leading back to the pre-Nazi German past. The decline of the German welfare state thus left Germans far more conceptually state 'orphaned' than the citizens of other European countries.

The West German conservative politician/thinker who launched the session, did reflect on the current decline of the Bonn Republic's federal system, which was rapidly being replaced by a far more centralized form of government in the Berlin Republic in which the executive had the real power and the parliament was marginalized. He attributed this growing centralization to Europe's need for strong national interlocutors, but also to the demands of globalization. The result was a 'consensus democracy' best incarnated in the current CDU and SPD coalition, in which all political issues were settled without any public debate and without any concrete results, since the state could not produce

wealth and thus solve society's problems. The result was that Germany's younger generations wanted a return to the old 'father state' that would protect them from globalization and its dangers and protect them from the difficult task of taking charge of their own lives, which implied a renewed commitment to the work ethic.

It was therefore no accident that the 'father' metaphor with respect to the welfare state dominated the round table discussion with the participants debating, not unlike adult children, the current condition of their 'father'. Bismarck's 'father state' had been authoritarian and powerful, and to some extent his legacy was best found in postwar East Germany. The postwar West German 'father' was a silent provider. But now, in a united Germany, the father was no longer fulfilling his responsibilities.

For some, the father had simply abandoned the house and run away with the money (a direct reference to the tax evasion scandal of wealthy Germans hiding their money in 'foundations' in Lichtenstein, which made front-page headlines during the round table), in what could be called the privatization of public goods. To remedy against this 'father-thief', people had to dip into their savings to help their adult children. For others, the 'father' had left the family while still exerting disciplinary control over their lives in what could be called 'control without care.' For yet others, he had not run away but had simply become a totally inept father unable to perform his duties properly: regulating the wrong things and legislating in an absurd manner over who could benefit from social welfare.... even in terms of the size of the apartments, with the result that some people who needed help were forced to close off rooms in their house in order to qualify. Interestingly enough, these three interpretations all came from 'Ossie' participants who stressed that the current social welfare dysfunctions made them think of the old GDR in a kind of *déjà vu* syndrome.

The Berliners and the 'Wessies' were not far behind in their criticisms, stressing that the 'father' had simply gone away without leaving a forwarding address after having become totally unreliable: unable to pay pensions or to propose jobs. The father might be absent but people still expected him to send cheques to the abandoned family. Without

them, Germans felt they were now skating on a 'thin ice' identity, since they had always defined their state in terms of available work and social protection. For one participant, maybe the 'father' was slowly being substituted by a 'mother' state, one prodding the birth of more children so as to ensure Germany had a future demographic base for its welfare payments.

One last metaphor, given by the politician who had started the session, was perhaps the most realistic. The German 'father' had neither run away nor become incompetent. He had simply become old and frail and was now confined to a wheelchair. One simply could no longer expect much from him. Unless one thought there could be some therapy to rejuvenate him, and the only one was to strike a new balance between the state and civil society, so as to put the frail man on a diet and put him back to work.

All participants agreed that drastic solutions were needed to cope with this failing father. One American voice suggested a shift of mental categories, for the time had come to cut the umbilical chord and to stand on one's own feet as 'adults', reapplying the Kennedy slogan to think what one could do for the state rather than what the state should do for its citizens. Others feared that Germany was embarked on a spiral of poverty, since those who received welfare payments produced children who would continue to be poor given the labour market. Other voices felt that the current welfare system was actually impeding immigrant integration, and that one perverse effect of the system was that wealthier members of society were simply withdrawing from the state, financing their own needs privately, and turning their backs on the original social contract. This could only lead to a privatization of the *res publica*. A psychologist stressed that not only the rich were withdrawing from the public sphere but also those who were poorer and on the margins, who felt they had experienced repeated injustices and humiliation. They too abandoned the contract, so that the malaise was more widespread than one could imagine.

One person wondered whether the failed state might not be replaced with a growing reliance on

communities. This would offer a specific identity as well as vital social services, while strengthening inter-generational links in a new form of 'living together', which would fill the German void of missed collective 'belonging.' Others feared that such communities, by guaranteeing welfare services, could easily trap people into closed religious or identity 'ghettoes.' Still others worried that people were so alienated from the state that they forgot it was supposed to incarnate 'all citizens' and that the state had to be recognized once more as the 'joint actor' of all Germans. A political scientist also stressed that countries had national cultures and that it would be impossible to turn Germany into the US with its communities and private social insurance, or into China with its tradition of collective social family responsibilities.

All seemed to agree that there was a need for a state that regulated less and when regulating, did it less rigidly. There was also agreement on the fact that Germans needed to become more self-reliant and that they should also (re)discover the virtues of voluntary work; some bemoaned the fact that fewer Germans were involved in associations for the public good, with the result that the poor and the elderly were becoming ever more lonely. Perhaps the time had come to envisage a res publica of voluntary work. One participant commented that the state was ever more distant from its citizens, and nowhere more so than with respect to immigrant women. If they were listened to, many of their families' problems would be grappled with more successfully, but immigrants remained 'objects' of discussions rather than joint actors.

The group as a whole agreed that the state could not be reformed or changed for the better, as long as a great power coalition remained in power, since it was self-paralyzing. One needed democratic debate and a true opposition that did not help those in power, in order to clarify the major national issues that Germany had to confront.

Beyond this political problem, however, what emerged most clearly was the degree to which Germans were still orphans of a significant state identity, now that their welfare 'father' state was in a wheelchair. This issue was only hinted at in the debate. One participant mentioned that the whole

federal system needed to be overhauled, since there was no longer any 'value added' gain for the citizens from so many levels of power. Another stressed the need to strengthen local government, for that was the level at which major social decisions were taken. A third felt parliament should take back the power it had lost to the executive. But one had the impression that these individual suggestions formed part of a far larger need to rethink and re-programme the postwar *Bundesrepublik*. This need to fine tune or even revise nearly 60 year-old institutions will surely dominate national policies in the decade to come, as Germany learns to define itself as a country with a long past and an increasingly 'digested' Nazi period, and above all as a country which now has a long and decent postwar past. It could very well be that some of the 'patriotic' emotions best conveyed by the 'Ossies' at the round table will have to spread to the 'Wessies' as well, and even to the children of the immigrants for Germany to have a functioning and fully shared post-welfare nation state (perhaps along the lines of the Swedish state and obviously not along the lines of the French state).

Being a minority in Germany

This session covered Germany's immigrant problems, mainly with Turks, even though other groups such as the Volga Germans were peripherally mentioned. Virtually no reference was made to the older types of postwar immigrants, such as the Italians and the Yugoslavs, and there was a general consensus that Jews from the former Soviet Union were very different types of immigrants, both in educational and in cultural terms, so that they were not at all comparable. They did not go after the same jobs, and had a radically different integration process.

The session was started off by an academic psychologist of Turkish origins who stressed that Germans were under the impression that immigrant 'integration' had failed. This impression, in his view, was false. He stressed the fact that there were far greater differences inside each immigrant group than between a given group and the majority society in Germany. Integration was most difficult for uneducated persons coming from remote agricultural villages with no city experience, and infinitely simpler for urban immigrants. Under the

same 'Turkish' label one had Turks and Kurds with very different cultural visions and loyalties. He cited the fact that Kurds even rooted for the 'other' team when the famous football team from Istanbul, Galatasaray, played in the European Champions League.

Similarly, he stressed that even religious commitment was not homogeneous. Immigrants who believed in a 'loving God' were far more positive and adapted far more easily to the host society than those who believed in a 'God to be feared' that limited their interaction with 'infidels.' Finally the specialist stressed that immigration had immediately led to a leap in educational achievements for the second generation, who, typically, had eight to ten years of schooling, where their fathers had only had three to five, while the number of students of Turkish origin was regularly rising in the German university system.

This rather long-term optimistic scenario was not refuted by the group, which did, however, qualify it, particularly in the realm of education. Another educational specialist emphasized the degree to which there was a generation of Turkish 'lost children' who were automatically shunted off into technical schools with little promising future. Another immigrant voice with a Kurdish background stressed that integration had not failed, but it was a constant struggle in which the best outcomes were the result of self-help and self-organization, not of government structures. But she did agree that migration was an 'opportunity' not just for the immigrants, but also for society as a whole, if it would only adapt.

The conservative Western politician accepted that one could no longer consider secularization as a prerequisite for integration, but he hoped that Germany society as a whole, including its immigrants, would draw a line against the religious fanatics who propounded dangerous political theology, which had no role to play in a democracy. This was the only (and even then, highly veiled) reference to terrorist threats in Germany. This topic simply was not pursued, perhaps because it was deemed to be marginal in the German context, even thought the chief of the 9/11 terrorists had studied and lived for many years in Hamburg. On this count, the silence over terrorist cells resembled the similar

silence of the British round table concerning the 7/7 British-born terrorists.

Those coming from East Germany with little or no experience of immigrants stressed that 'integration' did not only concern immigrants, but also those 'old' Germans who had fallen prey to social precariousness and for whom immigrants were guilty 'phantoms' as job stealers. This reading seemed confirmed by another Western voice who cited a statistic: 12 per cent of Germans had immigrant origins, but those of Turkish or Volga German origins, along with young 'Ossies', comprised the vast majority of prisoners.

A Berlin voice made the point that 'integration' was itself a pipe dream since it presupposed a homogeneous equal society into which the immigrant had to blend. Germany was instead an increasingly unequal and heterogeneous society in which immigrants could make their own niche, for there was no master matrix. To which the younger West German politician made the important point that Germany had just woken up to its immigrant problems, especially among the conservative CDU party, that, as little as ten years ago, was still speaking in terms of lump payments to immigrants so that they could return to their home countries. That illusion was gone, which meant politicians were finally grappling with the major social implications of immigrants of the second and third generation, and how they were fitting into German life. Politicians were now talking 'with' the immigrants rather than 'about' them. It was none too early, since, he added, in his home town of Essen, fully 38 per cent of school children came from an immigrant background; not all of them were poor, many were the children of educated refugees.

Other participants preferred to describe daily life. The consensus was that Turks had become totally accepted presences in German society, as proven by popular jokes, TV series and by a growing body of literature and films. The judge stressed that Chancellor Merkl's statement that she was the Chancellor of Germany's Turks as well, marked a conceptual milestone in immigrant integration, since they were no longer considered as 'guest workers.' But the next step was to ensure that immigrants were far more visible in public life but also in state

jobs. She pointed to the fact that there was not a single employee of immigrant origins, not even a typist, in the entire judicial system of Hanover. Only concerted political action could bring about such change.

One American voice wondered if it would not be better to speak of 'acculturation' rather than 'integration'. She then asked a question which stunned the round table. How long did it take for people to stop being considered as 'immigrants' and to be considered as German, or at least as hyphenated Germans? The judge with Turkish origins replied immediately that immigrants seemed to remain immigrants forever. She cited her own experience. Although she was born in Göttingen, and very much felt that was her hometown and childhood background, no one accepted her as 'German', but constantly referred to her Turkish heritage. Beyond her reply, no one could answer, which proved the degree to which Germany was indeed new to the immigrant question, and had to equip itself semantically, conceptually, culturally and politically to confront it in the years to come.

The younger Western politician stressed the degree to which it was difficult for Turks to state 'I am German', when postwar Germans themselves had felt mainly shame for being German. Furthermore, most Turks were also convinced that they would return 'home' to Turkey, so they did not even bother to try to become German. Now, instead, new generations of Germans felt at ease with their identity. New generations of Turks knew they would live their lives in Germany, so that the stage was finally set for confronting the immigrant problem. Another participant mentioned in passing that Germany still had to solve a semantic problem in expanding its citizenship to immigrants: the fact that there was no German word for 'citizen', but only the highly unsatisfactory one of '*Bürger*' with its 'bourgeois' social connotations. Both *Bürger* and *Mitbürger* were loaded words, since Jews objected to being called the latter, as though they were only ancillary or second-class citizens.

Interestingly, the issue of faith schools, as well as of religion did not come up in the debates spontane-ously, whereas it had loomed large at the British, Swedish and even French round tables. Participants

commented on this only after I noted its absence. Most felt that faith schools were not really weakening agents of the *res publica*. Their curriculum was controlled and compatible with German requirements, and any ideological overtones would not be accepted. Many even felt that private schools could be a stimulus for state education by reintroducing the principle of excellence and competition. If organized with parents, they could also be an asset in the strengthening of communities. According to an 'Ossie' voice, they even offered solutions in East Germany, where they replaced financially strapped public schools in largely underpopulated areas, thus avoiding the need for expensive and exhausting 'bussing' of students. Only one voice, while approving the principle of such private schools, asked what would happen to the 'residual' students left in the public schools. Did they not risk vegetating in an educational ghetto?

The real educational issue for the round table participants was the overall quality of German education. This was the only round table where the large European-wide study of high school achievement, referred to as the Pisa Study, was mentioned. Perhaps because the results, showing German mediocrity, clashed with the national belief that German schooling was excellent, whereas it had become too lax, and content-less. There was much discussion on how to improve it: by making compulsory school start earlier rather than at the late age of seven. This allowed one 'Ossie' participant to highlight the inefficiency of the German system, which had failed to integrate the very best aspects of the GDR, namely its pre-school system, which had been copied by Finland. As a result, the German authorities were now sending experts to study the Finnish system, when they had had the original in their own East German backyard. A West German voice felt Germany should tackle head-on the issues of school underachievers and overachievers, both of whom were sacrificed on the altar of 'normality'. Since each Land was responsible for its educational policies, the education crisis could be read as one more questioning of a too decentralized national setting.

What was most striking in this session was the calm tone of the debates. There would be much work ahead, but none of the participants spoke in terms

of unsolvable conflicts or imminent crises, either about the integration of Turks or of social cleavages. There was a consensus that the country had only begun to tackle these issues, and there was much rejoicing over this change of national spirit, combined with a feeling that it was still too early to judge the results. On this count Germany seemed blessed by its neophyte status which set it apart from eternally un-reformable France, muticulturally fatigued Britain, and a slightly more anguished Sweden, not to mention internally torn Poland.

Building the *res publica*
The final session of the round table, by concentrating on the future of the German *res publica*, came back to the very intense discussions of the very first two sessions, which had dealt with Germany's political identity and the state. This return to 'basics' revealed two very different, but not necessarily incompatible, approaches to Germany's *res publica*: the advocates of 'thin' formal values versus the advocates of a more 'thick' cultural belonging. These two camps were not based on any predictable ethnic, political or geographic differences. Since they cut across all identities, these 'thick' and 'thin' visions represented truly valid intellectual markers for effective political choices, precisely because they stood in a continuum and not on different sides of an ideological divide. The advocates of the 'thin' camp were perhaps more pessimistic than the advocates of the 'thick' camp. The former felt Germany still had to nail down and reiterate fundamental principles, whereas the latter, while acknowledging the importance of these principles, felt one could go beyond them to espouse more cultural and social expressions of identity.

The 'thin' camp reiterated their belief that the German *res publica* could only be consolidated by strengthening 'common rules.' A professor with an 'Ossie' background stressed that the legitimacy of the res publica would come through a total respect of procedures in the shared rules of the game. Only in this manner could civil society be harmoniously linked to the state. The key element in this debate was, according to her, the issue of citizenship, the fundamental building block of the res publica. Common 'values' could not constitute such a building block because different citizens could hold

very different values, and there could be no Supreme Court of 'values.' She was open to the idea that common rules could evolve through time and even change in the future. What mattered was that procedure be respected.

The judge agreed, but took a more militant stand, stating that values such as freedom, equality and individual human rights were non-negotiable and had to be taught to all children at an early age. If necessary, they had to be imposed on recalcitrant members of different groups who did not share them. Fleshing out values was a secondary activity. Priority should be given to ensuring that principles be respected. Social cohesion, the 'thick' aspect of societies, could not be regulated in her view. The *res publica* should stick to its legal framework.

These positions were countered by those who felt that no country or society could be held together only by abstract and universal principles. As the member of a younger generation, the West German politician stressed that the country could not continue living with a legal framework that had been drafted in the mid-1950s and remained unchanged since then. Germany society in 2008 bore no relation to that of 1958. The Constitution should remain the backbone of the state and society but much else needed to be renegotiated. A living society needed 'flesh' and some kind of collective cultural and emotional 'glue.' He added that abstract values such as 'tolerance' were not sufficiently strong to create social cohesion. What was needed was a shared commitment toward new ideas for society as a whole, for common social projects, ideas that would bind people together beyond ethnic or religious identities. A cultural activist stressed that democracy needed to be 'refreshed'. Hybrid identities should be celebrated, and useful work elevated once again to an ideal, rather than an obligation.

The historian agreed that the *Grundgesezt* was not sufficient for national life. It could only ensure the protection of the individual against the state. The *res publica* should instead provide the bases for a 'communicative cohesion' based on citizen participation in projects that transcended their own private needs. In such a context, there might be a need to create some form of 'affirmative action' to

ensure that people were integrated into the state. This 'affirmative action' was not meant to right social and economic imbalances as in the US, but to create citizens. He was seconded by the former 'Ossie' dissident who felt that the *res publica* had to be anchored in local level civic movements that would then feed the democratic space in a critical manner with innovative ideas and from there the institutions of the state. The logical endpoint of such civic initiatives had to be politics and the legally binding framework of the state, and not a society of NGOs, as many activists had believed in the 1990s.

A political issue linked to Berlin provoked much debate, as a case study of the limits of applied democracy. It referred to the Mayor's decision to schedule a non-binding referendum on what to do with the Nazi-built Templehof Airport, whose use as an airport he no longer felt was valid. Many members of the round table felt that a non-binding referendum constituted a democratic breach which made a mockery of citizens' wills. Others felt the mayor was perfectly entitled to launch such a consultative non-binding referendum because he had the political legitimacy with which to decide the fate of the airport without needing to comply with the referendum. The issue pitted the proponents of civil society against those of state politics.

Another issue that was raised was linked to the notion of collective rights. The Jewish voice with Russian roots made a plea for a *res publica* which would formally and legally respect group identi- ties and group rights. He argued on behalf of the 'dignity of minorities' and their right to speak from a vantage point of collective injustice or suffering. Their collective sensitivities should be respected. The Constitution guaranteed the positive freedom of speech. One should now enforce the negative right to stop hate speech, so that this curbing of free speech would protect not just Jews, but all minorities. Another participant mentioned the need to think in collective terms of the elderly. The cultural activist from Berlin agreed that Germany was governed by too many 'white middle-aged men', and needed far more visible alternative voices.

The other participants responded somewhat warily to this notion of collective rights. They felt that freedom of speech warranted the greater protection.

On this count, former 'Ossie' voices, with an experience of totalitarian collective definitions, were worried about the notion of collective rights and of formally established identities. They feared such labels might be placed on people who might want to define themselves differently, especially in the long run. Others rebutted the notion that Germany was run by white middle-aged men, arguing that things were changing rapidly on that front, but that new faces were bound to appear more slowly in Germany, since the administration, unlike in the United States, did not change with every new electoral victory.

The older Western politician stressed that German democracy was structured precisely, in the wake of Nazism, to protect and give particular weight to non-extremist minority voices. There was no need for minorities to be over-represented. If properly channelled, they could play an important role in a political system whose constitutional backbone was still perfectly functional, but which could and should evolve to encompass ever greater numbers of citizens.

The round table ended with participants giving their opinion on whether they thought Germany's time line was moving 'upward' or 'downward' with respect to the country's social and political problems. Despite their very different backgrounds, the vast majority of the participants felt the timeline was moving 'upward.' They were optimistic, or at least serene in their belief that Germany would be able to meet the *res publica* challenges ahead. The advocates of both 'Thin' and 'Thick' belonging agreed that the legal framework of the country was sound. They also agreed that Germany had finally come to accept its status as a country of immigrants, just when the immigrants themselves had accepted the fact that they were staying. This combined entry into the 'reality principle' was finally paving the road toward meaningful dialogue.

They also concurred that there were more elements that united all types of Germans than separated them. Politically, it was important to strengthen citizen initiatives and to think collectively about the terms of a greater social cohesion at the local level far from abstract and often too 'consensual' national politics. Culturally, it was important to stress the

degree to which all identities (whether in the majority or within the minorities) were far from homogeneous and therefore open to outside influences and to the idea of multiple loyalties. Hence the importance of keeping identity lines between immigrants and 'old' Germans 'blurred' rather than cast in cement. Geographically, the *res publica* had to meet the needs of all Germans, not just those in the minority, but also those in the former East Germany as well as those who were conservative and not particularly favourable to change. Finally, socially, the res publica had to reopen the channels of social mobility, thus ensuring that no one be left behind in a society where jobs no longer guaranteed autonomy and status.

The tasks were no more immense than anywhere else in Europe, but what made the German round table stand out was the openness and earnestness of the debates. Its participants considered their country as a relative neophyte in the arduous task of creating an inclusive society with shared values, in brief, a *res publica* truly common to all. The spontaneity and directness of their discussions was the best proof that Germany had indeed reached the moment when it could confront the past, rethink the present and plunge into the future with a newly-found common language, one that could even discuss the Holocaust in internal German terms, without the need to look for external approval. The round table was in itself the perfect manifestation of this newly found confidence in Germany as a vibrant democratic laboratory ready to confront openly, modestly and creatively the national challenges before it.

Diana Pinto
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The programme for this round table is available online at:

http://www.jpr.org.uk/common-good-in-europe/downloads/round_table_germany_programme.pdf

Report on the Dutch round table

Dr Diana Pinto

The sixth national round table in the Ford Foundation funded project 'Voices for the *Res Publica*: The Common Good in Europe' was held in the Netherlands in June 2008, under the auspices of the London-based Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR) and the Amsterdam-based Foundation and cultural centre, Felix Meritis. The purpose of the round table, as defined in the Project's manifesto, was to bring together a carefully chosen group of opinion-formers and academics to foster a frank and in-depth 'off the record' exchange of views on the conflicts, underlying fears and deep defensive reflexes that exist within each minority or majority group; in other words, those factors which had led to a weakened common public space.

It is, of course, very difficult for the person who conceived the entire project, and planned the round table programme to write an 'objective' report on the round table's outcome. I trust that my non-Dutch astigmatism will compensate for my deep involvement in the very shape of the project. I can only hope this will contribute to a more detached reading of the proceedings. I hope the Dutch participants will feel challenged by this summary, much as I was throughout the entire two days of debates. Nevertheless, when reading what follows, please bear in mind this personal *caveat*.

Summarizing a two-day round table with such a diverse group of participants inevitably implies confronting several risks. The first is that of generalizing on the basis of what a given number of individuals present said, when other participants in their place might have raised different issues or addressed the same issues in a different manner. The second risk is that of 'essentializing', i.e., attributing a given person's comments to his or her ethnic background, political or religious affiliation, age or gender. Each individual is, of course, a sum of different experiences and identities which, at times, clash or reinforce each other in defining that person's outlook. Essentializing is a particularly dangerous proposition, especially for a project

which seeks to build a new res publica on a wide set of intertwined multiple identities.

Yet, it is impossible not to generalize at some level if one is to use the round tables as a starting point for further *res publica* debates. In the pages that follow, I have referred to given group identities (such as Christian, lay, Jewish, and also Muslim, but at other times Moroccan or Turk – conservative or progressive) only when what was being said stood out for having been said by a member of a given group who clearly invoked his or her given identity while grappling with the issue at stake. Similarly, I felt it was worth reporting when only members of a given group took stands on a given issue while others who belonged to other groups did not jump into the debate. Lastly, I refer to 'generations' when there was a clearly defined cluster of statements cutting across identities by persons of the same age group.

Preliminary remarks on the round table

The Dutch round table was composed of sixteen Dutch participants, plus the British director of JPR and myself, with a more continental and French perspective.

The Dutch participants constituted a highly diverse professional group. There was a well-known economic commentator, a university anthropologist, an academic publisher, a judge, a lawyer active in the defence of the rights of women, a young philosopher active in civil society, a teacher also involved in general publishing, a civil servant responsible for the development of Dutch culture in the former colonies, an artist working on issues of religious and cultural identity. To which were added a rich mix of NGO activists focusing on issues as diverse as democratic education and development, the human rights of asylum seekers, local level youthful social entrepreneurship in the tougher neighbourhoods of Amsterdam, and grassroots European integration alternatives. In a country as small as the Netherlands, the issue of geographic representation was clearly less important than in the larger countries, although one participant had a Frisian background and another lived and worked in the Dutch South.

There was also a good sociological mix. In religious terms there were Catholics, Protestants, Jews and Muslims present, as well as lay voices. One person was very active in the Dutch Protestant church. The Muslim woman wore a headscarf, whereas a Muslim man advocated assimilation to the point of forfeiting any religious prescriptions against alcohol or certain foods. One of the Jewish voices was Dutch but with an Israeli background. The Muslims came from Turkish and Moroccan backgrounds, and there was also a voice coming from the former Dutch colony of Suriname. In social terms, some of the voices came from simple immigrant backgrounds, others belonged to the middle classes, with a few probably stemming from the Dutch elite.

The Dutch round table stood out in comparison to all previous ones for four highly specific reasons:

1) The murder of Theo van Gogh at the hands of a native-born Moroccan who killed him for 'religious' reasons because he had dishonoured the Prophet, and who threatened a similar fate to the Somalian Dutch writer and political activist Ali Hirsi Ali, coming after the earlier murder of the populist candidate Pym Fortuyn continued to constitute a powerful (even if by now unmentioned) backdrop for the debates. The country as a whole and the participants were still visibly trying to overcome this traumatic recent past. The collective introspection and search for a national identity these two murders initiated was clearly not over. Indeed one could feel that the country had still not found a stable inner equilibrium, and that just about every aspect of national life was under heated debate and critical reconsideration, after decades of unquestioning acceptance, if not contentment. With the exception of Poland (but that round table took place at a particularly tense moment in Poland which subsequently improved with the arrival of a new Prime Minister and governing coalition), the Dutch round table was the most critical with respect to its national institutions: the state, the administration and the entire roster of regional and local governments, along with all official bodies. Neither the media nor the citizens themselves were spared. Only the Law and the judicial system seemed to retain some legitimacy. One had the impression that the country needed a massive overhaul, as though it had not undergone conceptual repair work in

decades, and the round table discussions reflected this malaise, not just with the present but with the past.

2) In thematic terms, one could sense that the van Gogh murder had instilled a deep fear of an uncontrollable 'Islamist' presence in the country, and this fear conditioned all sessions. The net result was that issues linked to 'Dutch Muslims' or 'Muslims in the Netherlands' were ever-present, well beyond the specifically designated sessions. Some of the participants sought to 'defuse' it, but that only encouraged others to bring the topic back to the table. The result was a strange sequential perspective on the country, with older problems contemplated uniquely through this more recent Muslim lens. It was as though the 'law and order' positions of the 'man in the street' had found an echo in the thinking of some social activists and intellectuals, normally prone to less emotional positions. The result was that there was as much argument among the 'old' Dutch as to how to approach these issues as between the 'old' and the 'new' Dutch. These 'down to earth' fears over Islamist violence and terrorism thus loomed large and, quite interestingly, they spanned all generations, in ways that simply did not occur in the other national round tables, where the younger voices were far more optimistic. Perhaps all of these issues were exacerbated by the fact that the country is so geographically small and the number of immigrants so highly visible, especially in the many cities of the Netherlands. But the almost obsessive nature of this reference showed that Holland was indeed crisis-ridden on this count.

3) The European dimension was also far more present in the Dutch round table debate, both in terms of time devoted to it and of the passions it evoked, compared to all the other round tables. Perhaps, in the round table, just as during the referendum, 'Europe' played an ersatz role for frustrations raised at the national level against a weak and passive political class, in a setting where any Dutch national consensus was extremely fragile. It could also be that Europe's legal, political and economic presence loomed far larger on Holland's horizon, given the country's small size, and its feeling of no longer being 'in control.' Suffice it to say that the debates over Europe shed important

light on the current weakness of the entire EU project.

4) Finally, the Dutch round table was also the one to have the highest number of young participants (under thirty). These younger voices shared many of the fears of their elders concerning Islamist fundamentalism and pessimism over Europe, so there were no real generational divides on this count. Their social and political (in the extended sense of the term) commitments, however, offered a somewhat upbeat reading of a Dutch situation that ranked only second to the Polish round table in terms of pessimism. But the voluntarism of the younger voices was, above all, the result of this surrounding pessimism. 'Things could only get better', precisely because they had become so bad.

A comment on the round table dynamics. The Dutch round table, given the situation, ran the risk of becoming either excessively polarized or conversely, of going stale with too many participants falling victim to battle fatigue by having 'overtalked' or 'rehashed' these questions, which had dominated Dutch media since the murders. Fortunately, this problem did not arise. As an outsider, I had the impression that opinions collided and tough things were being said in a series of very frank exchanges, precisely because many participants had not had the possibility of such 'off the record' face-to-face encounters in the past, where no one was labelling them as belonging to camp 'x' or 'y'. During one session there was even a clash that led one participant to storm out of the room (he returned after much parleying on the part of the national partners). This was the first psychodrama in the entire cycle of round tables.

One participant in particular stressed that he had chosen to attend the round table because he was tired of contributing 'soundbites' to the media which then inevitably distorted them out of context in an increasingly polarized public debate. He was happy with this two-day period of intensive off the record discussions that would respect content and nuances. Another participant stressed that she had chosen to attend because the debate did not presuppose a 'token Muslim voice' but instead sought to integrate such a voice in a very different, far broader, res publica context. For some

participants, the round table offered the first occasion for serious conversations with Dutch Muslims and, conversely, for the latter with Dutch non-religious Jews. One had the feeling that even Dutch Catholics and Protestants saw each other in a different light through the double impact of Jewish and Muslim voices in this national debate. At the end of the meeting, when I asked the participants to reflect on whether the 'timeline' was moving upwards or downwards in terms of progress, most stressed that it was slowly inching upwards, if only because people were beginning to 'look' in the same direction, even if they did not see things along similar lines. All in all, the round table seemed to reflect a modest but important change in a national setting that was far more fragile and polarized and permeated with a feeling of national powerlessness than any other round table.

These feelings were quite visible in the way participants addressed the six key topics of the round table: 1) National identity and shared values; 2) The Dutch past and the shaping of group identities; 3) The role of the state in Dutch society; 4) The status of minorities; 5) The bases for a res publica; 6) Europe.

National identity and shared values
The participants did not waste any time in entering the fray and, as with the German round table, the very first session was among the richest, since all the national dilemmas were brought out in the open, at times quite starkly. The Dutch round table on this count excelled in calling 'a spade a spade'.

The tone of the round table was set at the very start by one of the younger voices who stated that the lack of trust in institutions was perhaps the most important Dutch 'shared value'. The institutions in question were all-encompassing: the state where the three branches of power (the Trias Politica) were in deep collusion; political parties who failed to confront any of the major social problems besetting the county; the media, which addressed issues superficially and with a desire to shock and even elicit fear while seeking to substitute themselves to the legitimate but stultified sources of power. He then added that political power in the Netherlands counted for very little, since all major decisions were taken in Brussels and not in the Hague. In

a provocative manner, he claimed that Microsoft had far more power than the Dutch state. It was interesting to note that this sweeping verdict on the Netherlands came from a young immigrant voice, who was not just concerned about issues linked to immigrant Muslims, but with the very fibre of Dutch society for all. He called for new, far more responsive institutions at the local and regional levels, and also for a new Europe that would step out of its traditional emphasis on the 'never again', which was no longer valid for younger generations.

There were many reactions to this opening salvo. The anthropologist warned against such a dramatic reading of a Dutch society, stressing that there had been similar crises of trust in the 1890s and 1930s. He further stressed that historically, relations between Catholics and Protestants had never been calm or based on 'trust', as many Dutch and foreigners believed. These groups were just as locked into their own self-contained worlds as present-day Muslims were perceived to be. In brief, he felt that the Netherlands had never been 'one nation' but had always been composed of groups that maintained a great cultural distance from each other. For those who accused Islam of bringing 'back' religion in highly secular societies, he stressed that the country had previously experienced waves of de-secularization, for instance after 1848. One could only wonder whether this 'lack of trust' was not perhaps a longstanding shared value.

Another participant wondered whether politicians could address this lack of trust. He feared that they often hid behind the 'forces of globalization' as an excuse for their own disastrous incompetence since they had created such an abyss between citizens and politicians. His concern was that politicians were undermining traditional divisions of power by encouraging the media to take on a policing role in lieu of the incompetent police, in the hunt for criminals (and terrorists). Citizens should not become vigilantes. Again this voice came from an immigrant Moroccan background, but the issues he raised transcended any particularist 'Muslim' vision.

There was much debate over the issue of journalists and citizens involving themselves in crime prevention. Some felt that these two groups had to fill in for incompetent police officers, as the only way

of denouncing police ineptness. Others felt instead that this new culture of fear was actually stoked by the media who played into the hands of popu-lists. One participant stressed that the 'true' face of Dutch society had come out in the new, far more restrictive asylum laws, which showed that perhaps the most commonly shared identity of the country's citizens was xenophobia, which then led to typecasting. The Israeli-Dutch artist confirmed that as a Jew born in Baghdad before the creation of the state of Israel, he was now perceived by policemen as a 'dangerous Iraqi'.

The debate then shifted to the issue of whether one could refer to 'common values'. The judge felt these underpinned the lives of responsible citizens; otherwise no justice could ever be administered. But she was quick to destroy another positive myth about 'the Dutch' when she claimed that the country was anything but avant-garde in its legal traditions. She told the group that women were only given full judicial independence (from fathers, brothers or husbands) in 1956. This was a way of relativizing the 'backwardness' of immigrant groups who came from countries which still practised similar judicial restrictions.

Other participants preferred to highlight the need for 'minimal values' linked to the constitution and its fundamental freedoms, while others stressed that whatever common values one needed, these should be 'clear' above all. Clarity concerning the national rules of the game was the key component of any possible future 'togetherness'. Others were far more blunt. They clearly called the vital common values, 'Western values' which are strongly rooted in fundamental freedom and human rights. In other words, there should not be any coming together of 'old' and 'new immigrant' Dutch values. This elicited a more radical response from some participants who stressed that values were not fixed in stone and were constantly changing. These voices claimed that any reference to 'Western values' would, almost by definition, leave out those who did not come from the West and thus compromise any attempt to make society all-inclusive. The anthropologist stressed that Dutch 'identity' went beyond the constitution, which was merely an instrument which presupposed a more important 'moral' component in the very notion of citizenship. Identity instead, was the fruit

of power struggles and negotiation, and therefore in constant evolution.

The session had just begun when one self-defined 'post-modern' participant asked the question which showed the extent to which the Dutch remained in the grip of the van Gogh murder, and the subsequent fear that the Netherlands was losing control of its identity to creeping 'Islamization'. His ques- tion was couched in terms of political theory. If two thirds of the Dutch people wanted *Sharia* law, should (or must) that jurisprudence become the law of the land? Should democracy itself be negotiable? The anthropologist, with a pique of provocation confronted with such an implausible scenario, said 'yes'. The judge qualified it by saying that, of course, democracies were built on the protection of the right of minorities, so that majorities could not rule unconditionally. Sharia law as interpreted in distant Muslim lands, could not really be applied in the same manner in the West. In no other round table were such 'what if?' scenarios envisaged, much less discussed.

The debate became clearer when two participants with a Muslim background tackled the issue of 'Dutch identity' in differing ways. The more assimilationist voice argued that, rather than dismissing it, the notion of Dutch identity warranted discussion, for there was such a thing. It was composed of a set of values, a historical canon, the constitution, and a certain way of living. One could modify articles of the constitution, re-read the past, but certain pillars remained. A national identity implied certain minimum requirements and a set of clear rules, and exclusion was an integral consequence of such prerequisites. Any national identity, especially a democratic one had to correct extremists.

The Muslim voice arguing for greater identity 'needs' stressed that as society changed, rules also had to change. Not just rules, but also the law. She gave as proof the legal changes that now allowed gay marriage – a very interesting and somehow unexpected reference when used by a Muslim woman who chose to wear a headscarf and sought to have it accepted inside Dutch institutions. She based her argument on the legal fact that one could oppose 'human rights', among which freedom of

religion was supreme, to 'constitutional rights.' The Convention of Human Rights, unlike constitutions, was neither time bound nor geographically defined. This position did not go unchallenged. A philosophical voice stressed that when Catholics and Protestants achieved political and social co-existence with the Treaty of Maastricht of 1674, no religious camp abused anyone else's freedoms, whereas Muslim immigrants today did, with respect not just to their wives, daughters and sisters, but also towards society at large. A European activist added that freedoms could only be preserved through checks and balances and the European context fortunately prevented countries from going astray on their own path of compromise. This statement gave legitimacy to the previous observation that 80 per cent of laws in Holland were European anyway, so that freedoms would be preserved by respect for checks and balances. Democracy had to be procedural and inclusive, but pluralism did not rule out some exclusions. In other words, extreme Islam had no place within Dutch society, individual freedoms of religion notwithstanding.

Only one participant sought to expand the debate beyond the fixation on Muslim extremists, by invoking the need to curb the extreme right as well. Another stressed that fear should not dictate values. Neither statement was picked up by the rest of the group. The session concluded with a shared feeling that the Dutch tradition of consensus and respect had been replaced by one of fear and mistrust, and that no way had been found to overcome this state of affairs for the time being. As an outsider, I could not help feeling that the participants of the round table had no particular feeling of 'pride' or even 'pleasure' at being 'Dutch', so that there was no nostalgia for a simpler or more homogeneous past in their world view.

The Dutch past and the shaping of group identities

This session built on the preceding one to produce an even more polarized and anguished description of Dutch reality. Groups were not described in terms of their status within society but in terms of their different 'essences' and yet again the Muslims were found to be wanting in their relative integration. One could only be struck by the degree to which

anti-Muslim positions were presented openly and without intellectual qualification, as if 'the Muslims' constituted one compact and equally dangerous group.

The anthropologist kicked off the session with an opposing view. He stressed that group identities were a historical fact, but that the past did not repeat itself. What did repeat itself was the inclination to use the past as a blueprint. Yet, even though groups existed, what counted most in his eyes beyond ethnicity and religion was the importance of social class. Society was composed of many 'different differences' so that it was unfair to focus on ethnicity or religion alone.

One participant with a Jewish background countered that these two factors prevailed nevertheless and gave as proof that many Christians preferred to see their disaffected churches become dis- cos rather than mosques. Another with a similar background replied that the Dutch debate over identity was conditioned by the impact of Muslim fundamentalism which had instilled fear across the entire society, even adding the fear of verbal terrorism specifically against the Jews. As a counter- statement, another participant replied that racism and xenophobia were 'natural' to all groups.

A participant with a Surinamese background, who defined himself as being the voice of the 'man in the street' stressed that, in his opinion, Muslims were the only group in Dutch society who had proved unwilling to integrate, unlike the dark- skinned Surinamese, African Blacks or Jews. He pointedly referred to the fact that Muslims 'bothered' the established values of society.

His extremely frank views were rebutted by one Muslim voice, who stressed that Muslims entered the society *de facto* as scapegoats, and that if the *Zeitgeist* surrounding them were different, they would also behave differently, and less defensively. She continued to say that if the Muslims were perceived to be a threat, they then became a threat. This position did not go unheeded. Even the anthropologist was forced to admit that Muslim fundamentalists were feared not in any abstract manner but because of their attacks and terrorism, not only on Dutch soil but in the world. Others added that Muslims did not want to 'really' integrate because they had a vision of ruling the world one day. An- other voice added that Muslims were feared because they were not 'transparent', unlike blacks or Jews. While yet a third stressed that the Chinese were probably the least transparent of all, but in the eyes of another participant, they did not constitute a threat.

The group did agree on one thing: minorities of all types, including small native ethnic minorities, were always looked upon with suspicion in case they harboured extremists who might challenge the established order. One participant with a Frisian background spoke about how he was interrogated by the police, simply because he had attended a conference of separatists from all over Europe out of curiosity.

As if to stop this debate over *ad nominem* identities, the judge wondered whether there was an optical problem with the issue of Muslim 'integration'. The more they were invisible and remained closed off within their own group, the more they appeared to the rest of society to be 'integrated' because they kept a low profile. Whereas once they stepped out of their closed communities to enter the wider world, they all of a sudden appeared to be 'less' integrated, since they aired their own needs and identity considerations. The point was extremely interesting. Some members of the group, however, did not buy this analysis, stressing once again that Muslims were dangerous because they tried to impose their own standards on others.

The one and only dissenting voice over this whole debate was that of the youngest voice with a Moroccan immigrant background. He quite simply said that he was a child of the 1990s and as such, was no longer interested in the 'identity quests' or emancipation movements of his immigrant elders. What were most relevant to him were the class divisions within Dutch society, divisions that were shared by poor immigrants and white Dutch alike. These social tensions were responsible for the weakness of Dutch society, and the only way out of the Dutch malaise was to address them head on in social and economic terms. In one of history's ironic cycles, he announced to the group that he had just

begun reading Marx.

Once again the debate continued with an apparently theoretical reflection which then turned out to be filled with a priori readings. The issue centred on whether groups were formed from within or created from the outside by society. The anthropologist stressed that groups became 'tangible' only when they were imposed, with some hostility, from the outside. This tendency to define people from the outside was particularly insidious because, according to the scarf-wearing Muslim woman, there was virtually no cohesive internal 'Muslim identity' in the Netherlands. The outside world turned a group of low-class immigrants, who happened to hold onto very different religious identities within Islam, and who came from very different regions, such as Morocco and Turkey, into one single 'pariah group'.

One of the participants, perhaps because of his Jewish background (and the polemical definition of the 'Jew' by Jean-Paul Sartre as being someone others defined as a 'Jew') adamantly refused such a reading, stressing that groups were formed from within. Theory moved into reality when the debate centred on whether Muslims were imposing their values and world views onto others. Some participants denied this was the case. Others felt that the extremists were imposing their violence on others, thus disrupting society as a whole. One participant claimed that it was impossible to generalize on the basis of a small violent fraction inside a group, to which another stressed that holding on to such a reading was 'intellectually deficient', given the fact that it was always small groups that created danger.

The Moroccan voice arguing for Muslim assimilation within Dutch society stressed that extremists were also formed by external and not internal group conditions, and he cited the impact of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in this context. Interestingly, this conflict had never been mentioned in the other round tables with respect to Muslim extremism....Were the Dutch simply being more outspoken or direct than others on this count? He proposed that Dutch society needed to work on coalitions to counter extremists from all sides.

The first step, in his opinion, was to overcome major misunderstandings. He cited the work of one Muslim educator who sought to introduce the teaching of Islam in Dutch public schools precisely to counter the negative influence of radical imams who taught in some of the country's mosques. Most commentators had instead seen in his proposal a dangerous desire to introduce political Islam inside Dutch education, thus undermining the country's values. The group's response to this example revealed much about the tense Dutch climate. Many had not really heard about his proposal, and if they had, they had assumed his was the voice of a Muslim extremist who wanted to introduce radical Islam into the public curriculum. They seemed genuinely surprised to learn that he had the opposite aim in mind.

The more conservative commentator listened with interest but replied that 'appearances mattered' and that this man's 'missionary like style' frightened the wider public, who, helped along by a hostile press, was not able to see the positive democratic aspects of his proposals. He, along with many in the group, put the blame for this state of affairs on the Muslim community itself, arguing that if it had voiced more open opposition to Muslim extremists, the credibility of its advocates would have been infinitely stronger.

The two Muslim voices, who had opposed each other on many of the other issues, were unanimous in their anger this time. They both replied that moderate Muslims had condemned all acts of terror, including 9/11 and the van Gogh murder, and other extreme actions, but that no one was interested in their condemnations. Also, was it fair to ask Muslims who defined themselves as fully-fledged Dutch citizens to have to take responsibility for the crimes or violence committed by other Muslims in distant lands as their own? The media bore a major responsibility on this count for conflating identities by only paying attention to and broadcasting extremist voices. Basically, Muslims remained suspect and 'guilty' if they were silent or if they spoke their minds. They were discriminated against by appearance.

To which one participant replied that unfortunately, this was how all societies worked. Hence Muslims needed to work much harder to make their moderate voices heard, while also promoting greater

education inside their communities so as to facilitate integration. The Muslims present replied that the moderates were not able to do 'PR' as well as the extremists and that many people inside the communities were eager to work with and form alliances with Jews, and to fight together against extremists. One young participant felt that much had to be done on this front, because most Dutch were afraid that Muslim community spokesmen making moderate sounds were, in reality, little more than 'wolves in sheep's clothing'. Most agreed that the press bore a heavy responsibility for the general picture the country had of Muslims.

As a timid sign of hope one Muslim participant stressed that Muslims were learning to maximize their own interests in a democratic manner. For instance, she cited that the community had decided not to make any protests when the film 'Fitna' by the Dutch parliamentarian and filmmaker Geert Wilders came out with its extremely anti-Islamic positions. Because they had not fallen in the trap the Dutch media had prepared for them, in the end the film received very little public attention and a replay of the cartoon tempest was avoided. Muslims, according to this view, were becoming better at showing that Islam was perfectly compatible with democracy and human rights and that the fundamentalists were only a minority fringe inside the community.

A cultural activist stressed that some groups were now working to introduce young Moroccans to Dutch wartime history, by making them participate in the commemorations of Dutch resistance and also of Jewish deportations, as a way of gaining a better understanding of the identity stakes of a country that had been too silent over its own past for too long far. He felt that a leader such as the mayor of Amsterdam, Job Cohen, had confronted the immense problems of his city and had played a key role in defusing group identities, which were certainly 'mellower' than five years earlier. Greater Muslim visibility meant that the group was beginning to participate actively in Dutch public life and in schools.

These last-minute observations were reassuring, but they came late in the debates, which continued to show the degree to which Dutch society (even in a group as select as the round table participants) still remained profoundly divided and fearful over 'Muslims', not just among conservative elders, but also within progressive youth.

The role of the state in Dutch society

The feeling of Dutch malaise continued with the session on the state. Significantly, I was surprised to see that the entire round table seemed to agree that the reference to the 'state' meant the 'welfare state'. In this they took the very opposite tack from the Swedish round table. Whereas I had assumed that the Swedes would spend a significant amount of time discussing the decline of their iconic welfare state, they did not do so. They concentrated on the state as the purveyor of norms, power, and identity, resting on the strong foundations of the historical regalian Wasa state. The result was a far calmer reading of their own society.

The Dutch, instead, gave the impression of having no similar strong state background to fall back on. As in the British round table, no reference whatsoever was made to their constitutional monarchy. But unlike the British case, 'government' was not perceived as a useful presence helping society to 'muddle through'. In the Dutch case, 'government' and its administrative elites, as presented by the round table participants, lay at the very heart of Dutch problems. More specifically, participants agreed that the Dutch welfare state (still praised in Sweden despite its shrunken resources) was inherently responsible for the crumbling condition of Dutch society.

The retired civil servant who had worked in the field of immigrant integration minced no words in describing the dysfunctional perverse effects of the Dutch welfare state in assuring social equality and a feeling of national belonging. He stressed that, of course, no one 'starved' because of its subsidies, but that these were mere handouts that produced lethargy and passivity on the part of the immigrants, who were not integrated in the society through work. This state of affairs had come about because the entire concept of the welfare state was based on 'condescension' towards those one had to govern and a belief in superior social engineering on the part of the central but also local state administrators,

planners and social workers. At all levels of Dutch society, government officials preferred to have one interlocutor for neatly boxed-in groups rather than take into account the very real needs of individuals beyond their sociologically determined identities. Furthermore, according to the participant who was very active in the Protestant Church, those in charge of the welfare state had no real understanding of poverty and no firsthand experience of it. Instead, churches did because the poor often came to them for direct help.

The conservative commentator agreed, stressing further that the state should only concentrate on those sectors of society that the liberal market did not know how to cope with: mainly, the just distribution of ever scarcer resources. The young local-level political activist who felt that social cleavages were far more important than ethnic or religious ones in explaining the failings of Dutch society, confirmed that in his 'problem' neighbourhood of Amsterdam, people wanted and hoped for change at the local level and had no trust whatsoever in the national level. They wanted greater empowerment above all. The judge stressed that in some cases, among the disabled and the elderly, who were unable to make their own choices, others had to take on such responsibilities, so that one could not do away with the welfare state tutelary traditions, but these had to be steeped in humanism, not technocracy. A few participants felt that the Dutch paralysis was due to the fact that most civil society institutions also lived thanks to state subsidies and handouts, and so were not able to be as critical
of society as they should. This was refuted by one NGO activist who felt that these subsidies in no way conditioned their work or link to the state. The anthropologist felt, instead, that the state had never been neutral with respect to society and of course played a role in favouring some NGOs over oth-ers. Others spoke of how foundations were able to circumvent the blockages of the state at all levels, but that they did so often through collusions at the top of society. The result was that the activities 'on behalf' of society continued to carry great weight, thus preventing the rise of a grass roots and spontaneous collective social life.

This dysfunctional state of affairs was confirmed by the local level activist who stated that after the murders the Dutch state had given quite a lot of money for projects among Moroccan youths, whereas Turks and poor whites received very little attention, not to mention society's marginals who were not even visible on the radar screens of the state. Money was thus given out in function of criteria of immediate crisis, irrespective of the number of people involved. One participant even wondered whether, in the future, the handouts given to 'Arabs' might not recede with the arrival of Romanians. All agreed that a small class of managers 'at the top' took political and financial decisions without the necessary consultations.

It did not take long for the debate to return to the fixation on immigrants viewed once again through the Muslim lens. The young European activist raised the issue of the massive use of the welfare state by immigrants as one possible explanation for its crisis and the need for it to be pared down drastically. To which the more combative Muslim political activist replied curtly that this was simply not the case. Immigrants who used these services excessively were simply sent back to their countries of origin. The more moderate Muslim voice instead stressed that immigrants should be admitted to he country only if they had already been previously acculturated to its values. He also agreed that the 'cuddling to death' by the welfare state was preventing responsible citizenship. He added that trade unions had been of no help whatsoever in promoting immigrant integration or the retooling of immigrants for employment. This was slowly occurring through the second generation who could be more active socially because it had mastered the language.

What emerged from the discussions was the degree to which Dutch immigrants were divided and often pitted against one another. More than one participant stressed the degree to which the Surinamese were jealous of the attention the Moroccans were now receiving. The Moroccans felt the Turks were better organized (and therefore listened to), while the Turks were apparently terrified of Moroccan youths. Listening to this set of pecking orders one had the impression that the entire society was trapped in identity prisons, perhaps inaugurated with the rigid divisions that had allowed Protestants and Catholics to co-exist.

For some of the 'old' Dutch voices, the problem lay in Europe Report on the Dutch round table elsewhere. These tensions were provoked by the 'inhuman' conditions of the big cities, and by the distant technocrats who managed them. For others instead, the city was the place where a vibrant new and all-inclusive culture was emerging. There might be a weak sense of belonging to 'The Netherlands', but many immigrants had no problem defining themselves as being from 'Amsterdam.' It was less clear that they would take on a 'Rotterdam' identity or one linked to the smaller towns of the country.

This moved some of the younger participants to stress the need for a totally revised urban planning system. Some praised, while others excoriated the multi-purpose buildings that had cropped up in immigrant neighbourhoods. These buildings often combined administrative and social services with cultural centres, sports facilities, rooms for banquets and marriages and even prayer rooms. One participant felt they were social traps that further isolated immigrants from the rest of society, curtailing any spontaneous encounters one would have in open spaces. Another felt instead, that these buildings gave immigrants an anchor in an otherwise anonymous urban setting. Either way, the debate over the buildings seemed to be a metaphor for the far larger debate over the Dutch state.

The only aspect of the Dutch state that was given positive ratings in a very negative panorama was the Dutch judicial system. The 'law' did not occupy as central a role in underpinning the res publica as in the Swedish and German round tables, perhaps because it was not the emanation of a strong state, but at least it came out of the general institutional débacle relatively unscathed. Participants of all stripes tended to agree that the judicial system in the Netherlands offered a fair and equitable justice. Above all, even the immigrant Muslim voices stressed that their communities respected the law and those who enforced it. According to one voice, immigrants were not willing to protect 'their own' if they had broken the law, a sign of hope for a future res publica mentality. The law still stood supreme in its claim of neutrality, whereas politics was wrapped up in the complicated issue of colonial heritage (for the Surinamese) or of relations with Muslim 'others'

(with respect to the new immigrants).

There was however, much debate as to whether Dutch law protected Muslim women as much as they should be or if it was too lenient with Muslim men in their understanding of women's rights. The judge and the lawyer with a Muslim background insisted that criminal law had to be equal for all, even if some judges did take into account the cultural background of those who committed violence against women. Others were less sanguine and felt that the law was not doing enough to sanction honour killings inside the Muslim community. To which others replied that the judges must be left alone to assess the situation, without group or media pressures, provided they stood for legal continuity irrespective of whether the inculpated were Muslim or not. The divisions established earlier in the round table continued to resurface on all of these issues. But it was important to see that for the judge, the law, so far, 'worked', even though she was worried that judges were stifled by a growing demand for procedures that allowed them less time for quality reflection.

The status of minorities

In a less tense national setting, this would have been the session which would have addressed the issue of immigrants, the 'otherness' and 'belonging' of minorities and their changing status in society. But as we saw, this topic hit such a raw nerve in the Dutch context that it coloured all the previous sessions as well.

It was thus somewhat surprising to see that when the time came to address the topic head-on, the round table participants were less negative and less polarized than in the previous sessions (perhaps because they had got to know one another better and learned to trust one another more).

The more 'assimilationist' Muslim voice kicked off the debate by stressing that Muslims as a minority must integrate in the wider society. This meant that Islam had to be modernized and its tenets had to be rendered compatible with the requirements of a minority religion. This could be done because the essence of Islam would not be hurt under such a status in the West. As concrete proof of this change,

Imams had, for instance, to accept to shake a woman's hand. But conversely, Dutch media and the wider society should highlight the importance of this modernized Islam and these Imams and not focus only on its more backward pockets. All the more so, the political activist with the headscarf stressed, because Islam had a strong social and not only spiritual dimension which was totally compatible with a democratic setting. Concretely this meant, in her opinion, that the Dutch state should subsidize mosques, so that they did not fall under the control of foreign powers and could then teach an Islam that was compatible with Dutch mores and laws. But in correlation, Dutch Muslims should be given the same rights as any other religious group in Holland, including the right to their own Muslim schools, for the vast majority of Muslims lived lives that were fully compatible with Western standards.

The artist with an Israeli background stressed that the problem with Islam lay in the fact that there was no central authority, so that no modernized current could curb an extremist one in the name of a revised 'doctrine'. The conservative commentator who had been quite critical of a radicalized Islam all along, found this presentation of a modernized democratic Islam far too angelic to his taste and sought to bring the discussion back to the dangers of 'real' Islam with stoning to death in Iran, honour killings, and female circumcision. His words were greeted with great impatience from the group as a whole. The consensus seemed to be that yes, there were these excesses elsewhere, but they were not pertinent to Dutch Islam. Upon hearing this, the commentator stormed out of the room claiming that he was raising vital questions for the Dutch future, since extremists were to be found within the country, questions which the other participants were minimizing on purpose.

During his absence, the judge stressed that for such a moderate Islam to flourish, it was important that the non-Muslim Dutch stop holding their own Muslims accountable for what was being done, in the name of Islam, in distant and alien lands. The anthropologist emphasized that these traditions predated Islam and could not be attributed to it. Others stressed the degree to which the second generation, the children of the immigrants, had ever weaker ties to their country of origin, and therefore

did not want to be held accountable for what was going on there. Their struggles, references and future were to be found in the Dutch context, the only one that truly counted for them. Furthermore they had loyalties to their families, perhaps to the region of their ancestors but not to the 'old country' whose institutions they barely knew and would not have approved of, and to which they often did not even return for holidays.

The publisher with a Frisian background asked how non-Muslims could help further the integration of their Muslim fellow citizens. To which the Muslim advocating assimilation replied that they should learn to listen to what was being said inside the communities. He cited the fact that as early as the 1980s moderate Muslims had been the first to warn of the danger coming from radicalized foreign Imams who were allowed on Dutch soil. Unfortunately, no Dutch authority was interested in listening to the community at the time, and so no precautions were taken against this threat that later turned into a reality. Twenty years later, Muslim communities in Holland needed constructive and friendly criticism above all, not suspicion and fear. A non-Muslim participant stressed that the Dutch majority should stop speaking of 'tolerance' toward their minorities because the term was condescending and largely based on indifference. One 'tolerated' only those whose views one rejected.

On the issue of Muslim schools, most agreed that they would be no more dangerous than other religious schools, which ultimately taught very little 'religion' and were almost identical to state schools. The judge stressed that such private denominational schools were allowed since 1918 and one could not prevent Muslims from having their own by 'changing horses in midstream'. She added that there was nothing to fear because Dutch law defined their conditions for existence, their curricula and their obligations.

Clearly everyone in the round table made an effort to sound somewhat more positive on these issues, including the person who stormed out of the room and who was convinced to return to the meeting. The session still ended, nevertheless, with many unsolved questions. Despite stressing the importance

of having an open and vibrant multicultural society with many identities and cultural references, with all the cuisine and music that accompanied such cultural openness, the Muslims at the round table continued to wonder whether Muslim Dutch were truly given the opportunity of becoming 'Dutch'. They even wondered whether the majority of Dutch citizens saw anything positive in their immigration.

Things became even more complicated when certain non-Muslim Dutch, in a gesture of good will, sought to compare Dutch Muslims to Dutch Jews with their strong religious and cultural identity and ties to Israel, which they assumed could also be applicable for Morocco. The comparison was immediately refuted by many others (not just the Jews present) who stated that Jews were 'different' and not comparable. Israel was not a country of origin; Jews were fully integrated and of course there had been the Holocaust. This was, by the way, the first time the Holocaust was mentioned at the round table. Those who refused the comparison showed their fears of a possible Muslim immigrant 'double loyalty', not to mention the 'single loyalty' of the Islamic extremists inside Dutch society. This small moment of tension offered yet another window on a society that had not come to terms with either its past ghosts or its present tensions. But it also raised a more European dilemma: using the Jewish reference was a problematic example with which to assess the possibilities and also limits to identity, belonging and multiple allegiances.

Building the *res publica*

This session showed the degree to which each participant had given a great deal of thought to how best to create a *res publica* in the Netherlands, probably because its current weakness seemed so flagrant. The teacher who kicked off the session was not overly optimistic, fearing that it was difficult to create shared commitments in affluent societies. The judge, instead, used the return of the participant who had stormed out as an example of hope in dialogue.

There was consensus around the fact that any future Dutch *res publica* had to be built on political and social modesty rather than on the previous ambitious and arrogant social engineering that had led to the current crisis. For the anthropologist,

development had to be 'organic' and based on local knowledge. Those who had espoused knowledge from above as 'authoritarian architects' were out of touch with what people wanted at the local level. A young NGO activist as well as the judge agreed that the key word for the future was 'organic' and only a *res publica* rooted in individual and small social initiatives could work. This moved the former civil servant to ask sceptically whether they wished to dismantle governing bodies through new groups. The young social entrepreneur denied this and based his vision of the *res publica* on five key concepts: citizenship; institutions based on self–help and local initiatives; creative knowledge beyond an often stultified educational system; a strengthened secular society that allowed for religious needs; and the restoration of all sorts of rituals in order to integrate everyone inside society. These five goals could only be attained if people became involved and even took risks on behalf of social development. Equally important, the new organizations that stemmed from this risk-taking could only innovate if they represented people beyond their ethnic or religious identities in terms of their shared needs inside a wider society. Another NGO activist stressed that one could only have responsible citizenship if the government first gave the example of political and social integrity. The philosopher stressed that there could be no *res publica* without commitment to collective proposals and projects.

Several participants, including the judge, were worried about the res publica falling prey to an ever-growing emphasis on 'procedures' which killed individual contributions and also transformed technical means into often shallow ends. The publisher rebutted that it was far easier today to circumvent the restrictions of rules because there were many different counter-forces compared to forty years ago. Others wondered whether religion could provide a 'connecting tissue' among groups, or whether the family might play such a role, in lieu of crumbling institutions. Not everyone was convinced, preferring to think of the *res publica* as a secular space in which people made collective commitments for the common good, beyond their immediate blood, ethnic or religious ties. To the question of whether the time line was moving 'upwards' or 'downwards', there was a consensus that things were looking better, because as the

anthropologist said, different groups were beginning to look in the 'same direction'. Another participant stressed that, after all, Holland had a good economy and a still functioning welfare state safety net, so that with a new type of political willpower and more responsible citizens, things could change significantly for the better in a relatively short time. Another participant stressed that it would be worthwhile going back to 'basics' and asking questions such as 'Who are the Dutch?' and 'What is the importance of the constitution?' to raise citizen awareness. Much could be changed through modest and untechnocratic 'planned' pedagogy.

In the Dutch case, however, this timid optimism could not be defined within national boundaries. Perhaps because the Netherlands was so small; perhaps because it depended to such a degree on its neighbours for many vital needs, the timid optimism shown in this session came with a major proviso, which was not shared by any other national round table: the situation in Europe.

Europe

In the preceding round tables, the reference to 'Europe' was treated almost as an afterthought and without much intensity compared to the domestic debates over national identity and social priorities. In the Dutch round table, however, the discussion over 'Europe' was inherently linked to the debates surrounding the future of the *res publica*. Europe, in brief, was seen either as the guarantor of Dutch change or as a problem that was responsible for the country's current weakness. The reasons for the Dutch 'no' to the treaty of Nice became far easier to understand given this dichotomy.

The group divided into three stances on the European issue: those who felt that Europe offered greater guarantees for the development of the Dutch *res publica*; those who felt that Europe was not conducive to a stronger *res publica*, and those who felt that the two would rise or fall together.

For some, Europe actually created the best conditions for a renewed Dutch *res publica* in that it guaranteed fundamental values that might otherwise fall victim to the moods of populist or extremist majorities. Europe offered a greater

cultural and intellectual backdrop and allowed, according to the social entrepreneur, the creation of a 'European generation' that was no longer interested in chasing an elusive 'European identity' but actually in promoting European grassroots cooperation, in other words simply 'doing Europe'. Another participant stressed that Europe 'existed' and permeated many a project. The problem was that it was increasingly taken for granted, so that people could vote 'no' to the treaty while remaining 'European'.

For others instead, Europe was a problem for the *res publica. Not Europe itself but the fact that those* who had promoted the 'yes' to Europe and who, after the 'no', tried to reconcile Brussels with civil society, were the same social engineers and technocrats who had been responsible for the collapse of Dutch society in the first place. Those against Europe abhorred decision-makers who had not been elected. Among those who needed to be rallied to the *res publica* groups in society who had seen Europe as a threat figured prominently, either in terms of identity or on purely economic grounds. In these milieus, the European ideal had simply not taken root. Perhaps, as a younger participant suggested, maybe the newcomers to Europe could best define its future, because the old Europe built on the 'never again' to Hitler rang no bells for new generations, who had entirely different cultural and above all historical and political backgrounds and references. To succeed, Europe had to dip into all pasts and not just the obvious ones that were celebrated by society's social engineers.

For the third group, Europe and therefore the Dutch *res publica* were both in danger. Institutions needed support otherwise they could easily crumble. Without them, political problems could not be addressed. But for the young social entrepreneur, it was difficult to decide in the current climate who was more irrelevant: European or Dutch politicians. For the anthropologist, Europe had still not become an 'invented community' to whom one owed spontaneous allegiance in the same way one owes it to the nation state, but he felt that, with time, such a community would come about. Younger voices were less sanguine. For the philosopher working on behalf of asylum seekers and refugees, Europe had simply become a codename for the power that kept

such fragile foreigners 'out' and said 'no' to immigration. For a young European activist, Brussels, unfortunately, was far from becoming an 'imagined community' but was instead full of companies and media interests engaged in very real and detrimental business deals when not in active 'pork-barrelling'. The European 'soul' had vanished all the more easily now that there was no European accountability to its citizens. Another participant wondered whether Europe was good for each country's minorities or further deprived them of any legitimacy. Another mused that maybe the *res publica* should be built at the local level, leaving the founding values to Europe, in effect making the nation state irrelevant, especially since 80 per cent of laws were drafted in Europe.

The demise of the nation state drew no support. A European activist was quick to point out that Europe did not 'make laws', while the judge specified that all laws were made in the Dutch context following European directives. A cultural activist stressed that there was no discrepancy between a cultural Europe and the ongoing liveliness of national tradition and languages. Only the nation state could ensure the bonding of immigrants to the larger population. Other participants wondered whether Europe was not too small a horizon for Holland, which needed to be present in the BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India, and China). Others replied that Europe was actually the ideal vehicle for globalization, in terms of Holland's own interests.

The twinning of the Dutch *res publica* with Europe's own fate showed the degree to which Holland's small size had made it impossible for her to think of the *res publica* in purely national terms. But the twinning went further. Both elites suffered from the same democratic deficit. Both were unable to take real needs into account and both mistrusted popular opinion. In brief, the same reforms were badly needed in both the European and the Dutch contexts, with Holland being a miniature version of Europe, not a very reassuring situation.

At the very beginning of the round table, a philosopher in the group had defined the *res publica* as the equivalent of a table which both united and separated those who were sitting around it. This metaphor pleased all sides. Those who argued for

clearcut principles and founding values could make the point that one did not negotiate the number of legs on a table: one needed at least four and they had to be solid. Those who argued, instead, for the changing role of values stressed that a table was only as important as what was placed on it (both in reality and metaphorically).

By the end of the Dutch round table both sides seemed to come together, thanks to a younger generation which stood for strong founding values (against a possible extremist Muslim threat), a strong Europe, and a total institutional overhaul of the very pillars of the *res publica*. Perhaps the spirit of the round table was best summarized by the Muslim woman who wore the headscarf when she proclaimed that she had profited from it because she had been taken out of the 'Muslim corner' and brought into a far more general debate in a context of trust and comfort.

The problems besetting Dutch society are surely far more complex than those of any other Western country, but the round table showed that out of such a crisis, new ideas and solutions were slowly emerging. This was a case of pessimism leading to a very deliberate realistic engagement for a better future. One voice mentioned that solutions could only be found if one thinks in terms of 'utopian realism' by choosing to be an optimist so as to tackle the problems in practical terms. All in all, the Dutch round table did not exude the optimism of the German round table, did not believe that the country could simply 'muddle through' as did the British round table, did not share the self-love of the French, or the angst of the Poles, or the serenity of the Swedes. It could only grapple with the society it had, and hope that 'optimism' as an attitude might actually plant the seeds of a future true optimism. By all accounts, this in itself marked a true progress.

Diana Pinto
August 2008

The programme for this round table is available online at:

http://www.jpr.org.uk/common-good-in-europe/ downloads/round_table_netherlands_programme.pdf

Report on the European round table

21 - 23 November 2008

Dr Diana Pinto

The seventh round table in the Ford Foundation funded project 'Voices for the Res Publica: The Common Good in Europe', and the first comprehensive European round table was held in the UK in November 2008, under the auspices of the London-based Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR). The purpose of the round table was to bring together for the first time some of the leading voices of the previous six national round tables, so as to carry the entire project one step further. In order to keep the group small, so as to retain the depth and vitality of the debates, it was not possible to bring more than two or three participants from each country to the European round table. The choice was extremely difficult to make and those who did not attend, remain of course, integral members of the project.

The meeting had a double purpose: to see whether one could create a network of European res publica 'voices' who could dialogue among each other and intervene in public fora on some of the project's key themes with the advantage of comparative clout. And to determine whether one could build on the different national experiences in order to formulate common policy-making ideas. In order to facilitate the discussion, JPR had commissioned a set of papers from a selected group of national participants to cover the key themes that had emerged from the national round tables. The five key themes were: 'national identity', 'the law', 'the status of minorities', 'religion', 'the state and civil society'. Around thirty short papers have thus been produced which can be read either thematically or across the board in national terms.

In my previous national reports, I had presented the following *caveat*:

Summarizing a two-day round table with such a diverse group of participants inevitably implies confronting several risks. The first is that of generalizing on the basis of what a given number of individuals present said, when other participants in their place might have raised different issues or addressed the same issues in a different manner. The second risk is that of 'essentializing', i.e., attributing a given person's comments to his or her ethnic background, political or religious affiliation, age or gender. Each individual is of course a sum of different experiences and identities which at times clash or reinforce each other in defining that person's outlook. Essentializing is a particularly dangerous proposition, especially for a project which seeks to build a new 'res publica' on a wide set of intertwined multiple identities. Yet, it is impossible not to generalize at some level if one is to use the round tables as a starting point for further 'res publica' debates. In the pages that follow, I have referred to given group identities (such as Christian, lay, Jewish, and also Muslim, but at other times Moroccan or Turk – conservative or progressive) only when what was being said stood out for having been said by a member of a given group who clearly invoked his or her given identity while grappling with the issue at stake. Similarly, I felt it was worth reporting when only members of a given group took stands on a given issue while others who belonged to other groups did not jump into the debate. Lastly, I refer to 'generations' when there was a clearly defined cluster of statements cutting across identities by persons of the same age group.

This *caveat* is even more pertinent for the European round table, where it was important to understand whether what was being said revealed an essential national aspect and vision of the debate or a shared 'feeling' across European boundaries which reflected more a given generational or cultural/ religious angle. Both were crucial for the project.

Thanks to the papers, and to the fact that all the participants already knew 'the rules of the game', the round table debate took off immediately and covered the five key themes without any necessary preliminary presentations. There were twenty-one participants (two were unable to attend at the last minute). The group was composed of intellectuals, lawyers, NGO activists, most of whom were opinion-makers in their respective countries, and every ethnic and religious group was represented.

National identity and shared values

This was the topic where participants spoke most obviously as members (whether of the national majority or of minorities) of their respective countries. The Swedish moderator launched this session by stressing that in many countries (including his own) debating the content of 'national identity' was a quite recent phenomenon. To prove his point, he mentioned that Sweden had created a 'national holiday' only very recently. Many other voices from the UK, the Netherlands, Sweden and Germany agreed concerning the novelty of this debate. The two exceptions on this front were, of course, France and on another level, Poland. One French participant started off the session by stressing that France had a long tradition of reflecting on the content of 'national identity', which was far more important as a concept than any discussion over pluralism. He proceeded to define national identity in France as based on five key points: language, citizenship, a strong public service, the concept of laïcité and a shared, even when conflicting, history, which, at times, was transformed into a 'broken narrative', as in the case of new communitarian assertions. He stressed that the victorious 1998 World Cup French football team may have been multiracial, but was not 'multicultural', since most of its players came from the West Indies, which had been French far longer than Alsace.

In perfect counterpoint, a Polish participant stressed that in the case of Poland, national identity was just as crucial but it was based traditionally on ethnicity, Catholicism, private ownership of the land and a national historical narrative that excluded all 'others'. Any identity emanating from the state or linked to the notion of citizenship was perceived as irrelevant to national 'belonging'. The Polish 'voice' who stressed the importance of an ethnic definition of national identity did so because he wanted the other participants to be aware that such an ethnic definition was prevalent in all the newly integrated central and eastern European countries that had entered the EU in recent years. One could not speak of a European *res publica* without taking this fact into account, for such ethnic majoritarian visions could not be simply wished away. They were here to stay.

The debate was thus framed by these two opposing definitions of national identity. Echoing the position of a Swedish immigrant voice, most participants agreed that ethnicity could no longer underpin national identity in any of their countries. One Dutch participant stressed that national identity was not innate but had to be actively learned in cultural, historical and political terms by all citizens, even those who had 'always' been there. However, even those who advocated citizenship as the new necessary motor of a national identity 'process' were quick to stress that such an abstract concept no longer sufficed. It was impossible to separate it from a more innate feeling of 'identity', based on emotions, history and geography. Especially among the UK participants there was much discussion about the 'poor whites' who felt they had 'lost their country' to multiculturalism. There was now a shared feeling that these leftover members of the old majority deserved greater consideration and legitimacy. Majority 'rights' remained crucial. One German participant stressed instead that in Germany, the novelty still remained 'minority rights'. The Turkish minority, until recently left out of all national debates, was just beginning to understand the power of citizenship to make their voices and culture heard.

An important discussion ensued on the comparative importance of geography and history in the strengthening of national identity. A number of British and Dutch voices seemed to stress the importance of geography, in the notion of national belonging, claiming that immigrants often felt a stronger attachment to their city or to their region than to the nation state as such, and were, in turn, perceived to belong more easily at those levels by their majority counterparts (who perhaps shared the same preference for regional identities). A French voice coming from an immigrant background stressed that he felt European first and French only after, because the larger reference allowed him to hang on to multiple belongings. All Europeans had hyphenated identities, and so it was through Europe that he could define himself as French. No one else echoed this feeling, which was very forward-looking.

Other voices, mainly from Germany and Sweden, stressed instead the importance of history in any

national identity. Immigrants had to take on the national past, warts and all, if they wanted to belong. Straddling both sides, one immigrant UK voice stressed that the older immigrant communities were often closer to the majority populations than to new immigrant waves, and that in the process the historical 'we', in statements such as 'we did terrible things in our empire' versus 'we did great things in the empire' was becoming blurred. This constantly shifting 'we' was perhaps the best guarantee that no one could criticize minorities for 'aping' majorities as they tried to fit in. There was only one dissenting voice on this issue, coming from another British participant (of 'white' working-class origins) who argued, in a clear left-wing sense, that one could not blame the working classes for the historical faults of the elites.

The debate clearly showed that national belonging had to be redefined beyond ethnicity but had to go beyond the abstract notion of citizenship. A deeper identity 'glue' had to be found, and this common search prompted one (French) participant to wonder whether *in the very long term*, the French definition of national identity – albeit without the French cultural imperative – might not hold out the most promise.

The law

A significant proportion of the round table participants were either trained in law, active lawyers or judges. This session, concerning the different points of legal tension across different European countries, was thus particularly enlightening. The following key themes emerged from the discussion:

- The increasing tendency to have judges and lawyers become the key arbiters of political debates in place of politicians, who forfeit their responsibility to debate societal issues in the political and parliamentary realm.
- The danger of having a 'dictatorship of the law' with the state taking over social, ethical and political issues which should be debated first within civil society because they imply citizen responsibilities.
- The issue of whether the law should specifically mirror the needs of minorities and also whether such groups should be physically represented

inside the entire judicial system including among judges.
- The relationship between local national laws emerging out of a given tradition, versus the often perverse effects of 'one size fits all' European laws.

With the exception of one French participant who stressed that it was precisely the role of judges and the courts to have the final word over controversial political issues, the rest of the group worried about the excessive turning to the legal system to solve social and political clashes. There was a consensus that many of these clashes should have been resolved in the political sphere...if only politicians were courageous enough to take strong stands, rather than seeking consensus at all costs in order to be re-elected. Judges could not and should not, according to this view, become the arbiter of societal debates, especially since many of the laws that they were asked to validate were often 'catch all' and badly formulated since they tried to please all. This stand was upheld by the legal voices from the Netherlands and Germany.

The voices representing civil society, whether in Poland, the UK or Germany, were most keen to defend the role of the citizen and of civil society institutions in ensuring that the state remains accountable for its democratic values. One Polish voice stressed that too much state legislation put citizens 'to sleep' with respect to their moral and legal responsibilities. This was particularly true in issues of ethnic or religious discrimination and memory (particularly those linked to Holocaust denial). In his view, citizens could become complacent if it was assumed that these responsibilities belonged to the state. Civic alliances and citizen awareness lay at the heart of democratic states, not just laws, whose application was perceived to be the state's responsibility. Once again the French voice disagreed, stressing that it was indeed the state and the judicial system's responsibility to ensure that society comply to certain standards and to protect citizens from disorder. In this view it was entirely logical that the French state had decreed in the19th century after the abolition of slavery that it was illegal to advocate or praise slavery, just as it was a crime to engage in Holocaust denial. On the issue of laws against Holocaust

denial, a German voice stressed that when these laws were first enacted in Germany, they were meant to protect the German majority (not any minuscule Jewish minority) from any renewed temptation to listen to neo-Nazi 'sirens'.

The question of minority representation in the legal system provoked strong disagreement among members of different minorities. More secular Muslim voices from the UK and Sweden argued strongly against minorities having their own 'niches' or representation inside the judicial system. The British voice felt that there was a 'mythical' aspect to the law (linked to its formal blindness) which should not be trivialized by turning the judiciary into a sociological mirror of society's composition. He also stressed that there was no guarantee that lawyers and judges emanating from minorities would be more effective in their tasks. Much great jurisprudence had emanated from the wisdom of old non-representative elites. The Swedish voice wondered, in a provocative manner, whether the quest for greater minority representation would not ultimately lead to separate jurisdictions or judgements in function of the group in question, not unlike in colonial settings.

A Jewish voice from Germany, seconded by a Dutch religious Muslim and two voices of Muslim background, one from Germany and one from France, took the opposite tack. They argued that minorities would feel they truly belonged in their respective countries if they felt their specific needs were listened to in the judiciary realm, and above all in the lawmaking process. The Jewish voice from Germany and the Muslim Dutch voice argued for specific collective minority rights in order to protect minorities and their identities from the ignorance and indifference of majorities who could not possibly know the constraints linked to living as a minority in a given country.

The discussion ended with the issue of whether the law should reflect the values of society as a whole. On this count, most participants felt that the law should take into account, within certain limits, the different cultural values present in a society, but only if they did not contradict the laws' fundamental principles of equality, human rights etc. A Dutch judge stressed that this type of debate was

not new but had accompanied legal reflections for centuries, and that the law evolved with time and changing circumstances. On this count, many participants felt that the Polish voice was still speaking from an anti-totalitarian position derived from the Communist experience, and that one had to return to a more positive reading of the state rather than emphasizing the ways of protecting oneself against it.

The status of minorities

The German moderator began by asking a rhetorical question: whether the debate concerning minorities would disappear if equal opportunities were guaranteed to all citizens. The consensus was that minority issues would remain pertinent even in the most open of societies.

A German voice stressed that the integration debate was deeply flawed because it neglected the fact that both majorities and minorities had to evolve to meet common challenges. Most governments tended to think of this debate instead as a technical issue, whereas it lay at the core of all political and social questionings. A French voice stressed that European countries had a long history of having to confront minorities. Social mobility and jobs determined whether such minorities were properly integrated, more than any political debate. A Swedish immigrant voice reiterated that state policies did not work. For immigrants to integrate, there was the need to 'upgrade' national identities into a more open and flexible version, in his analysis a sort of 'Swedishness 2.0'. That could only be achieved by no longer defining the concept in physical terms (blue eyes) or in terms of old folk rituals. A German voice asked whether what was required was an 'Americanization' of identity, where there were no racial or religious connotations whatsoever today to being an American.

The Polish voice stood out again by stressing that Europe was full of ethnic national minorities that had left their own lands and bore little comparison to the new 'foreign' immigrants who had reached the continent since the war and increasingly so in the last few decades. National minorities did not seek to integrate, but properly accepted that, with their differences and multiple belonging, they were

the source of incredible cultural wealth. To prove this, he stressed that Polish culture had always been produced at the periphery. Now that there were no longer national minorities in its midst, the country had become 'boring'. A German voice responded that internal minorities already participated in any country's political life, with guaranteed representations and rights, whereas new immigrants possessed no such structural legitimacy.

An older established Swedish voice stressed that Sweden had created official 'national minorities' only recently, in order to distinguish them from the new arrivals. And these had to be broken down into two different categories: the asylum seekers as refugees and classical economic immigrants. The majority population judged both groups by their desire to integrate into the wider society. But this was also true of the immigrants who did not necessarily wish to remain part of a separate community. A younger Swedish immigrant voice of Muslim background stressed that there was a generation gap. Older immigrants did not mind being self-confined, but their children felt the social barriers far more acutely, since many did want to integrate but were not truly accepted. Yet another Swedish voice stressed that majorities evolved as well through time, and besides, there were many different ways of belonging to a majority Swedish culture, both in social and intellectual terms. Furthermore no one obliged immigrants to participate in folkloric rituals or holidays. This intra-Swedish debate was valid for other national settings as well, as stressed by a young German voice of Turkish background. In her view, new immigrants were not discriminated against because they did not go to Church but because they did not belong in terms of implicit cultural references. Some countries were less tolerant than others on this count. Another German voice felt that time played a positive role. Younger 'Teutonic' generations were far more tolerant because they had grown up and gone to school with children of other origins and were familiar with them.

A more sceptical British immigrant voice agreed. He stressed that there were no 'fourth generation' children of immigrants who were not fully integrated. One had to accept that in all historical contexts, there had always been a 'sacrificed

generation'. The only problem was that immigrants were often integrated into the underclass, but that was a social not a minority issue. The Polish voice replied that internal minorities did not integrate at any generation: not the old Jews of eastern Europe, nor the Roma, so it was not a matter of time for them—one more reason to distinguish among minorities. A German voice stressed that integration could be variable, on some counts but not on others, and that the integration process was not linear, since many members of the third generation were less integrated than their parents. A French voice referred to the 'dis-assimilation' of many French Jews in recent years as a possible danger. The session ended with a feeling that most of the problems placed under the minority/majority label, especially in terms of immigrants, were socio-economic in nature. All the other types of integrations could find solutions in an ever more open space with different cultural and human rights references, and on this count, Europe, as a supra-national identity, played a positive role.

Religion

The session was launched by a young Catholic reformist voice from Poland. She advocated less intense ties between state and Church in her country and felt that the Church would be better off if it received less support from the State, and fewer 'favours' from politicians. She also felt the Church had no right to address the state by making political 'demands' in Bishop's letters on such issues as *in vitro* reproduction or other advanced medical technologies. (To which a French voice replied that, in France, before the separation of Church and state in 1905, the state gave money to the Church as a way of better controlling it). Another Polish voice (of Jewish background) felt that it was important to distinguish between the presence of religion in the *res publica* (which was positive) since the right to practise a religion constituted one of the basic human rights, from the presence of religious institutions (whose power should instead be closely controlled). Poland was perhaps the only country represented where one could speak of the Church abusing its position inside the state.

Participants from other countries felt that Church/state relations worked rather well, and that there

was no need to overhaul them. Religion was not discriminated against in the public space. This was particularly true with respect to the German situation where the different Christian churches (and Jewish groups) were very active in societal debates through their Academies, but also knew their limits in the wider public discourse. In his view it was important to hear the conservative positions of the Catholic Church over scientific innovations, for they were not necessarily retrograde. The same positive impression was shared by the UK voices (where there is an Established Church), and in Sweden, where the Lutheran Church was de-established in 2002. In Holland, where the Reformed Churches were historically the most important, a longstanding sharing of public space with the Catholics had created an institutional balance.

The most interesting reflections to emanate from these Western European voices related to secularism and even atheism. There was a widespread agreement that religious voices and a religious outlook were important forces in civil society but also in dialogue with the state. Atheism was considered to be closer to a strident belief rather than to a lack of belief. Many participants who defined themselves as being personally without religion stressed that religious answers had to be listened to because the secular camp had found no satisfying responses to any social or ethical question. A res publica without openly accepted religious input, in the words of one self-defined British atheist, would open itself to dire consequences, for those who believed would then opt to go underground and take on very extreme views. Most participants agreed that all religions were based on non-negotiable values and that the point of making their views heard in the wider public was not to turn them into negotiable bargaining chips, but to add another dimension to important ethical debates, and to help define or elaborate minimal collective 'values'.

The discussion then turned to the main question of Islam and its position inside European societies, and inevitably addressed the issue of religious fundamentalism. No one questioned Islam's place in the European religious equilibrium. The group addressed it in terms of free speech versus hate speech, with a specific reference to the Danish

cartoon incident. As could be expected, those participants who spoke from a religious position were the most critical of the affront made to Muslims as a community through the cartoons. The right to caricature did not imply the right to offend. The lay participants stressed instead the need for Muslims in Europe to understand that Western culture had a long tradition of polemics with established churches. In this perspective, the right to blaspheme (against God) was a fundamental right. The group as a whole, including the religious Muslim voices, reached a consensus that in a democracy it was possible to 'offend God' through blasphemy, but that offending a given community of believers was something that needed to be legally sanctioned. However, the community of believers needed to understand the cultural context in which they lived to make sure that they were not 'offended' by something other religious believers had come to accept as part of a free society.

Once again, the two Polish voices stressed that civil society should not abdicate the moral responsibility of ensuring religious groups were not offended. The law could not solve everything, for neither decency nor respect – two crucial attitudes in any democracy and truly *civil* society – could be legislated or legally enforced. Furthermore the presence of religious voices inside the *res publica* implied that secular societies overcome their frequent implicit assumption that religious voices always had a (hidden) 'agenda'.

In terms of politics, one Muslim religious voice from the Netherlands stressed that Muslims were not sufficiently protected compared to Jews, who were in a 'better situation' because they could invoke protective anti-racist legislation on their behalf. Muslims did not constitute a race. They did not even, in her opinion, constitute a coherent internally self-defined group, but were for now a loose galaxy of believers with very different cultural traditions who had been lumped together as 'Muslims' as an external (and pejorative) European category. Hence the amalgam constantly made between all Muslims and a few extremists. A French Muslim voice added that 9/11 had compounded the situation by turning Islam into a suspicious creed and movement. Whereas the Swedish Muslim voice wondered whether extremist religious Muslims had not also

played their part in this situation by broadcasting an intolerant version of their religion, one that included clear discrimination against young women.

A French voice concluded the debate with an important reference: namely, that French jurisprudence had chosen to stress the context in which anti-religious statements were made in trying to determine whether they constituted blasphemy or hate speech. A teacher making such comments in a classroom or a politician in a meeting would be guilty; a newspaper publishing caricatures or an artistic production mocking some religious aspects would not. It was thus no accident that Plantu, one of France's leading cartoonists in *Le Monde*, always included representatives from the three monotheist faiths in his anti-religious cartoons. The *res publica* in Europe would only flourish when these distinctions were accepted by all and when rational and religious discourse were understood to be complementary for each needed to be criticized by the other to strengthen its own role.

Civil society and the state

This session was moderated by the Polish participant with a great internal experience of the Solidarnosc movement. He began by asking the group how they would define the link between the state and civil society, and whether civil society could keep the state out of the picture.

This question led to a very interesting exchange between this Polish voice whose fear of too much state power was conditioned by the Communist years, and a Swedish participant who instead, in the best Swedish tradition, considered the state to be a mostly positive and even benign actor. The Pole saw the state as an entity that needed to be constantly controlled and counterbalanced by civil society. The Swede saw it instead as the logical extension of civil society, particularly in its social democratic incarnation.

The group's reactions to this debate revealed interesting geographical and generational differences. A younger Swedish immigrant voice felt that it was important to establish a clear well marked distance between the state and civil society, for he feared that a state that defined itself as 'good' could easily hijack civil society and its actors

by creating tidy little 'identity boxes', thus numbing all complex debate. A German voice stressed the danger of having a German public opinion which instinctively distrusted (also for historical reasons) the state while granting too much confidence to NGOs, whose agendas were not always clear and who could also be manipulated by the state, with money, visibility, access to decision-making etc. Hence the need to keep a 'safe distance' between the two, always bearing in mind that civil society sounded great as an abstract term, but needed to be monitored carefully in reality.

A British voice was startled to see this distrust of civil society, for who else could one trust? To which the Polish moderator replied by extolling the value of ever vigilant mistrust, for even democratic states could inflict far greater damage than any civil society actor. One could assume good intentions on all sides, but it was vital to check constantly. The Swedish voice rebutted by stressing the importance of *a priori* trust as the crucial building block of any valid *res publica*. One could always check later, but trust was primordial.

A French voice close to the trade union movement stressed that civil society was already present in the state by way of Parliament, and could not just be considered as a loose 'thing' that filled the 'gaps' in state action. To which a German voice replied that a legislative state did not necessarily protect civil society discussion, for it had a tendency to rely on 'experts' and their commissions rather than on active civil society voices. A young Dutch voice stressed that the very concept of civil society had to be redefined to centre it on social entrepreneurs, business, and the state organs which worked with them. While the Dutch judge stressed that what one expected of the state (and not of civil society) was its *predictability* and *due process*. To which one Swedish voice replied that 'predictability' was not a virtue per se. Some horrible dictatorial states were completely 'predictable'.

A further distinction was made by the Polish voice, who stressed that civil society actors were best on 'single issue causes' whereas one expected the state to take a larger and interconnected viewpoint, since it was meant to regroup multiple interests. One had to make sure, however, that the state did not pump

civil society for its own interests, withering it in the process.

The discussion moved to political parties, which traditionally had been the institution that regrouped society's multiple grassroots interests. But now many participants felt political parties were no longer fulfilling their responsibility, preferring to think of themselves as representing one sociological group or cause, not unlike NGOs. The result was that democracies had been turned into horse-trading exercises with a concomitant loss of general interest.

Many voices shared this reading, feeling that no group was performing its duties properly, neither the government, nor political parties, nor trade unions, especially when they knew they were being filmed, and therefore accountable to their respective constituencies. A German voice wondered whether civil society would take a secondary position in the current economic crisis where one had lost all faith in 'market forces'. A UK voice felt political parties were ever less representative of society as a whole, with Labour in particular, being taken over by Etonians. A Dutch voice stressed that political candidates were put on election lists in a most undemocratic way. A French voice stressed the fact that new groups were excluded from the political parties, and that even when they were called in by the state for consultation, they 'froze' without significant negotiations, because they knew they were being scrutinized by their respective constituencies.

Two other German voices sought to balance the discussion by stressing that the state and civil society could interact positively. NGOs often carried out state initiatives, for instance training the spouse of an immigrant so that she could master the German language and thus fit into the new state-derived rules. A German academic stressed that the state did much co-founding of civil society actors. Perhaps the solution was to make such grants available only when more than one civil society actor was involved so that there would be internal checks and balances and also less risk of co-option. Transparency was vital on all counts. One Swedish voice reasserted the importance of the state by saying it could make a very positive difference in society, citing the contrast between Swedish (calming) and Danish

(aggravating) state actions toward immigrants.

This session ended with a strong shared condemnation of the political system in each country. Clearly democracy was not working since new immigrants were not being brought into the system, which no longer responded to society's changing needs. And 'Europe' was perceived as being part of the problem and not the solution, since it was even less grassroots oriented than its respective states.

This blanket judgement on the part of round table participants, who all claimed to be pro-European, is worth noting. Irrespective of their age, most of the voices spoke out of concrete disappointment. The older ones (a Swedish and a Dutch voice) increasingly resented the EU tendency to over-legislate, thus destroying the important cultural and traditional national underpinnings of national laws (which they deemed to be highly positive since they had evolved out of a concern to have different social groups 'live together'). They also worried that the European legislator lacked any democratic legitimacy since it acted out of its own highly detached technocratic sphere. A younger Polish voice expressed the disappointment of the new countries that the EU had not actively helped democratic forces to gain power, happily accepting, instead, the old elites with their old clientele networks which were greatly strengthened and even amplified through EU membership. She was even sceptical about the various European youth initiatives which threw money out of the window by organizing festivals where fun was stressed and no complex issue was ever addressed.

This attitude was best summarized by the fact that no one in the group mentioned the forthcoming June European Parliamentary elections as an event that might have some possible connection with the European *res publica* project. 'Strasbourg' rang no bells, even though two French voices made a timid attempt to say something positive about Europe. The first claimed that the European Parliament was becoming a more serious place in terms of legislative power. The second stated that there obviously was no European 'state', but that something that could be called a European 'civil society' was slowly coming to the fore. They were the only ones, and

perhaps it was no accident that they were French. All the others saw Europe as 'missing' and above all as a disappointment.

Building a *res publica*

In the welcoming letter to the round table, participants had been asked to reflect on what meaning they attributed to the very term res publica and how they wished to pursue the project.

These are some of the suggestions which emerged:
- A reflection on the role of language and culture as integrative factors for new immigrants.
- Analyzing the shifting contents of terms such as 'minority' and 'majority', with the assumption that the more people felt they belonged selectively to both on different issues, the more a society would be integrated.
- A reflection on what a common European public sphere might entail in terms of shared themes in strengthening civil society.
- Building the notion of a 'common destiny' uniting majorities and minorities at a European level, as a way of bringing different groups to work together.
- Concentrating on the 'soft power' of identity, even in anthropological terms. What was required to make minorities feel comfortable: as an example, would European dinner parties take into account the fact that Muslims do not drink alcohol?
- Defining the rules of engagement in order to overcome misunderstandings and apathy. Learning from other national experiences on precise questions.
- Fighting against the possible recrudescence of closed nationalisms as they mushroom in the new countries of the EU.
- Rethinking nationalism without an ethnic component to create a new sense of belonging beyond multiculturalism.
- Analyzing what the term 'European' meant outside of Europe in order to use it to better integrate minorities within, in terms of 'values'.
- Fighting against social exclusion, a key component of immigrant problems.
- Rethinking the notion of Citizenship as a key to belonging to a community.
- Rethinking the notion of the 'General Interest'. Can it be useful in the integration of minorities?
- The problem of the demonization of 'the Other'.

Further work

These are general categories but they help define how the key five points of the project should be approached.

Above all, they provide the content with which to continue the project in its double dimension:

- Providing enough comparative material for possible policy-making recommendations, which will rest on some European-wide research.
- Fixing a few themes which members of the group will want to pursue in voluntary subgroups and in coordination with one another.

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The programme for this round table is available online at:

http://www.jpr.org.uk/common-good-in-europe/downloads/round_table_europe_programme.pdf

Future of the Voices for the *res publica* project

The second and last European Round Table of the 'Voices for the *res publica*' project was held on 10-12 July 2009 in Chesham, UK.

The meeting had a double agenda:

1. Bringing up-to-date our understanding of developments within each country, while assessing their role in any future European common action. Our discussions centred on the impact of the economic crisis on the key themes that had underpinned our project.
2. Given the issues raised, planning concretely for follow-ups to the project after the end of the Ford Foundation grant on 30 September 2009.

Report on the Second European Round Table

(10-12 July 2009)

Participants were asked to reflect on the situation in their respective countries since their own national round table took place and in light of the international economic crisis.

The Economic Crisis

Interestingly enough, most participants felt that the international economic crisis had not significantly transformed their respective national settings in terms of the key *res publica* issues, for very different reasons. Sweden, the Netherlands, and even Poland appeared to be unaffected or only slightly touched by the crisis, perhaps because they had overhauled their state and banking sectors earlier than others. Germany had been in such a state of economic doldrums already that the crisis did not fall out of a clear sky and so did not change the context significantly. France had a far more regulated context than many other countries and was less affected by the collapse of the bubble. As for the UK, the economic crisis was but one part of a far larger crisis of trust involving all organs of the state, the media, and the political class, so that it contributed to the general gloom without having provoked it.

But all participants agreed that the crisis would inaugurate an age of shrunken state services requiring more local level initiatives to compensate for the weakening of the old welfare state nets. This could cause social and political havoc in France, a country where such state-run services were inherently tied up with the national identity. In other countries, many felt that, rather than being a problem, such a shrinking of state services could be seen as a blessing in disguise that may bring about improved national integration and increased local action.

Identity Issues

Participants agreed that the economic crisis had not adversely affected the sense of national identity felt by immigrants. Indeed, many felt that the whole issue of 'identity' was falling off the radar screen, either because other (economic or political) worries had replaced it, or simply because of 'battle fatigue', which some interpreted as the result of a victory within public opinion. As a sign of this, no one seemed to turn the issue of the wearing of a *niqab* or a *burqa* into a major national debate, not even in France, where initial calls for legal sanctions were in reality soft-pedalled...perhaps because there were more pressing problems at hand or simply because the numbers involved were tiny.

'Identity' issues were now replaced by issues linked to social welfare, the labour market and social services and these cut across any identity lines, paradoxically integrating immigrants in the same national problems. There was a new accent on the problem of 'trust' and 'participation' in national settings where there was much apathy and an increasingly mediocre political class. Ecology was also taking over as a universal cause that transcended 'identities.'

Local level actions were taking precedence over national debates, particularly in the UK, where lack of trust (in politics, in the media, in the established powers, and even in NGOs) was becoming a major source of worry, as in the Netherlands. It was important not to let such national fears be

monopolized by the extreme right. And this new emphasis on the local level further guaranteed the integration of minorities through their votes but also through their running for office.

Germany stood out as the only country where issues of national identity, which had been taboo for so long, were finally resurfacing to play a major cultural and political role in the creation of a common historical narrative. The country was still trying to come to grips with an inclusive identity based on historical responsibility. However, this new inclusive identity, which must look to the future, should be mindful to avoid potentially dangerous populist overtones.

The Future of Immigrant Minorities

The group was split over this issue. Some felt that, despite everything, countries still remained overwhelmingly 'White and Christian'. This meant, in the case of some Frenchmen of Muslim background, that they preferred to emigrate to 'new lands' such as Canada or even to the Emirates where they had greater job opportunities. But this did not mean that they would not come back, and in any case, they might reflect in a more extreme manner the case of many other Frenchmen who also felt stuck in the country's still ossified job structures. No similar mention of an 'exodus of talented immigrants' was made for immigrants from the other countries.

Most felt that immigrants, whether coloured and/ or Muslim, were in the process of being integrated. It was simply a matter of time. Most agreed that the best way to ensure this was at the local level and through negotiation, rather than heavy legal action. Local belonging was fine for some but one had to be careful that it did not end up as 'ghetto belonging', with little interaction between neighbourhoods. Nor did 'virtual belonging' via the new technologies necessarily add up to real belonging. But this problem transcended immigrant minorities to encompass society as a whole.

Some stressed the importance of the generational divide, feeling that younger generations were interacting very differently. Others pointed to a recent

Gallup Poll which showed that the trust of immigrants in their respective national institutions was much higher than anticipated. But others argued that it might be deference rather than trust. In that case, younger, less deferential, generations could prove to be more combative than their parents, but this could be seen as a healthy sign that would lead to greater participation and future inclusiveness.

Multiple loyalties, European belonging, citizenship, dual citizenship

The group agreed that local, State and European identities were destined to play a growing role for all populations, not just immigrants. The question arose whether dual citizenships could facilitate national integration by not forcing the children of immigrants to have to choose between different identities, not unlike having to choose between a father and a mother. This was a major issue in Germany, which did not allow dual citizenship, unlike France, which allowed it (despite its official anti-multicultural stances). Not all the immigrant 'voices' agreed on this issue. Many felt that the process of achieving fully fledged citizenship and equality in the country where one lived was a more important goal than retaining ties, which were bound to weaken, with one's country of origin.

Others felt that the solution to any multiple loyalties was to be found inside 'Europe', the place which would allow for these hyphenated identities to emerge. Not all shared this optimism, but clearly the issue of not being able to be defined just by citizenship of one's country of immigration remained a very real problem.

Cultural Issues

One can sum up under this wide heading the different remarks participants made concerning the long-term aspects of the *res publica*. These included such issues as:

national commemorations and how to redefine them to give them relevance in changed contexts; the ongoing relevance in each country's development of key historical moments, which then led to a consolidated national identity;

the fate of old (religious, ethnic, political) minorities
and their survival or disappearance;
giving new meanings to the historical origins of local
cohesion;
language, literature and the arts as vehicles for the
inclusion of different identities and, conversely,
similar fates.

All of these aspects are perceived as central to the
strengthening of trust in the res publica.

The most important tentative conclusion of the
second European round table was that the 'identity
debates' may have come to an end. This was due in
great part to the fact that identities were gaining
increasing respect, but above all to the fact that the
major problems our societies will have to face in the
future are common to all, and do not benefit from
being divided by considerations of identity. This is
particularly true with respect to issues linked to the
economic crisis, unemployment, social justice, the
law and environmental questions.

Paradoxically, the 'identity era' may have been one
predicated on ongoing prosperity and a certain type
of 'narcissistic' luxury. We have now entered an era
in which common problems in a shrinking economic
context are carrying the day. The *res publica*, rather
than harkening back to a distant and mythical
harmonious past, points to a future yet to be
defined.

Participants in the round tables

Famile Arslan (Dutch round table, European round table) Practising lawyer, also involved in the work of the Islam and Citizenship Foundation
The Hague, The Netherlands

Astrid Assefa (Swedish round table) Actress and singer, head of the regional theatre of the province of Dalecarlia Stockholm, Sweden

Steve Austen (Dutch round table) A Permanent Fellow of the Felix Meritis Foundation involved in international projects such as *A Soul for Europe,* writer and cultural activist Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Régine Azria (European Jewish round table) Historian, Research Fellow, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales Paris, France

Jos Baijens (Dutch round table) Teacher of communications, organization and Dutch language; a co-founder of *Globaliseringslezing*, a lecture series on the issues of globalization Tilburg, The Netherlands

Pernilla Baralt (Swedish round table) Consultant on issues of environment and de- velopment. Responsible for issues concerning democracy, dialogue and debate at the representa- tion of the EU Commission in Sweden Lidingo, Sweden

Ilija Batljan (Swedish round table) Mayor of the City of Nynäshamn south of Stockholm Sweden

Dr Robert Berkeley (British round table, European round table) Director, Runnymede Trust London, UK
Alison Bernstein (German round table) Vice-President, Ford Foundation New York, US

Jean-Marie Bitomo-Edjolo (French round table) International businessman; lecturer in economics and marketing, Université de Marne-la-Vallée and Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers (CNAM - Ile-de-France) France

Sophie Bloemen (Dutch round table) Co-founder and Director of the Danube Founda- tion, an organization that brings together young Europeans for the exchange of ideas Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Dr Christoph Böhr MdL (German round table) CDU Delegate at the Landtag, the State Parliament of Rhineland-Palatinate Chairman, Deutsche Cusanus Gesellschaft; author Trier, Germany

Halina Bortnowska (Polish round table) A Catholic commentator, member of the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights Warsaw, Poland

Ruud Bosch (Dutch round table) Director of Stichting Culturele Manifestaties N.A.N.A. (Cultural Manifestations) Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Said Bouddouft (Dutch round table) Director of the Meander Foundation, a centre for social development focusing on diversity and inte- gration

Linda Bouws (Dutch round table, European round table) Director, The Felix Meritis Foundation. Active in international cultural life
Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Michael Brenner (European Jewish round table) Professor of Jewish History and Culture, University of Munich Germany

Tony Breslin (British round table, European round table) Chief Executive, Citizenship Foundation London, UK

Professor Dr Micha Brumlik (German round table) Professor, Institute for Educational Sciences, Johann Wolfgang Goethe University Frankfurt am Main, Germany

Aje Carlbom (Swedish round table) Social anthropologist Lund, Sweden

Selim Chazbijewicz (Polish round table) Professor at the Warmińsko-Mazurski University, Elbląg; former Imam of the Muslim Community in Gdansk Gdansk, Poland

Dr Helen Crawley (British round table) Institute for the Study of European Transformations, London Metropolitan University London, UK

Krzysztof Czyzewski (Polish round table) President, Borderlands Foundation Suwalki, Poland

Lars Dencik (Swedish round table) Professor of Social Psychology, University of Roskilde Stockholm, Sweden

Henryk Domanski (Polish round table) Professor of Sociology, Collegium Civitas; Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Polish Academy of Science Warsaw, Poland

Jean-Marc Dreyfus (French round table, European round table) Lecturer in Holocaust Studies, Department of Religion, University of Manchester

Dr Seyda Dilek Emek (German round table, European round table) Judge Hanover, Germany
She participated strictly in a personal capacity.

Mohammad Fazlhashemi (Swedish round table) Assistant Professor at the Department of History at the University of Umeå Umeå, Sweden

Dr Catherine Fieschi (British round table, European round table) Former Director, Demos; Director of Counterpoint, the British Council's cultural relations think tank London, UK

Anna Foa (European Jewish round table) Historian, Professor of History, University of Rome La Sapienza Rome, Italy

Konstanty Gebert (Polish round table, European round table) Journalist, Gazeta Wyborcz, writer Warsaw, Poland

Professor Dr Viola Georgi (German round table) Junior Professor, Institute for Educational Sciences, Freie Universität Berlin Berlin, Germany

Eliane Glaser (European Jewish round table) Honorary Research Fellow at Birkbeck College, journalist and radio producer, BBC London, UK

Adrienne Göhler (German round table) Psychologist, author Berlin, Germany

Zia Haider Rahman (British round table, European round table) Writer and human rights lawyer

London, UK

Peter Halban (European Jewish round table) Publisher, JPR Board member London, UK

Nelly Hansson (European Jewish round table) Executive Director of La Fondation du Judaïsme Français Paris, France

Miklos Haraszti (European Jewish round table) Representative on Freedom of the Media, OSCE Vienna Budapest, Hungary

Arnold Heertje (Dutch round table) Emeritus Professor of Economics at the University of Amsterdam and a commentator on current issues for the media Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Lydia Hevueling van Beek (Dutch round table, European round table) Judge Hilversum, The Netherlands
She participated strictly in a personal capacity.

Eva Hoffman (European Jewish round table) Writer London, UK

Hasret Karacuban (German round table) Spokesperson, 'Green Muslims' Working Committee', 'Die Grünen' North Rhine-Westphalia; sociologist Cologne, Germany

Anousheh Karvar (French round table) National Secretary of the CFDT (Confédération française démocratique du travail) Paris, France

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Ireneusz Krzeminski (Polish round table) Professor of Sociology, University of Warsaw; researcher on antisemitism Warsaw, Poland

Katarzyna Kubin (Polish round table) Researcher

on culture Warsaw, Poland

Thomas Kufen (German round table) Integration Representative, Government of North Rhine-Westphalia Dusseldorf, Germany

Yves Kugelman (European round table) Editor-in-Chief, Tachles and Aufbau Basel, Switzerland

Tony Kushner (European round table) Professor of Jewish and non-Jewish Relations, De- partment of History, University of Southampton UK

Crista Huisman (Dutch round table) Advisor and project coordinator for the Forum Voor Democratische Ontwikkeling (Forum for Democratic Development) The Hague, The Netherlands

Sunny Hundal (British round table) Editor, Asians in Media; founder, New Generation Network London, UK

Raji Hunjan (British round table) Democracy & Education, Carnegie UK Trust London, UK

Dilwar Hussain (British round table) Senior Research Fellow, Islamic Foundation Leicestershire, UK

Anneli Jordahl (Swedish round table) Writer and journalist Stockholm, Sweden

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Nick Lambert (European Jewish round table) Hanadiv Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Royal Holloway, University of London London, UK

Mariam Lau (German round table) Journalist and author, Chief Correspondent, Berliner Morgenpost Berlin, Germany

Antony Lerman (European Jewish round table, British round table, Swedish round table, Dutch round table, German round table, Polish round table, European round table)
Former Executive Director, Institute for Jewish Policy Research London, UK

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Björn Linnell (Swedish round table, European round table) Writer, critic and publisher, Natur & Kultur Stockholm, Sweden

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Professor Dr Susan Neiman (German round table) Director, Einstein Forum Potsdam, Germany
Ulf Nomark (Swedish round table) Musician and youth activist Vallda, Sweden

Lissa Nordin (Swedish round table) Social anthropologist Arsta, Sweden

Monika Nowicka (Polish round table) Sociologist, Collegium Civitas Warsaw, Poland

Edward Osiecki (Polish round table) Chaplain to the Vietnamese community Warsaw, Poland

Nanda Oudejans (Dutch round table) A philosopher working on a PHD about expertise in refugees, asylum, immigration, human rights, democracy and law at the University of Tilberg The Netherlands

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Dr Diana Pinto (European Jewish round table, British round table, Polish round table, Swedish round table, French round table, German round table, Dutch round table, European round table) Director, Voices for the res publica project, Institute for Jewish Policy Research Paris, France

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and journalist, editor of Monde de la Bible Paris, France

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Janusz Salamon (Polish round table) Jesuit; Director, Centre for Education and Dialogue Cracow, Poland

Yvette Samuelsson (Swedish round table) Manager of parking lots in the northern town of Boden Sweden

Dr Martin Schaad MBA (German round table, European round table) Assistant Director, Einstein Forum Potsdam, Germany

Dr Friedrich Schorlemmer (German round table) Theologian and author Wittenberg, Germany

Professor Dr Anna Schwarz (German round table) Professor, Institute for Cultural Studies, Europa-Universität Viadrina Frankfurt an der Oder, Germany

Joseph Semah (Dutch round table) Israeli-Dutch artist, born in Baghdad Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Olivia Skinner (British round table) Editor, Catalyst London, UK

Magdalena Sroda (Polish round table) Professor of Ethics, University of Warsaw; former plenipotentiary of the Polish government on Equality of Status of Women and Men Warsaw, Poland

Lena Stanley-Clamp (European Jewish round table, British round table, Polish round table, French round table, European round table) Director for Public Activities, Institute for Jewish Policy Research; Director, European Association for Jewish Culture London, UK

Dariusz Stola (Polish round table) Historian, Institute of Political Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences; Collegium Civitas Warsaw, Poland

Lena Sundström (Swedish round table) Writer, columnist and broadcaster Enskede, Sweden

Thijl Sunier (Dutch round table) Lecturer in anthropology, University of Amsterdam. He has researched inter-ethnic relations, Turkish youth, Islam and civil society Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Farid Tabarki (Dutch round table, European round table) One of the founders of the Dutch think tank Prospect, Amsterdam, which provides a forum for younger people Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Claire Thépaut (French round table) Examining Magistrate Nanterre, France

Joanna Tokarska-Bakir (Polish round table) Professor of Cultural Anthropology, Collegium Civitas Warsaw, Poland

Dr Haci-Halil Uslucan (German round table) Representative Professor, Institute for Psychology, University of Potsdam Germany

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Rosa van der Wieken (European Jewish round table) Physician and former member of Amsterdam City Council Amsterdam, Netherlands

Connie Webber (European round table) Academic publisher, Littman Library of Jewish Civilization Oxford, UK

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