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# Summarizing the issues
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# Introduction

Following the round tables in the UK, Poland, Sweden, France, Germany, Holland and Europe, I was invited to examine both the reports of those meetings, written by Dr Diana Pinto, and the twenty-six articles written by a range of individuals involved in the round tables, in order to extract some of the major themes and ideas that were raised during the process. Perhaps, inevitably, in a task designed to summarize, I have had to generalize and oversimplify, and it may well be that I have failed to capture many of the nuances of people's opinions. Nevertheless, I hope that by taking an overview, I may have identified at least the major strands of discussion, which, in turn, may help to inform, guide and focus future conversations.

The paper is divided into five sections:

1. National Identity
2. Law
3. Status of Minorities
4. Religion
5. State and Civil Society

# 1. National Identity

### How has the concept of national identity changed?

I was particularly struck by two general comments. The first, made at the Swedish round table, noted a changing attitude towards diversity. Whereas in the past, diversity was commonly regarded as a problem that needed to be solved by building a strong sense of unity, today it is far more likely to be seen as an opportunity to be enjoyed to promote a rich, multi-layered and complex tapestry of identities. Secondly, as was pointed out at the European round table, the notion of 'we' is constantly shifting today; national identity used to require a clear sense of 'us' and 'them,' but increasingly both of these terms have become blurred.

### On what should national identity be based?

Both of these factors have led to something of an identity crisis in most of the countries involved in the *res publica* initiative. France may be an exception – uniquely, a claim was made that it has no restrictive sense of Frenchness (not least because most of its minorities came from former French colonies and thus spoke French, contributed to French culture, and were entitled to French citizenship) – but even there, serious questions are being asked about the foundations upon which this identity should be built.

A strong case was made for **core values**. Perhaps the best examples are to be found in Germany, where the *Grundgesetz*, the German Basic Law, serves as a type of Bill of Rights, and in France, where the fundamental principles of *Liberté, Egalité* and *Fraternité* continue, to some degree, to exert a significant influence. However, some opposed this on the grounds (i) that core values are inevitably Western values, which, by definition, exclude non-Westerners; and (ii) that neither core values nor identity are permanent – they evolve over time as a result of power struggles and negotiation.

Others argued for **shared culture**. In a remarkable moment during the German round table, a case was made for an emotional definition of 'Germanness', based on love of the country and its land. Perhaps core values are too cold, too distant, and commonality requires something more emotional and more grounded from which to build, some form of *Leitkultur*. A participant at the Swedish round table suggested that theatre and literature – or perhaps the arts in general – may be the basis of this. Others in favour of core values countered that there is something profoundly emotional about the value of the dignity of the human being.

Some suggested that **active praxis** could be the basis. Comment was made around the Swedish round table that commonality arises out of group interaction, and opportunities for people to meet one another, share day-to-day problems and work together.

Others pointed to the importance of **shared memory**. This issue arose particularly at the German round table, where the memory of Nazism and the Holocaust bears down so heavily on contemporary discourse. The question of whether all Germans need to accept that past as their own, or whether

immigrants to Germany are able to adopt a different/additional past, remains moot. It was noted that Germany is still very much in the making because of its history, and that all Germans, not just immigrants, are on an identity quest. Swedish voices similarly stressed the importance of history in any national identity. However, it was in the context of a discussion about this issue at the European round table that it was noted that the 'we' of history ('we did terrible/great things in our empire') is becoming increasingly blurred.

**Shared space** also featured as an important element. Both British and Dutch voices at the European round table raised this issue, arguing that immigrants often feel a stronger connection to their city of region than to their nation state. In contrast, one loan French voice from an immigrant background maintained that his strongest link was to Europe first and foremost, and only after that to France. And the German voice described above, who sought solace in an emotional attachment to 'the fatherland', similarly used geography as a central reference point.

At the European round table, most participants agreed that **ethnicity** could no longer underpin national identity, but even the advocates of **citizenship** as the motor of a national identity building process felt that such an abstract concept was insufficient. A number of participants across the round tables clearly appeared to be looking for **something else** – some, as yet, unidentified 'glue' that might help to mould a stronger sense of commonality and togetherness.

### To what extent does national identity require positive, negative or neutral reference points?

Several round tables touched on the issue of whether national identity required a positive, negative, or neutral basis upon which to build national identity. In Sweden, it was noted that it was becoming increasingly difficult to determine what was 'un-Swedish,' although it may be that such a negative definition is one means of helping to construct a positive identity. Some Swedes argued for a definition of Swedishness that was wholly positive and that discarded all bad traits; others called for a new, culturally neutral definition in order

to include those from non-Swedish backgrounds. In Poland, this distinction between positive and negative seemed to permeate the entire discussion about national identity, with many mourning both the absence of a positive idea of Polishness, and the way in which a minimizing of patriotism in the *Solidarnosc* years caused a resurgence of aggressive nationalism. In Germany, in the context of the discussion about *Leitkultur*, there was a strong sense that if this is to become a basis for national identity, it needs to be built on a positive, rather than a negative narrative. Finally, a young voice around the Dutch round table made the somewhat facetious claim that the only shared value in Holland was a negative: a distinct lack of trust in the state, political parties and the media. Ultimately, perhaps, one needs to look at this issue through each of the three lenses – positive, negative and neutral – or alternatively, through Peter Berger's lenses of the prescribed, the preferred, the permitted and the prohibited.

### How should national identity be built?

There was an important discussion around the UK round table about the language we employ with regard to including minority groups in a shared national identity. In the context of some general discomfort around the debate on the nature of Britishness, different terms were discussed: notably 'integration,' 'tolerance,' 'assimilation' and 'belonging.' 'Tolerating' or 'assimilating' minorities were both widely rejected as problematic; 'integrating' was considered somewhat more acceptable, with a view expressed that maybe all citizens needed to be integrated into a shared identity, not just immigrants.

I identified four processes that were raised in the various round tables with regard to the construction of national identity: legislation, education, celebration and time. Clearly, l**egislation** is required in some way, the classic example being the German Grundgesetz, which was seen as a stepping stone to cultural integration. **Education** came up on several occasions – most notably, at the European table it was argued that one cannot assume that national identity is innate; in reality, it needs to be actively learned. Whether this learning process ought to be formal or informal was not specifically addressed,

although formal citizenship tests were discussed as a form of cultural literacy, and voices at the Polish round table raised the more informal educational approach of **celebration**, expressing their concern that Polishness was rarely, if ever, celebrated. Lastly, both in Germany and Holland, some of the more optimistic participants wondered whether many of these issues would be resolved simply by the passage of **time**, and that, whilst a range of interventions could be imagined and implemented, many of the issues currently regarded as divisive would ultimately resolve themselves.

# 2. Law

*'Ever since Roman times, Western notions of statehood and government have been inflected by an underlying regard for law and attendant order... Increasingly, the challenges to the res publica itself are being played out in the legal arena, wherever a public dispute cannot be worked out through public processes or civic negotiation, and recourse is sought either in the courts or by legislative assemblies laying down laws'.*
(A British round table participant)

The round table discussions raised a range of legal issues that may be worthy of further exploration in the context of the res publica initiative. I would suggest that these issues largely fall into the following five categories (some of which clearly overlap with one another):

Legal responsiveness to minority groups; Protection of freedoms, civil liberties and human rights; Relationship between national and European legal systems;
Relationship between legal systems and government, state and civil society; Legal procedure.

## a) Legal responsiveness to minority groups

*'The Law must be equal to all and thus blind, but many fear it is becoming deaf to country's social realities'.*
(A French round table participant)

The sensory metaphors deployed above capture a certain tone that permeated many of the round table discussions. There was a clear sense from some – perhaps, most notably, from many of those involved in the Swedish round table – that there ought to be clear universal laws that apply to everyone, regardless of idiosyncratic cultural practices or beliefs. On the other hand, many of the minority voices – and particularly some of the Muslim ones – maintained that legal changes were required to accommodate new social realities.

In the context of this broad theme, a variety of more specific questions were raised. Certain culturally-bound practices were discussed – the Jewish customs around ritual slaughter, the Islamic practices of the headscarf and veil, as well as the more extreme cases of bigamy and honour killings, and the Sikh customs of wearing the turban or carrying knives. The extent to which these can be compared or contrasted, and whether, or how, they ought to be accommodated, is clearly on the agenda for some.

Similarly, participants grappled with the question of cultural context, and the extent to which it should be a consideration in cases where the law of the land has been broken. In certain instances – notably the French – no 'statistics of difference' exist due to the overarching tradition of *laïcité*, and whilst this policy was certainly intended to diminish difference, it sometimes appears to exacerbate it. In others, where ethnic or religious origins are clearly known, the question of whether these are relevant or not comes into play.

This, in turn, leads to the question of minority visibility, and whether – as is the case in Sweden – there ought to be 'official' minorities. Advocates of the idea claim that such legal status accords minority groups status and financial support; opponents maintain that it labels people, simplifies the complexity of multiple identities and raises tension within minority communities over who has the right to represent them.

Citizenship law is connected to this debate: notably, what rights and responsibilities ought to be accorded a citizen? What legal requirements are necessary to become a citizen? Is dual nationality acceptable or desirable? Seyda Dilek Emek argued that 'The [German] ban on dual citizenship creates considerable identity problems for large sections of

the German population and a significant potential for society to drift apart. Wide sections of society feel excluded...' When one considers just how dramatically the cultural and religious make-up of European society has changed since the Second World War, one wonders whether the legal system has yet managed to adapt or respond adequately to this.

### b) Protection of freedoms, civil liberties and human rights;

*'Taking advantage of a growing feeling of insecurity, a whole range of (national) control powers are being created, which can be exerted without there being a case of suspicion of a concrete penal offence. Some of these powers delve deeply into the personal lives of citizens... There is still some discussion among Dutch jurists regarding how far the government is allowed to go...'*
(Lydia Heuveling van Beek)

The tension between protecting society from extremism and abusing human rights was an overarching theme that was discussed around most of the round tables. Most fundamentally from a legal perspective, this raised the issue of parameters around limiting hate speech, whilst simultaneously seeking to protect freedom of speech, a concern that was illustrated by reference, for example, to the Danish cartoons incident, the murders of Theo van Gogh and Pym Fortuyn, and the criminalization of Holocaust denial, to which we might now add the controversy over the Geert Wilders film, *Fitna*.

The complexity concerns the location of minority rights in the wider context of fundamental Western principles, and the extent to which individuals should be free to express their religious identities. However, with particular reference to the fears associated with Islamic extremism and with the spectre of Guantanamo Bay as the unspoken backdrop, the issue of internment without due process was never far from the surface.

### c) Relationship between national and European legal systems

*'The obligation to transpose European directives into domestic law and the multiplications of fiscal rules*

*and incentives have given rise to a new kind of law, highly technical and detailed in the extreme.'*
(Claire Thépaut)

A remarkably small number of participants appeared to regard European law and directives as a positive. Some of the voices round the French table certainly looked to European laws as a possible source of help in breaking longstanding legal stalemates, and there was limited Polish support for the European Union's work. In general, however, the European Union was either barely present as a positive reference (e.g. UK, Sweden, Germany,) or opinion over its capacity to positively affect the *res publica* was heavily divided (e.g. Holland). Criticism focused mainly on an apparent tendency to over-legislate, and feelings within member states that European law was being imposed from above. What this seems to suggest is either a deficiency in European law to positively alter national realities, or a distinct lack of awareness of its value.

Part of the problem, to which some pointed, may be historical – that local and national laws grow out of different legal traditions, and European law, which tends to be 'one size fits all', may work in certain instances in certain countries, but rarely seems to work for all. Nevertheless, the fact that a number of the round table discussions about law had an almost Hobbesian quality to them (which may simply be the result of the kinds of discussions that are possible in such fora), may indicate that certain legal fundamentals have become blurred, both by the emergence of a larger European legal framework, and the new social complexities that manifest themselves in very localized settings.

### d) Relationship between legal systems and government, state and civil society

*'Voices representing civil society... were most keen in defending the role of the citizen and of civil society institutions in ensuring that the state remain 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... Civic alliances and citizen awareness lie at the heart of democratic states, not just laws'.*
(A participant from the European round table)

Whilst specific relationships between different forces were discussed, there appears to be an underlying concern that the general interplay between legal systems, political systems, the state and civil society is often deficient. The quote above suggests that civil society has become less active than in the past and ceded responsibility to political representatives, a claim backed up by much of the existing literature on the decline of social capital. Comment was made at the European Round Table that judges and lawyers are increasingly becoming the key arbiters of political debates, and claims were made that legislation in France – for example, the newly acquired right of the homeless to sue the state for not giving them proper lodgings – cannot solve the fundamental problem of a lack of social housing, the responsibility for which must fall on political shoulders.

Concern was also expressed about the extent to which the law should be responsive to, or free from the influence of public will. Strong voices were heard in favour of the latter. One British participant points out that 'the ebb and flow of judicial protection and civil rights matches the ebb and flow of public consensus... even when the courts claim that they are restrained and not influenced by the transient passions that dominate the press, the public and politicians'. He also draws a useful distinction when he maintains that democracy 'is founded on a myth of law, and that myth stands squarely on the myth of judicial independence, not impartiality, from the annoying fracas on the street'. Claire Thépaut goes further with her plea that the law 'will have to stop being the compliant instrument of populist discourses (and policies) bent on stigmatizing the country's minorities'. Nevertheless, it is clear that the law cannot be deaf to popular opinion, and voices around the Dutch Round Table recognized that the law has to change as society changes, with the legalization of gay marriage given as the obvious example. Ultimately, the notion of justice as blind, aloof and timeless is being challenged by a range of contemporary cultural and political factors, and uncertainty over whether or not this is desirable formed an essential part of the debate.

### e) Legal procedure

*'France's laws are not the problem. They amply*

*cover all of the legal needs of the République. The problem stems from the fact that governments, whether from the Left or the Right, are constantly promulgating new laws, many of them not even passed through parliament, as a way of showing the public that they are politically active'.*
(From the French round table)

A major issue of concern, particularly in France, appears to be that legal procedures have become overly bureaucratic. In her article, Claire Thépaut noted that '... every facet of penal process or social policy is submitted to incessant modification, often in line with the televized pronouncements of the head of state. Laws accumulate, sometimes contradicting each other, endlessly piling modification upon modification'. She added: '...legislative inflation and instability have caused widespread ignorance of legislation, not only on the part of ordinary citizens but also among practising lawyers and the public servants whose job it is to apply the country's laws'.

It is not entirely clear how far this extends to other legal systems (although similar comments were made around the Dutch round table), but the accusations that legislation is being introduced at a pace that renders it indigestible, and that lawyers and judges have insufficient time for quality reflection, certainly gives one cause for concern. Similar accusations have been made – outside of the round table structure – about policing, education, politics and social work and one wonders just how damaging this may be to the res publica.

# 3. Status of Minorities

### Complexity

I am struck, first and foremost, by the complexity of the issue, and the way it seems to continually change in form. It is complex, first of all, because there is no consensus on what constitutes a minority, or who can legitimately be considered part of a minority group. It is complex because even when these matters are legally determined, they rarely capture the complexity of the reality. It is complex

because of the range of opinions that exist around integration: is integration desirable? Who ought to be obligated to integrate? Into what should they become integrated? Is integration a one-way street? And what are the mechanisms that support the integration process? It is complex again because even if all of these issues were resolved, integration does not appear to have a clear endpoint – an integrated minority in one generation does not necessarily result in an integrated minority in the following generation. In short, this is a messy issue, and it may well be that simple, neat policy solutions will always fall short.

## What is a minority and who is a member of a minority group?

There are, of course, different types of minorities in society, and the category is by no means confined to ethnic, national and religious groups. Nevertheless, the debate around the various round tables largely centred on these, even though it quickly becomes clear on reading the material that different countries define and label them in a range of particular ways. To offer just three examples, in Poland a distinction is drawn between 'national' minorities (Czechs, Lithuanians, Slovaks, and Jews), and 'ethnic' minorities (non-Poles with no state representation). In Sweden there are only official 'national' minorities (Finns, Suomis, Roma and Jews). In France, minorities obviously exist, but they are not recognized in any formal way, and the gathering of statistics on ethnic groups is forbidden. The way in which Jews are classified is particularly striking to me – as a national minority in some instances, as a religious minority in others and as an ethnic minority in still others.

The issue of who is part of a minority group was discussed. Whilst it was noted at the European round table that there is always a sacrificed generation when it comes to minority integration (and thus the status of the immigrant generation itself is not in question), it was pointed out that second generation immigrants often know the country in which they live far better than the country from which their parents moved (Swedish round table). So, as was asked at the German round table, at what point is someone no longer an immigrant? Furthermore, in the context of the same discussion,

it was argued that the tempo of integration will vary from one individual to the next, and that the process is not necessarily linear; indeed, disassimilation also occurs. One might add to this discussion that the mere fact that individual rates of integration vary suggests that the very notion of an externally legally defined minority group is suspect, as internally, group members may differ dramatically in their personal sense of belonging to that group. To complicate the matter still further, as integration takes place, and particularly, as intermarriage occurs, the boundaries between 'us' and 'them' become more blurred and porous (Swedish round table).

## Integration

Integration was probably the theme that most dominated proceedings at the round tables in the context of the discussions about minorities. Qaisar Mahmood's article on the subject offers a neat way of capturing Swedish government policy that is almost certainly applicable to other contexts: (i) **they should become like us**; (ii) **they don't have to become like us**; and (iii) **us and *them* should merge into a new we**. He presents this as a linear process of development in Sweden, although it may be more accurate to suggest that all three of these attitudes exist concurrently today. The first of these positions maintains that those who deviate from the norm are expected to discard their specific character and adopt the values, customs and habits of the ethnic majority. The second creates the possibility for minorities to preserve and develop their language and traditions within their new context, thereby offering them the chance to choose the extent to which they wish to assimilate or not. The third emerges out of a critique of the 'us' and 'them' way of thinking, lauds the notion of cultural, religious and linguistic diversity over multiculturalism, and seeks to create a new and shared solidarity and 'we-ness' (which Mahmood argues is desirable, but still some way off in the Swedish case).

Regardless of which of these policies one chooses to adopt, three obvious questions remain about how to achieve the desired goal. The first is: i**nto what should one integrate?** Voices at the German round table maintained that integration was impossible because it presupposes a homogeneous society; a similar point was made in the UK round

table. The second is: **where does responsibility lie?** To what extent is it incumbent upon the minority or the majority to enable integration to take place? In Holland, there was a strong sense that Muslims need to work much harder to integrate; in France, it was unclear whether responsibility for the isolation of minorities in the banlieues lay with the minority or the state; in Germany, it was noted that the local majority population tends to delegate its responsibilities toward immigrants to the government. The third question is: **what constitutes success?** At the European table, one participant noted that majority populations judge immigrants by their desire to integrate into wider society. Whilst this is probably true, it raises the issue of how immigrants ought to be judged and what constitutes 'good' integration.

However, again, all of this merely scratches the surface of an overwhelmingly complex issue, which is perhaps best captured by Rob Berkeley in his article: 'Engagement around integration alone is difficult and it is understandable why. The benefits for any group of there being integration without equality and diversity are pretty thin. It is being asked to 'integrate' without a clear picture of what it is that you are being asked to integrate into. It is being asked to integrate on the basis that you leave behind what you already have. It is being asked to integrate without any acknowledgement that you will be able to influence the shape of the whole. It is being asked to integrate into power structures that may leave you in a disadvantaged position'.

## Into the realm of solutions

In the course of the discussions, several strategies were suggested as possible ways to deal with some of these challenges. It is important to note in parentheses that these policy suggestions are not necessarily united in their definition of the problem, and, as policy thinkers know well, problem definition is the most critical part of any policy development process. Nevertheless, they do identify areas worthy of consideration as we seek to build the *res publica*.

Several individuals raised the issue of **language** – namely, are we employing the correct and most appropriate terminology to even talk about these issues? Whilst this is a rather esoteric and somewhat

philosophical discussion, the terms used – integration, segregation, assimilation and toleration, multiculturalism and diversity, ethnic, religious, cultural and national, minority, majority, us and them etc. – are all loaded in some way. If a new 'we' is desired – what one Swedish participant referred to as 'Swedishness 2.0' (language that itself would have been incomprehensible just a few years ago) – perhaps a new and more sensitive language is needed to move us from where we are to where we ought to be.

On a more practical level, can these challenges be solved by improving **social mobility**, as was suggested at the French round table, and/or by improving **political participation** of minorities (German round table), and/or by looking more closely at the issue of **minority representation** (Dutch round table), and/or by making **legal** changes, for example, around naturalization (German round table)? Are there **cultural solutions**, and if so, what are the relative benefits of cultural conservatism and cultural relativism? Alternatively, perhaps a *Kultur der Anerkennung* (culture of mutual recognition) is the correct model (German round table)? To what extent can the **education** system be utilized as a mechanism for change, and to what extent does it exacerbate the problem? (At the French round table, it was argued that schools were becoming segregated *de facto* because of territorial divisions between minority groups and the majority.)

Each of these areas – and no doubt many more – are worthy of further exploration.

One final personal thought. Given the fluid complexity of the issue and the differences of opinion that exist about it, it may be necessary to pursue several seemingly conflicting policies simultaneously. For example, might it not be possible to establish culturally conservative initiatives that seek to both define majority culture and integrate minorities, alongside more culturally relative initiatives that support and celebrate minority cultures and invite majority populations to engage with them? These need not be mutually exclusive, and may, in the course of time, create a 'new we' that draws on the best and most compelling of all cultures and intellectual traditions.

# 4. Religion

### The overarching spectre of Christianity

At several of the round tables, there was clear recognition of the fact that Christianity remains the overwhelming backdrop to European society. Whilst levels of religious belief and practice are undoubtedly in decline everywhere, the presence of Christianity continues to be felt. In Holland it was noted that the national anthem has Christian elements, reference is made to a Christian prayer on the coinage, and the head of state is always inaugurated in the Nieuwe Kerk in Amsterdam. In Germany, many social and political structures continue to be heavily influenced by Christian churches, notably the CDU (one of Germany's largest political parties), and a number of major welfare organisations. In Sweden, most people still belong to the former State Church (Lutheran). In Poland, the Catholic Church plays a particularly important role in society, and according to Zuzanna Radzik, 94 per cent of all Polish citizens declare themselves to be believers. Clearly, in spite of the influx of immigrants with other religious beliefs, the spectre of Christianity looms large.

### Religious decline

Nevertheless, the decline of religious belief and practice is a critical factor in any discussion of the topic. In Sweden, Maria Södling noted that 'the overall picture is one of institutionalized religion being marginalized'; in the UK, Jonathan Magonet described the decline in the importance and authority of religion and a parallel decline in religious commitment; and even in Poland, Zuzanna Radzik noted 'the most significant atheism is to be found in the 18-25 age group, who were, paradoxically, those who studied catechism at school'. In short – and perhaps the absence of religion in any of the debates around the German round table is the best indicator of this – religious language and discourse have increasingly become a side-show.

### Is this good or bad?

For many voices around the round tables, this decline should be regarded as a positive. Maria Södling saw it as a positive that the rather narrow Lutheran view of society has been replaced by the freedom to shape one's own life in any of the ways that modernity offers, that monopolistic religious demands no longer prevent people from seeking out alternatives, and that religious leaders can no longer define, for example, the 'proper' place of women. She similarly points out that the process of secularization has created an environment in which non-Christians are no longer defined or labelled as 'other.' Several participants sitting at the Polish round table felt that Christianity, as practised in Poland, foments societal divisions, and is known principally for its oppositional stance towards certain groups (anti-homosexual, anti-abortion, anti-immigrant, etc.) It was even described there as a 'black cloud' casting its shadow over the entire country.

However, in her article, Zuzanna Radzik pointed to many of the constructive contributions of the Church: its role in helping people to organize their thoughts and cope in an ever-changing social reality, its capacity to offer people a sense of community, and the enormous amount of charitable work that takes place under its umbrella – day care institutions for the disabled, shelters and kitchens for the homeless, jobs for the unemployed, orphanages and homes for addicts, and street work with children and prostitutes. Furthermore, she also points to research which draws a direct link between levels of religious practice and engagement in communal life (e.g. voting in elections, involvement in non-governmental organisations, etc.) Jonathan Magonet supports Radzik's ideas when he writes: '"What goes unnoticed and unheralded is precisely the regular rhythm of religious life conducted in local churches, synagogues, mosques and temples throughout the country. Such grass-roots communities, representing the many different ethnic groups that make up contemporary multicultural and multi-faith Britain, are essential building blocks of civil society. At their best, they exemplify the values of mutual support, welfare for the weak or elderly, education for young and old alike, charity for those in need, occasional political interventions, democratic systems of governance and outreach across their particular faith framework to others. The dramas of individual life transitions are reflected, joys shared and sorrows comforted, and festival cycles link communities with one another and to their respective historical roots'.

## Spiritual growth and the search for meaning

As Maria Södling argued, one of the downsides of religious decline is that it leaves people bereft of a framework within which to express faith, gratitude, anxiety, guilt and meaning. The Bible and its exegesis traditionally gave people an understanding of the condition of other human beings and an insight into how previous generations conducted their lives. Jonathan Magonet questioned whether this human need for ritual and community was being met by secular frameworks – the pub, health clubs, nightclubs, even football – and whether the general need for spirituality had been met be New Ageism, evangelism and fundamentalism. New Ageism was barely, if at all, mentioned at the round tables, but certainly forms an important part of the literature on contemporary religion and spirituality. Maria Södling noted that Sweden's bishops were experiencing a growing interest in spiritual matters, and Magonet himself observed a growth among radical, conservative evangelizing elements that had a strong commitment to faith, accompanied by a simplified set of beliefs, expectations, certainties and securities. One wonders whether the individualistic society that emerged out of non-religious Enlightenment Europe is now experiencing a growing need for community and shared purpose, and whether, as Magonet speculates, the economic downturn will further fuel this need.

## Fear and awe

Maria Södling offers an intriguing thesis on how religion has responded to its growing marginalization in society. She suggests that because it is no longer mainstream it no longer needs to respond to the demands of ordinary life in terms of reason and comprehensibility. It has it own distinctive language and system of logic, and has developed a sacred aura whereby even secular people express respect and reverence for the religious. The result, in a liberal and tolerant society, is that religion becomes untouchable, beyond communication and beyond criticism. This could partly account for the growth of Islamic extremism on the continent, which, according to Jonathan Magonet, has been greeted with a combination of fear and an element of spiritual envy about how Islam has managed to build such passion for its cause amongst some of its adherents.

Nevertheless, concerning social attitudes to Islam, Famile Arslan maintains that no such sacred aura exists. She writes: 'It does seem in recent years as if there are only Muslims living in the Netherlands. Not a day passes without an article in the press about Muslims or Islam. Naturally, there is often a negative undertone'. In spite of the ongoing claims that many young European Muslims have a positive relationship with European society and law and participate fully in political, economic and social systems (German round table), there is a great deal of suspicion, to the extent that core elements of European law are being questioned.

## Church and state, and the role of religion in the *res publica*

The relationship between Church and state came up on a few occasions. In Poland, not surprisingly, strong voices spoke in favour of less intense ties; in Holland, whilst there is organizational separation between church and state, it was suggested that the separation was insufficiently clear because it is not part of the Dutch constitution. However, at the European round table, there was a shared sense that the relationship works fairly well in most cases. There appears to be a growing understanding that rational and religious discourses, whilst different, are complementary, and that each needs to be criticized by the other in order to strengthen its own role (European round table). Whilst some felt that religion had no place in any discussion about the *res publica* (French round table), the dominant view appeared to be that it was important for the *res publica* to openly accept religious input for several reasons: (i) religions tend to be based on non-negotiable values, which add an important dimension to ethical debates (European round table); (ii) formulating a theology that affirms people's similarities and accepts their differences is an essential part of building the *res publica* (Maria Södling, Sweden); (iii) being on our guard against destructive religion is a common task (Maria Södling); and (iv) if religion is excluded, it is likely that religious ideas will go underground and become far more open to extremism (European round table).

# 5. The State and Civil Society

## Definitions

It is striking how people employ the two terms 'state' and 'civil society' slightly differently, which may be due to national differences or linguistic inconsistencies, but is equally likely to be a result of the broad and somewhat fluid nature of the concepts themselves. In his paper, Tony Breslin examines this issue in some detail, and thus it may be helpful to use his definitions, if only as a means of creating a shared language.

Breslin admits that the term 'society' is notoriously difficult to define, but he contrasts it with the 'individual' and suggests that discourse about it is principally concerned with how we might live more effectively within and across community boundaries, and how we might bring proper governance to those communities to ensure they are effective, just and sustainable. In his definitions, 'government' refers to that group of people in power at any given point in time and therefore holding significant control of public policy, and 'state' refers to the formal and permanent machinery and agencies of government and other institutions through which people are ordered and controlled.

Breslin also draws a helpful distinction between the terms 'civic' and 'civil'. 'Civic' refers to those conduits and institutions that operate in the formal sphere – political parties, trade unions, chambers of commerce, etc. They are either part of the state apparatus, or hard-wired into it by virtue of their influence, status or reputation. 'Civil' refers to smaller organizations and campaigning groups – charities, local tenants' associations, community support groups, etc. – that are typically referred to as the 'third sector'.

## Examining the component parts

The discussion about the state and civil society around the various round tables essentially involved examination of the various component parts involved (i.e. the state, national government, local government, political parties, civic institutions, local, national and international NGOs, voluntary groups, the media, particular groups within society – e.g.

young people – etc.), and the nature of the relationships that exist between them. It was striking how the nature of the various components differs in each country, particularly due to the vagaries of history and migration patterns.

For example, whereas the state occupied a central place at the French round table and was described as a defining actor of Swedish identity at the Swedish round table, it barely existed as a category at the UK round table, and, at the Polish round table, was described as a passive entity that barely belongs to the Poles, never mind its minorities. Furthermore, at the German round table, due to the country's particular history, there was a sense that the state was still somewhat 'in the making.' Nevertheless, there was plenty of criticism which may be shared across geographical space: notably the declining relevance of the nation state because it is too big to deal with local challenges and too small to deal with European/global ones (Sweden), the general lack of trust in major state institutions (Holland, Europe), and, at a more technical level, the rules the state applies to its funding of civil society initiatives (e.g. annuality) that make it difficult to develop sustainable, long-term programmes (Martin Schaad article about Germany).

Civil society was often regarded as something of an ideal. At the UK round table it was described as a place in which conflicts can be solved and an arena that focuses on people rather than government. At the European round table a view was expressed that civic alliances and citizen awareness, not just laws, lie at the heart of democratic states. It was, on occasion, lauded for its still active nature (for example, by Wojtek Kalinowski in his article about France, by Martin Schaad in his article about Germany, and by Tony Breslin in his article about the UK). In contrast, however, others mourned the lack of value placed on volunteering (Germany), the lack of interest in political life among young people (France), a certain degree of apathy about society in general (UK), and the difficulties preventing the poorest and least well-educated from participating in civil society (Germany). In the Polish case, Konstanty Gebert mourned the absence of civil society in general, and blamed it on the fact that the civic and civil organizations established before the collapse of Communism morphed into the state infrastructure,

thereby leaving a void which was only now starting to be filled.

Government and political institutions were typically criticized – government was seen as a very abstract and impersonal entity (UK), political institutions were accused of failing to represent French society (France), self-paralyzing power coalitions were blamed for the absence of a true opposition (Germany), politicians were described by some as incompetent (Holland), and political parties were accused of representing specific groups or causes in a similar way to NGOs, rather than fulfilling their more overarching responsibilities (Europe). Tony Breslin offered an interesting analysis of why this may be the case, making the claim that politicians and NGO employees are increasingly drawn from a narrow sector of society – middle-class graduates with little, if any, personal experience of the problems they are seeking to tackle.

### Relationships between the component parts

Regardless of the relative strengths and weaknesses of these component parts, it was the nature of the relationships between them that provoked the most criticism. In a typical example, Wojtek Kalinowski wrote: 'What characterizes the French case is not the absence of civil society or the apathy of citizens towards an omnipresent state, but the fact that the relationship between them and the state does not work since it is built on distrust and competition, rather than trust and collaboration'. Similarly, Göran Rosenberg argued that the 'bonds between state and civil society in Sweden are under pressure', and Tony Breslin claimed that 'the civic and the civil spheres are becoming increasingly separated and that this is problematic for the future health of our democracies'. In the German case, a call was made by Martin Schaad for more 'bridging activities' that foster dialogue and debate between particular interests and that include all voices as well as the voiceless.

Similar comments were made during the round tables themselves. In Holland, a claim was made about the existence of an 'abyss' between citizens and politicians, and a plea was made for more responsive institutions on both the local and regional levels. In Poland, the nature of the 'us versus them'

political discourse was seen by some to have created a complete lack of trust in the state or civic institutions. In Sweden, it was pointed out that technologically-enabled global connections across borders create new ties at the expense of more localized ones. Lastly, at the European round table it was suggested that too much state legislation results in citizens being 'put to sleep' in terms of their moral and legal responsibilities and that, in general, the political system seems to respond poorly to society's changing needs. In essence then, it is not simply the nature of the various institutions and organizations that comprise the state and civil society that requires attention, but also the oil that lubricates the relationships between them, and the glue that helps bind them together into a coherent whole.

### Towards policy

In the final analysis, I am drawn to comments made by Göran Rosenberg and Tony Breslin that deal with how recent societal changes have altered social realities, and how philosophical and structural change may be required to deal with that. In a passionate conclusion to his article, Rosenberg writes: 'Diversity is not a choice but a human condition. Or rather, the human condition. Our ability to imagine diverse worlds, telling diverse stories, finding diverse meanings to our lives, creating diverse societies, is what makes us human. We can choose to have it divide us. We can, perhaps, also choose to have it unite us'. Breslin concludes his article in a not dissimilar fashion: 'If the objectives of *res publica* are to be achieved, we need a process-based conception of citizenship that embraces concerns about identity and belonging and a conception of civil society that both reaches across the third sector – from volunteer-led youth or community groups to established super-charity – and engages meaningfully, and where appropriate, structurally, with the civic apparatus of formal democracy. Only in such a setting can we begin to engage with the discussions about identity, diversity, commonality and multiculturalism that have been at the heart of the *res publica* discussions so far. Only in such a context are the issues about the relevance of formal politics and the accessibility of both the civic and civil spheres… likely to be addressed'.

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