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Convergence—Widening—Deepening: 'Maastricht II' and 'Basel II': the Timetable for European Union and the Role of the Churches*

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Maastricht II

In Western Europe the debate over 'widening' and 'deepening' has been going on ever since the ending of Europe's division into two camps – that is to say, the transformation of Eastern European countries into democratic sovereign states with market economies which are anxious to 'rejoin Europe' politically, a Europe to which they have always felt they belong spiritually and culturally but from which they have been forcibly kept out. Maastricht I, which certainly did not have a smooth passage even in the member states in Western Europe (witness the processes of ratification in France and Denmark), has as its expressed aim economic and monetary union as well as a common foreign and security policy. It is an attempt to deepen the existing European community, transferring national sovereignties to community institutions. In addition, now that the East–West conflict has ended, it is to include safeguards to ensure (a) that Western Europe does not revert to national rivalries and a pattern of power-politics, and (b) that the new larger Germany stays linked into the West.

To this extent Maastricht I is to be welcomed and, despite its inadequacies, to be defended against national sensitivities and the criticism of points of detail. Its opening sentence states that 'Through this treaty we ... lay the foundations of a European Union'. This sentence is in the present tense, rather than being a declaration of future intent – about the Union as a political reality already in existence. This unambiguous statement is however quickly watered down: 'This treaty represents a new stage in the realisation of an ever-closer union of the peoples of Europe, in which the decisions are made at a level as close to the individual citizen as possible.' The process of building the Union's institutions has however led to the present situation in which it has to be said that decisions are not made at that level. Much of the criticism of Maastricht I is concentrated on just this point.

It must also be said that Maastricht I was from another point of view the last attempt by Western Europe, in a Europe in which the frontiers were becoming ever

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more open, to defend a status quo of freedom and prosperity against the problems of an Eastern Europe in the process of reorganising itself. Maastricht I is the last attempt to think in terms of a Europe without Central and Eastern Europe, and as such it is a dead end.

Meanwhile a whole series of countries have signed up to join the EU. Widening is not being questioned in principle. It is just that the Central European countries are still waiting in vain even for a timetable and a set of joining criteria. I personally regret the fact that a process similar to that which widened the EU southwards has not been adopted, whereby the new democracies would first have been incorporated politically and the process of adaptation undertaken gradually over a longer period.

Now we are approaching Maastricht II: the 1997 Intergovernmental Conference to revise Maastricht I. What will be at issue? It seems clear to me that no further steps will be taken towards a European federal state. In this respect national divergences are far too great, and in this sense 'deepening' is on the rocks. The key question might well therefore be: 'What must be done so that the widening of Europe to the East does not endanger what has already been achieved?'

The EU cannot close its eyes to the countries in the East wanting to join, if it does not want to deny its own principles. The concept of Europe – I am quoting the Polish Foreign Minister Bartoszewski in his Bonn address – has

... taken on a civilising significance. It has become a collective symbol for fundamental values and principles. Europe means above all individual freedom and human rights, both political and economic. It is a citizen-led system. It is law-based government. It is an effective economy based on private enterprise and initiative.

I was long of the opinion that widening could be achieved even without deepening, if the political will were there – particularly as deepening is associated with even more Brussels centralisation. The need for reform is in my opinion twofold. Firstly, the effectiveness of the decision-making mechanisms: the principle of subsidiarity must be observed more strictly, and at the same time, at the level at which Europe-wide decisions are made, the principle of the majority vote must replace the principle of consensus, otherwise the EU will be paralysed. Secondly, democratic legitimacy: the European Parliament must receive the necessary powers for decisions of central importance. At the moment it is quite powerless as far as the typical tasks of a parliament are concerned – electing the 'government' (the president and the commissioners), passing laws and setting budgets.

A third area concerns a common foreign and defence policy. In Maastricht I there is certainly a discrepancy between the political and economic blueprints. In this area consultation mechanisms will surely be improved, but this does not mean that political action will thereby become more effective – especially in acute European crises. Bosnia is an all too chilling example, certainly as far as Europe's political will is concerned, not to speak of what Europe might actually be able to do.

Widening of the EU to the East is connected in people's minds with the expansion of NATO. We Germans, in particular, should have an interest in preventing another division of Central Europe into different defence zones. Germany – and I quote Timothy Garton Ash – is freed from the dilemma of being centre stage only when it also has western neighbours in the east.

To sum up, then: at issue in Maastricht II is the adaptation of European treaties to the era which began after 1989 – a task to which Maastricht I did not do justice.

Basel II – What Should the Task of the Churches Be?

In his Bonn address about Europe, Bartoszewski said that Europe is also

... a reflection on the destiny of man and on a moral order born of Judeo-Christian traditions and the imperishable beauty of culture ... Europe is an open society. Europe neither relegates any of its peoples from its society nor isolates them. The most that can happen is that peoples who belong to geographical Europe can isolate themselves from the civilised European community. In recent decades these have included the totalitarian Soviet Union and Nazi Germany.

With acknowledgment to Leszek Kołakowski I would like to add that Europe is also the capacity for critical self-examination. Whoever fails to summon the will and ability for this excludes himself from the European dialogue.

In this situation churches must rise to the challenges of the time; the key themes are 'the Judeo-Christian tradition', 'culture' and 'openness'. On the basis of these concepts the churches should be champions of a 'pan-European' vision, which means advocating a step-by-step widening to the East. The task of the church is fundamentally universal, not limited by state borders, national and cultural differences or other particularities. Churches are therefore freer than states, not having to take account of national interests. Churches must do all they can to promote intercultural exchanges, meetings and reciprocal contacts. Only in this way can Europe become a reality in the individual lives of its citizens. Churches must fight any signs of nationalism, xenophobia and antisemitism – first of all in their own ranks. The churches on this rich West European island must become aware of those on the edge, cut off, without full civil rights – foreigners from outside the EU, refugees, *Gastarbeiter*, asylum seekers. The whole complicated story of flight, migration and the fate of those affected falls within the central concern of the church. Politics – including the Maastricht II agenda – looks on this whole issue from the point of view of security considerations, including measures to combat crime. In this sense, as Basel I has already stated, the churches must help to free people from the mentality of protecting one's own and from selfish consumerism, instead promoting the readiness to share. They must see to it that now the wall across Europe has come down we do not harden into a fortress mentality and erect new invisible barriers – although we must be aware of the borders and barriers which do exist. Finally, churches should pay special attention to the role of small countries and languages. I do not know whether Czech or Lithuanian can ever become an EU language; but these languages and cultures must not be drowned in one big European melting-pot. In this respect the USA is an instructive example: ethnic and cultural demarcations are today on the increase again. In a Europe not only of economics and politics but also of culture and religions, the churches must refrain from any religious fundamentalism, fighting it first of all in their own ranks. If they are only one factor among many in culture and society, they are nevertheless irreplaceable in interreligious dialogue. Not only does this concern the exchange with Judaism essential for the church and Christian theology, but also the exchange with Islam, unavoidable because of increasing neighbourly proximity.

Everything comes down to the fact that what is expected of the church is the universal and the cultural side of the Europe integration process. In our seminar we are looking at the basic requirements for this task, keeping memory alive, stimulating thoughtful recollection, discussing our various recollections and becoming reconciled

with one another. Without this process all efforts to deepen and widen remain political formulae or hopeless attempts to turn Europe into a bastion against the rest of the world. Citizens of a Europe like that would not be fortunate.

The dual concept 'deepening and widening' can also be applied to the tasks of the church, albeit differently from the way it is applied in political terminology. Neither 'deepening' nor 'widening' is possible without the other. In teaching – particularly the teaching of the mentally handicapped – it is a universally accepted principle that knowledge and skills have to be 'deepened' and 'widened' at the same time. Since the construction of Europe is essentially a learning process, the churches may well be able to make productive use of this principle in their own European dialogue.

(Translated from the German by Edward Thomas)