Brazil, Berlin, Burslem: Memory, Identity and Place

Today internationalism and cosmopolitanism are seen by many as worthy of praise. Yet this was not so in the first half of the twentieth century when internationalists and cosmopolitans were often denounced –and, in some places, shot. Indeed in the nineteenth century even progressive literary critics such as Vissarion Belinsky, a Russian westernizer, attacked some writers for their 'rootless cosmopolitanism' –an early, perhaps the first use of this expression (then not anti-semitic).

Yet even today the forces of nationalism are stronger than those of cosmopolitanism (Scotland, Catalonia, England, Wallonia) and the new populists use nationalism more than ever. Citizens may not trust politicians but they trust their own more than those of other countries. They expect their governments to protect their own interests above those of foreigners.

Politics is still overwhelmingly national politics.

Cosmopolitanism and the tolerance of other cultures are praised, though this praise comes, usually, from intellectual élites, a cosmopolitan section of the population, people who speak more than one language and travel easily and are more curious about other people. In the cosmopolitan narrative, nationalists are provincial and narrow-minded and are obsessed with defending their own culture while cosmopolitans glory in their ability to transcend borders and frontiers, in being 'citizens of the world' which is what cosmopolitan means. The present British PM does not agree. She is on record as saying that 'If you believe you are a citizen of the world you are a citizen of nowhere.'

Yet, when it comes to culture and politics the majority of the inhabitants of each nation-state tend to be unaware of the culture and the politics of neighbouring countries let alone of distant countries' (unless it is American politics which is constantly discussed by the international media while American cultural products, particularly music, films and television fiction are widely exported).

Such abject ignorance about neighbouring nations is true even in highly advanced countries with fine schools and ancient universities. Thus Jean Racine, the 17th century dramatist who is studied in all French schools, is virtually unheard of in neighbouring Germany and Italy. A majority of Germans and French have never heard of Dante. People live in their nation as if it were a kind of village.

Be that as it may, the world of today is divided into almost 200 sovereign states –many more than 150 years ago. Each of these states, however small, maintains all the paraphernalia of sovereignty largely established in the 19th

century: passports, borders, armies, uniformed police, currencies, national anthems, national days, and central banks. There are exceptions and some are remarkable: a number of European states have adopted a single currency (2002) and abolished border controls among each other with the Schengen Agreement of 1985. Otherwise these sovereign states celebrate a 'share memory' and a 'national' culture which requires regular celebration, least the memory is forgotten, have a media that give priority to national news, and impart their national history in schools where children are taught to be proud of their country even though that there is little personal merit in being born in any one particular place. They are given a somewhat edulcorated account of the birth and development of their nation. The litany is fairly similar –almost a literary genre in itself- constantly poised between a lachrymose sense of self-pitying victimhood and a vainglorious account of heroic deeds. 'We', it says, have been around for centuries, perhaps even more (1066, famously, in England; 966 in Poland; since Romolus and Remus in Italy; since Plato and Aristotle in Greece; since the days of Abraham or Moses in Israel). We have written glorious pages of history and they would have been even more glorious had it not been for the dastardly acts of our oppressors. Eventually we achieved our freedom, our independence, our happiness, and we, who are unlike everyone else (for we are Croats and not Slovenians, Italians and not Austrians, French and not German, etc.) can finally be like everyone else: members and possessors of a country, a nation, defenders of a remarkable literature, a major culture, a beautiful language, and a unique landscape.

Few of today's sovereign states have existed for long within their present boundaries or even at all. An Italian state has existed only since 1861 but Venice and its region was incorporated only in 1866; the capital, Rome, only in 1870 and the existing borders with Austria have been extant only since 1919.

The British state has not been in existence since 1066 as children used to be taught in schools. Great Britain has been in existence only since 1707 with the Acts of Union between Scotland and England. The country's borders changed again in 1801 when Ireland became part of the United Kingdom, and again in 1922 when the southern part of the island of Ireland became a separate sovereign state.

History has dealt with borders and population in a cavalier way and determined that a place could be part of a state for reasons which had nothing at all to do with national memories –a relatively simple task since in most cases such memories did not exist. Immanuel Kant, had he been born in Russian Kaliningrad after 1946 rather than in 1724 in Königsberg (as it was called until fairly recently), might have been a Russian philosopher rather than a German one. Arthur Schopenhauer, had he been born in Polish Gdansk rather than in German Danzing –as it was when he was born in 1788- would have been Polish. The inhabitants of Corsica are now French, whether they like it or not (and some don't), only because France acquired it in 1770 –

previously it was an independent republic which had freed itself from the Republic of Genoa. Had this not happened, Napoleon (born in Corsica in 1769) might have been little more than a local strongman. The people of Nice are French today because the city and its surrounding territory was handed over by the Kingdom of Piedmont to the French in 1860 –had that not happened the Italian Riviera would have been much more extensive, tourists would be regaling themselves with *zuppa di pesce* instead of the *bouillabaisse,* and its inhabitants would be supporting Italy's national football team and not that of France. The city of St. Louis in Senegal was French in 1659, nine years earlier than the city of Lille (not far from Paris) when it was acquired by Louis XIV with the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle.

In any case the borders of France have been unstable throughout the centuries.

Alsace, minus Strasbourg, was attached to France only at the end of the Thirty Years' War (1648). Belgium has existed as a state only since 1830.

Lorraine was acquired by Louis XV because he married Maria Leszczyńska, the daughter of Stanisław Leszczyński who was then the Duke of Lorraine (1766) and who had obtained Lorraine only in 1738 in compensation for renouncing the Polish throne. Yet for much of the 20th century the children of Lorraine (who, until recently, spoke at home a German dialect) were taught in French schools not only that they were French but that, as such, they were descendants of *nos ancêtres les Gaulois* (our ancestors the Gauls).

Even the belief that the Gauls were the ancestors of the modern French is recent. Gaul was unmentioned throughout the Middle Ages. Current scholarship doubts seriously that there was ever even a single Gaul nation. And since the Gauls have not left any written texts what we know about their great 'national' hero Vercingétorix comes from his conquerors, the Romans.

The amazing popularity of the comic strip Astérix since 1959 have probably reinforced the belief in *nos ancêtres les Gaulois*.

French boundaries may have been unstable but they look as solid as rock when compared to those of Poland. This is not surprising since Poland is in the middle of the northern European plain, a flat surface with few natural geographic limits. What is more surprising, though not if one is aware of the fervid imagination of nationalists, is that the Polish state celebrated 'its thousand-year history' in 1966 –'history' having began with the Christianization of the country and the baptism of King Mieszko I (a tribal leader of the Polanie tribe). In 1966 the country was then under communism but the idea of the millennium rallied all and sundry, communists and patriots, Catholics and agnostics. Yet, the borders of the country which was celebrating such longevity expanded and shrank regardless of who lived where and what language they spoke. In 1634 'Poland' included what is now Lithuania (another independent sovereign state with extravagant claims of longevity, in this case since 1253) as well as bits of Moldavia and Prussia. Then Poland

began to shrink, then it expanded. After the Second World War, it shifted to the West as it acquired former ‘German’ territory and lost some to the USSR (the direct beneficiary was the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic now independent Ukraine whose boundaries have been equally elastic and are currently in dispute). As Norman Davies remarked: ‘Despite the Poles’ own fervent belief in the “motherland”, it is impossible to identify any fixed territorial base which has been permanently, exclusively, and inalienably, Polish.’

In Estonia, nationalist historians claimed that the country’s history should be traced back to an age of ‘ancient freedom’ which preceded the German-Danish conquest in the thirteenth century. Then followed 700 years of slavery; then independence between 1918 and 1939, then more slavery under Soviet rule, before finally the recovery of independence in 1991.

Some states appears to have a truly long history, as is the case with Japan, with more or less the same boundaries for centuries, an easier feat if you are an island or, in this case, four large islands and a few thousand smaller ones. It became a unitary state, in a manner of speaking since local clans continue to fight it out for centuries, only in 1590 under the regency of Toyotomi Hideyoshi. The drawing of proper ‘modern’ borders occurred only in the middle of the 19th century and so even Japan is a modern artefact.

Other states, like the USA, declared its sovereignty first and embarked on expansion later. The boundaries of the USA in 1776 have little in common with those of the USA today. One could almost say that British settlers, having declared their independence from the mother country, and having become Americans continued the westward conquest the British had started.

Thus each state builds its own special ‘national’ history, however chequered it is. For instance, Montenegro,

(or, in Slavonic, Crna {ss’erna} Gora, ‘Black Mountain’ or Montenegro in Venetian) is one of the ‘newest’ European states, but it was a sovereign state before the First World War (though its tiny borders changed in the course of time), having successfully resisted complete subordination to Ottoman rule. It was amalgamated into Yugoslavia in 1919, and regained its independence in 2006 when it seceded from what was left of Yugoslavia (i.e. Serbia, the rump of the old Yugoslav state). It acquired its own constitution, but not its own currency having decided to use the Euro even though it was not in the European Union.

It has a diplomatic corps and its own armed forces but not its own language since everyone speaks Serbo-Croat but local nationalists insist that their version of the language should be called Montenegrin, a ploy that older states such as Belgium, Switzerland and the USA, have refrained from adopting. No-one speaks Belgian, Swiss or American but Montenegrins, apparently, speak Montenegrin. The country also has a new national anthem, *Oj, svijetla majska zoro* ('Oh, Bright Dawn of May'), based on a nineteenth-century folk tune whose words were regularly re-written to fit the prevailing politics. Montenegro has fewer than 700,000 inhabitants –fewer than Staffordshire- but more than at least twenty other sovereign states (including EU members such as Malta and Luxembourg).

Our new brave globalized world is thus also a world of 'them and us', of states, large and small (mainly small) trying to make their presence manifest, taking offence, being proud, and defending, sometimes hypocritically, the sanctity of their borders against secessionist claims by even smaller 'nations' festering within and aspiring to get out.

This is the situation Georgia faced with the recalcitrant inhabitants of South Ossetia and Abkhazia who do not feel they share the ancestry some Georgian nationalists, with a remarkable flight of imagination, trace theirs to; back to the Hittites in the 18th century BC or to the more recent kingdom Egrisi (6th-7th century BC) -the outcome of local chieftains fighting it out for their own power and aggrandizement. Thus Kalistrat Salia's nationalist *Histoire de la nation géorgienne* (1980 –he was living in France), celebrates Georgians ('one of the most beautiful races in the world') as an ancient people who, in spite of external threats and invaders managed to preserve their national personality, their language and their culture.

With the collapse of the USSR, it became routine to rediscover one's nation even if, when the collapse occurred, some, such as Uzbekistan, were rather reluctant to become independent. But once independence was obtained, history books were rewritten Timur (Tamerlane in the West, Tamburlaine in Marlowe's great play), once depicted, probably accurately, as a cruel tyrant and responsible for the death of millions, became the founding hero of the country. His equestrian statue now graces the spot in Tashkent where Karl Marx's statue once

stood.

There are far more states today than in 1880 but before 1800 there were more states than in 1880. There is an ebb and flow in the coming into being and the disappearing of states which suggests that it is better to avoid any deterministic view as to their future. There may be more. There may be fewer. In any case the meaning of states and of sovereignty has changed in the course of the centuries to such an extent that an all-embracing definition is a waste of time. For our purpose a state must be sufficiently centralised to ensure that all its constituent parts recognize the existence of a unitary centre: being 'united under the same law and the same name', as Titus Livius put it in his *Ab urbe condita*, and is what most people understand as a sovereign state. In more modern times a state should be able to impose its will sufficiently to be able to collect taxes. If it cannot force or convince its citizens that they should pay up so that their state can function, then it is a 'failed' state as are, patently, Congo, Somalia and Iraq.

The great empires extant in the course of the nineteenth century, such as the colonial empires of the French, the British, the Dutch, and the newly-formed Belgian, the short-lived Napoleonic empire, and the pre-existing Russian and Ottoman empires left, as their fundamental legacy, the elimination of thousand of self-governing units, tribal areas, principalities, duchies, bishoprics, and city-states –an operation we could regard as a gigantic geographical tidying-up.

This is particularly glaring in the case of sub-Saharan Africa, a part of the world in which local languages, traditions, cultures and history played almost no part in the apportionment of the territory among colonial powers though many of these societies, particularly around the Great Lakes (Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and the eastern part of what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo) had states-like attributes such as kingdoms, taxes, justice systems.

Before the advent of colonialism there were in sub-Saharan Africa some 10,000 polities exhibiting as diverse range of organization as their equivalent in Europe: kingdoms, city-states, small isolated communities, trading towns, empires. Under colonialism thousands of self-governing units were wiped away and boundaries drawn across well-established lines of communications. As a result the Maasai were cut in half by the Kenya-Tanzania border; the Bakingo people found themselves in states called Gabon, Democratic Republic of Congo (Kinshasa), Republic of Congo (Brazzaville), and Angola; the Yoruba (who number over thirty million people, more than most European nations) could be found in Nigeria, Benin and Togo. Nigeria itself, the most populous state in Africa was the result of the amalgamation of two British protectorates by their governor, Sir Frederick Lugard, into one colony (1912-14). The name had been suggested by a renowned journalist, Flora Shaw,

in an article in *The Times* in 1897. (Shaw eventually married Lugard).

The decision to accept the colonial borders has been, on the whole, respected by the African states –though there were important exceptions. The worst conflicts in Africa have been the result of civil wars rather than interstate wars. But this is also true for the world as a whole: since 2001, for instance, most conflicts in the world were civil wars, sometimes with external intervention.

Though not as pulverized as pre-colonial Africa, pre-Napoleonic Europe too was a remarkably fragmented entity consisting of dozens of statelets under the domination, protection or toleration of larger states –some of these tiny entities still survive either as a gambling preserve (Monte Carlo), or a tax-dodging haven (Monte Carlo again and Lichtenstein), or a dispensary

for cheap alcohol (Andorra) or the producer of pretty stamps (San Marino). In one case, the Vatican, it hosts the head office of a world religion.

At the time of the French Revolution there were, within the boundaries of what today we call Italy, almost twenty self-governing units. By 1870 they had been amalgamated into a single state: Italy, a state with a history it claimed to be ancient and a language, Italian, only a minority of its inhabitants could speak or spoke habitually. This state joined a system of European states which turned out to be stable on its western flank and unstable on the eastern one (the main exceptions to the rule of western stability after 1880 was the birth of the Republic of Ireland in 1922 and the formalization of Danish and Icelandic independence).

The transition from the twenty or so states of 1880 to the forty-two or so of today is almost entirely due to the collapse of three empires: the Ottoman Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the Tsarist Empire and its Soviet successor.

European States in the 1880s	
Austro-Hungarian Empire	Montenegro
Belgium	Ottoman Empire
Bulgaria	Portugal
Denmark	Romania
France	Russian Empire
Germany	Serbia
Greece	Spain
Holland	Sweden
Italy	Switzerland
Luxembourg	UK

European States (2013)		
In the European Union (28)		**Outside the EU (14)**
Austria	Ireland	Albania
Belgium	Italy	Belarus
Bulgaria	Latvia	Bosnia
Croatia	Lithuania	Kosovo
Cyprus	Luxembourg	Iceland
Czech Republic	Malta	Macedonia
Denmark	Poland	Moldova
Estonia	Portugal	Montenegro
Finland	Romania	Norway
France	Slovakia	Russia
Germany	Slovenia	Serbia
Greece	Spain	Switzerland
Holland	Sweden	Turkey
Hungary	UK {???}	Ukraine

The Ottoman Empire, in the course of the nineteenth century, 'lost' Greece, Wallachia, Moldavia, Bulgaria, and most of present-day Serbia, and Bosnia. In the years leading to the First World war it also 'lost' Albania, Macedonia, Cyprus and Crete; Thessaly (annexed by Greece) and Eastern Rumelia (annexed by Bulgaria). Thus the Ottoman Empire, which, under Suleiman the Magnificent, extended to the doors of Vienna (1529), was reduced to a rump across the Straits and a largely Muslim population which stretched deep into Asia which is what is present-day Turkey.

The fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the end of the WW1 led to new states: Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia. The disintegration of Yugoslavia in the 1990s led to the creation of seven new states.

Even Scandinavia was in turmoil: at the end of the nineteenth century Iceland was part of Denmark, and Norway was controlled by Sweden. Norway became fully independent only in 1905. Iceland became a fully independent republic only in 1944.

Thus of the twenty sovereign states that existed in Europe in 1880 only nine (Switzerland, Great Britain, France, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Denmark, the Tsarist and Ottoman Empire) had existed in the eighteenth century and only seven of these survived into the 21st century.

But continuity had hardly been the norm even in these apparently long-lasting states. Switzerland acquired the Valais, Neuchâtel and Geneva only in 1815. Denmark lost Schleswig and Holstein to Prussia in 1864.

Contrary to the terminology that contrasts the old continent –Europe- to the New (the Americas), the European state system of 1880 was not older than that of North or Latin America. In fact it was relatively new state system, the result of the consolidation of doomed empires and of the amalgamation of statelets. By contrast the American state system (in both North and South) had acquired contours which would last to the present day while Europe was, in the nineteenth century, the incoherent amalgam it had been for centuries and still is.

The European paradox is that the regional association we call the European Union, which has hardly any of attributes of a state, is the strongest and closest inter-state association in the world but it is located in the continent with the greatest degree of political fragmentation. This is not a novel state of affairs. Since time immemorial, no single state or conqueror had been able to unify Europe or even to build a large and stable empire in it as the Chinese were able to do in China for at least two thousand years, or the Mughal in India for at least two centuries, or the Arab, Berber and Turkish empires in North Africa and the Levant.

(Above) MAP OF EUROPE 1500

(Above) MAP OF EUROPE 1700

(Above) MAP OF EUROPE 1900

(Above) MAP OF EUROPE 2000

And the fragmentation goes on

In complete contrast to the constant redrawing of states and nations in Europe, where historical memories are constantly invented and re-invented, the USA, where everything is new or is supposed to be new, exhibited a formidable degree of continuity. Independent since 1776, it adopted in 1787 a Constitution which is still substantially the same today and is the oldest in the world. Its main formal political arrangements have remained unchanged (President, Senate, House of Representatives, federal system, relatively autonomous judiciary). Yet, throughout the nineteenth century, everything else changed including key aspects of what makes a nation: territory and population. Few countries of a respectable size have undergone the extraordinary demographic transformation that has characterized the USA. Furthermore the bloodiest war the USA ever fought, the Civil War of 1861-65 put an end to any further secessionist tendencies.

Whatever it is that holds America together it cannot be a common memory, but a set of rituals which are constructed and renewed regularly. And it works: the remarkable stability of US borders contrasts with the chronic instability of Europe, an instability which endures even in the 21st century when there is a real possibility that Belgium will break up while nationalist parties in Catalonia, the Basque country, Scotland and even Corsica are strong enough to force the central government to take their nationalist aspirations seriously.

Once can invent the Europe one wants. The Europe which was seen as a beacon of civilization, the template of modernity, was the western part. When European thinkers discussed Europe, they did not mean ‘Europe’ as a geographical reality stretching from the West coast of Ireland and of the Iberian peninsula to the Caucasus and to Constantinople and from the icy waste of Finland, Sweden and Norway to the warmer climate of Sicily.

The identification of ‘Europe’ with Western Europe and the concomitant negative view of the East had been a common trope since the days of the Enlightenment. Voltaire, in his *Histoire de Charles XII* -one of the best-sellers of the 18th century assumed, not entirely wrongly, that his readers would be those who lived in civilized Western Europe and not in the ‘desolate’ and cold areas of the North or the ‘distant and remote areas’ of Eastern Europe.

Europe has remained Western Europe. Cultured Europe, colonialist Europe, Imperial Europe has essentially been Western Europe, but it was also a Europe which was becoming less and less central to the history of the world.

The Second World War signalled the unquestioned end of European supremacy, and end which had started with the First World War.

This is the background to the European Economic Community, as it was then called when it was born. It was essentially a small free trade area involving only six countries. But it was also more than that since it became, however imperfectly, the focus for the dreams of unity that many Europeans harboured. In some cases such dreams were those of a return to a glory that they thought existed. In others it was a way of withstanding and defending oneself against the new West, that is the United States. In others it was just a question of prosperity. And for many it was a question of being part of a modern project and the fear of being left out. The Six became the Twenty-eight. Each step from the six to the 28 has been described as a step towards European unity. Of course things are more complicated than this. The Europe of the 28 remains profoundly divided in keeping with the history of Europe. Europe has never existed as a united entity. It has always been profoundly divided. This is the peculiarity of Europe’s history. No conqueror, no country, has ever been able to impose its rule over the inhabitants of our continents. The origins of the European Community now the European Union reflects this disunity. It was its economic success that eventually convinced the British to join. The Danes and the Irish joined at the same time because their economies were then very intertwined with that of the United Kingdom. Then Greece, Spain, and Portugal joined and they did so because joining would help them to put the past of their dictatorship behind them. Then Sweden, Austria and Finland joined largely for economic reason. And the former communist countries they needed respectability, they needed recognition, they needed a clear break with the communist past.

Can one construct a European identity? Should one construct it? What would it entail? The only model we have for this is the construction of national identity through the invention of memories. This takes us back to the nineteenth century, when History, then barely established in the academy, was becoming important. The Romantic revolution had re-centred it as the master narrative where the people could read their own biography. Heroes could still be Kings and Queens but only because they represented the ‘genius’ of one’s nation. Historians, for centuries the lackeys of sovereigns, the chroniclers of

lies, now acquired a ‘democratic’ role and, with this, an important market. The British historians of the nineteenth century presented a rosy and entirely comforting view of the development of British history. It was the history of a succession of intelligent reforms based on pragmatism. Even Cromwell and the little unpleasantness which befell Charles I’s head were drafted in a story of constant progress towards greater democracy and rights. An enlightened ruling class gave in to popular pressure just at the right time, before the masses turned to violent revolution. Unlike the rebellious French, the confused but well-meaning Italians, the militaristic Germans, the hopelessly romantic Poles, the British did everything right. The cliché still dominates the British view of themselves and played a role in the recent referendum. It is sufficient to remember that Greece, which regards itself as having been greviously damaged by the EU, has been extremely reluctant to even consider leaving it, whilst Britain, which has done reasonably well, is leaving.

> What is a common European experience? A mythology of progress and civilizing mission (ignoring the heavy borrowing from the Orient, above all from China, India and the Middle East) is one. Another is a bloody history of warfare and genocide. One could stress the positive and tone down the negative, but, fortunately, this is unlikely. Having conquered their professional freedom, historians are not likely to tailor their lessons and their books to the requirements of ‘a common European identity.’ This is not to say that it would not be a good thing if Europeans had a greater feeling of belonging together and sharing a common destiny – particularly as it happens to be true as it is true that the dissolution of the European Union would be a political and economic catastrophe. But I don’t think a European identity can be taught. I don’t think that one can make Europe a nation-state of the nation-states.
>
> But let’s us not forget that most people’s idea of history is not based purely on what they were taught at schools and university. They learn their history partly from the distorted recollections of parents and grandparents, partly from the inchoate references to the past they glean from broadcast news, partly from newspapers, partly from books (above all from novels), and, above all, from television and films.
>
> Right now the typical history taught in schools in most of Europe consists of a fundamental pillar: the history of one’s own country.
> The peoples of the European nation-states had not chosen their nation. They have had nationhood and nation-building thrust upon them. Eventually they became British, German, French, Italian, and Belgian. They may have felt Scottish or Cornish; Gascon or Bretons, Bavarians or Prussian or Austrian, Sicilian or Piedmontese. And many still do, but, eventually, thanks to a bureaucracy and an education system which gave

them a common language, states which gave them common institutions, and thanks to wars, national anthems, sporting tournaments, Eurovision song contests, national broadcasting, and a host of other initiatives, Europeans have learned to identify with a particular set of political institutions we call ‘nations’.

Let me conjure up an example.
Imagine something terrible happened to the United Kingdom. A major collapse of the economy. Something which would persuade the Scottish and the Welsh and the Irish that they would be better off if they seceded. After all it may happen, at least in Scotland and perhaps, though unlikely, in Northern Ireland.
Imagine further that the collapse was so serious that other regions of England decided they wanted independence. Yorkshire or Lancashire or perhaps Cornwall. Today the Cornish nationalist party exist, but it is regarded as joke. But then so were the Scottish nationalists. Imagine Cornwall as an independent country. Not impossible since its population is of c.500,000 (same as Luxembourg) and an area of just over 3.5 thousand km^2 (bigger than Luxembourg). The new nationalist government will immediately start constructing a Cornish identity and a Cornish culture. Right now it seems only 3000 people can speak Cornish, but the new Cornish government could make school teach Cornish. After all Cornish is covered by the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (the European Union promotes local regional identities (may I also remind you that Cornwall overwhelmingly voted to leave). In 2005 it allocated 80,000 pounds for the promotion of the language –not a princely sum, it is the equivalent of the salary of a couple of school teachers. Later the Cornish Government could make it a condition of public employment that people should be able to speak the language. It could subsidise a newspaper in Cornish (even now one of the local papers has the occasional article in Cornish). There is no Cornish literature to speak of but this does not mean that the new government could not annex literary figures who have lived in Cornwall (there are many since this is a beautiful region) as well as ancient folk stories such as that of Tristan and Isold much of which takes place in Cornwall and on which Wagner based his famous opera on the basis of a story by a German, Gottfried von Strassburg who died towards the beginning of the 13^{th} century.

Right now the nation-state is still the main focus of identity for Europeans, but an increasing proportion of the European electorates are angry with their politicians and vote, increasingly, for ‘anti-system’ parties of the right, parties that raise the spectre of the dangers of immigration, and of the movement of people across state boundaries.

In theory, and here is the paradox, one might have expected Europeans – disappointed with national politics- to look to the European Union for guidance and leadership, but their anger against their political class turned into opposition against the pan-European project of their national leaders.

But why are so many angry or, at the very least, disappointed? Europeans have never been richer. They have never experienced such a long period of prosperity and of peace. In the present difficult economic climate the European Union is seen as an irrelevancy, a side issue or, for some, as an obstacle. Perhaps it is not surprising that the European project has failed to conquer the hearts and minds of so many: to become central to political life the European Union would need far more powers than it possesses at present. But to acquire more power it needs the backing of Europeans. It needs to conquer hearts and minds. And this is the vicious circle -the main impasse- in which the Union finds itself.