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# **ELECTRONIC VIVANT- EUROPE**

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Looking at the European elections of June 2009,  
we publish hereunder an extract of a conversation between Pierre Defraigne,  
Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Philippe Pochet, recorded for UTOPIA/EUROPE.



## When history redefines Europe

Pierre Defraigne, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, Philippe Pochet.

Interview by Pierre Jonckheer and Benoît Lechat.

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*Three recognised observers for three central subjects: the Europe borders, its competencies and its place in the world: **Daniel Cohn-Bendit**, President of the European Parliament Green group, **Pierre Defraigne**, economist, former Cabinet director of Étienne Davignon and François Lamy, and **Philippe Pochet**, Director of the Institut Syndical Européen.*

*They talk about Europe broadening, the European project and the Union's relationships with foreign countries, particularly China. Where we can see that recent history leads to a regular redefinition of the European project.*

### **Pierre Jonckheer :**

Let us start with the issue of the European borders...

### **Pierre Defraigne :**

Broadening was inevitable. It will go on with the Balkanic countries which aim at joining the Union. However the border shift prevents citizen identification. **It strengthens the European Government and weakens the European citizenship.** But this is the price to pay. The broadening limits are for me **Ukraine and Turkey**. I don't see them enter the Union. Nevertheless they constitute bridge states between the Union and Middle-East and Russia. We should offer them the best possible integration, without reaching membership, while leaving them freedom to be themselves. Both countries should still achieve unity. They are deeply divided, and early membership would worsen that up to breaking down. It is particularly true for Ukraine. **We should not only think of Europe but also to these country viability.**

### **Daniel Cohn-Bendit :**

In 1968 we said "we don't care about borders" and this was much more than a joke. If in 1957, in *Traité de Rome* time, European had started thinking about East broadening, they would have missed the political reality. After the Wall fall, history suddenly forced them to redefinition. But the problem is to have made broadening before deepening. If we had debated the Constitutional Treaty before broadening, everything would have probably been simpler. Europe would have been given a much clearer political and institutional identity, and so the framework hosting the new countries. This is why broadening strengthens the European Government.

Also, countries that joined the Union after the Wall fall earned their freedom against the Soviet occupation. They are in a **process of auto-definition of sovereignty. They can thus hardly understand the legitimacy and efficiency of sharing that sovereignty.** But if Poland (as well as Hungary and Czechia) had not been occupied by the Russians, they would have signed the Roma Treaty in 1957. Nevertheless one should obviously not have waited for deepening before broadening. It was politically impossible, as was German unification in front of economic difficulties - unless the Wall had to be rebuilt.

(...)

### **Philippe Pochet :**

The debate about borders is linked to the initial European project which was federal. Even if the Treaty was primarily a federal project, it had to define its borders at some time. But today there is

no majority to support it, whether we like it or not. Another project is slowly emerging. The first mistake was not having turned broadening into something positive. Broadening has become a kind of complaint, saying "if we had done something else, things would have gone better" **The lack of vision** and some tergiversations prevented broadening from becoming a positive project, as opposed to the broadening to Spain, Portugal and Greece. As soon as there is no federal project anymore, one should ask **which is now the meaning of the European project and the meaning of its borders**. It was right to proceed to broadening before waiting for a federal project. It is not always easy, but we benefit more, for example, from Czechia inside the Union than outside, even at the cost of a less ambitious project.

**Pierre Defraigne :**

One remark on Turkey, another on the instrumentalisation of the broadening.

Turkey is a **divided country**, on regional, social and religious levels. It should achieve unity, including transfers from wealthy citizens toward the poor. An early adhesion would **free the Turkish establishment from its duties toward its people**. (...)

We should consider Turkey as **Bridge-state** instead of trying a risky adhesion which would raise big issues to itself first.

My second remark is on the instrumentalisation of the broadening by the British. I remember a sentence from « Breaking of Nations » by Robert Cooper, Director General of Robert Solana, High Representative of the European Union in Foreign and Security Affairs. He says that **the greatest victory** of the foreign policy is the broadening. But I believe that foreign policy should aim at influencing the others. When the others transform yourself, it is not a foreign policy anymore.

**Daniel Cohn-Bendit :**

I am ready to accept this idea of **Bridge-state** since it is already the role of Turkey, whose integration will start with integration of secularity and the emancipation from Kemalism.

But we can not say the we know how the story will end. (...)

Instead of speaking of a less ambitious European project, I would rather speak of a project which should regularly **redefine itself according to history**. (...)

**Philippe Pochet :**

**The economic crisis** will result in massive industrial reorganisations. It leads us to rethink the economic policy beyond a monetary policy and including an industrial policy **focused on low-carbon development**. We must rethink our foreign policy based on this industrial project, and so the border issue. For instance it makes no sense to let the European cementers moving to Turkey. One should leave the old economic categories and **build something completely new**.

**Benoît Lechat :**

However the current trend looks like a **renationalisation of the economic policies**. The BCE set aside, we don't see the which actors have the strategy able to leverage this new industrial project.

**Daniel Cohn-Bendit :**

I agree that the Commission's current operating mode is driven by a **renationalisation of the Commissaire's behaviors**.

**Pierre Defraigne :**

The Commission does not work like a college anymore. Some even call it the Permanent Representative Committee, which make many laugh but also many cry.

**Daniel Cohn-Bendit :**

Let us take two examples illustrating this evolution.

When Europe defined an environment policy on cars, a few hours later, the German commissaire Verheugen, in charge of enterprises, stepped in for the **defense** of the German industry.

Commissaire Charlie MacCreevy, in charge of the interior market, **fighters against** any attempt toward financial regulation.

So the Commission has become a crazy world.

**Pierre Jonckheer :**

We can summarise what has been told so far in saying that the Union is **(i)** a project which is adjusted on the historical evolution; **(ii)** a strict border definition is not supported, given the existence of bridge-states. But **(iii)** the broadening cases have weakened the European citizenship. We can add that **(iv)** the federal European project is dead.

Meanwhile, both ecological and financial crises call for a European competency reinforcement. However many national public opinions have evolved against the European project, as shown by the difficult ratifications of the Lisbon Treaty. Reinforcement should be institutional and supra-national, as can be seen in the debates on the banking supervision and the commitments in the climate-energy package. Who will setup the European agenda for the next G20 and the relationships with President Obama? We clearly have a **political leadership problem**. How do you handle it?

**Daniel Cohn-Bendit :**

(...)

What heads of government call "European cooperation" is only the addition of national plans, without any improvement of common tools, any questioning on the BCE - see for instance the Eurobond initiative. Europe was built by a **generation which endured the war** and vitally needed to get out with it. This is far beyond the short-term vision of the Merkel and Sarkozy's generation, even if they draw sometimes in the right direction.

(...)

**Philippe Pochet :**

Busy for thirty year with European affairs, I have always heard this diagnosis of a bad-working Europe, going from crisis to crisis. But **from another point-of-view**, one has been able to create **(i)** the common currency, which has become the second reserve currency; **(ii)** the premises of a foreign policy; **(iii)** a leadership on environmental issues, even if competencies could be better shared.

The European Parliament has achieved positive results on **(iv)** the Reach directive (\*) and **(v)** the Services directive, although after many hard debates.

*(\*) The **Registration, Evaluation and Authorisation of CHEMicals** regulation applies to chemicals as well as to many preparations (coloring, painting) and items (furnitures, vehicles). Not only producers and traders but also users are involved in the potential risk determination. The products available before 1981 are specifically targeted by REACH.*

The classical view of a confederal Europe is not realistic.

The European factory produces a few good things for the future. For thirty years we have been waiting for a crisis that would force us build something better. But I believe that we will never get a nice and clean structure.

**Pierre Defraigne :**

I am not happy with this factory. I agree with Philippe Pochet as far as the past is concerned. We have been living a quite stable period, with some growth and a weak inflation, and with institutions

working without excessive disfunctioning. But remember that inequalities have worsened.

**The current crisis marks the end of this period.**

(...)

A Central Bank whose mission is the defence of the currency can not for instance lend to demanding States. Instead, states must lend to each other. But Eurobonds should come from an **intergovernment agency** endowed with owned resources. It is the only way to benefit from the highest rankings on the credit market. (...)

The future is at risk. **We need a solid community budget.** For year 2009, payment credits are 0.9 with a limit of 1.24. That's a shame: we can't make Europe with such a low budget.

The MacDonald budget was the right approach: 6-7% of the community PIB. We should get rid of the fiscal paradises. Europe is the only continent, as opposed to China and the US, to host them on its own territory! (...)

**The Commission was unable to manage the financial crisis.** There is not even a debate on it. But I stay optimistic because nature hates vacuum and Europe has only changed through crises. Still the **budget and fiscal harmonisation** remain big issues.

**Daniel Cohn-Bendit :**

In different dramatic times we saw different behaviors. German unification raised massive problems, but then Kohl and Mitterrand started the Euro project, which was pending since 1972. Nobody knew how to synchronise every economical and financial models. But then, during the German unification, they succeeded, with the help of a **strong Delors Commission**. We don't see today anyone able of such an enterprise. A political vacuum has been created by the Commission and Council inconsistency and by the fear of a Parliament which meanwhile **loses its power in favour of nationalistic behaviours**.

**Philippe Pochet :**

Renationalisation may be a necessary step to come out of current issues. Let us take the example of the car industry: State aids should be prohibited. But we see France and Germany work alone to save their national companies. **By breaking the state aid prohibition rule , they completely break the common market.** So there is no barrier anymore to a European industry policy directed to sustained development.

**Daniel Cohn-Bendit :**

But this can not explain why the PPE and socialist parties give a so strong support to the national industries. European Parliament's role should be the **promotion of a common goal**.

We can understand it from the national governments, but the Parliament fails to balance it.

**Pierre Defraigne :**

The problem with the car industry is that solutions could only come out in the middle or long term. Solutions are known, but they will take time, while the elections come next June. So candidates direct their campaign toward today voters rather than tomorrow's. **Nationalistic behaviour is opportunistic**; they will be Euro-fans again after the crisis.

**Benoît Lechat :**

What would do the Greens if they were in power in France or Germany in front of the car industry crisis?

**Daniel Cohn-Bendit :**

There was a solar-energy company which was ready to take over Opel!

**Benoît Lechat :**

This was first an ad, wasn't it?

**Pierre Defraigne :**

Governments are granting € 2500 for car recycling...

**Cohn-Bendit :**

In the seventies and eighties a terrible industry wreck happened in the steeling industry. One tried to save national companies through national assistance. We see the result today. Probably the same is going on today with the car industry. Europe could indeed claim that we need to protect their workers. But it is more important to make this industry **produce completely different cars**, in a different transport framework. One need to invest into workforce conversion and set up transformation criteria. That will be expensive, but not more that what we are currently doing, without future. One need a middle-term vision which drives the economical and social investments. But today one pretends that production will be saved by forcing everyone to change car every three years, while they could change every ten years only and reduce the ecological impact.

**Pierre Jonckheer :**

You seem to agree on stating that **(i)** the institutions don't work well, and **(ii)** there is a lack of political leadership. You mention **(iii)** the need for a better budget and **(iv)** a new industrial policy. You are looking for European projects, but managed by which institutions? So don't we need **(v)** a stronger political European power? This is a cultural fight. Would you agree that, despite the disillusion ambiance, one can not give up the debate on **reinforcing the Commission's political legitimacy**? As for me, that implies **trans-national European elections**, direct elections for the Commission, generalisation of special-majority decisions, etc. Can we escape the institutional debate? (...)

**Philippe Pochet :**

Since Delors Commission, there hasn't been one European Commission taking leadership.

**Pierre Defraigne :**

This is not really true for Prodi and Thorn Commissions. The President was weak, but **Commissioners like Mario Monti or Pascal Lamy had a strong community vision** and were powerful. The current situation is pathetic because Barroso is alone and inexistent.

**Daniel Cohn-bendit :**

(...) In all big cases like the Services directive and the Climate package, the main actors were the Parliament and the Council. **The Commission did not exist**. I see no reason to accept the extension of this powerless Commission. The political power of the Commission is its President. The election campaign should include a claim for retiring Barroso.

**Philippe Pochet :**

The Parliament should have an initiative right, which has always been refused. Why is it restricted to the Commission?

**Daniel Cohn-Bendit :**

I have been reluctant for long, but in the current situation it would balance the Commission weakness and favour its reinforcement.

**Pierre Defraigne :**

One should restate the core business of the Commission as the **definition of the European common good**. It's a difficult task. One should identify the needs and be able to show that **the European answer is the good one**. This responsibility can only be taken by an executive power with considerable means, at least for coordination aspects.

Today some deputies seem to have a better cross-view than some Commissioners who are bound by their competency fields. But the President's role consists of setting up workgroups where General Directions meet and promote new ideas. Even if it takes time, it raises the common good question.

**Pierre Jonckheer :**

We also need to talk about the international position of Europe.

**Pierre Defraigne :**

Just two simple statements:

First there is no power without projects. The project enables the power, not the legacy: we must move from legacy to project.

Second a civil power only exists with a **defence which ensures its credibility**.

**Philippe Pochet :**

**This a XIXth century vision!** The traditional power of Westphalian State-nations with its military attributes should not be casted at the European level. This is an obsolete concept, unable to address the current challenges like the climate changes which require cooperation. We clearly see the total inadequacy of the American power to rule the world.

**Daniel Cohn-Bendit :**

What do we mean by military power?

Any political organisation should protect its citizen's interests. Europe has developed new neighbourhood relationships, but they are hampered by Human rights clauses which are forgotten as soon as they are signed. **There we leave a potential civil power promoting a European project.**

Meanwhile we are facing conflicts that we are unable to manage (Afghanistan, Proche-Orient)

(...) If we are looking for an agreement between Israelis and Palestinians, we will have to wait for 1000 or 2000 years. The international community should impose a solution with guaranteed borders and withdrawing of most colonists from Cisjordania. An international military force should come into play with European participation. This a new notion of military power.

(...)

A major breakthrough would be the union of 27 national armies in one European body. It would allow big cost savings and enable modernisation and new strategies.

**Philippe Pochet :**

From a strategical point of view, the true battle line can be drawn between China on one side, America, India and Japan on the other side. How should be play in this game?

**Pierre Defraigne :**

Without controlling our own defence, we will have no choice, and be forced to play the American game!

**Daniel Cohn-Bendit :**

Chinese have played a great chess game. They put their tower in the middle of Wall Street and it

will be hard to get it out!

I believe Europe should have a **resource-oriented** civil policy. Tomorrow's great issue is **water**. How far are we ready to go? Up to a military force in the Middle-East?

**Benoît Lechat :**

As shown in the Georgia conflict, isn't there a lack of a strategy which would select privileged allies?

**Daniel Cohn-Bendit :**

We talked about the missiles, but not about Gazprom expansion which gives a strong power to the Russians against us. Meanwhile the Georgia issue is closed: Abkhazie and South Ossetie are out, full stop. But the Crimee issue remains.

**Pierre Defraigne :**

Russia can become more open unless it feels threatened, for instance if it is **surrounded by OTAN forces**. That is Russia's tragedy. We have a great historical responsibility with respect to Russian people. We should see it as a geopolitical problem without fear. Russia has not capacity to attack anyone. Its only weapon is gas, but it has only shoot against itself until now.

About China, the unique-party system is terrible, but it still **draws million people out of poverty**. It is also making progress in the Human rights domain. Meanwhile we ignore what is going on in Gabon. Last January eight French soldiers died in Franco-Gabonese manoeuvres, but they were not received at the Invalides like the Afghanistan casualties, because France has nothing to do there.

**France is shamefully taking profit** from a very rich country which keeps its people in an awful misery. Instead of giving lessons, we should show respect to the impressive Chinese work.

Postponing the Europe-China summit was a strong signal, directly targeted at Sarkozy and France. We should be careful to keep being listened.

Only China, US and Europe can take us out of the worldwide crisis. But today the China-US axis is stronger than the China-Europe axis. Since Americans will not help us, we must strive to exist in front of China, and build a more mature relationship with them. We should be both more powerful and more respectful.

**Daniel Cohn-Bendit :**

We need cooperation with America, while being able to talk about Guantanamo. It is exactly the same with China. We can talk about renewable energies, **but also** about human rights.

Their social progress is achieved at a terrible cost, comparable to the early capitalism that we lived in Europe in the XIXth century. **The last example is the milk story, whose production was hold up by a mafia. This has been made possible by the very nature of their political system.**

**Pierre Defraigne :**

China Daily wrote that customers grant Europeans for pointing out these toxic-product sales. This is a case where **quality standards** expressed the European power.

**Daniel Cohn-Bendit :**

We should be able to support that level of standards in the individual political rights area. This is not giving lessons: some day China Daily will grant it as well.

**Pierre Defraigne :**

There is a distinction to be made between testimony and management, but both are necessary. I wrote papers for the Chinese about independent trade unions, mutual societies ...

**Daniel Cohn-Bendit :**

We should explain to China the rules to be followed in a worldwide space: economic development yields no value without independent trade unions.

**Pierre Defraigne :**

When the Chinese labour regulations were recently amended in a progressive way, two organisations alerted the Chinese government about competitiveness: the American and European Trade Chambers!

**Daniel Cohn-Bendit :**

So we agree! How much time did it take for European companies to understand that they would only do business in South-Africa by fighting Apartheid ! So finally did Volkswagen and others. Chinese power severely affects Darfour and northern Cambodia, by changing its economic structure.

Openness to Chinese should be driven with **our standard levels** in all these matters. This is not compatible with the sale of dozens of nuclear plants by Areva.